Children affected by internal migration and displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean

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CHILDREN AFFECTED BY INTERNAL MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT in Latin America and the Caribbean
Brief: Children affected by internal migration and displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Key Points

There is much less evidence on children’s internal migration within the region than is available for international movement; available evidence is often much less up to date. The countries with most evidence are Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru; the brief also outlines insights from Central America and Haiti. The numbers involved are often much higher than for international flows, even in countries that are host to substantial migrant and refugee populations and people in transit.

The evidence on factors contributing to internal migration and displacement generally focuses at a population level, with limited attention to specific factors affecting children and adolescents. This said, the studies reviewed mention inequalities in educational opportunities as an important factor motivating children and families moving to regional or capital cities, and poverty and regional inequalities contributing to adolescents’ long-term or temporary labour migration. Studies also highlight organized crime and violence – both generalized and targeted at individual families, children and adolescents – as reasons why children and families move to cities or states that are perceived as safer.

The studies of seasonal migration reviewed highlight adolescents’ (mostly precarious) living and working conditions, and their migration for seasonal work to fund their own or family members’ education. One study from Mexico reported on pre-adolescent children taking part in farm work alongside their parents, with limited education and childcare provision available and low parental wages. Where schools are provided in temporary farm settlements (mostly for younger, non-working children), language barriers contribute to high levels of drop-out among indigenous children. The timing of seasonal labour migration also limits their ability to re-enrol in their home areas.

Studies of children’s and families’ long-term migration focus largely on the impacts on education, poverty, housing and protection issues. These studies highlight interruptions to children’s education, difficulties re-enrolling for administrative reasons, challenges related to language barriers (for indigenous children) and adaptation to new environments, but also suggest that migration enables rural children to enrol in higher quality schools. Studies from Colombia also highlight higher rates of mental ill-health among displaced children, but do not always distinguish the effects of displacement and those of the reason for displacement (e.g., violence). Three studies also highlight continuing safety risks in urban areas, related to displaced families often finding accommodation in poor areas with high levels of violence.

A set of studies from Bolivia, Haiti, Peru and Paraguay report on rural children migrating to stay with urban households and undertake housework in exchange for board and lodging. The majority of studies highlight the exploitative nature of these arrangements, the health and protection risks these children face (including physical and sexual abuse) and their often limited access to education.

Reports from across the region identify trafficking of children both within countries (often to large cities and tourist resorts) and internationally, particularly by criminal groups operating in border areas. The largest number of reported cases are of trafficking for sexual exploitation (particularly of girls), followed by labour exploitation, particularly in agriculture, mining and other natural resource-based industries (where boys tend to be overrepresented), and domestic work. Studies highlight poverty and deceptive offers of work as key factors leading to recruitment of children into highly exploitative arrangements.
This brief brings together insights from studies on internal migration and displacement within Latin America and the Caribbean. This is one of the world’s most urbanised regions, with much rural-to-urban migration having taken place in previous decades (Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria 2017). However, rural poverty, inequalities in work and educational opportunities between regions, and between rural areas and cities, continue to drive internal migration. Central America is experiencing rapid urbanisation, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa (International Organization for Migration and World Food Programme, 2022). In Peru, for example, as reported by Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática and Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (INEI). The numbers moving internally far outweigh the numbers of international refugees and migrants.

1 National Institute of Statistics and Informatics and International Organization for Migration.
and OIM 2015), in the early-2010s, Lima received at least 57 per cent of internal migrants. The intensifying effect of climate change contributes to, and may accelerate, internal migration as agricultural livelihoods become increasingly precarious. As the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 2020) reports, increasingly frequent extreme weather events (such as tropical cyclones and hurricanes) also drive displacement both within countries and internationally.

Both adults and children in parts of the region (e.g., El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Colombia and Brazil) also report violence as an important reason for movement (Amnesty International 2020; Comisión Interinstitucional para la Protección de Personas Desplazadas por la Violencia 2015; Gobierno de El Salvador 2018). Children also move in pursuit of better education or work opportunities and to reunite with family members. The forces that underpin internal migration and displacement are similar to those that contribute to movement internationally (Save the Children, 2022).

Although international migration in the region has been the focus of much greater policy attention, funding and programme support, for some countries, the numbers moving internally far outweigh the numbers of international refugees and migrants. For example, since 2015, Brazil has welcomed 264,000 refugees and migrants from Venezuela (Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela (R4V) 2022). Between 2000 and 2017, 6.4 million Brazilians fled their homes due to disasters, 1.2 million moved due to development projects in their places of origin, such as dams and construction programmes, and 1.1 million rural people were displaced by land disputes (Folly 2018). Similarly, in Mexico, between 2015 and 2020, as reported by Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI, 2021), 874,967 foreign migrants and refugees were identified by migration authorities, while 3.8 million nationals migrated internally during the same period.

The brief draws on a set of 110 studies, and is based on a search of academic and grey literature in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French, with a focus on studies published since 2011. Unlike studies of international migration, these studies largely focus on children’s experiences at their destination, as journeys are typically considerably shorter; a few studies also discuss how conditions in their communities of origin contribute to movement. No studies discuss return and reintegration after temporary migration.

The studies reviewed mostly do not discuss specific policy or programme responses to issues arising for children from internal migration and displacement. This may be because issues affecting children who migrate internally are often considered within broader policies and initiatives (e.g., inclusive access to services). The main exception emerging from the studies reviewed was initiatives to strengthen the protection of specific groups of migrant or displaced children (e.g., those affected by some forms of child labour and trafficking). Thus, this brief does not discuss programme or policy responses in any depth.

2 Note: Most percentages in this study are rounded to a whole number. Very low numbers where decimal points are significant have not been rounded.
3 One study from the Dominican Republic found that over the period 2005–2010, bucking the general trend of rural-to-urban migration in the region, almost double the number of young people (aged 15–24) migrated from urban to rural areas as the reverse. The study does not suggest explanations, nor whether it is likely that similar dynamics persist today (Guiskin, 2019).
4 National Institute of Statistics and Geography.
5 It is important to note that the numbers of migrants identified by migration authorities is often substantially lower than the actual numbers.
6 Full details of the searches can be found in the companion report to this brief: Marcus, R. et al. (2023) Children on the move in Latin America and the Caribbean: Review of evidence, Panama City: UNICEF.
1.1 Structure of the brief

The brief outlines the evidence on poverty and inequality, climate change and disasters, violence and infrastructure projects as factors contributing to internal migration and displacement. It then outlines evidence on children’s experiences of seasonal internal migration, long-term internal movement and displacement, both with and without families, and on (largely) domestic child trafficking. The brief concludes with a summary of key insights and evidence gaps.

