

# CHILDREN WITHOUT TRUCE

Victims of forced displacement by widespread violence  
in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala



**MONITORING SYSTEM**

Forced displacement in the Northern  
Triangle of Central America



This unit is in charge of the creation and development of a regional mechanism that allows for the follow up and monitoring of internal forced displacement by widespread violence in the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America. To do this, it developed strategies and methodological instruments for the collection, storage, and analysis of data on the magnitude and characteristics of the phenomenon. It also produces trimestral, annual, and special reports on the dynamics, nature, and patterns of internal displacement in the region.

The information produced and analyzed by the Monitoring System allows for advocacy work with the Governments of the region so that they assume their responsibility to the humanitarian needs and protection of the victims of forced internal displacement, with special attention given to vulnerable groups, such as children, adolescents, women heads of family, the elderly, and disabled people, among others. Thanks to this System, we are convinced that gathering data is an essential task to increase social consciousness of the needs of victims, and to place the phenomenon on the national agenda.

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## Acronyms

CANAF	Attention Center for Returnee Children and Adolescents
CEPAL	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
CIDH	The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)
CIPPDV	Inter Institutional Commission for the Protection of People Displaced by Violence
CIPRODEH	Centre for Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights
CONADEH	National Human Rights Commission in Honduras
CONMIGHO	Consular Migration Observatory of Honduras
CSJ	Supreme Court of Justice of El Salvador
DGME	General Directorate of Migration
EDUCO	Education and Cooperation Foundation
FGR	Attorney General of El Salvador
FAES	Armed forces of El Salvador
IML	Institute of Legal Medicine
ISNA	Salvadoran Institute for the Integrated development of Children and Adolescents
IUDPAS	University Institute on Democracy, Peace and Security
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education in Guatemala
MINED	Ministry of Education in El Salvador
OIM	International Organization for Migration
ONV	National Violence Observatory
PDDH	Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights
PMH	Human Mobility Pastoral
PNC	National Civil Police
SBS	Secretariat of Social Welfare
UDFI	Forced Internal Displacement Unit
UNAH	National Autonomous University of Honduras

## Summary

The following report systematizes data on internal displacement by widespread violence, and its effects on children and adolescents in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The information focuses on this population group to expose the effects of widespread violence that increase the vulnerability of children and adolescents.

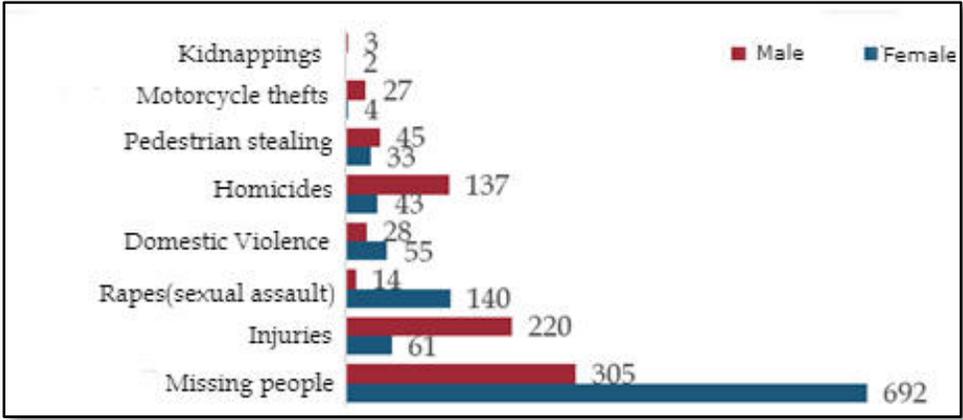
The period analyzed for this report was from January 2016 to June 2018. In the case of El Salvador, the report relied on information collected from Cristosal's database, and records from national and international organizations serving children and adolescents with a territorial presence in the country. In the case of Honduras, the report relied on information and registers provided by the following organizations: Casa Alianza, CIPRODEH, and Human Mobility Pastoral, as well as the anti union violence network. These organizations directly assist victims of violence who are internally displaced. In Guatemala, the systematized information (of a qualitative nature) has been gathered so far by Cristosal, based on a study by Rafael Landivar University.

