REPORT SUMMARY

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

in Latin America and the Caribbean:
Review of evidence
Children on the move in Latin America and the Caribbean: Review of evidence
- Report Summary

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References
1 Background

Since the mid-2010s, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has experienced a rapid increase in human mobility within the region. Children typically make up around a fifth to a quarter of people on the move in LAC: In 2019, children aged 0–17 constituted 19 per cent of migrants in LAC (Migration Data Portal, 2021); in 2021, children made up an estimated 26 per cent of people forcibly displaced internationally in the Americas\(^1\) (UNHCR, 2022).

This upsurge in migration and displacement in the region has spurred substantial response efforts, aimed variously at developing a more supportive policy environment, meeting the immediate needs of migrants and refugees, managing flows in areas experiencing large numbers of people in transit and assisting with integration into new countries. It has also led to an explosion of research aiming to understand the experiences, needs, challenges and aspirations of people on the move.

This report aims to synthesize recent evidence on three main topics:

- the patterns of children's and adolescents' international mobility in the region;
- the challenges they face and their resulting needs; and
- policy and programme responses.

\(^1\) This includes North America.
It is part of the United Nations Children's Fund Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office's efforts to promote proven responses to human mobility that genuinely respond to the needs of children and families: in their communities of origin, in transit, as they settle in new countries or if they return to their countries of origin.

The report is based on a review of published and grey literature and internal UNICEF project documentation undertaken between October 2021 and March 2022, with additional studies received until mid-June also incorporated. This review draws on over 450 reports and studies in Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French. Inevitably, as a synthesis of evidence from the whole region covering all aspects of children's well-being, and based on desk review, the depth of analysis on any given issue or country is limited. Reflecting the attention of the international community, and/or social scientific studies from within the region, the bulk of evidence relates to movement in and through Central America and Mexico, out of Venezuela, and to a lesser extent, from Haiti. The review also found a substantial body of academic research on the implications of movement for children's educational and social integration, in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Despite the use of varied search strategies, inevitably evidence gaps remain, with particular gaps for many Caribbean countries.

The report recognizes that for many children and adolescents, migration – despite its challenges – represents an opportunity, and that for many children, particularly those moving with their families through regular routes, this does not put them at elevated risk. In accordance with UNICEF's mandate to secure children's rights, the report focuses on forms of human mobility that increase children's vulnerabilities and risks that their rights are not fulfilled. While recognizing that human mobility in the LAC region comprises people moving for multiple reasons, including refugees and asylum seekers fleeing violence and persecution as well as other migratory situations, the focus of this report is largely on migration, reflecting the fact that outside Brazil, most of the movement in the region is addressed through migration management initiatives; details of asylum policies and specific provisions for refugees are largely outside the scope of this report.

1.1 | The scale of children’s international movement in LAC

Over recent decades, LAC has been – and continues to be – a region with considerable emigration to the United States of America, Canada and Europe (IO M, 2022). It has also experienced considerable internal and intercountry movement. In addition to these longstanding movement patterns, over the past decade, three other sets of mixed movements have grown in prominence: the movement of over seven million refugees and migrants from Venezuela, almost six million of whom have moved to other LAC countries (R4V, 2022a); movements from, within and through Central America and Mexico, with Mexico increasingly becoming a destination for refugees and migrants from elsewhere in the region, and movement patterns within Central America becoming increasingly complex; and movement from Haiti, and of Haitians (including many who had previously resided in South America), within the northern Caribbean, and through Colombia into Central America. Figure 1 summarizes the main movement patterns discussed in the report.

Other movements, particularly those that have accelerated since 2020–2021, such as movement from Cuba and increasing numbers of migrants and refugees from Africa and Asia (Yates, 2019), are much less well documented. As a result, evidence on children's experiences is sparse.2

2 The companion briefs to this report synthesise evidence on children's internal mobility within LAC (Marcus et al., 2023a) and on the experiences of children who remain in their countries of origin (Marcus et al., 2023b).
The main factors contributing to cross-border movement are economic inequalities and limited educational opportunities, violence and extreme weather events.