1.2 Availability of evidence

Compared with international movement, there is substantially less evidence on internal migration, both of the numbers of children on the move and of its effects. One reason for this is that official quantitative data on internal movement are often based on censuses that take place every 10 years, several of which were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Tsavkko Garcia 2021). Available data for many countries are now around 10 years out of date (see Table 1). Further, studies of children moving domestically rarely compare their situation and well-being with non-migrant children in their communities of origin or in the areas they settle, and thus provide a partial picture of the challenges, as well as the positive changes, that children in the region experience as a result of migration. Around half of the studies reviewed focus directly on migration and displacement; the rest are thematic studies (e.g., of child labour) that discuss issues facing both migrant and non-migrant children. Studies frequently focus on specific aspects of child well-being. For example, most of the studies found from Colombia focus on the mental health of displaced children, whereas those from Nicaragua largely discuss movement for work and study.
### Table 1. Available data on internal migration and displacement of children in Latin America and the Caribbean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY/SUBREGION</th>
<th>DATA</th>
<th>SOURCES</th>
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| **Bolivia** | ▪ Data from the 2012 census shows 1,033,174 people who lived in a region other than that of their birth, an increase of 89,132 people compared to 2001.  
▪ Between 2007 and 2012, children under 15 constituted 18% of internal migrants, down from 21% in 2001, with minimal gender differences. Children under age 15 mostly moved as part of family groups. Much movement in the 15–19 age group was for educational reasons. | Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) 2018; Unidad de Análisis de Políticas Sociales y Económicas 2018 |
| **Brazil** | ▪ Between 2000 and 2017, 6.4 million Brazilians fled their homes due to disasters, 1.2 million moved due to development projects in their places of origin, such as dams and construction programmes, and 1.1 million rural people were displaced by land disputes. | Folly 2018 |
| **Central American subregion** | ▪ In 2020, 1,639,554 displacements in Central America were caused by natural hazards, compared to 40,574 in 2019. | IDMC 2020 |
| **Colombia** | ▪ The numbers of internally displaced persons have increased in recent years. In 2009, 2,977,209 people (half of them children) were registered as displaced in the Registro Unico de Poblacion Desplazada. In 2020, almost 5 million people were registered as displaced, of whom 1.3 million were children. | Carrillo 2009; UNICEF 2021 |
| **Eastern Caribbean** | ▪ From 2014 to 2018, 3.4 million people, including 761,000 children, were internally displaced as a result of cyclone-related storms and flooding in Caribbean Small Island Developing States. The 2017 hurricanes alone displaced approximately 3 million people, including 400,000 children, in a single month. | Francis 2019; UNICEF 2019; IDMC n.d. |
| **Haiti** | ▪ An estimated 20,000 people were displaced as a result of violence and insecurity in 2021; at least 220,000 people were displaced by the earthquake of August 2021.  
▪ A survey of people displaced by violence in the Port-au-Prince area conducted in May 2022 as part of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix programme found that 52% were under 18. | OIM 2022a; OIM, 2022c |
| **Mexico** | ▪ 3.8 million people migrated internally between 2015 and 2020. Of these, 26% were children and adolescents aged 5–19 years.  
▪ The largest number of internal migrants moved from Mexico City (15%) and from the state of Mexico (14%), Veracruz (10%), Guerrero (5%) and Jalisco (4%) (data disaggregated by children’s age were not available).  
▪ The states with the largest numbers of internal child migrants arriving were: the state of Mexico, where 12% of residents aged 5–17 had lived in another state in 2015, Nuevo León (7%) and Mexico City (6%). | INEGI 2021 |
| **Peru** | ▪ In 2015, at least 7 million Peruvians were living outside the region where they were born. Children aged 0–14 are estimated to represent 11–18% of this total.  
▪ A study of 615 Peruvian adolescents in various regions of the country found that just under one third (200 respondents) had moved regions for at least three months over the period 2009–2013 and 40% had migrated more than once. | INEI and OIM 2015; INEI 2020; Gavonel 2017 |

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a National Institute of Statistics  
b No age-disaggregated data showing the number of children under 18 were found.  
c Unified Registry of Displaced Population
2 Factors contributing to internal migration and displacement

2.1 Poverty and regional inequalities exacerbated by climate change

Regional inequalities continue to underpin the migration of families, and of adolescents independently, to urban areas in search of better study and work opportunities. For example, in Peru, 45 per cent of people in rural areas live below the national poverty line in contrast to 14 per cent of urban dwellers, and 55 per cent of urban students achieve satisfactory education levels according to national benchmarks, compared with only 18 per cent of rural students (Cueto et al. 2018). In a study of 200 Peruvian adolescents aged 15–19, 38 per cent reported moving for education and 25 per cent for work (Gavonel 2017). As qualitative evidence has shown, the idea of ‘becoming somebody’ who speaks fluent Spanish and does not work in farming is central to indigenous families’ and adolescents’ motivation for rural-to-urban migration (Aufseeser 2021; Crivello 2011, 2015).
In Brazil, similarly, regional inequalities continue to influence internal migration but patterns of movements have changed in recent years: Migration to the Southeast Region of the country has slowed due to high living costs and lack of job opportunities, and newer urban centres in the south have become a sought-after destination for economic migrants (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada 2010). Few studies of economic migration in Brazil discuss children’s experiences; however, a small-scale study in Santa Catarina (a region that had a 59 per cent increase in the volume of migrants in recent years) found that 30 per cent of families had migrated more than once in their children’s lifetimes (Alcubierre 2017).

Regional inequalities and rural poverty are increasingly exacerbated by climate-related shocks and stresses (Mixed Migration Centre 2021; Horwood, Frouws and Forin 2019). In Mexico, Central America, some Caribbean countries (e.g., Haiti) and parts of South America (e.g., Peru and Chile), climate change is increasingly identified as a factor that contributes to the increase in domestic and international migration in search of better opportunities and living conditions (Nexus Interamerican Consulting Services 2021; Bergmann et al. 2021). Most evidence on climate-related displacement is not disaggregated by age. However, Baez et al. (2017) estimate that droughts in the northern Caribbean increase young people’s likelihood of internal migration by 7 individuals per 1000. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2019) reports that in the last quarter of 2018, 2.2 million people suffered crop losses mainly due to drought in the Central American Dry Corridor, covering El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua; droughts in Haiti have affected 4.4 million people, or half the population, over the past two decades (OCHA 2020).

Increasingly frequent and severe weather events are also contributing to displacement, with the small island states of the Caribbean being among the most vulnerable. The impacts of natural phenomena such as El Niño have increased, and the loss of 30% of Andean glaciers had a significant impact on water safety, agriculture and rural livelihoods. Climate change is also having serious effects in the Andean region: Over the last decade, the impacts of natural phenomena such as El Niño have increased, and the loss of 30 per cent of Andean glaciers also had a significant impact on water safety, agriculture and rural livelihoods (Bergmann et al. 2021). For example, in Peru, half the national territory and one third of the population is exposed to recurring hazards, with over 9 million people frequently facing heavy rains, floods and landslides; these factors, which already contribute to seasonal and permanent displacement, are likely to increase substantially with climate change. In Peru, in 2017 alone, 2,870 schools were damaged due to natural disasters – more than triple that of any previous years – leading to displacement in search for educational opportunities for children (Bergmann et al. 2021).

Many of the issues facing children in contexts of displacement are well-known in the field of child protection in emergencies (UNICEF 2019) and thus are summarized only briefly here. These include health risks related both to the damage caused by the disaster and

7 The respective figures were: Honduras: 937,000; Cuba: 639,000; Brazil: 358,000; and Guatemala: 339,000 (IDMC 2020).
conditions in emergency shelters, which are particularly acute for children under 5, and disrupted education. Children are particularly vulnerable during population displacements, especially if their parents are killed or they are separated from their families in the chaos of the event. Displacement, and in particular, sheltering in large, communal facilities often increases women’s, girls’ and LGBTQI+ people’s risk of sexual and gender-based violence (Bradshaw 2014). In addition to psychological stress, separated children are also at increased risk of inadequate care, violence and exploitation, including trafficking within countries and to other countries (Bleeker et al. 2021).

Disaster-related displacement can lead to long-term migration. For example, many of those affected by the years of drought and the hurricanes in Honduras joined the first migrant caravan of 2021 (IDMC 2021). Similarly, the 2017 earthquakes that took place in Puebla and Chiapas (Mexico), and hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020, contributed to further displacement and migration (Nexus Interamerican Consulting Services 2021). IDMC estimates that annually, on average 200,000 people are displaced by floods in Brazil; in 2021, total numbers displaced were 1.79 times higher than this estimate (IDMC 2022a). In Peru, half the national territory and one third of the population is exposed to recurring hazards, with over 9 million people frequently facing heavy rains, floods and landslides; these numbers, which already push seasonal and permanent displacement in the country, are likely to increase substantially with climate change (Bergmann et al. 2021).

