



# Community-Based Child Protection Mapping in Colombia and Ecuador

A participatory action research method to strengthen community-based mechanisms that respond to child protection issues during adversity.

# Introduction

In recent years, both Colombia and Ecuador have become transit and destination countries for refugees, migrants and other people in the process of human mobility. Despite border closures and movement restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in irregular movement, particularly stemming from the vulnerable situation in Venezuela. This has led to heightened protection risks for refugees and migrants and poses new challenges for governments and the organizations seeking to identify and assist people in need.

**Approximately 2,342,907 Venezuelan migrants and refugees have been registered in Colombia.**

However, migration across irregular borders makes it difficult to register the population properly. The situation for these migrants and refugees also becomes more complex once they arrive in Colombia. According to the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA), from January 2023 to March 2023, there have been four massive, forced displacement and confinement alerts in Nariño territory<sup>1</sup>, and in Putumayo the last alert reported in December 2022 was related to massive, forced displacement as well. Despite the government policies and adopted measures to protect migrants and refugees, forced displacement, drug trafficking, armed conflict, illicit crop

cultivation, threats, and murders persist in these territories.

Ecuador, especially the border cities, does not have adequate infrastructure or resources to meet the influx of people. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, Sucumbíos, Esmeraldas, and Carchi are not only among the top 10 poorest provinces in Ecuador (41.9%; 41.6%; 29.1% of the population in extreme poverty, respectively)<sup>2</sup> they also have high unemployment rates (5.4%, 10% and 6.3%, respectively). Particularly in border provinces, Ecuadorian families already experience poor housing conditions, and living situations for people on the move is even worse. The government's lack of capacity to provide basic services and guarantee human rights protections has turned migration into a humanitarian crisis that unleashes the chaos of care

and leaves the most vulnerable people unprotected<sup>3</sup>.

To further complicate matters, **discriminatory and xenophobic misconceptions are commonly attributed to Venezuelan families from host communities, which can hinder migrants and refugees when applying for jobs or accessing health services.** In Colombia, Venezuelan migrants and refugees are conceived of as “thieves”, “competition”, “a plague”, “an invasion” and so forth. Another additional obstacle based on stereotypical misconceptions is the “sex worker” label attributed to Venezuelan women in Colombia. This has led to the hyper-sexualization of migrant and refugee women’s and girls’ bodies and to the appearance of discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes towards women when they try to get a job, access education, or when socializing within the host community<sup>4</sup>.

Overall, children’s and families’ rights and wellbeing are at risk. Therefore, **to expand humanitarian aid to Ecuadorian and Colombian borders, ChildFund, in partnership with War Child, is initiating a child protection program in emergencies that aims to strengthen the system through the development-humanitarian nexus to better support Venezuelan children and their families, as well as increase hosting communities’ resilience and social inclusion.** As part of the program preparation process, ChildFund and War Child launched a contextualized analysis referred to in this document as Community-Based Child Protection (CBCP) mapping to identify child protection concerns and issues using a participatory learning methodology.

<sup>1</sup> GIFMM. (mayo de 2022). Refugiados y Migrantes Venezolanos. Obtenido de reliefweb.int/report/colombia/refugiados-y-migrantes-venezolanos-en-narino-mayo-2021-mayo-2022.

<sup>2</sup> eluniverso.com/noticias/2019/11/06/nota/7591325/pobreza-ecuador-2019/

<sup>3</sup> ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/EMPLEO/2021/Anual-2021/Bolet%C3%ADn%20técnico%20anual%20enero-diciembre%202021.pdf

# Background

Colombia has historically been a country of origin for migrants and refugees, however given the Venezuelan crisis, it is now primarily a transit and destination country<sup>5</sup>. The massive flow of people into Ecuador has had two critical moments: the first, for security reasons, occurred in 2001 because of the Plan Colombia security policy, and the second happened for economic reasons because of the Venezuelan crisis in 2018. **The northern border provinces including Imbabura, Carchi, Sucumbíos, and Esmeraldas regularly host migrants and refugees, and are facing increases in poverty because of the growing population needing health care, education, employment and housing.**

For instance, Esmeraldas has seen growing unemployment and school dropouts directly related to the high population growth, and also an increase in violence: This province is now one of the most dangerous in Ecuador and the region, with a homicide rate of 48.79 per 100,000 habitants (the national rate is 15.48)<sup>6</sup>. According to the Working Group for Refugees and Migrants (GTRM by its Spanish acronym) the lack of jobs and livelihoods in Carchi has led foreigners to require more and more international assistance<sup>7</sup>. Finally, Ibarra's health care system could not provide for the new host population and required international support and supplies to control measles and cover sexual and reproductive care<sup>8</sup>.