Why are children moving within the region?

The main factors contributing to cross-border movement – of both adults and children – in the region discussed in the report are: economic inequalities and limited educational opportunities, violence and extreme weather events, often intersecting with each other. Economic inequalities and stresses have long underpinned migration within and from LAC. In recent years, as well as longstanding patterns of movement for better economic opportunities (IOM and PP, 2022), economic crisis in Venezuela has been a key factor driving the large-scale exodus. Further, in much of the region, growing water stress and the effects of extreme weather events have contributed to internal and international migration, from the northern Caribbean (Baez et al. 2017), Peru (Bergmann et al., 2021) and northern Central America (OCHA, 2020; International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021), to give a few examples.

Violence – both generalized and targeted, including targeting children – has also become a more important factor leading to mixed movements within and from the region, with evidence from Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Mexico, among others (Amnesty International, 2020; Comisión Interinstitucional para la Protección de...
A study by Clemens (2021) found that in the average municipality in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, for every 10 additional homicides in the children’s city of origin, there were an associated 3–6 cumulative additional child migrant apprehensions at the United States border across the study period (2011–2016).

More micro-level evidence on children’s motivations for movement also illustrates the role of social norms and aspirations in fuelling movement. For example, research in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras found that rural children move primarily to attempt to fulfil aspirations, whereas their urban counterparts move as a result of a combination of aspiration and insecurity (Save the Children, 2022). Longstanding patterns of movement (in particular) have established networks in destination countries that facilitate migration; in areas with high levels of outflows, migration can be established as a norm, almost as a rite of passage or a path to adulthood and economic independence (Kandel and Massey, 2002). Changes in policy (discussed further in Section 3) also influence movement patterns. For children, family reunification is another key motivation, for both the independent movement (among adolescents) and accompanied movement (among younger children) seen throughout the subregion.

1.3 Which children are on the move?
Disaggregated data on children’s cross-border movement is only available for a few migration corridors in the region. Overall these show that:

- boys comprised between half and two-thirds of adolescents detected attempting to move from Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) to the United States (Gobierno de México, 2021). This may reflect boys’ greater vulnerability to gang violence, girls’ more limited access to resources to finance their journeys and stronger social norms expecting them to stay at home and care for family members (Save the Children, 2022). Around 25 per cent of children attempting to move from northern Central America to the United States did so unaccompanied; their average age was 15 years (IOM and WFP, 2022).
- of children leaving Venezuela identified in a survey in 2019, 96 per cent of children aged 6 and under travelled with both parents or with their mothers. By contrast, among adolescents, 38 per cent travelled with their mother, 24 per cent alone and 17 per cent accompanied by siblings or other people (e.g., neighbours or friends) (OVM, 2021). This represents a change from an earlier dominant pattern of parents moving first and children subsequently travelling to join them.
- among children of Haitian descent (some of whom have citizenship of Chile, Brazil or other South American countries) moving through the Darién Gap in Panama, 77 per cent are under 5 and moving with their families (UNICEF, IFRC and Red Cross Panama, 2021).
- indigenous children are overrepresented among Guatemalan children moving to Mexico for seasonal work and among those returned to Guatemala from the USA, indicating their greater likelihood to have attempted migration (OIT, 2014; OIM Guatemala, 2017).

We had to try to sleep all day and just have one meal, I mean we’d have a little snack and dinner.”
(17-year-old Colombian returnee in Bogotá, previously living in Venezuela, Ceja Cárdenas et al., 2020, p31)
Children's experiences of migration and displacement in LAC are very diverse and encompass:

■ Movement for a range of reasons and in diverse circumstances: This includes forced displacement due to violence, persecution or disasters, and migration to reunite with family members or in search of a better life.

■ Movement in varied groups or alone: This includes children moving with family members or peers and those who are unaccompanied; as part of 'caravans', small groups or individually; and the experiences of 'second-generation' children born to migrant or refugee parents.

■ Hugely variable distances: Movement may be within countries, to neighbouring countries and across the continent, through both safe areas and areas that present considerable risks (e.g., sea, jungle, areas controlled by organized crime and armed groups).