The report also includes extracts from testimonies, and two case studies of displacement by violence overseen by in El Salvador, one case overseen by Casa Alianza in Honduras, and three cases directly assisted by Pop No'j Association in Guatemala of returnee indigenous children who were forced to migrate. These cases focus on the very children and adolescents who are affected. They include a proactive analysis of the gaps detected with the intention that the States can nimbly consider them to benefit the necessary protection and care of this population.

To date, there is no accurate data on the number of people who are forced to leave their homes due to widespread violence in Guatemala, thus the phenomenon remains invisible. The studies that have been conducted on forced displacement by violence refer more to international migration than internal displacement. The State of Guatemala does not currently have a law on internal displacement by widespread violence.

Guatemala is considered one of the most violent countries in Central America, according to data from the National Civil Police (PNC, 2018). Between January 2017 and July 2018, 6,632 homicides occurred, 5,681 were men and 951 were women. In the same year, they registered 2,690 murders of people ages 0 to 24, and 512 were between 12 and 17 years old (PNC, 2018). The National Civil Police's data (PNC, 2018) shows that the departments with the highest indices of violence against children and adolescents are: Guatemala, Alta Verapaz, Escuintla, Petén, and Huehuetenango. Between January and July 2018, the PNC reported 1,812 complaints of violence against children and adolescents, 783 of them male, and 1,029 of them female. The increase in the number of complaints from female children and adolescents is because 692 females were reported missing, and 140 reported rapes.

**Graph 1.** Crimes against children and adolescents disaggregated by gender and age range, from January to July 2018. Guatemala



Source: Own creation, based on data obtained from the PNC-Guatemala, through public access to information.

The rate of violence against children and adolescents is alarming. The Children and Adolescent Shelter Association, in their report, "Statistics on Children and Adolescents 2018," suggests that, "children and adolescents continue to be victims of a broken system that does not comply with the protection they need" (Children and Adolescent Shelter Association, 2018, paragraph. 2).

Regarding Honduras, Casa Alianza reports that, in the past 20 years, 12,642 arbitrary executions and violent deaths of children and young adults under 23 years old have been registered in the country, of which 3,528 have occurred in the last four and a half years (Casa Alianza, 2018). On the other hand, data from the National Violence Observatory [ONV] of the National Autonomous University of Honduras [UNAH], indicates that 3,179 child homicides occurred between 2008 and 2015, in other words, a violent death occurred every 22 hours (ONV-IUDPAS-UNAH, 2016).

Another indicator of forced displacement in Honduras are school dropouts, which are monitored by the Secretariat of Education (2017). Between 2014 and 2016, 170,520 children and adolescents across three different education stages: preschool, primary school, and secondary/high school, left the educational system. This represents an average of three student drop outs for every 100 students enrolled during that period.

On the other hand, according to the Departmental Directorate of Education of Francisco Morazán, approximately 369 schools are under threat by criminal bands. Teachers face a similar situation when they must work in schools located in areas with the presence of criminal gangs (Aleteia SAS, 2018).

According to Cristosal's records in El Salvador, between January 2016 and June 2018, the organization assisted 418 children and adolescents who were forcibly displaced by widespread violence. Of these cases, 208 were girls and adolescent women (49.8%), and 210 were boys and adolescent men (50.2%). Regarding their ages, 66.7% were children between 0-11 years old, while 33.3% were adolescents. Cristosal worked with a total of 141 people ages 0-17 in 2016, 241 in 2017,

and 36 from January to June 2018. It is important to mention that of the 418 children and adolescents, 202 of them were the direct victims of the violence that forced their family move; of which 120 were in a situation of forced displacement at the time of their registration. 67.3% of the 202 children and adolescents who were direct victims were between the ages of 0 and 11 years old.

**Graph 1. Children and Adolescents Who Had to Forcibly Move, 2016 to June 2018. El Salvador**

Age	2016		2017		2018		Total
	N	%	N	%	n	%	
<b>0-11 years old</b>	104	73.8	153	63.5	22	61.1	<b>279</b>
<b>12-17 years old</b>	37	26.2	88	36.5	14	38.9	<b>139</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>141</b>		<b>241</b>		<b>36</b>		<b>418</b>

Source: Own creation, based on the database of Cristosal's monitoring system (2018).

