

“We also have a say”: Experiences of children and adolescents affected by migration

April 2025 | Colombia

Key recommendations made by children, adolescents, carers and key actors:

- 1. Strengthening family communication and community ties is essential.** Venezuelan children and adolescents emphasised the need for greater emotional support and understanding within their families. Support is needed to implement strategies that promote positive communication practices, such as active listening within families, as well as community spaces that foster stronger social connections.
- 2. Improving access to quality education is critical for the development, safety and well-being of children and young people.** In Colombia, access to education for those living in informal settlements must be improved, as well as school infrastructure, resources, and recreational areas. More teachers are needed as well as training so they can identify and prevent bullying.
- 3. Improving the safety of public spaces is essential for the protection and well-being of young people.** Strengthening networks of support and collaboration between the community and local authorities is key to enhancing responses to security risks. Safer recreational spaces are needed which require more maintenance, secure playgrounds, and better public lighting. Participants also emphasised the need for more psychological support and safe spaces provided by humanitarian organisations.
- 4. A multisectoral response is essential to address the diverse needs of children and adolescents affected by migration.** Beyond strengthening education and protection, responses should also improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and promote entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods, always considering the local context. This will not only contribute to the safety and well-being of children, but also reduce their vulnerability, school absenteeism and the need to migrate.

Introduction

The political and economic crisis in Venezuela continues to cause migration flows that affect the safety and livelihoods of those migrating and host communities. By 2024, [7.8 million migrants and refugees left Venezuela](#), with Colombia receiving the most.

According to the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows ([GIFMM](#), by its Spanish acronym), 36.6% of the Venezuelan population in transit in Colombia are children and adolescents who face barriers to accessing education, discrimination and bullying.

Between 13 September and 1 October 2024, IMPACT, through its initiative REACH, conducted an assessment with children and adolescents, caregivers and experts, to understand how young people are affected by migration in a host community in Maicao, Colombia, on the border with Venezuela. Focus groups and key actors (KA) interviews with protection experts were held with the support of Save the Children to understand the experiences and needs of children who have migrated and those who have remained. For a full analysis of the findings, please find the full report [here](#).

In a climate of reduced funding, studies of this kind are critical to assess the needs and experiences of children and adolescents. With this information, we can inform a more effective cross-sector response to improve their wellbeing while ensuring their voices are heard.

1. Strengthen positive parenting, and community and family ties

Children and adolescents, as well as caregivers and KAs, highlighted the need to improve interpersonal relationships and stability in their homes. Many children and young people reported emotional and physical abuse within the home, verbal insults, arguments among other family members, and limited support. Young people miss their family and community members, some feel depressed and left behind. Young people emphasised the need for improved communication and respect within their families, expressing desires for better understanding and emotional support. In Maracaibo, active listening and respect for their privacy, avoiding comparisons and constant criticism were suggested.

Caregivers suggested promoting cultural and community activities to reinforce family values, whilst KIs emphasised the need to sensitise and train the community on child protection issues. Involving families in educational and community activities through the creation of parenting schools and joint workshops was suggested.

"I don't like how little time we spend together as a family. My advice would be to listen to and value what you have at home." (Adolescent men, 15-17, Maicao).

2. Strengthen educational spaces

Participants agreed on the need to strengthen educational spaces for the development and protection of young people. Requirements for access into the education system should be made more flexible, and educational spaces should be established within camps to guarantee the safety of and education for migrant children. Caregivers highlighted the importance of the government strengthening the education system to reduce dropout and prevent children from being exposed to situations of vulnerability. KAs suggested that teachers should be trained to identify and prevent

situations of abuse, reinforcing the idea that education should be a safe and protective space.

It was also proposed that schools be provided with better infrastructure and basic resources, including adequate recreational areas, teaching materials and academic reinforcement for those who need it.

Participants stressed the importance of the role of teachers, calling for more teachers and noting that their attitude directly influences pupils' motivation to learn. They recommended encouraging more inclusive teaching, with greater patience and clarity in explanations.

3. Improve the safety of public spaces and services

The safety of public spaces must be improved for the protection and wellbeing of young people. Children, adolescents, parents and caregivers alike highlighted the need to reduce the dangers associated with road traffic accidents and to promote community strategies for reporting and responding to protection incidents, including accessible reporting mechanisms.

Establishing networks of support and collaboration between citizens and local authorities is key to strengthen the response to security risks. A protection expert noted that it is essential to incorporate an ethnic approach in security and protection programmes, ensuring the integration of indigenous communities without altering their traditional practices. KIs pointed to the insufficiency of protection services by the state and humanitarian organisations, especially in vulnerable communities. Caregivers called for psychologists alongside safe spaces provided for children by humanitarian organisations. It was also suggested that organisations increase their presence in the community to strengthen the well-being of young people.

Parks, safe playgrounds and better lighting in public areas are needed to provide safer spaces for recreation. Furthermore, participants proposed extracurricular activities and cultural spaces that would allow

"You could say that we are present as organisations, offering health services, education and food. However, we are often unable to cover all the demand because resources are limited and the conditions in La Guajira." (Protection expert).

children and adolescents to develop their artistic and academic skills, including dance, singing and mathematics classes.

4. Promote a multisectoral response

A multisectoral approach is critical for responding to the interconnected needs of children and families affected by migration. Caregivers and KAs agreed that lack of employment is a determining factor in the migration and vulnerability of children in the communities. To mitigate these risks, caregivers stressed the importance of promoting entrepreneurship and generating sustainable livelihoods to prevent family separation. KAs proposed national and municipal programmes to guarantee sources of income and capacity building in different trades that contribute to family stability.

At the same time, respondents highlighted the need to improve access to essential

services, such as WASH, which directly impacts child well-being. For instance, girls aged 9-11 emphasized the importance of having adequate toilets at home or in community spaces, as the absence of these services affects their dignity, health, and sense of security. Addressing these challenges in a coordinated manner—linking economic stability with improved service provision—can strengthen protection mechanisms and reduce the vulnerabilities that drive migration.

"Bathrooms, we need bathrooms." (Girls, 9-11, Maicao).



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