According to a Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) conducted by GTRM, the primary needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador include access to food (87%),

employment/livelihoods (65%), accommodation/shelter (53%) and health services (25%). Sixty-two percent have an expired visa or none at all. Of the 46% of households with school-age children, 32% were not attending school. In terms of access to livelihoods, 38.5 % of Venezuelan refugees and migrants are unemployed, in comparison to 6.3% among host communities.

The Colombian government has adopted a series of measures to guarantee human rights access to Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia and for Colombians returning from Venezuela through the Migration Policy (Law 2136 of 2021) or the Venezuelan Migrants Protection Statute (Decree 2016 of 2021). According to the Venezuelan Migrants Protection Statute data, 12,118<sup>9</sup> migrants and refugees in Putumayo and 19,732<sup>10</sup> migrants



and refugees in Nariño were registered in 2022. However, in practical terms, these policies do not appear to make much of an impact. Children and adolescents in Colombia who are migrants or refugees, belong to an ethnic group, or live in rural territories are much more likely to suffer varying kinds of violence. Additionally, girls and young women are at greater risk of suffering sexual violence and boys have a higher risk of consuming psychoactive substances and/or being forcibly recruited or associated with an armed group or armed forces.

To better understand the difficult realities children in refugee and migrant families face, ChildFund proposed a CBCP mapping diagnosis and analysis report about children and adolescents. This mapping process relies on multiple tools that allow collecting data from members of the community, through various approaches.



These include:

- » **Emergency Timeline and Mapping:** Collects information on emergencies, crises, or disasters from the experiences of the community itself.
- » **Storytelling:** Gathers data from children and youth in crisis through helping children develop a fictitious story that mirrors their situation.
- » **Body Mapping:** This is intended to collect information from children without producing any revictimization by motivating a children's discussion when drawing a child's body.
- » **Community Mapping:** Through a focus group exercise, this method aims to understand the emergency from day one.
- » **Community Discussion:** Data obtained from the community mapping helps the community to discuss and identify risk and safety situations.
- » **Dot Voting—Why? Why? Why?:** Seeks to have the community vote for various situations such as unsafe places, more community forms of discrimination, and care entities.
- » **Key Informant Interviews (KII):** Seeks to collect in-depth responses from critical community members.

This methodology was applied to children, teenagers, and adults in mobility situations in the main cities of each selected province.

<sup>4</sup> Barómetro de Xenofobia y Fundación Plan. (2020). Boletín #1 – Mujeres migrantes: hipersexualización y machismo online.

<sup>5</sup> El Tiempo. (2022). Migrantes venezolanos en Colombia serían más de 3 millones; 62 % quiere quedarse. Obtenido de eltiempo.com/politica/gobierno/migracion-venezolana-en-colombia-que-pasara-con-los-migrantes-720279

<sup>6</sup> primicias.ec/noticias/firmas/esmeraldas-violencia-pobreza-ecuador/

<sup>7</sup> r4v.info/sites/default/files/2022-01/%5BCLEAN%5D%20Reporte%20operacional%20GTRM%20Tulcán%20-%20OCT-DIC%202021.pdf

<sup>8</sup> r4v.info/es/document/r4v-reporte-sobre-movimientos-tercer-trimestre-2022

### La Hormiga-Putumayo:

- » The first group consisted of **12 children**, six boys and six girls.
- » The second group consisted of **24 adolescents**, 12 girls and 12 boys.
- » The third group was comprised of **15 adults**, 3 male and 12 female.