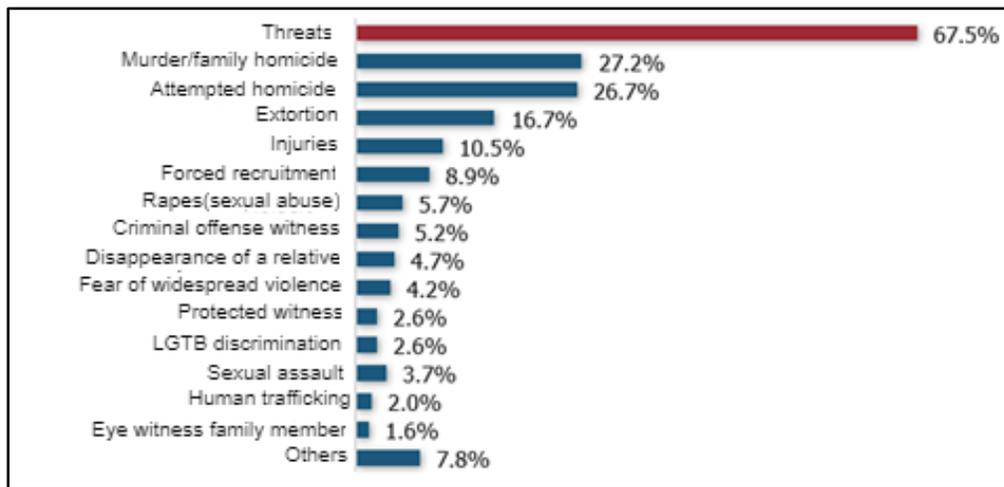
This register, and wake-up call was also reported by organizations focused on children and adolescents with a strong territorial presence in El Salvador. The EDUCO Foundation assisted and registered 346 children and adolescents who were displaced in 2016 and 2017. Meanwhile, Plan International reported providing humanitarian aid to 787 families that included child and adolescent members, of which 70% of them were in a situation of confinement with restricted mobility due to widespread violence, and 28% had been forcibly displaced.

### **What motivated these children, adolescents and their families to forcibly displace?**

*"My mom told us that if we went to the pulpería [corner store], and we came back, we had to lock the door, just like in a prison. We were confined and could not go outside, because they (the gang members) were already saying that we stole things from them. They did not ask us for a specific sum; they just told us that if we did not want to pay the 'supposed renta' (extortion fee), we would share our house. That was the moment I told my mom that we could not live like that. I told my mom to sell the house, even if it was for a small amount, but that we had to leave that place, because our lives were worth nothing in that house." (Testimony, Tegucigalpa, Honduras).*

In the case of El Salvador, the majority of families with children and adolescents stated that one or more family members had been a victim of threats (67.5%), followed by 27.2% that said a close family member had been murdered. It is important to highlight that 26.7% of families experienced an attempted homicide against a family member (see the following graph).

**Graph 2.** Cause of forced displacement by widespread violence in children and adolescents, 2016 to June 2018, El Salvador



Source: Own creation, based on the database of Cristosal's monitoring system (2018).

Regarding the perpetrator of the act of violence that caused children, adolescents, and their families to move, primarily people associated with gangs were reported (94.6%). Despite the incidence being much lower, it must be noted that in a 6.3% of the cases, PNC members were held responsible, and, to a lesser extent, members of the Armed Forces of El Salvador [FAES] were mentioned (1%). These figures should be highlighted, because they implicate institutions that should be guaranteeing citizen and national security, as agent generating insecurity.

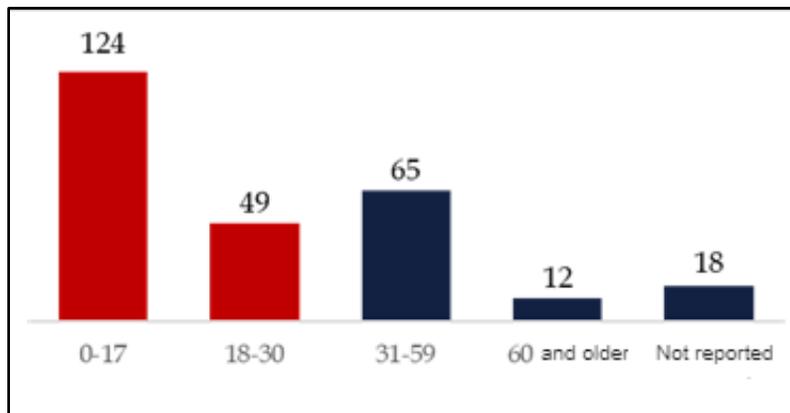
Despite the severity of the situation that they face, in only 55.3% of cases was a complaint filed before the authorities. The entities to which families turned to the most, were the PNC (62.9%), the Attorney General of El Salvador (FGR, 59.0%), and, on a small scale, families approached the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights (PDDH, 22.8%). However, it is important to note that in a 41.4% of the cases handled by Cristosal, families acknowledged that they had not reported the violent act they were a victim of. The reasons they mentioned for not reporting were diverse, among which stand out the fear of reprisal from the perpetrator (82.2%), and, on a smaller scale, mistrust in institutions (24%), among others.