■ Movement by different means of transport: Risks are particularly associated with journeys in small boats, people stowed onto trains and journeys on foot.

■ Movement of all lengths: Journeys vary from short-term 'pendular' movements across borders on ancestral lands to access services or to trade, to temporary migration or displacement, to permanent settlement in a new country.
2.1 The policy and political context

GLOBAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Figure 2: Factors influencing children's experiences of migration
the protection of refugees and displaced and stateless people in the Americas. Likewise, all mainland Latin American states are signatories to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness Refugee Convention and nine are not parties to either convention on statelessness. Almost all countries in the region, for which data are available, are parties to the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, As UN member states, countries in the region are committed the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe and Orderly Migration. SDG 10.7 outlines a commitment to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. As of 2019, 79 per cent of governments in LAC reported having in place policies

| REGIONAL FREE MOVEMENT AGREEMENT |

Subregional free movement agreements facilitate regular movement, in particular migration for work, with an emphasis on

There is some evidence that visa fees associated with long-term residence in some families have moved under the provisions of regular pathways such as these.

| UNITED NATIONS |

the region. Between January 2019 and December 2021 the Migrant Protection Protocols at the US border or in the USA to Mexico to await adjudication of migration and asylum Supreme Court judgment in June 2022 allowed for the programme to be discontinued. and approximately 146,925 unaccompanied children, who were transferred to northern

5 The Brazil declaration marks 30 years of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and outlines a strengthened led to the declaration is not available.
Central America and Mexico without access to regular immigration processing, asylum, health and protection screenings (Customs and Border Protection (CBP), 2022).

In combination with bilateral agreements between the USA, Mexico and northern Central American countries, these policies have led to both large numbers of families and unaccompanied children living in camps and shelters along the Mexico-USA border, and to a substantial increase in the ‘assisted returns’ of children to El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. In addition, changes in eligibility for Temporary Protected Status in the USA also influence migration dynamics (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2021).

**REGIONAL INITIATIVES.**

Regional initiatives are also participating in specific initiatives to strengthen responses to increased human mobility:

**Marco Integral para la Protección y Soluciones (MIRPS, Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework)**: In line with commitments under the 2018 Global Compact for Refugees, MIRPS has been developed to support regional cooperation among Central American countries and Mexico. It aims to:
- Improve mechanisms for reception and admission;
- Respond to immediate and persistent humanitarian and protection needs;
- Support host countries and communities; and
- Enhance opportunities for durable solutions to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

The Quito Process coordinates responses to Venezuelan migrants and refugees and supports their integration into host states. Signatories to the Quito II plan have committed to promoting children’s rights, supporting access to health and education services and preventing statelessness. The sixth meeting, in Santiago, mandated the development of a regional coordination instrument for the protection of migrant and refugee children and supports their integration into host states.
refugee children, which has led to the development of an operational guide. The seventh meeting, in Lima, also urged participating states to consolidate a network of focal points for child and adolescent protection systems and to strengthen child protection systems (Quito Process, 2021).

The Los Angeles Declaration resulting from the Summit of the Americas of June 2022 commits signatories (most Latin American countries) to expanding legal migration pathways, supporting integration, investing in migration management, addressing root causes to reduce migrant pressures and coordinating responses to mass migration movements and displacement crises. The declaration calls for efforts to provide humanitarian protection, and to reduce the need for irregular movement. Participating governments agreed to: enhance their individual migration management capabilities; increase information sharing and coordination across borders; address deporting people with valid protection claim; and create an early-warning system to alert each other to large cross-border movements (Selee, 2022).

In response to rising xenophobia in the region (Oxfam, 2019; Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022), several countries (e.g., Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago) have also tightened migration laws since the late 2010s. Increasingly restrictive immigration policies in many countries mean that large numbers of people are pushed into moving via irregular routes. This both exposes them to increased risk and exploitation en route, and means they often cannot access services in countries where they settle. Changing policies at short notice (often exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions) have also left migrants, including children, stranded waiting for their situation to be resolved.
3. Haitian movement throughout the continent

Movement from Haiti, and by people of Haitian descent throughout the continent, is one of the largest-scale but least well-documented flows. Movement from Haiti to the Dominican Republic of children and adults for agricultural labour and more recently other forms of casual work dates back to the 1950s, though increasingly restrictive border control policies mean that such movement is often irregular. Between 2010 and 2017, over 85,000 Haitians moved to Brazil, either on humanitarian visas after the 2010 earthquake, and/or to work on the construction of facilities for international sporting events in Brazil; other Haitian communities moved to Chile and Argentina, with migrant workers' children being born in and receiving citizenship of these South American countries (Yates, 2021). Economic downturn and rising xenophobia have led some Haitians to move towards the United States and/or Mexico, through South America or via arrival in Colombia and crossing the Darién Gap (Yates, 2021; Morley et al., 2021). A combination of the declining security situation in Haiti in 2021–2022 and increasingly restrictive policies affecting Haitians in the Dominican Republic have increased irregular movements across the border, with associated risks and expulsions, and have led to growing numbers of Haitians attempting...
Most evidence on issues facing children focuses on settlement in the Dominican Republic, of both recent migrants and second- or third-generation Dominicans of Haitian descent.
country for a year or more, enrolment rates are similar for Venezuelan and Colombian children (CDR, 2021). The majority of countries in the region provide free access to basic health care for children and pregnant women regardless of migration status, but not necessarily for more complex care or medication; documentation-related barriers and costs are the main obstacles to accessing health services. Studies also highlight misperceptions among school staff, health care providers and staff of social registries (the gateway to access social protection) as to migrants’ and refugees’ entitlements and/or the documentation required (Machado et al., 2021; Caja Cárdenas et al., 2020).

Qualitative studies mostly suggest that children perceive their situation to be better in their country of asylum or destination than it was in Venezuela, with greater access to food and greater overall security. However, they also highlight challenges related to low parental income, overcrowding and integrating into new school systems, as well as (in places) xenophobic and gendered street harassment and discrimination in schools (Caja Cárdenas et al., 2020; Plan International, 2020). As well as the risks encountered in transit, studies highlight the risks of sexual exploitation that migrant and refugee children, intimate partners (Mendoza Romero, 2022; CARE International, 2019). Up to a third of adolescents travelling without their parents or legal guardian (OVM, 2021), transitory care of unaccompanied and separated children is another key child protection issue.

To some children spending long periods in institutional care (CDH-UCAB, 2021), efforts are underway throughout the subregion to strengthen foster care for younger children, and supported independent living for older adolescents on the move.

The majority of countries in the region provide free access to basic health care for children and pregnant women regardless of migration status, but not necessarily for more complex care or medication.
Over the past three decades – before the exodus from Venezuela – Argentina, Chile and Brazil had also experienced substantial migration from neighbouring countries, such as Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru. This movement is facilitated by MERCOSUR free movement agreements, though these agreements do not grant the right of free movement for work, and so poorer migrants are more likely to enter through irregular routes, impeding children’s access to services. A substantial body of literature (especially from Chile) examines the experience of ‘migrant’ children (often second generation), particularly with respect to education, and emphasizes challenges related to poverty, access to good-quality schooling and discrimination (e.g., Pavez Soto, 2013, 2019; Ribeiro and Araújo, 2018; Zenklusen, 2020). Studies from Argentina also indicate higher rates of adolescent pregnancy and motherhood among children of recent migrants than among the national population. Some evidence from Brazil highlights ongoing child labour among children of Bolivian descent in Sao Paulo’s textile industry (Freitas, 2014), while a few studies also mention migrant adolescents’ involvement in agricultural, construction and domestic labour in Argentina (Pacecca et al., 2013; Gorsky, 2018).

In recent years, Argentina, Brazil and Chile have become host to substantial numbers of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, with Bolivia and Uruguay also hosting smaller Venezuelan communities (R4V, 2021). Evidence on the challenges that children and families in transit face, on journeys of hugely varying lengths, duration and conditions, comes mostly from journalistic sources and needs assessments conducted by international humanitarian agencies. These include health risks related to dehydration and the effects of extreme temperatures for those travelling through high-altitude regions, and risks of violence and extortion. The majority of recorded migrants and refugees on these journeys to Brazil, Chile and Argentina also host substantial communities of Haitian origin, some of whom have been moving towards North America since the mid-late 2010s in response to declining economic conditions, growing xenophobia and more restrictive visa conditions in some countries. In mid-2022, emerging reports showed that some of this population (including children) was returning to South American countries where they held residence rights or citizenship (MMC, 2022).
Movement to, within and through Central America and Mexico

Mexico and Central America are simultaneously: a source of mixed migration movements, a destination for refugees and migrants (particularly Mexico and Costa Rica), a transit zone (especially for migrants heading towards the United States) and a region to which former migrants return, both voluntarily or involuntarily. Irregular migration from and through the subregion substantially outweighs migration by regulated routes, due to the inaccessibility of regular migration pathways (IOM and WFP, 2022).

Since the mid-2010s, the number of children from the subregion migrating has increased substantially: moving with their families, in small groups, as part of caravans and without adult accompaniment. During transit, children on the move experience violence, abuse and exploitation; face challenges in meeting their basic needs for food, water, shelter and sanitation; and have limited and variable access to health and education services.

Most qualitative literature focuses on the risks children face crossing the Darién Gap and Mexico and emphasizes the risks of dehydration, violence and robbery (and attacks from wild animals in Darién) (Anastario et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2021; UNICEF, IFRC and Red Cross Panama, 2021). Studies of migrant caravans report the difficulties of crossing the border between Honduras and Guatemala, such as discrimination and violence from host communities or being unable to move due to closed borders and mobility restrictions (REDLAC, 2020).

Governments in the subregion have developed processes for refugee status determination procedures and for the regularization of migrants settling in their territories, though lack of documentation and high administrative costs act as barriers. All subregional countries’ legal frameworks establish children’s right to public education, regardless of their migration or refugee status, and to basic health care, though lack of documentation and sometimes cost barriers also affect access to health and education services, varying by country. Discrimination also deters health service use (especially among pregnant women); studies from Costa Rica also highlight children’s experience of xenophobic discrimination in schools (Campos-Saborío et al., 2018; Mora, 2021).

The regional legal and policy framework, strongly influenced by US policies, has changed rapidly and influenced movement patterns. Much of this framework aims to deter migration by shifting the adjudication of immigration and asylum applications to Mexico. Returns of children, both accompanied and unaccompanied, from the United States and Mexico continue to take place on a large scale, often without adequate screening for international protection needs or family reunification claims, best interest procedures, vulnerability assessments or family tracing. The literature on child returnees focuses on Mexico and Honduras, and children’s education and mental health, and highlights the challenges of integration (or reintegration) into a different school system and the stigma of being a ‘failed’ migrant (Bustamante de la Cruz, 2019; OIT, 2016).

Children from the subregion migrating has increased substantially: moving with their families, in small groups, as part of caravans and without adult accompaniment.
Table 1: Key challenges facing children in different stages of movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>KEY CHALLENGES</th>
<th>MAIN COUNTRIES WITH EVIDENCE REVIEWED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Few economic and social opportunities</td>
<td>El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence (organized crime, gangs, gender-based violence, targeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>remittance recipients)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychosocial well-being of children who remain behind when parents migrate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>Risk of physical and sexual violence and robbery</td>
<td>Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accidents, illness and disease related to environmental conditions,</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Very limited access to education (especially affecting those on extended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>journeys)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement</td>
<td>Regularization, access to key documentation</td>
<td>Argentina, Aruba, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Curacao, Dominican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to post-school education (technical and vocational education and</td>
<td>Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>training)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to health care (information, documentation and sometimes cost-related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>barriers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty, related to irregular status, limited labour market access and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor-quality housing with variable access to water and sanitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M R X V E M R S R; [X W V E M R S R; G E X M S R S T] S T S V X I R M X S I R W</td>
<td>R M X S I W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-protection risks, especially gender-based violence, sexual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social integration: xenophobia and discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return</td>
<td>(Re)integration into school systems and/or access to training/higher education</td>
<td>Haiti, Honduras, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and pathways to work for older adolescents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychosocial well-being related to challenges of reintegration/desire to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>remigrate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policy responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF COUNTRIES/SERVICE</th>
<th>ACCESS FOR ALL CHILDREN REGARDLESS OF MIGRATION STATUS</th>
<th>ONLY AVAILABLE TO CHILDREN WITH REGULAR STATUS</th>
<th>REGULAR STATUS NOT REQUIRED BUT ID REQUIRED</th>
<th>ACCESSIBLE TO ALL BUT RESTRICTIONS ON SERVICES THAT CAN BE USED (LEVEL OF EDUCATION OR TYPE OF HEALTH SERVICE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An additional area covered by the data is how children who are considered to have violated migration laws are treated. Secondary sources for which data are available indicate that in 12 countries immigration detention of children is illegal, in six it is illegal but practised and in three it is illegal with no recent reports of it being practised. Given the harmful effects of detention, this indicates an outstanding area where further policy and practice change is needed.

Programme responses. The report reviews 46 evaluations and 112 descriptions of projects and initiatives for which no evaluation evidence was available. These initiatives were undertaken by a variety of organizations, with around 27 per cent of initiatives being supported by UNICEF, and the others governments, other UN agencies and donors, and/or grassroots national or international civil society organizations. Figure 3 shows the geographical focus of documents analysed indicating the high concentration of studies focusing on initiatives in Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. Figure 4 shows the thematic emphases of initiatives. The high proportion of child protection initiatives reflects both substantial UNICEF activity, and a particular focus in this report on initiatives focusing on children, rather than migrants and refugees in general.
4.1 Evidence of policy and programme impact and effectiveness

Impact evaluations are rare among the studies examined, and primarily focus on the impacts of cash transfers on migrants and refugees. The majority of evaluations on the performance of initiatives, with some commentary on factors that had enabled or undermined initiatives. Table 3 outlines some of the most common outcomes identified by sector or type of activity and also indicates the types of initiative for which very few studies in the region have attempted to assess evidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTOR/THEMATIC APPROACH</th>
<th>KEY ACTIVITIES AND EVIDENCE (WHERE AVAILABLE)</th>
<th>KEY KNOWLEDGE GAPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>service centres and other points on migration routes are appreciated by adults and children on the move but that TV S Z M W S R M W S J X I R M R W Y J Q G M I R X E H R S X E P [E] W needs of family groups or indigenous cultural traditions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition and health</td>
<td>N utritional monitoring and support of children under 5 years and pregnant women on key migration routes. O ccasional referral to emergency health care in transit. Some initiatives to boost availability of sexual and reproductive health services to migrants and refugees (including adolescents). Returnee support packages sometimes include medical checks (including dental care).</td>
<td>Physical and mental health impacts of all activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Some evidence that extracurricular/homework clubs, in-kind support and mentoring have helped increase motivation to study in communities of origin and returnees but have not affected intention to migrate. Education for children in transit is limited but includes classes in shelters, school in a bag kits and tablets loaded with educational content; some initiatives helping newly settled children enrol, obtain documentation, learn in new languages or provide non-formal classes for children not yet enrolled in formal system.</td>
<td>Very limited evidence of initiatives providing education in transit; none are evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child protection</td>
<td>Substantial investment in strengthening child protection systems to respond to children on the move. Emerging positive practices of transitory care include foster care and small-scale ‘group’ homes for unaccompanied children E [E M X R K] E Q M P [V I Y R M Q G E X M S R S V V I W S P Y X M S R S] support in independent living for adolescents close to legal adulthood. Mental health and psychosocial support services are generally provided at comprehensive support centres and shelters and typically focuses on building a socially supportive environment through play, group activities, sports, etc. and providing support to survivors of gender-based violence.</td>
<td>Very limited evidence of the impact of system strengthening activities, e.g., development of protocols (including operating procedures) to respond to unaccompanied and separated children throughout region, or training in protocols or systems for supporting child migrants. Also, no evaluations of the impact of workshops and other awareness-raising activities on violence against children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What factors have contributed to positive outcomes?

The following factors are identified as contributing to the positive outcomes observed:

- **Partnership and coordination between different government departments and non-government organizations**. This helps fill capacity gaps, and enables services to respond effectively to children’s multifaceted needs. In addition, intersectoral coordination mechanisms have proved helpful, particularly in humanitarian responses (e.g., R4V sectoral working groups).

- **Responsiveness to key needs of migrant and refugee population** (Nexus Interamerican Consulting Services, 2021), often as a result of participatory approaches that align programme activities with needs and engaged participants effectively. This includes sensitivity to gender, ethnicity, disability, age and other aspects of identity, as relevant in particular situations.

- **Sensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences**. Increasingly, initiatives throughout the region are providing interpreters and/or information in multiple languages and adopting participatory approaches to better understand the culturally specific needs of different groups. This needs to be mainstreamed more effectively.

- **Including parents/caregivers in initiatives working with children** (e.g., reintegration programmes) enhanced effectiveness, though greater efforts may be needed to time activities or social worker visits so they do not clash with parents’ work schedules.

- **Strong existing foundations (policies, infrastructure)** that can be developed further to meet the needs of people affected by human mobility, and flexibility and adaptability so that initiatives can respond to rapidly changing external circumstances, e.g., changes in migration policy, or pandemics.

### SECTOR/THEMATIC APPROACH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTOR/THEMATIC APPROACH</th>
<th>KEY ACTIVITIES AND EVIDENCE (WHERE AVAILABLE)</th>
<th>KEY KNOWLEDGE GAPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal assistance</td>
<td>Legal and documentation support often provided at migration reception centres, by mobile teams and in some transit shelters. Main ‘impact’ evidence is of numbers reached in different service centres.</td>
<td>Impacts and effectiveness of activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and communication</td>
<td>3RP M R IER H] M R I G SQ Q Y R M G EX M SR G E Q TEM K R W W LE V information about key dangers, how to avoid them, regular migration routes and available services – focus varies by stage of journey. Some evidence of effective participatory approaches involving children designing information campaigns.</td>
<td>Impacts of campaigns rarely evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social protection</td>
<td>Evidence of positive impact of cash transfers on children’s health, education and nutritional well-being, and ability to reunite with family members. Skills training without efforts to strengthen livelihood opportunities has little effect on intentions to (re)migrate. Initiatives that prioritize local economic development are more likely to be effective.</td>
<td>Type of initiative with most rigorous evaluations but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>Campaigns and activities integrating host communities and migrants, e.g., sports and arts activities, increasingly trying to IRW V IFS X L LS W X G SQ Q Y R M X M I W E R H Q M K V E R W F I R</td>
<td>Limited impact evidence examining changes in attitudes or behaviour.</td>
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</table>
Contributions, in cash or kind, from local organizations, which boosted the legitimacy of externally funded initiatives. The report also identifies the following factors which undermined initiatives' impact and effectiveness:

- Government departments overwhelmed with excessive responsibilities, particularly in the context of policy changes, an increase in migration flows and high levels of staff turnover.
- Insufficient skill levels among key ‘front-line’ staff (service providers and migration officials), particularly in areas where migration flows have recently increased and/or too few staff have relevant professional backgrounds. This leads to limited capacity to implement child protection policies and protocols.
- Insufficient funding, which limits initiatives’ reach, impact and sustainability. Though some initiatives – particularly those providing or renovating infrastructure, or distributing emergency assistance – have reached hundreds of thousands of people on the move and in host communities, funding for emergency response plans often allows them to reach only a small proportion of people in overall need (OCHA, 2020; R4V, 2022b). The 2021 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for displaced Venezuelans, for example, only received 42 per cent of funding required; the education, nutrition and social integration sectors were particularly underfunded (R4V, 2022b).
- Misalignment between children’s and families’ priorities, and those of funders or implementing organizations, in some cases, both in terms of choice of activities and of key information and communication needs. These point to the need for a greater emphasis on basic livelihood, food security and shelter, and safe care for young children, including expanded day care to enable parents to work and/or to accomplish administrative tasks related to settling into a new country (DARA, 2022; Prieto and Montiel, 2020). Two studies also highlighted an overemphasis on parenting workshops to counter violence against children, in the context of insufficient efforts to help parents provide for children’s basic needs (DARA, 2022; Save the Children, 2019).
- Limited extent of participatory needs assessment and project development: Evidence of participatory approaches to developing or refining activities involving children (or their families) in contexts of mobility is rare, which may lead to priority needs being missed. Evaluations also rarely involved children in articulating the strengths and weaknesses of initiatives, or even included the voices of children. Some of the few exceptions were the studies of returnee-focused programmes in Honduras (Universalia, 2017; Casa Alianza Honduras, 2015; Concha, 2020) and an initiative in Colombia, where Save the Children incorporated student feedback into the design of education programmes serving migrant children (Save the Children, 2019).
- Limited gender-responsiveness. In many of the initiatives examined, gender-responsiveness was largely implemented through awareness-raising around gender-based violence, through training to better support survivors, and through the provision of menstrual hygiene kits. Only one study reported on efforts to shift underlying gender norms; this initiative was considered to be helping shift gender stereotypes and to lead to greater respect for people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities on the move. Evaluations recommended greater attention to developing more gender-responsive approaches, given persistently inequitable gender norms and high levels of sexual violence.
Much research into the experiences and needs of children on the move in LAC has been undertaken. Though many gaps are specific to countries or sectors, a few cross-cutting gaps are apparent. These include:

- data that are not always disaggregated by age – a priority of the International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC, 2022);
- limited evidence on children moving through regular pathways;
- the effectiveness of many actions, including: education for children in transit; child protection system strengthening efforts, particularly training and the development of guides and protocols for responding to children on the move; legal assistance and initiatives to support access to documentation; awareness-raising activities around violence against children; and MHPSS activities;
- limited evidence on children returning to their or their parents’ countries of origin, and any differences related to the nature of return (voluntary return or expulsion);
- geographical gaps: evidence is strongly skewed to the migration and refugee flows with the greatest levels of international funding and visibility. This means that patterns of movement with implications for child well-being, but that involve smaller numbers, are much less well documented. Examples include movements in both directions between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, movements of nationalities other than Venezuelans and Haitians in South America, and returns, particularly expulsions to Haiti and northern Central America.

There are so many of these workshops on parenting here that you would think that we don’t love our children here. The NGOs are fighting over each other to use these spaces, there are so many of the same types of workshops every week.

(DARA, 2022)
The report recommends increasing the priority given to impact evaluation. In contexts of pressing needs, there are ethical questions about the trade-off between committing funds to research and evaluation, as compared with programming to meet those needs, as well as the cost and logistical challenges of following up with a mobile population. Nevertheless, there are several promising routes to strengthening the evidence base on effective approaches. These include:

1. Investigating migrants’ and refugees’ (including children’s) levels of satisfaction with services offered more systematically. This could identify areas of improvement (particularly for people in transit) across different services (e.g., information and documentation assistance, health care, child protection services, WASH). Potentially this could be integrated into the periodic monitoring of activities.

2. Pooling funds more frequently between organizations for needs assessment and thematic evaluations. This would allow studies to probe more deeply, to capture children’s and their families’ perspectives more effectively and to understand better the extent of changes (or not) in the lives of children in contexts of human mobility.

3. Making greater use of publicly available data to understand the impacts of changes in policy (e.g., with respect to regularization or entitlements to particular services). Both administrative data (e.g., data on education or health service use) and data from regularly conducted surveys, such as Living Standards Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys, and Labour Force Surveys, could provide insights into how far policy changes are affecting migrant and refugee children, and allow comparisons of poverty levels, service use, etc., with their non-migrant counterparts, as studies in Brazil have done.
References