These stresses are likely to intensify; although the relationship between climate change and migration is complex, increased aridity, decreased freshwater availability, soil salinization and sea level rise could render several Caribbean islands uninhabitable at 1.5°C of global warming (Francis 2019). The World Bank (2018) projects an average of 1.4 to 2.1 million ‘climate migrants’ by 2050 in Mexico and Central America (equivalent to 0.7 per cent to 1.4 per cent of the subregion’s population, rising to 1.9 per cent without effective policies for mitigating climate change). The Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Coasts are expected to see substantial outflows, while the cooler highlands of central Mexico and Guatemala are projected to receive high numbers of migrants. In South America, the same report projects the movement of between 2 million and 13.2 million people (or between 0.44 per cent and 2.89 per cent of the population), depending on how far climate-friendly policies are implemented. These large flows would have major implications for stress on resources and livelihoods, service provision and child well-being.

### 2.2 Violence

Studies from multiple countries and subregions highlight the role of violence in influencing the decision to migrate internally. In northern Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) violence, homicides, extrajudicial killings and forced gang recruitment have led to exponential increases in forced displacement internally as well as internationally (Comisión Interinstitucional para la Protección de las Personas Desplazadas por la Violencia 2015; Gativa López 2016). By the end of 2019, nearly 800,000 people from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras had migrated (either within their countries or across international borders) to escape escalating levels of gang violence and persecution, among other factors (Families on the Run 2020). Evidence from a national survey in El Salvador suggests that around 111,000 people changed their residence because of threats to their life and security in 2021. As some moved several times, the total number of internal displacements was estimated to be around 175,000, of which gang violence triggered just over 80 per cent (IDMC 2022c).
Estimates from Haiti suggest that at least 19,000 people have been displaced by violence and insecurity that has intensified since mid-2021 (OIM 2022a; Human Rights Watch 2022). Displacement Tracking Matrix Surveys undertaken in and around Port-au-Prince in late April and May 2022 indicate that children constituted around half (48–52 per cent) of displaced people (OIM 2022b, 2022c). In areas under the control of armed gangs, this violence has worsened an already severe humanitarian crisis (DiPierro-Obert and Dupras-Tobias 2022). For example, evidence from IOM’s Displacement Matrix Tracking in May 2022 suggests that in the 125 neighbourhoods in and around Port-au-Prince sampled, 78 schools, 26 health centres and 19 markets were closed and three fifths of respondents reported not having enough income to cover their needs (OIM 2022c). As well as leading to internal displacement, this insecurity also fuels refugee and migrant movements out of the country (Mixed Migration Centre 2022).

A Consejo Nacional de Población9 (CONAPO 2021) national diagnostic study of forced internal displacement emphasizes the linkage between different manifestations of violence and internal displacement in Mexico. Using census data from 2020, this report estimates that at least 262,411 people have migrated internally due to insecurity linked to crime or violence, of whom 29 per cent were children.10 The most affected states were Chiapas, Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas and Zacatecas. Criminal violence accounted for 95 per cent of displacements, with most taking place in Michoacán, Guerrero and Chiapas. Michoacán was most affected, with 13,000 movements, more than 10 times the figure for 2020. Criminal violence also led to 3,600 displacements in Zacatecas and further cases in Nayarit, the first time the phenomenon had been recorded in either state. Around a quarter of the displacements triggered by violence nationwide involved indigenous populations, who were also affected by conflicts over land. At the end of 2021, approximately 379,000 people across Mexico were estimated to have been displaced as a result of violence (IDMC 2022c).

CONAPO’s (2021) national diagnostic study also found that 33 per cent of people who indicated that they had not been victims of any sort of crime in their locations of origin migrated out of fear of violence and/or to avoid the recruitment of their children into gangs and organized criminal activities. Testimonies recorded by Perez and Viramontes (2019) indicate that causes of displacement included threats of violence against children or perceptions that children were at risk of violence on their way to and from school. Indigenous families who had moved from Oaxaca and Chiapas to escape mostly moved as family units, sometimes with other (non-related) community members; women with young children were most likely to move (Perez and Viramontes 2019).

In northern Central America and parts of Colombia, sexual assault, the risk of being coerced into sexual relationships with gang or drug cartel members, or members of armed groups, and fear of the consequences of refusing their advances, contribute to migration, particularly among adolescent girls and young women.11 For example, in Honduras, a study by Comisión Interinstitucional para la Protección de las Personas Desplazadas por la Violencia11 (2015) found that, between 2004 and 2014, in the 20 municipalities selected for the study, 41,000 households (or 4 per cent of households in the study) had members who had migrated internally due to violence or insecurity. Further, 20 per cent of household members reported to have moved internally were children. This may reflect an effort to escape victimization, including beatings, rape and murder at the hands of gangs, forced recruitment into gangs or simply being injured or killed as bystanders of shootings.

9 National Population Council.
10 IDMC (2022a) estimates that Mexico was home to 356,792 internally displaced people by the end of 2020. Evidence from 2018 suggests that 31 per cent were children.
11 Interinstitutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence.
In Colombia, conflict has contributed to substantial movement from rural to urban areas (especially to Bogotá) since 1985 (Cadena-Camargo et al. 2020). An estimated 8 million Colombians have been displaced due to armed violence and conflict since the 1990s (Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2022). Children and families have fled high levels of violence and threats in rural areas, displacement by armed groups or the Colombian army as they occupy areas, the fear of forced recruitment into armed groups, and sexual and physical violence against adults and children (Gómez-Restrepo et al. 2018; Sánchez Acosta et al. 2019; Mootz et al. 2018; Save the Children 2013). The crisis in the agricultural sector, lack of access to land and drug trafficking-related violence have also been important drivers of internal displacement (Gonzalez Maxcyclak et al. 2013; Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados Colombia 2021). Children and their families fleeing violence often suffer repeated displacements: An IDMC study found that over 40 per cent of interviewees in Antioquia who had moved between 2018 and 2022 had been displaced more than once (IDMC 2022b).

The percentage of children and adolescents among internally displaced people in Colombia has nearly doubled between 2000 and 2018, reaching 28 per cent (COALICO 2018); IDMC’s (2022b) study in Antioquia and Chocó estimates the proportion of children as higher still: around 50 per cent. The number of indigenous and black children among this population has also increased considerably, representing about 28 per cent of all internally displaced children in 2017 (COALICO 2018). Currently, the regions with the highest levels of displacement are Antioquia, Chocó, Cauca, Valle and Nariño, with displaced people moving towards Cúcuta, Bogotá and Soacha; there is also evidence of increasing displacement in Norte de Santander, a region with a high number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees (COALICO 2020). Displaced children and adolescents are at a heightened risk of extreme poverty and precarious living conditions, school dropout, hazardous and exploitative work, and association with criminal organizations (Save the Children 2020).

2.3 | Development-related displacement

Development related to the construction of dams, roads and the expansion of agribusiness continues to contribute to internal migration and displacement, with most available evidence coming from Brazil. From 2018 to 2020, the rate of deforestation (largely for agribusiness) in Brazilian Amazonia increased by 54 per cent (Amnesty International 2020) and between August 2018 and July 2019, indigenous peoples lost 91 per cent more land to agribusiness than in the same period in the previous year. Many people have moved as a result of the growing violence of land grabs and retaliation against local communities’ resistance. In 2021, land conflict triggered at least 21,000 displacements in Brazil. Violence committed by land-grabbers and farmers accounted for 44 per cent of the total, and more than half of those displaced were indigenous people whose homes were destroyed (IDMC 2022c).