In Honduras, there has been progress, on the part of the State, in the official recognition of forced displacement since 2013, when executive order PCM-053-2013 (Executive Government, 2013) created the Interinstitutional Commission for the Protection of People Displaced by Violence [CIPPDV]. Nevertheless, to this day, no State authority has created a direct care mechanism for internally displaced victims of violence. Additionally, despite recognizing the problem, the State has not approved a law on forced internal displacement as demanded by civil society organizations, and it has not given institutions the resources needed to approach the people who are victims of forced displacement, instead placing the responsibility on civil society organizations to provide emergency humanitarian aid and action to protect the victims.

Cristosal Honduras, in synergy with civil society organizations, has shared information from January to June 2018 on victims of internal displacement. The partner organizations include: the Center for the Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights [CIPRODEH], Human Mobility

Pastoral [PMH], Casa Alianza in Honduras, and the Anti Union Violence Network, who have assisted a total of 268 people internally displaced by widespread violence. The majority of the internally displaced people assisted by these organizations are children, adolescents, and youth under 30 years old, whom represent 65% of the total.

**Graph 3. Internally Displaced People Assisted by Organizations, According to Age Range. Honduras**



Source: Own creation, with data shared by CIPRODEH, Human Mobility Pastoral, Casa Alianza Honduras, and Anti-union Violence Network. Honduras

According to the National Human Rights Commission in Honduras [CONADEH], in 2017, its Forced Internal Displacement Unit [UDFI] received 688 complaints of different violations of the right to life and personal integrity, affecting 1,424 people, 1.3% of which corresponded to children and adolescents ages 13 to 17 (National Human Rights Commission, 2017).

In its report, CONADEH notes that gang recruitment is one of the principal threats to children. In other words, the use and connection of children to organized crime activities. The report indicates that this issue remains unseen in Honduras due to a lack of investigation on the issue by the State's security and justice bodies, a lack of understanding about the recruitment processes criminal groups utilize, and because of existing gaps in the laws against human trafficking. In the case of extortion, CONADEH mentions that it is one of the principal and constant activities of criminal groups and causes displacement. This is due to factors like fragile State governance in areas dominated by the criminal groups, difficulties identifying forms of extortion, and the alleged complicity of State security agents, among others (National Human Rights Commission, 2017).

### Forced Internal Displacement By Violence and School Desertion

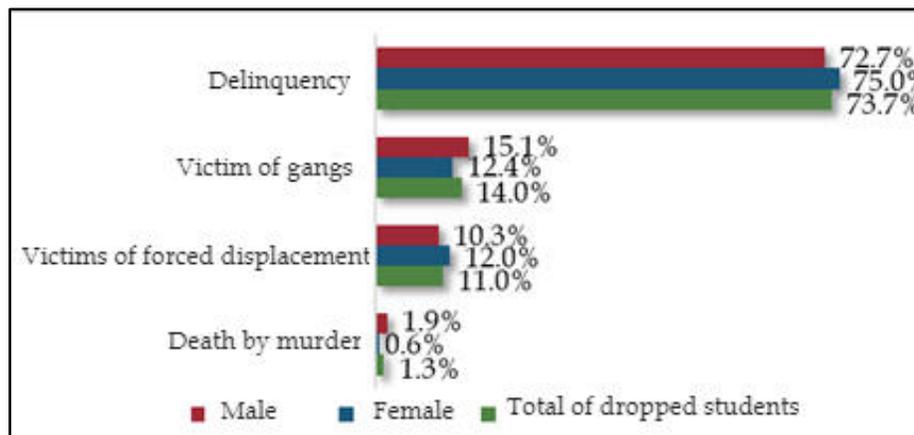
*Sara, and Eduardo, a mother and her 12 year-old son. They lived in an area controlled by one of the local gangs. Eduardo was threatened by a rival gang on public transportation that was trying to recruit him. Eduardo refused to join the delinquent group.*