### Mocoa-Putumayo:

- » The first group consisted of **eight boys and six girls.**
- » The second group consisted of **27 adolescents**, 15 girls and 12 boys.
- » The third group was comprised **32 female adults.**

### Pasto- Nariño:

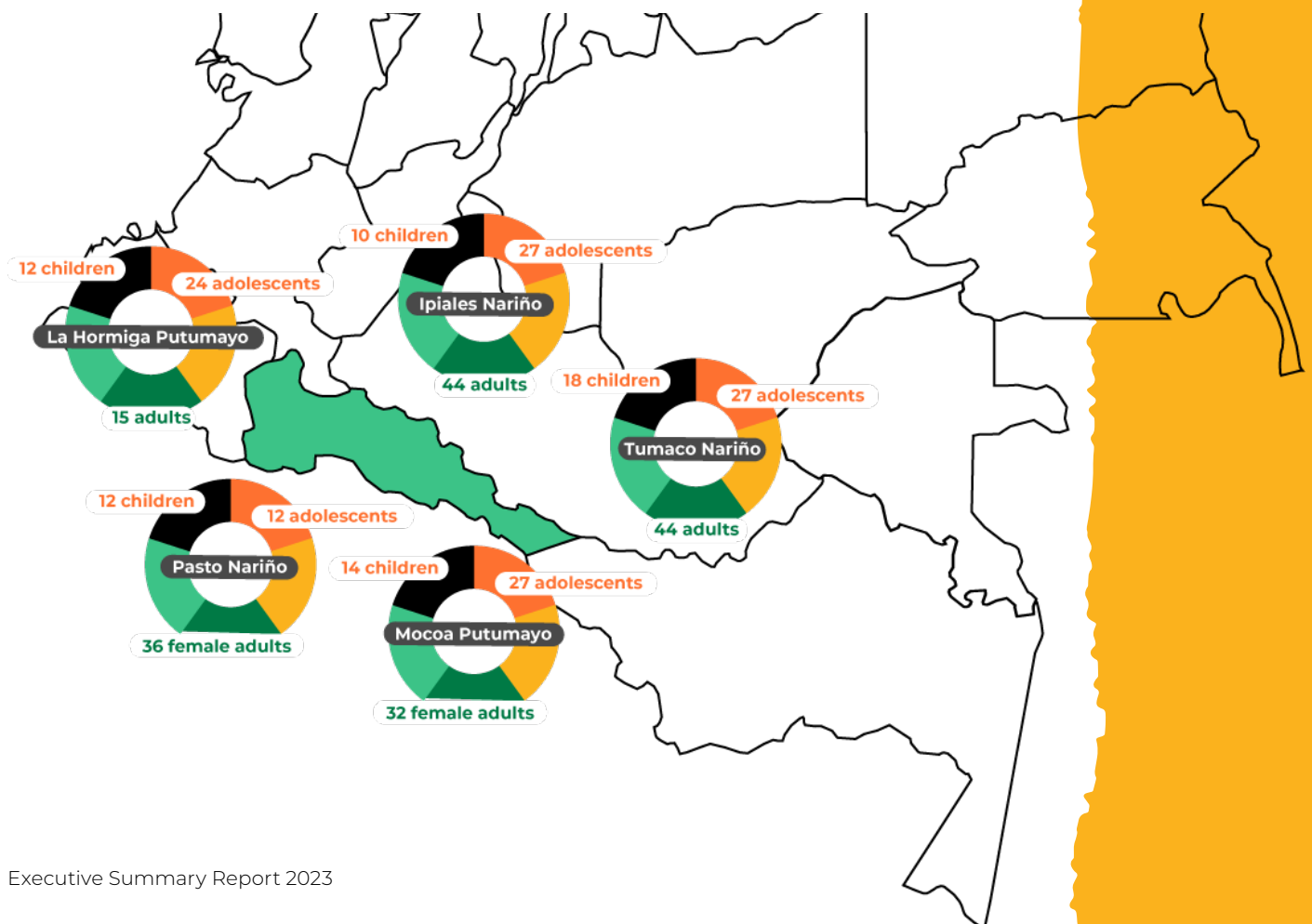
- » The first group included **12 children**, six boys and six girls.
- » The second group consisted of **12 adolescent** girls and 18 adolescent boys.
- » The third group was comprised of **36 female adults.**

### Ipiales-Nariño:

- » **10 children** participated – six girls and four boys.
- » The second group consisted of **27 adolescents** including 21 girls and six boys.
- » The third group included **44 adults** – 24 women and 20 men.

### Tumaco-Nariño:

- » The first group included **18 children**, eight boys and 10 girls.
- » The second group consisted of **27 adolescents**, 15 girls and 12 boys.
- » The third group was comprised of **44 adults**, 36 females and 8 males.