While displacement is occurring across the country, it is particularly high in the Amazonian region and in the southernmost states, probably due to the focus of development projects in these two areas (2018). Indeed, in Brazil, dams displaced 200,000 people in the last decade. The Belo Monte dam, at the core of Brazil’s Growth Acceleration Plan, was responsible for at least 15 per cent of these migrants (Folly 2018). Forced displacement leads to mass migration of the affected population to impoverished areas; the compensation received by families is seldom enough to allow them to stay in an area where costs are now higher (Rolnik 2016).

12 Land acquisition for development projects is also mentioned as a cause of displacement in Colombia (IDMC n.d).
Twelve studies, from Mexico, Peru, Honduras and Bolivia, report on the challenges facing children who migrate seasonally. The majority of children accompanying their families in seasonal work also work themselves, and they face risks related to the living and working environment. Seasonal work can also affect their education, though some seasonal work (as in Peru) takes place primarily during school holidays. Though some of these studies explore the situation of children who migrate seasonally for work in depth, and detail the varied challenges children face, they provide only a small snapshot of the many different patterns of seasonal migration across the region.

Díaz Páez’s (2020) study of seasonal agricultural migration from Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas to the state of Mexico found children (mostly indigenous) accompanying their parents, either to work in the fields, to boost their parents’ low wages, to care for younger siblings, or because they had no one to stay with. They faced risks from exposure to the weather, contact with insecticides or pesticides, lack of food and poor working conditions. They also lacked contracts and the minimum standards of protection that labour rights provide for adults. Living conditions were also very poor, as described by a key informant in Díaz Páez’s (2020, 117-118) study: “Migrants rent patios or rooms where they sleep crowded up to eight people. They sleep on cardboard boxes or on mats – the latter are brought from their communities of origin… Those who rent them the spaces give them totally empty and even unhealthy… usually only adults pay, but in some cases families pay for children as well.”

Schools for seasonal migrant children (usually younger children travelling with their parents) are concentrated in localities where large agro-export companies predominate, such as Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California, and in some states where migrants work for small producers, such as Hidalgo, Morelos, Michoacán and Tamaulipas. They are only provided if the farm is registered as a temporary settlement of migrant agricultural labourers. Even where they are provided, Díaz Páez’s study found that some indigenous children dropped out because of difficulties studying in Spanish, while others did not enrol. Their education was further disrupted when they returned to their home communities, as they had missed the ‘window’ to enrol.

Migrants rent patios or rooms where they sleep crowded up to eight people. They sleep on cardboard boxes or on mats – the latter are brought from their communities of origin. Those who rent them the spaces give them totally empty and even unhealthy… usually only adults pay, but in some cases families pay for children as well.

All quotes from research participants in the studies reviewed have been translated from Spanish by the report authors.
Similarly, in Peru, children and families move seasonally from poor areas to regions with stronger extractive economies, such as those that provide work in coca fields and gold mining. A rapid assessment study undertaken in 2010 estimates that 60 per cent of coca leaf collectors were girls between the ages of 10 and 17 years, the majority migrating from impoverished neighbouring regions in the Andes, particularly Cusco, Puno and Junin (Novak et al. 2011). In an ethnographic study, a 15-year-old girl describes her experience of working in coca fields: “I went not to scrape [coca] but to cook for like 100 men there. I was left with two more women [who were] older [than me], I was the youngest. We made food for everyone, nothing has happened to me, I was just a little scared at night and, well, some of them bothered me but nothing more [i.e. they did not sexually assault her]” (Tauchina, Romero and Lizarralde 2021, 126).

There is evidence of a similar pattern of movement to work in gold mining, particularly in the Madre de Dios region of Peru, where workers are offered a 10–20 per cent advance that later becomes a debt to their employers (OIM 2012). Studies suggest that around 30,000 families and 50,000 children work permanently in gold mining in Peru, and around 68 per cent of these workers are migrants; there is also evidence of seasonal migrant workers and human trafficking in the area, although these numbers are harder to estimate (Vallejo Rivera 2014). Household income in mining districts is significantly higher than in other rural districts, and public investment in water, sanitation, and education tends to be higher in mining than in agrarian regions; these contrasts may attract poor families and children to these areas (Manrique and Sanborn 2021).

Other studies in Peru highlight children’s migration to cities from rural provinces (particularly the Andes and Amazonia). Seasonal migration in Peru is so common that during the state of emergency that followed the first outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, at least 167,000 migrant workers tried to return to their regions of origin, 90 per cent of whom were working in Lima (Zapata et al. 2020). Children often move to Lima during school vacations and work on the streets doing jobs such as shoe shining, singing on buses or selling candy to cover costs of school materials and other material needs, or to contribute to the family income (Aufseeser 2021). A survey of 170 child workers in Lima found that half of the respondents had moved to the capital during their school vacations; these children were 9- to 12-year-old boys and girls who travelled alone or with peers of a similar age from the poorest regions of the country (Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables 2015). Migrant child workers often form groups with similar-aged peers to increase their safety in the urban environment and to protect themselves from adults who might try to hurt them or charge them extra for services like renting rooms (Aufseeser 2021).

An Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT 2016b) study in Honduras examined indigenous and Afro-descendent adolescents’ seasonal migration (from Tornabé, Sambo Creek, Copán Ruinas and Opotoro) to work in agriculture and tourism in order to fund their studies and contribute economically to their households. It found that levels of pay were low – around 900 lempiras (equivalent to USD$36) per month – and discrimination was widespread. As one adolescent participant said: “They make Garifuna boys trained in tourism waiters and exploit them overtime without pay and so on. And who do you think they put in the highest positions? The white girl, the blonde, even if she doesn’t know anything” (OIT 2016b, 23).

A report by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL 2021) highlights the internal seasonal migration flow into Tarijá (Bolivia) of around 3,000 people, who come to work on the sugarcane and Brazil nut harvest. Many of these are children, who are vulnerable to hazardous and exploitative labour and human trafficking. However, the report provides no further detail of their living and working conditions.
This section presents evidence on two main types of internal movement: children moving with their families and adolescents moving independently. The first set of studies do not always distinguish between first- and second-generation child migrants (i.e., those who took part in a move, and those who were born after their parents had migrated). The larger body of evidence is on children moving with their families. The discussion is organized by various aspects of children’s well-being.

4.1 Relocation with families

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Five studies from Colombia report on poverty-related challenges facing displaced children and families. IDMC (2022b) found that around half of the displaced people interviewed became unemployed as a result of displacement; between a quarter and half of them remained without regular income sources for over a year. Two studies mention a higher proportion of displaced than non-displaced children living below the poverty line (18 per cent and 39 per cent according to each of the two studies cited) (Gómez-Restrepo et al. 2018; Marroquín Rivera et al. 2020). Despite these very varied estimates, it is clear that a large number of internally displaced children live in poverty, with consequences for many other areas of their lives. In addition, internally displaced persons face barriers such as limited access to social and health services, tensions with host communities and difficulties accessing what they should be entitled to, such as food, temporary housing and economic subsidies (Cadena-Camargo et al. 2020). Studies of the effects of dam-related
displacement in Brazil also mention disruption of livelihoods and loss of assets, with negative impacts on children’s health and nutrition (Villas-Bôas et al. 2015; Magalhães and Carneiro da Cunha 2017).

Three studies also discuss challenges migrant and displaced families face in finding suitable accommodation. A study from El Salvador, based on quantitative household data, found that 31 per cent of displaced families lived in overcrowded conditions, in contrast to 20 per cent of non-displaced families. This was attributed to difficulties finding a new place to live, as well as loss of assets such as homes (Gobierno de El Salvador 2018). Bolivia’s Instituto Nacional de Estadística\(^{15}\) (INE 2018) found that parents who migrate internally with their children struggle to find rented accommodation, as property owners preferred to rent to families without children, especially those aged under 3 years old.\(^{16}\) IDMC’s (2022b) study of people displaced by violence in two Colombian cities (Quibdó and Caucasia) found that the majority of interviewees in both cities lived in less secure and often lower quality accommodation than they had before displacement.

**IMPACTS ON EDUCATION**

Ten studies discuss the impacts of internal migration and displacement on children’s education, revealing challenges both of access and related to learning.

Although migration data show that educational opportunities are a key reason why adolescents move, in Bolivia, INE (2018) found that the internal migrant population between the ages of 6 and 19 in most municipalities was less likely to attend school than non-migrants.\(^{17}\) Key reasons for this variation include migrant children’s greater engagement in economic activity, barriers such as administrative procedures for changing school, and the time needed to adapt to a new place of residence.

In Colombia, Silva-Arias et al. (2020) examined whether internal displacement has any impact on children’s educational achievement and whether this impact varies by gender. Using 2015 data from the Colombia Demographic and Health Survey, they found that boys’ schooling was negatively affected by internal displacement and that they were 6 per cent more likely to repeat a grade than their non-displaced counterparts. For girls, the study found no statistically significant correlation between internal displacement and grade repetition. A 2020 study of the effects of internal displacement in Chocó and Antioquia found that the length of interruption of children’s schooling varied widely: In one community the interruption was a few months; in the other, a third of displaced children were out of school for 3–12 months, and a quarter for more than a year (IDMC 2022b). However, this may reflect COVID-19 related closures as well as the effects of displacement. IDMC’s study also found that although displaced parents and children’s perceptions varied, more interviewees felt that the quality of education was better in their host community than in their home communities. The study also found that displaced children with disabilities were at increased risk of missing out on school as families struggled to access financial support or specialized health care and equipment, while teachers were rarely trained sufficiently to support them.

A study of the effects of violence-related displacement in El Salvador found that adolescents aged 14–17 years old who migrated between 2015 and 2016 were less likely to enrol in school than those who migrated between 2006 and 2011 (75 per cent vs. 84 per cent).

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\(^{15}\) National Statistics Institute.

\(^{16}\) See companion report on cross-border migration for further examples.

\(^{17}\) The respective figures were: 81 per cent vs. 92 per cent in La Paz; 76 per cent vs. 91 per cent in Cochabamba; and 89 per cent vs. 87 per cent in Santa Cruz de la Sierra (INE 2018).
per cent). The study suggests that this result may be reflecting the short-term effects of internal displacement on children’s education for reasons related to the change of residence and/or perceived continued risks of violence. Among children aged 4 to 17 who were not in school, 18 per cent of migrants (but none of the comparison group) reported acts and threats of violence as the main reason why they had abandoned their studies (Gobierno de El Salvador 2018).

Schnuchel’s (2018) study of Mixtec children aged 8–13 years old who had migrated to the state of Guanajuato in Mexico observed that some children felt uncomfortable or had difficulties when learning or speaking Spanish. Some children expressed their discomfort: “I couldn’t speak, I couldn’t ask for anything, I felt ashamed”; “I couldn’t pronounce some words.” (Schnuchel 2018, p176) Children who arrived at their destination when they were younger (during nursery or early primary school) learned the language faster compared to those who arrived at older ages. Also in Mexico, Franco Garcia (2016) found that although children migrating from indigenous communities to Puebla City were bilingual in speech, their writing and reading in Spanish was poor, leading to limited engagement with school material. The schools studied lacked a coordinated approach to support indigenous children, and some teachers were not helpful nor patient with the children. Literature from Brazil also shows that indigenous and Quilombola (Brazilian maroon) children who have moved from rural areas face challenges in urban schools, due to language difficulties and cultural differences in ways of learning (Bastos Lopes 2020; Vieira and Nascimento 2020).

In Mexico, two studies found that indigenous internal migrant children (and their parents) obscured their indigenous identities and avoided speaking their language, particularly in school but also in their communities (Franco Garcia 2016; Amador Borrero et al. 2016). By contrast, indigenous migrant parents in Mexico interviewed by Perez and Viramontes (2019) reported that they emphasized the culture and customs of their home communities to prevent loss of these traditions.

**IMPARTS ON HEALTH**

Eight studies discuss the effects of internal migration on children’s health. Two of these are from Peru; the remainder are from Colombia and focused on mental health and psychosocial well-being. A Young Lives study of children born to migrant mothers in Lima shows that there were some significant positive impacts on the well-being of children between the ages of 0 and 5 years old (Escobal and Flores 2009). For instance, migration increased family income by 55 per cent, was associated with a significant reduction of stunting among young children (17 per cent) and increased positive and caring behaviours from mothers (3 per cent). Access to piped and drinkable water increased by 4 per cent, and sanitation by almost 6 per cent – these relatively small gains reflect housing conditions in the areas to which they moved. However, a Peabody test found no significant differences in children’s learning achievements, and there was a 15 per cent decrease in preschool enrolment among migrant children; migration also reduced mothers’ perceptions of their children’s safety on the streets and their trust of neighbours. These findings are consistent with those of more recent studies (Cueto et al. 2018).

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18 Behaviours identified in the study included holding the child, calming her/him down, rocking her/him in her arms, giving her/him something to drink, taking her/him for a walk and giving her/him a toy (Escobal and Flores 2009).
Literature on the effects of displacement due to violence focuses on children’s mental health; all such studies are from Colombia. Gómez-Restrepo et al. (2018) found that displaced children in Colombia have a higher risk of mental health issues than their non-displaced counterparts: a 7 per cent prevalence of anxiety (compared to 2 per cent in non-displaced children) and a 13 per cent prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (compared to 7 per cent in non-displaced children). Furthermore, they found that almost a third of displaced children had two or more mental health problems. Likewise, Sánchez Acosta et al. (2019) found that 18 per cent of displaced teenagers in their sample, between the ages of 13 and 18, suffer from a mental health issue (without further specification), that 15 per cent had had suicidal thoughts, and that 3 per cent had problems with drug and/or alcohol abuse.

These results are also echoed by Marroquín Rivera et al. (2020), who also found that displaced Colombian adolescents have higher rates of mental health problems, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts than non-displaced adolescents. These findings probably reflect the main reason for displacement – violence – and are congruent with (though with lower estimates than) studies on children living in conflict-affected areas, like that of Hewitt et al. (2014), which found a 72 per cent prevalence of mental health issues and a 56 per cent risk of post-traumatic stress disorder in a sample of 284 children living in conflict zones. As a way of addressing the mental health impacts of displacement, Tamayo-Aguledo et al. (2021) found that a functioning family (measured through children’s satisfaction with family relationships) is key in alleviating mental health problems in displaced children. These findings are also echoed by those of Sánchez-Villegas et al. (2021) and, to a lesser extent, those of Domínguez de la Ossa (2018), who find parents’ capability is key to helping displaced children cope better with changes.

**IMPACTS ON CHILD PROTECTION**

One study discussed the impacts of displacement on child labour; four reported on violence against children among internally displaced and migrant communities.

In Colombia, Holgado et al. (2016) found that, in Barranquilla, Cartagena, Santa Marta and the Caribbean coast, migration and displacement into rural and suburban areas increase children’s likelihood of working. However, they found that the reasons for migrating were as, or more, important than the movement or displacement itself. Disaster-related displacement was correlated with a higher rate of child labour than displacement for other reasons, such as violence and better economic opportunities: 78 per cent of children in households that migrated due to disasters were engaged in child labour versus 52 per cent of those that migrated for other reasons. This may reflect having to move during disasters with very little opportunity to plan in advance, increasing families’ difficulties making ends meet and the need to resort to children’s labour. Holgado et al. also found that social programmes (such as Families in Action and Working for Children) provided limited protection against child labour. Cadena-Camargo et al. (2020) report that girls and young women from rural areas face gender-based discrimination, affecting their access to work and safety; both Cadena-Carmargo’s study and IDMC (2022b) also report discrimination against internally displaced persons, especially those suspected of links with armed groups.

Studies of the Belo Monte dam in Brazil highlight how displacement resulting from its construction have negatively affected the protection of children and adolescents. Displaced families lost their support networks, and insufficient new school places were

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19  Familias en Acción and Trabajando por los Niños
made available in the city of Altamira, to which displaced families relocated. Adults were forced to leave children alone when working, exposing them to abuse from construction workers and the risk of injury, for example from explosions on building sites. The rise in reports of sexual abuse and exploitation of children and adolescents (which rose from 29 reported cases in 2009 to 177 in 2012) is partially attributed to this decline in protective networks (Villas-Bôas et al. 2015). A study undertaken in migrant communities in Trujillo city in northern Peru also highlights the impact of stressful living conditions on violence against children. It found that a combination of working patterns and social norms that contribute to high levels of male alcohol abuse at weekends and cramped living conditions increases the risks of both intimate partner violence and child abuse (Kohrt, Barrueco and Pérez 2015).

Finally, in Mexico, Perez and Viramontes (2019) found that internally displaced parents who had moved between urban locations considered themselves as the protectors of their families and responsible for the security of all their relatives, including their children. These interviewees also distrusted government institutions (e.g., the police), which they perceived as corrupt and unable to protect their children. Internally displaced indigenous families reported that they migrated to locations where they thought government institutions were more likely to fulfil their need for security (especially that of their children). For example, the Triquis from Oaxaca and the Tzotziles from Chiapas migrated to the capital of their respective states or to Mexico City.

4.2 Migration to live with other households

Studies from Bolivia, Haiti, Paraguay and Peru discuss children’s internal migration, usually from rural areas or small towns to larger towns and cities, where they live with another family (who may or may not be related) and undertake domestic work in return for board and lodging and sometimes a small stipend. Known as restavêk in Haiti, criadazgo in Paraguay and padrinazgo in Bolivia, this arrangement often involves a child migrating...
for an extended period of time (several years). In Peru, hosts/employers sometimes present themselves as the ‘godparents’ of child domestics, who are giving them the opportunity of studying while doing cheap domestic labour (Anderson 2013; Aufseeser 2021), obscuring exploitative aspects of the relationship.

The informality of these movements make them hard to trace and quantify (OIT and INEI 2016) or to assess children's living conditions and rates of school attendance. Estimates from the mid-2010s, cited by Lamaute-Brisson (2015), suggest that there were around 225,000 children living as restavèks in Haiti, and that this is likely to be an underestimate. In Paraguay, an estimated 46,000 children worked under criadazgo in the mid-2010s, with girls, particularly from indigenous and rural backgrounds, disproportionately represented (USDOL 2017, cited in Stanford et al. 2021). Data from Lima (Peru) found that the majority of child domestic workers were born to migrant parents (whether they had migrated themselves is not clear), with 68 per cent self-identifying as Andean, 5 per cent as Amazonians and 7 per cent as Afro-Peruvians; 70 per cent were girls between the ages of 12 and 17 years old (Anderson, Minaya and Figueroa, 2010).

Many studies highlight the risk to children’s well-being that arrangements of this kind involve. Studies from Paraguay, for example, highlight that criadas (children in criadazgo), are often “denied the education promised, live in poor conditions, and are frequently subjected to physical and sexual abuse in the homes in which they work” (Stanford et al., 2021, p4808). They also commonly suffer from injuries related to cooking, such as burns and cuts, and from otherwise preventable childhood illnesses that were not treated, as their health care needs are often ignored. Key risks identified include mental health problems, physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies as a result of physical and sexual assaults, and rejection by their families upon returning, associated with the economic burden returning daughters may represent for the family and the stigma of having been associated with sex work (Stanford et al. 2021).

The USDOL (2021) report also highlights that children who migrate for this form of domestic work in Paraguay and Bolivia are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation, as they may be deceived by ‘offers’ that appear better than their conditions of servitude. Stanford et al. (2021) estimate that 50–90 per cent of trafficked women and girls in Paraguay were previously criadas.

Some evidence from Haiti indicates mixed effects on children's well-being. Drawing on 2012 Demographic and Health Survey data on children age 5–14, Haydocy, Yotebeing and Norris (2015) found that, compared to both all Haitian children and the poorest Haitian children, restavèk children have statistically significantly lower school attendance rates (79 per cent of restavèks were enrolled in school compared with 93 per cent of all children in the sample) and more labour responsibilities. However, they also found that restavèk children experience statistically significantly less physical abuse and less hunger than non-restavèk Haitian children, with no significant differences between boys and girls on any of these indicators.

Although these arrangements are often identified as the worst form of child labour, the studies reviewed report little evidence of effective action to prevent exploitation. Assessing responses in Paraguay, both Stanford et al. (2021) and USDOL (2021) report
that even though the country has signed all international conventions on child labour, criadazgo remains entrenched due to weak labour protection regulations for domestic workers, a lack of political will and a lack of budgets to address the issue. In Peru, rural families and girls contemplating migration perceive moving to Lima for domestic work as a more effective route to social mobility than street work (Aufseeser 2021). Though now somewhat outdated, an OIT (2007) study highlights the importance of regional migrant associations in Peruvian cities with inflows of seasonal migrants. These associations worked both as informal employment centres, spreading the word about employment offers during school vacations, and would intervene with employers if children were at risk. The study has no quantitative evidence about the effectiveness of these interventions and has not been updated with more recent data.

### 4.3 Independent migration for education and work

#### MOVEMENT FOR EDUCATION

Four studies examine children’s migration for education. Drawing on Haiti Youth Survey Data for 2009, Heckert (2015) examined internal migration of children and young people aged 10–24 for education, family reunification or work. She found that in all age and gender brackets other than young men aged 19–24, around a quarter of young migrants moved for educational reasons. Heckert also investigated financial flows between children’s natal and host households and found that rural households were typically sending money to children and their hosts to support their education and living expenses. Typically, girls received less resources than boys, possibly because of an expectation that they would contribute to their host household through domestic chores. This, in turn, may limit their opportunities to study, though the survey data do not provide direct evidence of this. Toffolon’s (2016) qualitative study of migration to Port-au-Prince also underscores the importance of migration for education and, in particular, of rural children moving to Port-au-Prince to study, often lodging with relatives.

Data from Bolivia suggest that most children who migrate for education are 14–18 years old and move because of the lack of secondary schools in their home communities (Vera, Gonzalez and Alejo 2011). Though Vera, Gonzalez and Alejo (2011) do not present quantitative data, they state that secondary school students tend to migrate without their parents, while those in preschool and primary school move with their parents. Based on analysis from the 2007 Unique Student Registry Survey, Vera, Gonzalez and Alejo also found that migrant children were more likely to be ‘overage’ for their grade compared to non-migrant students. For example, 22 per cent of migrant students in La Paz were ‘overage’ for their grade, compared with 19 per cent of non-migrants; the respective figures were 34 per cent versus 29 per cent for Chuquisaca and 32 per cent versus 28 per cent for Santa Cruz.

This is typically because the quality of education in these children’s home communities is assumed to be lower than that of the destination schools, so they are placed in lower grades in the city to ‘catch up’. Their parents are typically not well educated and unable to support their children’s learning, increasing the risk of the children failing the year. Children who migrate without their parents are also at risk of poorer learning outcomes, often because they receive less emotional support from their host families to help them

adapt to the new school and location. Other vulnerabilities include loneliness, financial constraints, social rejection, language difficulties (for some), domestic duties in the households where they live and the process of adjusting to the new school.

Steel, Winters and Sosa’s (2012) study, based on 70 interviews with women and men in Matiguas and Muy Muy (in the Matagalpa department of central Nicaragua) found that the absence of a local secondary school led adolescents to migrate to nearby urban and semi-urban localities for education. They found that, beyond relatively local movement for work, girls migrated more than boys to cities such as Matagalpa and Managua, supporting relatives in household chores in exchange for food and accommodation and, in some cases, continuing their studies alongside their domestic work.

**MOVEMENT FOR WORK**

Five studies report on children’s independent long-term migration for work. Heckert’s (2015) study in Haiti found – as might be expected – that out of all children who moved, the proportion who did so for work increased steadily during adolescence. Among children aged 10–12, 17 per cent of boys and 9 per cent of girls had moved for work; by ages 16–18, 37 per cent of boys and 32 per cent of girls were moving for work. The study does not provide further detail of the types of work they were engaging in.

In Nicaragua, Bucardo Chavez’s (2015) study of a group of female adolescents and youth aged 13–29 years old (from the communities of Samulali, San Martin and Guadalupe y Piedra Colorada) found that some participants (numbers not specified) migrated internally to Matagalpa (or internationally, to Costa Rica) to work as babysitters or housemaids. They considered this work ‘honest’ but with no possibility of improving their situation due to the low salaries and precarious conditions.

Around 32 per cent of Mexico’s approximately 2 million child and adolescent workers are temporary agricultural workers (*jornaleros agrícolas*), which implies migration for work (INEGI 2019). In addition, poor adolescent girls from rural areas migrate to urban locations to work, especially as housemaids, after completing primary or secondary school (OIM 2013). The studies of children’s seasonal migration in Peru, discussed in Section 3, also found that seasonal migration to Lima during school holidays gradually equips children with local social networks and knowledge of the city, and may motivate them to migrate there more permanently when they grow older (Aufseeser 2021).

OIT’s (2016a) study of indigenous children and migration for work in Guatemala likewise found that indigenous children join the labour market to fund their studies, or they drop out from school to migrate when they cannot afford their education. It also found evidence of children being recruited by organized networks that promised them a job in urban areas with food and accommodation, in exchange for a salary that was paid to their parents.

Overall, except for studies of migrant child labour, which discuss children’s (often precarious) working conditions, most of these studies focus more on the motivations for migration than children’s experiences once they have moved.
Studies from throughout the region report evidence on trafficking of children, both domestically and internationally, as criminal networks operate across borders depending on demand. Trafficking is related to migration in two main ways: Firstly, it is a form of involuntary movement in itself, with victims often moved substantial distances and requiring support to return home and to reintegrate into their communities; secondly, the criminal networks involved often prey on communities where seasonal or long-term migration are established patterns, and/or people are already on the move, with deceptive offers of jobs with good pay and conditions. Table 2 summarizes the evidence found.

As Table 2 shows, poverty is a key factor increasing children’s risk of being trafficked; this risk is often higher in border areas, and while much evidence focuses on trafficking for sexual exploitation, there is also evidence of children being trafficked to work in mining, agriculture, domestic labour, illegal activities and begging.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY/ SUBREGION</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Between 2017 and 2020, the Brazilian Federal Police registered 32 cases of child trafficking and 171 cases of adult victims. The Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública (MJSP 2020) estimates that the numbers are 10 times higher. Estimates suggest that 37–40% of victims are children (MJSP 2020). Secretaria Nacional de Justiça (SNJ 2013) reports that girls constitute the vast majority (94%) of children trafficked for sexual exploitation. Child migrants and refugees, particularly unaccompanied or separated children, and those with irregular migration status, are at increased risk (Alves de Souza Lima and Netto Machado Sanatarém 2020; Santos and Martuscelli 2017). There are at least 241 trafficking routes throughout Brazil, largely moving children to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro for sexual exploitation (Polícia Rodoviária Federal 2020). Since 2005, 4,876 children have been rescued from sexual exploitation on Brazil’s highways that connect the Northeast Region of the country to the South Region (Polícia Rodoviária Federal 2020). Poverty is a key risk factor for trafficking (Nascimento 2016; Agência da ONU para Refugiados 2021): Over 50% of trafficked children are in economically precarious situations at the time of abduction or recruitment; 61% are sent to work in hazardous and exploitative conditions in industries or as domestic workers (MJSP 2020; SNJ 2013). Recognizing high levels of trafficking and sexual exploitation in border areas, the Brazilian government created a National Programme to Confront Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents. This programme initially focused on 15 border cities (PAIR Mercosul 2012), but was later expanded to regions that were identified as communities of origin for child trafficking and sexual exploitation (Paludo et al. 2017). Illegal adoption constitutes up to 24% of cases of child trafficking in Brazil. While it is more common in the South of Brazil, where the population is predominantly white (MJSP 2020; Pessoa et al. 2020), there are also cases of illegal adoption of mixed-race and indigenous children for domestic servitude in the states of Amazonia, Pará, Rondônia, Mato Grosso do Sul and Mato Grosso (SNJ 2013). In the latter case, children are often taken from poor, rural families to work in urban centres in the same state, often with deceptive offers of education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>There is some evidence of an increase in domestic trafficking of children in the Dominican Republic from the interior of the country to coastal tourist areas (USDOL 2021). Haitian and Dominican men and boys of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic are particularly at risk of trafficking into forced labour in agriculture (Murray 2020).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Caribbean</td>
<td>There is some evidence of trafficking within and between various Caribbean islands, e.g., Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands; the Turks and Caicos Islands are a destination for men, women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labour; Bonaire, Saint Eustatius and Saba are both transit locations and destinations for trafficked people (Mejia 2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>The USDOL (2021) report documents the link between children on the move in Ecuador and labour exploitation and includes reports of exploitation of children of several nationalities. It indicates that migrant and refugee girls, as well as indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian children, are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation (a significant portion of which occurs near mining sites) and that children in Ecuador’s northern border regions – host to many Venezuelans in transit – are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into criminal gangs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras</td>
<td>There is evidence of trafficking for sexual exploitation, agriculture, domestic service, begging, street vending and performing in all countries. Indigenous communities in Guatemala and indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, particularly Miskito boys, in Honduras are often targeted for forced labour in agriculture, manufacturing, mining and hospitality industries (USDOL 2021).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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a Brazilian Ministry of Citizenship.
b National Secretariat of Justice
c It is not clear what proportion of victims are kidnapped and what proportion join voluntarily, having been deceived about the nature and location of work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY/ SUBREGION</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guyana and Suriname</strong></td>
<td>There are reports of young girls in mining communities being subjected to commercial sexual exploitation as a result of human trafficking, and trafficking of children for labour in mining (USDOL 2021; United States State Department 2021).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jamaica</strong></td>
<td>Girls and rural, immigrant and LGBTQI+ children are at greatest risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the country’s tourist resorts (USDOL 2021).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mexico</strong></td>
<td>The states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Puebla, Tlaxcala and Veracruz are primary areas where traffickers operate, moving people for sexual and labour exploitation to agricultural enterprises throughout the country, northern Mexican cities close to the United States border, tourist resorts and the United States (Lakhani 2015; USDOL 2021). Traffickers prey on areas with high levels of poverty and outmigration related to narco-violence, some also targeting children orphaned by violence; girls are at particular risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation, and of recruitment through courtship and offers of marriage, or of good jobs in the United States; indigenous children are often targeted (Acharya and Clark 2021). Girls trafficked for sexual exploitation reported experiencing high levels of violence (from clients, traffickers, drug cartel members and pimps), such as physical and sexual assault, verbal threats and abuse, and psychological abuse (Ibid.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paraguay</strong></td>
<td>Data on the proportion of children involved in trafficking are not available; children engaged in criadazgo (residential domestic labour, often in return for board) are at high risk of trafficking into other forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation within or outside Paraguay; there are some reports of trafficking of indigenous children to work in organized begging, and of recruitment of children and adolescents through social media, chat rooms and text messaging (Stanford et al. 2021). Although Paraguay’s Anti-Trafficking Law was passed in 2012, criminal law enforcement agencies lack resources to sufficiently investigate and prosecute most cases of human trafficking. Support services, e.g., for reintegration of survivors, lack funding (USDOL 2021; Stanford et al. 2021).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peru</strong></td>
<td>Reported cases of people smuggling increased from 539 in 2016 to 734 in 2018; 63% of people who had been smuggled reported being recruited deceptively (INEI 2019). Government data show that 89% of victims were female, of whom girls accounted for 33%; boys accounted for 42% of male victims (INEI 2019). Data suggest that most victims (adult and child) (504 in 2018) are sexually exploited; others are trafficked for labour exploitation (155), sale of children (9) and organ trafficking (3). The largest number of reports are from Lima and poor regions with extractive industries (such as gold mining and illegal coca fields) (INEI 2019). Victims are primarily girls who are kidnapped or taken with the consent of parents for sexual exploitation, and adolescent boys and girls who are given fake labour promises (Dammert Guardia et al. 2020; Mejia Fritsch 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 summarizes key insights and evidence gaps emerging from the literature on internal migration and displacement of children in the region.

**Table 3: Key insights and evidence gaps**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>KEY AREAS OF EVIDENCE AND INSIGHTS</th>
<th>EVIDENCE GAPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migration patterns and factors leading to migration or displacement</td>
<td>Poverty and inequality (exacerbated by the effects of climate change), violence and development-related displacement are key factors leading to internal movement. There is some evidence of families being displaced multiple times, and also that internal displacement can be a step towards international migration. Movement for education and/or work, to flee violence and instability, and for family reunification are the prime reasons for adolescents moving independently.</td>
<td>Apart from studies of adolescents moving for work or education, few studies disaggregate by age or discuss the situation of children in depth. There is thus a particular gap in relation to the situation of children fleeing violence.</td>
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</table>
### 6.1 Recommendations to strengthen the evidence base on children and internal migration and displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean

Table 3 has highlighted a number of areas where the evidence appears to be limited. The relative lack of evidence on internal migration undoubtedly reflects the greater spotlight and international resourcing focused on cross-border movement within the region. However, the numbers of internal migrants and displaced people are often far higher than for international flows, so strengthening the evidence on internal migration is vital for effective policy.

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Seasonal movement</strong></td>
<td>Studies of children accompanying parents for seasonal work highlight risks of exploitative work, absence of education, and health and protection risks. Children migrating independently for work face similar risks, though some migrate during school holidays to fund their education. Most studies are from Peru, Central America and Mexico.</td>
<td>Further studies are needed on seasonal movement in other regions, including of indigenous communities whose territories sometimes straddle international borders. There is little evidence on students who migrate seasonally during the school holidays to save money for their studies (studies were only found for Peru).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term movement</strong></td>
<td>Studies focus primarily on children’s educational experience and mental health, with a few also discussing poverty, food security, housing and vulnerability to sexual and physical violence. Several studies found that children’s education is interrupted due to difficulties in registering with schools in new environments and challenges for children settling in, particularly if they do not speak the dominant language fluently and/or are living apart from their families. However, once they are settled, many report benefiting from improved educational opportunities.</td>
<td>Discussion is largely general and qualitative, with little comparison of educational outcomes. Evidence on mental health does not clearly distinguish the impacts of displacement and the causes of displacement. Studies also rarely differentiate between first- and second-generation migrants. There is very little evidence of impacts on children’s health. There is limited evidence of the long-term impacts for migrants/displaced children, and for children in recipient communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Independent migration of children and adolescents</strong></td>
<td>Studies focus on children/adolescents a) moving to cities as domestic workers in exchange for room and board and b) moving for education or work. Studies of migrant domestic workers highlight poor living conditions, exploitation, risks of sexual and physical abuse and limited access to education, though these experiences are not universal. There is some evidence from Peru of cash transfers reducing adolescents’ need to migrate for work.</td>
<td>The evidence base is thin and largely gleaned from studies covering multiple topics in brief. There is little discussion of how policies could better support older adolescents to continue education/training (whether in communities of origin or after having migrated). No evidence was found on the care of children separated from their families due to violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trafficking</strong></td>
<td>There is evidence from across the region of trafficking both internally and internationally. Girls are at greatest risk for sexual exploitation and boys for exploitation in natural resource-based industries. Poverty is a key risk factor, and indigenous children and families are often particularly at risk.</td>
<td>Reports are often very brief, reflecting difficulties in obtaining accurate information.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This review has identified several promising entry points for strengthening policy- and practice-relevant evidence on internal migration. These recommendations are based on an assumption that, for an organization such as UNICEF, the key reason to support better data on internal child migrants is to ensure that their key needs can be met, through supporting environments that enable families to thrive, and through accessible, high quality public services.

1. **Make use of data from population registries, census data and household surveys to obtain up-to-date evidence on internal movement patterns.** Even taking into account limitations – such as undercounting of people living in informal housing and settlement arrangements, and any barriers to self-identification as an internal migrant or displaced person (e.g., concerns about discrimination) – population registries, census data and household surveys have the potential to provide an important source of information on movement of children and families. This quantitative data is hugely important to plan for provision of services and infrastructure.

2. **Establishing ‘displaced’ as an official category can both enable affected people to access support designated for them and provide another source of data on the numbers affected.** Such systems should allow unaccompanied adolescents to register. In contexts where such support exists, this data can be an important source of information on the numbers and distribution of displaced children (while recognizing that barriers to registration mean that coverage is unlikely to be universal). It is also important to recognize that people fleeing targeted violence may wish to stay as ‘hidden’ as much as possible (CONAPO 2019) and thus may avoid registering.

3. **Collect data that consider internal migrant and displaced children’s needs holistically.** Often this may mean focusing on data to support inclusive policies, rather than policies aimed at migrant children per se. Some of the challenges long-term migrant and displaced children face are directly related to relocation (e.g., difficulties registering with schools or accessing health services in their new areas, especially if they have fled at short notice and/or lost key documents during displacement). But many challenges, such as poverty and language barriers (for indigenous or other minority communities), are shared with non-migrants. Sectoral needs assessments that focus on addressing intersecting barriers to effective service provision and use could help ensure that migrant children’s needs are addressed alongside those of other poor and marginalized groups.

4. **Investigate specific protection risks related to different situations affecting internally displaced and migrant children.** Children and adolescents who move for seasonal work (with or without their families) in arrangements where they provide domestic help in return for board and lodging, who are trafficked, or who are displaced by a particular event or series of events (e.g., a disaster or upsurge of violence) all face specific risks to their well-being and rights. In these cases, focused studies may be needed to understand the numbers affected, the challenges they face and potentially effective policy and programme approaches.


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