*School, which should be a place of protection for children and adolescents, became the scene of the abuse of Eduardo's rights, above all his right to an education. The director of Eduardo's school asked him to change schools when he found out Eduardo had been threatened.*

*Eduardo had shown an amazing student performance and had even received recognition for his performance. However, this did not influence the institution's decision not to support the adolescent.*

According to data provided by the Ministry of Education of El Salvador (MINED, 2018), a total of 76,597 students dropped out of educational centers in 2017. Of these students, 44.1% were female, and 55.9% were male. The reasons students dropped out of school are diverse; in this report we will discuss those that are related to violence and internal displacement. Accordingly, 4,573 students nationwide dropped out of school because of violence-related reasons, representing 6% of the total students that abandoned their studies. The following chart shows the reason for leaving school, by gender. In general, it can be seen that delinquency is the most frequently cited reason, followed by victimization by gangs. It is important to point out that, of the total number of students who dropped out, 11% (502 students) dropped out because they were victims of forced displacement.

**Graph 4.** Students Who Dropped Out of School in 2017, Divided by Reason for Dropping Out and Gender.



Source: Own creation, based on the data provided by Ministry of Education (2018).

School desertion - as a direct effect of forced displacement - has not only been registered by Cristosal, but has also been detected by EDUCO, which has a presence in different municipalities of El Salvador, and works with children and adolescents through a sponsorship program to support education. In this way, in 2017, they identified that 311 of their programs beneficiaries dropped out of the educational system for violence-related reasons. Of the total number of children and adolescents identified by EDUCO, 56.6% of them dropped out because they and their families were forcibly displaced by widespread violence. Between January and September 2018, the organization registered 358 children and adolescents who dropped out of school because of violence, of which 170 were forcibly displaced.

In Guatemala, in the first quarter of 2017, the newspaper the Prensa Libre reported that, 13,000 minors suspended their primary or middle school studies, the causes identified were: poverty, family disintegration, cultural patterns, migration, child labor, health, school infrastructure, and racism. The following departments in Guatemala had the highest dropout rates: Escuintla, Petén, Izabal, Suchitepéchez, Zacapa, and Chiquimula (Alvizurez, 2017).

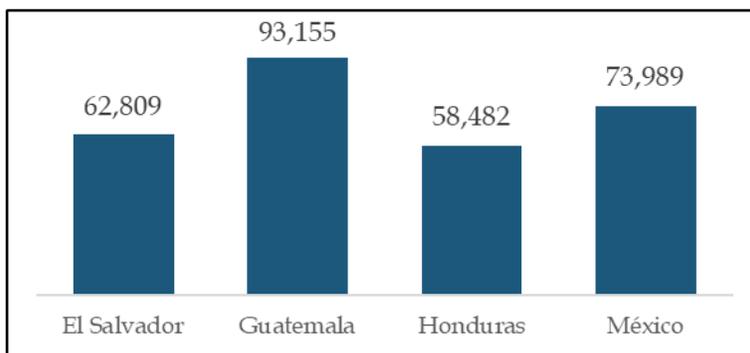
Additionally, the Prensa Libre reported that, according to the Ministry of Education's [Mineduc] statistics, student enrollment nationwide began at 3,887,264 students. However, in the first quarter of the year, 13,006 dropped out. Of that number, 2,551 said they were no longer interested in finishing school, 3,404 were transferred, 968 dropped out because of temporary migration, 663 due to work, 593 because of the distance they have to travel to get to school, 428 due to lack of resources, and 268 due to health issues (Alvizures, 2017).

In Honduras, school dropout rates have affected boys on a greater scale than girls across all three schooling levels: pre-primary, primary, and secondary school (between middle school and high school). And this is more noticeable in 7th to 9th grade; in 2015 specifically, the school dropout rate was 4.3% for girls, and 5.7% for boys, and in 2016 this increase to 6.7% for boys, and to 4.9% for girls (Secretariat of Education, 2017). In 2016, it was reported that 2,886 students from the three educational levels nationwide (pre-primary, primary, and secondary school) abandoned their studies for reasons related to school violence, the following department being those most affected: Atlántida with a 30% dropout rate, Cortés with 25.85%, and Francisco Morazán with 13.6%. In other words, 69.4% of cases of school dropout caused by school violence are concentrated in these three departments (Secretariat of Education, 2017).