### Carchi province:

- » The first group was conducted with **three boys and four girls** between the ages of 7 and 11.
- » A second group consisted of **three adolescents** between 12 and 16 years of age.
- » A third group comprised **nine adults** (one male and eight female)

### Imbabura province:

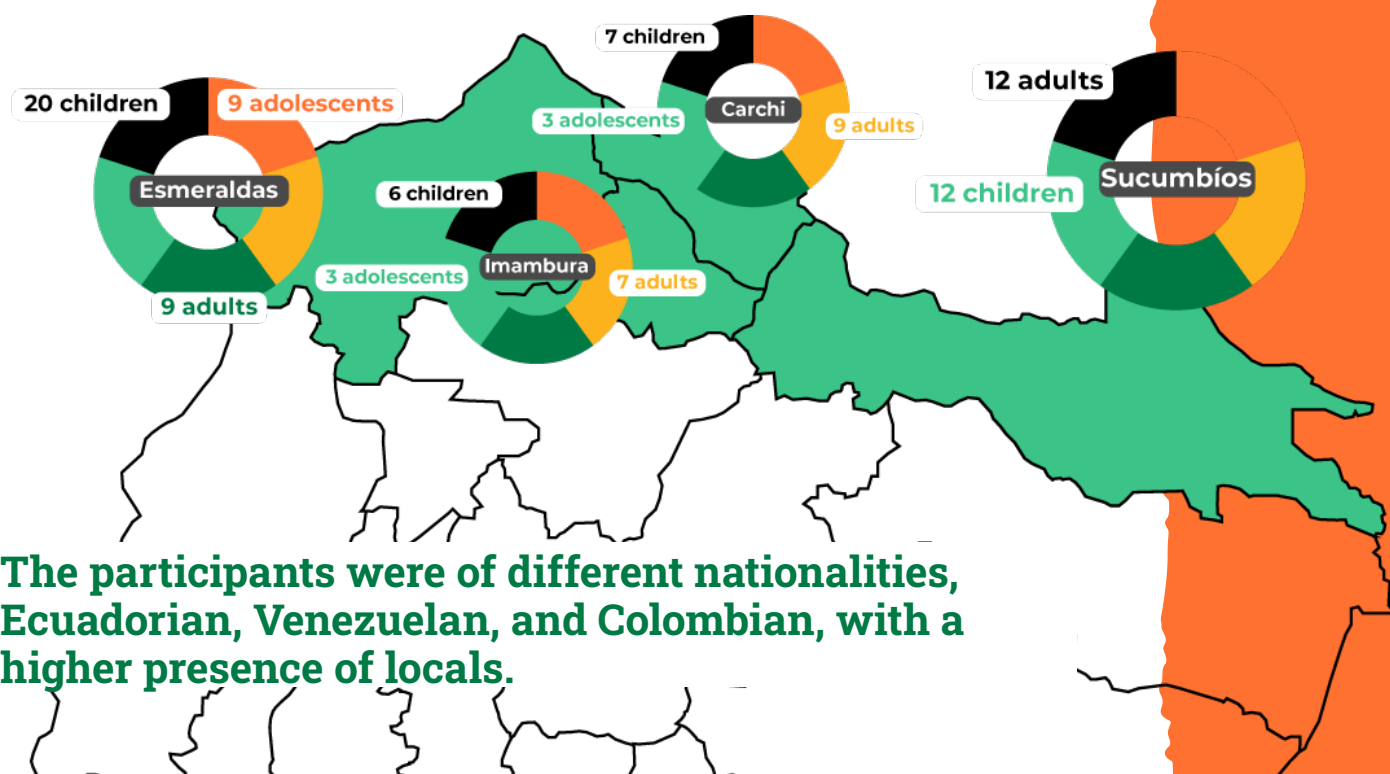
- » The first group consisted of **two boys and four girls** between 6 and 10 years of age.
- » A second group consisted of **three adolescents**, two girls and one boy between 12 and 17 years.
- » A third group comprised **seven adults** (one male and six females).

### Sucumbíos province:

- » The first group consisted of **12** Venezuelan citizens
- » The second group recruited **four early childhood children and eight children between 4 and 10 years old.**
- » The third group was comprised of **30 adults.**

### Esmeraldas city:

- » **20 children** participated in the first workshop, 12 girls and eight boys.
- » The adolescents were **nine**, four girls and five boys.
- » The adults were **nine** persons, four women and five men.



**The participants were of different nationalities, Ecuadorian, Venezuelan, and Colombian, with a higher presence of locals.**

<sup>9</sup> Migración Colombia. (2022). Estatuto Temporal de Protección-Preregistros. Obtenido de [public.tableau.com/app/profile/migraci.n.colombia/viz/EstatutoTemporaldeProteccion-Preregistros/Pre-registrosPublic](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/migraci.n.colombia/viz/EstatutoTemporaldeProteccion-Preregistros/Pre-registrosPublic).

<sup>10</sup> Migración Colombia. (2022). Estatuto Temporal de Protección-Pre registros. Obtenido de [public.tableau.com/app/profile/migraci.n.colombia/viz/EstatutoTemporaldeProteccion-Preregistros/Pre-registrosPublic](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/migraci.n.colombia/viz/EstatutoTemporaldeProteccion-Preregistros/Pre-registrosPublic)

# Synthesis and Findings

According to the groups of boys, girls, and young people who are most affected, it is important to note that intersectionality and some demographic components are relevant when considering the occurrence or prevalence of certain types of violence in a specific population. In other words, most communities recognize girls as those most at risk of violence and sexual exploitation, but this risk has varying degrees of vulnerability depending on factors such as whether they are in a migration situation, whether they have a permanent vocation, are in transit, or if they belong to an ethnic group. For example, if they belong to an indigenous group, influential factors are community beliefs and practices or whether they speak Spanish or not. It is also recognized that male children and adolescents have greater risks of being recruited or associated with an armed group or armed forces, consuming psychoactive substances, and suffering from patriarchal cultures. The degrees of vulnerability also vary based on factors such as whether they are located in an urban or rural area, or whether they identify with a different sexual orientation, among other factors.

In relation to coping mechanisms and community protection structures and practices, the communities in general

fail to recognize protection actions from a community perspective but rather recognize some individual and family ones by themselves. However, youth groups were identified that were born out of the initiative of young people themselves, who, although they mainly focus on cultural, artistic, and/or sports issues, represent a protection structure, a support network, and safe spaces for other youth and children.

Finally, regarding psychosocial support issues, special attention should be paid to the effects on the mental health and development of children who have been exposed to a family and community environment of violence, need, and neglect. The vast majority of children express concerns and fears about seeing their parents cry, fight, yell at them, or be physically or emotionally abusive. They also feel the impact of seeing people in a situation of great need, especially during waves of migration. Similarly, specialized cases around sexual violence, labor exploitation, and association of children and youth with armed forces or armed groups require attention.



# Conclusions

## Colombia

1. **The social fabric** and sense of community of affected populations must be strengthened as few communities coping and protection structures were identified.
2. **Youth led initiatives** were identified as a support network for young people and children. These are often seen as a space for free expression, generation of new ideas, and a perceived as safe spaces.
3. **The relationship between caregivers and children** is reported to be highly deteriorated, mainly generated by patterns of harsh parenting, long working hours outside the home by caregivers, and little confidence to communicate on relevant issues for children are adolescents which are often perceived as taboo topics by adults.
4. There is a **very marked feeling of fear** among children, young people, and members towards members of educational institutions.

# Ecuador

1. Children and adolescents consider home and school as the safest places. However, adults identify them as places of discrimination and xenophobia. Hence, **xenophobia remains a risk** that requires urgent attention, and it is necessary to raise awareness in the host population regarding migration and harassment in the schools.
2. **Border cities are often insecure**, and Esmeraldas is particularly unsafe. No adult would leave their child in the street without concern for their safety.
3. The most common **psychological support issues** that ChildFund's programming can address are initiatives oriented to eliminate stereotypes related to xenophobia, bullying, and mistreatment.
4. Key informants agree that children and adolescents in conditions of human mobility are **prone to human trafficking and are very vulnerable to exploitation** by their own families. In the same vein, a conclusion shared among the organizations interviewed is that the protection system does not adequately respond to many abuse claims.

"[There's] bullying at school and outside school. Bad situations happen due to social class, nationality, skin color or racism."- Colombia adult participant

# Commonalities observed across communities

- » There is a mainstream of the dynamics of the **armed conflict and drug trafficking**.
- » Perception of increased **consumption of psychoactive substances** by children and young people.
- » Difficult access to **basic services**.
- » **Harsh parenting** is a common pattern.
- » **Diversity is a common point** between communities. Often indigenous people, Afro-descendants, migrants, among others coexist in the same community.
- » **Sexualized stereotypes** towards migrant women and female adolescents due to patriarchal practices, xenophobia, and institutionalized harmful gender arrangements.
- » Children and youth often report psychosocial affectations, including lack of a caring and supporting environment. **Armed groups frequently meet the emotional and social needs** of children of belonging.

“In the neighborhood where I live there are many fights among young people, gangs that do bad things, and that makes me scared. So, I prefer not to go out at all because it is really very risky, and because I’m from another country, they look at me with a certain anger.”  
- Adolescent participant in Ecuador

# Recommendations

- 1.** Programs or projects should be encouraged and promoted so that government institutions implement them at the national or local level and by the social organizations that provide accompaniment and support to this migrant population and host communities.
- 2.** It is recommended that programs be undertaken to strengthen institutional response capacity to guarantee protection of victims of child abuse and other forms of violence.
- 3.** Further interventions must include the host communities and the migrant communities. Intervention should stop being considered an exclusive mechanism for developing and integrating people in human mobility conditions; instead, it must widen the scope and include the needs of both groups since discrimination, xenophobia, bullying, and other violent conducts are a constant in the two sectors.
- 4.** The best way to contribute to these children or families of abused children is to provide education. This is the best tool for parents or primary caregivers, teachers, and authorities, since it is a crucial component for the prevention and response to a case of violence. Education contributes to raising awareness and consequently preventing cases of violence against minors.
- 5.** To be sustainable, all activities routed to social development must include the host community and the migrant population. The suggested programs are aimed at strengthening the ongoing initiatives rather than starting new ones:

## Education

- ◆ Strengthen training programs related to culture for peace to tackle bullying, xenophobia, and mistreatment.
- ◆ Strengthen programs provided by local organizations that work for vulnerable and migrant populations.

- ◆ Strengthen national, regional, and local governments' efforts in technical training programs for adults, including host and migrant populations, in skilled labor, entrepreneurship, or generation of self-sustainable employment.

## **Culture, Recreation and Sports**

- ◆ Establish or strengthen programs that promote community participation through dynamics of social inclusion, such as arts and music and sports training schools (soccer, volleyball, basketball, etc.).
- ◆ Strengthen the opportunities for citizen participation, such as the creation of sports committees and entrepreneurship committees to generate new business models and promote agricultural and industrial entrepreneurship initiatives on a small scale.

## **Child Labor Prevention**

- ◆ Establish programs through social organizations in food handling and manipulation, basic cooking, baking, pastry making, tailoring, hairdressing, barbering, and esthetics.
- ◆ Establish programs to provide technical training for vulnerable and migrant populations in automotive mechanics, food processing and handling, clothing, and household goods, among others.

## **International Cooperation**

- ◆ Develop programs to strengthen existing public policies to improve care, support, and prevention of child abuse and other forms of violence to support access to justice.
- ◆ Strengthen national and regional capacities in all areas of social development.
- ◆ Build strategies that allow new generations to participate fully in digital technologies, taking advantage of opportunities and reducing risks in childhood, adolescence, and youth experiences. Technology has changed activities and processes, social relations, and with them, opportunities for inclusion. The potential benefits of these innovations are enormous and represent a tremendous opportunity for development and social welfare.
- ◆ Inform and socialize about the risks of human trafficking,

focusing on children and adolescents and reducing child labor, begging, and sexual abuse.

- ◆ Develop initiatives to reduce teenage pregnancy.

## **Capacity Building**

- ◆ Ensure that children and young people have access to activities that promote the prevention of psychoactive substance abuse, as well as leisure activities to occupy their free time.
- ◆ Provide caregivers with psychosocial support and mental health care that emphasizes nurturing parenting practices.
- ◆ Equip children and young people with knowledge of protective pathways to prevent human trafficking, as well as the use and recruitment of minors.
- ◆ Strengthen community cohesion and organic structures for child protection in connection with the formal protection system.

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