According to the Departmental Directorate of Education of Francisco Morazán, approximately 369 schools are under the threat of criminal gangs. Teachers are faced with a similar situation, when their job requires them to work in schools located in areas where there is a criminal gang presence (Aleteia SAS, 2018). As an extreme anti-violence measure, the Government has decided to militarize 49 educational centers, with the aims of providing safety for school staff and the educational community (Casa Alianza Honduras, 2018).

## Forced Displacement by Violence and its Connection with Migration

**Graph 5.** Unaccompanied children and adolescents, apprehended at the southern border of United States of America, 2013-2018.



Source: Own creation based on data from the United States Department of Homeland Security.

In the report of the extraordinary session of the Board of Directors of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in November 2017 by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [CEPAL], El Salvador expressed that

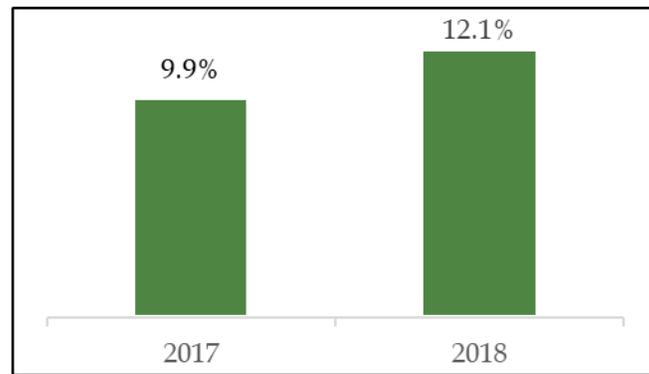
- to assist migrant children and women - they have strengthened the "legal and programmatic framework, and support for Salvadorans abroad (CEPAL, 2018:11). Something else that stood out in this conference, was the creation of the Center of Attention for Child and Adolescent Returnees [CANAF], which depends on the Salvadoran Institute for the Integrated Development of Children and Adolescents [ISNA]. These centers work in Usulután, San Miguel, and Santa Ana - the last one recently inaugurated - and they work specifically with children and adolescents who migrated unaccompanied and have been deported. The center provides assistance in the areas of: health, food, education, housing, legal counseling, and employment (ISNA, s/f).

Despite all of these efforts on the part of the Salvadoran Government, Salvadoran child migration has not stopped. In 2017, the General Directorate of Migration (DGME, 2018) reported that a total of 2,600 children and adolescents were deported, both overland and by air. Of these 2,600 children, 652 were returned by plane, and 1,975 by land. 35.1% (913) of them were adolescents between 15 and 17 years old. The International Organization for Migration (OIM, s/f), has published that in El Salvador, between January and June 2018, a total of 853 children and adolescents were returned, of which 35.6% were girls and adolescent women, and the remaining 64.4% were boys and adolescent men. According to data from DGME, 42.9% said they migrated for economic reasons, 28% for family reunification, and 26.4% due to factors associated with insecurity. Even though the incidence of violence is lower, it does not specify the type of violence, which covers up acts of violence that have been normalized.

In Guatemala, according to the Department of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents of the Secretariat of Social Welfare, the reasons behind migration are the search for: a job, better life opportunities, family reunification, education, and, lastly, because of violence (SBS, 2018). In 2017, of the 4,328 unaccompanied children and adolescents who were deported, 22 said they migrated because of the violence, and, thus far, in 2018, 17 have expressed the same motive (SBS, 2018:11). However, the institution does not delve into the phenomenon. According to the OIM's data for 2017, Guatemalan children and adolescents were motivated to migrate for the following reasons: 74.9% improving their life's condition, 46.6% family reunification, and 36.7% to find better job opportunities. 7% migrated because of violence and insecurity.

Meanwhile in Honduras, the information provided by the Consular and Migratory Observatory [CONMIGHO] indicates that in 2017, 48,022 people were deported to Honduras, of which 4,738 (9.9%) were children and adolescents under the age of 17 (CONMIGHO, 2018). For the period from January 1 to September 14, 2018, deportation numbers have increased to 53,756 Honduran migrants, of which 6,486 (12%) are children and adolescents (CONMIGHO, 2018).

**Graph 6.** Children and Adolescents Deported to Honduras, 2017 to September 14, 2018



Source: Own creation based on data from the Consular and Migratory Observatory of Honduras (CONMIGHO).

Casa Alianza of Honduras, in the framework of the study, "Children and Migration in Central and North America: Causes, Policies, Practices, and Challenges," shows that of the 200 child and adolescent migrants deported from Mexico who were interviewed, 65% stated that the main reason they decided to migrate was to escape violent situations in their communities. The predominant situations were: death threats from criminal groups, delinquency generated by confrontation between gang, petty crimes, and domestic violence (Musalo, Frydman, & Ceriani, 2015).

### Identification of Actors and Actions

The Pop Noj Association, and Cristosal developed a map of actors in Guatemala, in order to identify institutions and organizations willing to acknowledge and address forced displacement by violence. From the map of actors, one can observe that the institutions of the Executive and Legislative Organisms show an intermediate level of availability, because displacement is not yet recognized within the political agenda. As such, they don't have programs to assist displaced children and adolescents. Institutions from the justice sector, such as the Public Ministry and the Constitutional Court of the Supreme Court of Justice, have a discourse that enable them to support more protective measures for displaced children and adolescents. Decentralized institutions, such as the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights, are the most aware of the phenomenon of internal displacement and are thus taking actions necessary to address the phenomenon.

In the case of El Salvador, the Salvadoran state must recognize forced internal displacement by violence as a problem that is affecting vulnerable population groups, such as children and adolescents. At the same time, it is being asked to comply with *Amparo* 411 of the Supreme Court of Justice [CSJ], in which the Court requests that the State to officially acknowledge, protect, and support the victims of this phenomenon.

One of the main accomplishments of the Honduran State is the recognition of internal forced displaced. However, this is of little to no help for the victims of this issue, particularly children who are completely defenseless, and at the mercy of the organized crime groups in their

territories. This negligence is evidenced by the little or no impact of victim assistance and protection programs.

## Recommendations

The States of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, through their respective programs for the protection of children and adolescents, should create assistance programs specifically targeted to child and adolescent victims of internal forced displacement by widespread violence. These programs should guarantee direct and comprehensive care, defining each State agency with their mandates and responsibilities for the care, protection, and reparation of the rights of children and adolescents. It does not correspond to them, nor is it sustainable for civil society organizations to provide emergency humanitarian aid, and temporary and permanent relocation services.

The State institutions responsible for the care of children and adolescents must create measures for the prevention, assistance, and protection of potential victims of internal displacement and forced migration due to violence based on the conventions and international agreements ratified or recognized by the country. This should be accomplished with a human-rights focus that centers the best interests of the child. All these efforts should address the root causes of the problem, and emphasize long-term solutions for the affected population, as this is precisely the area where the most gaps have been detected in the initiatives that the States in all three countries currently implement.

It is necessary for State institutions to generate certified, accurate data on internal forced displacement by violence. With this data the State can give the phenomenon more visibility, promote solutions to assist victims - especially children and adolescents - that are based on an adequate registration and systematization of data, and it can correctly characterize the phenomenon and its victims. Data collection should not be limited to the survey of children and adolescents who have been deported but should transcend this to include in-depth interviews that allow for the identification of the different variables involved. State actions cannot be based on biased information, product of under registration and outdated information.

A regional vision, based on shared data, and comprehensive and coordinated action plans, would allow for the creation of effective protection initiatives that are implemented in the sub-region. It could even facilitate the development of pilot programs focused on long-term solutions for children, adolescents, and their families in the Central America region.

State institutions could take into account the best practices of civil society organizations that serve displaced populations, such as non re-victimization, and long-lasting solutions that promote a life plan for children, adolescents, and their families. Civil society organizations express their willingness to cooperate. However, it is necessary to state that this willingness does not mean they will assume responsibility for the humanitarian aid and relocation of victims and their families, as this is the responsibility of the States as the duty-holders in the area of human rights.

Special attention should be given to the presence of internal forced displacement by violence with a political component, which requires a specific treatment as there is resistance from the States to acknowledge this type of violence.

It is of utmost importance for international agencies to promote the official recognition of the phenomenon of forced displacement in El Salvador, and Guatemala. We ask the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [IACHR] for special follow-up so that a draft law specifically for the protection and assistance of internally displaced victims can be approved by the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly. We also ask that the IACHR accompany efforts aimed at the approval of a draft law of the same nature that is still pending in the Honduran Congress, and an official recognition in Guatemala of this phenomenon.

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This report was written in collaboration with:

