



## ‘Child Migration and Displacement in LAC: Aligning Evidence-based Solutions and Research Priorities’, 16-18 May 2023

UNICEF and University of Virginia

### Workshop Concept Note

#### Summary

The University of Virginia’s (UVA) [Democracy Initiative](#) (DI) and [Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy](#)’s [Global Policy Centre](#) (GPC) and UNICEF Innocenti (Innocenti) are partnering to hold an international workshop on the theme of ‘Child Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): Aligning Evidence-based Solutions and Research Priorities’. UVA’s DI and GPC has established an institutional partnership with Innocenti to co-host this 2-day event in LAC, for the **dates of 16-18 May** in Panama City. Funding has been generously provided by UVA.

The objectives of this two-day workshop are to convene a selection of leading academic experts and child migration practitioners, to discuss and align current state-of-art qualitative and quantitative evidence on promising solutions to improving child migration protection and care in the LAC region with remaining knowledge gaps and further academic and operational research opportunities. This consultative dialogue will take place through discussions over two days focused on the main themes of child and youth-focused elements legal identity, transitory care models, and regional cross-border case management.

#### Context

The context of migration across LAC and the Southern US border features a wide range of pressing concerns for child rights and well-being that call urgently for such an evidence review and stock-taking discussion. Children and adolescents make up a substantial proportion of people on the move in the region. Traveling alone, separated, or with their families, they represent one of the most vulnerable populations in the context of migration and are often overlooked. Approximately 6.3 million migrant children in the region confront life-threatening situations and multiple forms of violence during their journeys within and across borders, including the risk of exploitation by traffickers and arbitrary detention. Compounding this, many are denied or struggle to obtain access to vital services both en-route and in host countries.

As in other regions around the world, child migration in the LAC region involves a complex array of factors, including contexts of fragility, poverty and exclusion in home communities – as well as aspirations for family

reunification, access to education, and other life opportunities abroad.<sup>1</sup> While transit to Northern America has been a key feature of migration in the region, with a series of pressing protection and welfare needs for child migrants across the Southern US border,<sup>2</sup> this situation is changing – with more recent evidence also indicating an increase in pendular migration within the region (as evidenced by, for instance, outflow from Venezuela).<sup>3</sup>

Regional migration includes, for instance, the outflow of 5 million refugees and migrants in 2020 from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Colombia (currently the world’s second-largest international displacement crisis), and large mixed migrant outflows from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, due to a complex set of intersecting drivers of fragility.<sup>4</sup> Internal child displacement is also on the rise, such as that caused by irregular armed groups in Colombia, and as a result of extreme weather events, such as stronger hurricanes in the Caribbean.<sup>5</sup>

Protecting the rights of children and their families who are engaged in migration in LAC is an urgent priority for governments, international, and civil society organizations. National, regional and international responses struggle to meet both the scale and complexity of demands placed on child protection and welfare services by migration pressures, and to capture and scale promising programmatic and policy innovations which might help address such challenges. New evidence and thinking are urgently needed to ensure effective, child-sensitive solutions for the present and emerging future. Significant gaps in data, knowledge, and evidence, however, continue to constrain responses.

#### Opportunity for Academic Engagement on LAC Child Migration Evidence Priorities

The international aid community has invested enormous time, energy, and effort in understanding the drivers of child and family displacement. Rapid changes in the world’s climate and the ravages of COVID-19 make it essential that we take stock of the available evidence, key considerations, and remaining knowledge gaps, around some of the enduring issues faced by child migrants and refugees in the region and the agencies working to protect them. These include:

- 1) Barriers related to children’s access to rights, legal identity, and civil registration
- 2) Approaches to care in transit, including models of alternative child care for mobile populations
- 3) Cross-border knowledge management: How are knowledge products, including data and research findings, being shared between agencies and academia across borders, and how could this be improved in terms of efficiency, partnership opportunities, and child wellbeing outcomes?
- 4) A cross-cutting geographic focus on child and adolescent migration through the Darien Gap crossing, which presents a unique opportunity to explore multiple dimensions of child mobility, and compare movement of separate populations from different countries of origin in a mixed migration context.

#### Workshop Objectives

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF (2022) Migrant and Refugee Children in Latin America and the Caribbean. Webpage, available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/migrant-and-refugee-children-latin-america-and-caribbean>

<sup>2</sup> IOM (2020) World Migration Report. Available at: [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2020.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) (2022) MMC Latin American and the Caribbean, Quarter 2. Available at:

[https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/QMMU\\_Q2\\_2022\\_LAC.pdf](https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/QMMU_Q2_2022_LAC.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR (2020) Global Report. Available at:

[https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2020/pdf/GR2020\\_English\\_Full\\_lowres.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2020/pdf/GR2020_English_Full_lowres.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF (2019)

[https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/1691/file/ECA\\_Caribbean%20climate%20change%20report.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/1691/file/ECA_Caribbean%20climate%20change%20report.pdf)

The workshop will focus on consolidating evidence on promising solutions related to child migration and displacement in the region, drawing from recent UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO) evidence exercises – including its 2023 report carried out by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), [‘Children on the Move in Latin America and the Caribbean: Review of Evidence’](#), Innocenti’s LAC-focused [‘Future Frontiers of Childhood and Adolescence’](#) seminar series in March 2022, and Innocenti’s 202 [‘Rapid Evidence Assessment: What Works to Protection Children on the Move?’](#), carried out by ODI in partnership with IOM, UNHCR, and ILO.

To do so, the event will convene likeminded research experts, UNICEF, its key partners and policy stakeholders. Workshop discussions will focus on sharing evidence and identifying key considerations on themes as well as other regionally-relevant topics such as labour migration. Gender dimensions of migration and displacement will be integrated into discussions, and there will be an effort to learn about novel methodologies and analytical approaches.

The workshop will seek to engage with several key geographies of focus, including the Darien Gap, the Northern Triangle and the US Southern Boarder, which will serve as points of analytical departure to explore, via a route-based approach, a series of multi-thematic evidence gaps and opportunities related to child and youth migration as a holistic journey – from origin through transit, destination, and circular migration.

Beyond an opportunity for knowledge-sharing, key objectives of the workshop will include identification of LACRO evidence priorities and concrete opportunities for potential collaborative research partnership between participants. A workshop report will be produced and key themes and takeaways from the dialogue will also be integrated into a final version of the workshop briefing paper.

#### UVA-Innocenti Partnership Complementarities

UVA has partnered with Innocenti to bring together different kinds of evidence related to child migration through this event. As the world’s leading child rights actor, UNICEF’s wide-ranging work on child migration issues affords it an unparalleled practical perspective on the evidence needs facing relevant migration policy, programming, and advocacy, both in LAC and globally, as well as unparalleled convening power given its global profile. Innocenti’s mandate as UNICEF’s centre of excellence for research, and its established and growing [research and convening agenda on child rights, resilience and agency in migration and displacement contexts](#), makes it a natural focal point for UVA to take this engagement forward.

UVA’s Democracy Initiative and Global Policy Centre have expertise in early childhood development, the drivers of displacement and migration, and the use of statistical/empirical models for forecasting. The Center has established relationships with Save the Children, Sesame Workshop, International Rescue Committee, and Moving Minds Alliance, and can bring together a wide and diverse network of scholars and experts from the aid sector who are working on joint issues related to child mobility in the LAC region, and globally.

#### Workshop Structure and Provisional Agenda

This two-day workshop in May 2023 will bring together scholars and policymakers for a number of panels, to present research findings, and to develop a research agenda for the next decade. The workshop will run over two working days, beginning with an orientation, keynote address and participant dinner on late afternoon/evening of 16 May, 9.00 am – 5.30 pm on 17 May, and 9.00 – 12.00 pm on day 3 (Panama time). The event will take place in part of wholly in Spanish, with simultaneous translation. Day 1 will consist of plenary and thematic panel discussions, with Day 2 consisting of deep-dive workshops to further discuss evidence application to the workshop’s main themes.

In advance of the event itself, Innocenti and UVA will circulate a background briefing paper outlining the state of evidence and critical knowledge gaps around child migration in the region. This paper will orient participants to critical issues for discussion during the event, ensure a common conceptual starting point for understanding of key concepts, issues and trends; and present a series of questions in advance to help structured dialogue and debate in plenary sessions.

Participants will come together to with the ultimate aim of identifying opportunities for applying evidence to LACRO programmatic and policy challenges and opportunities by:

- **Reviewing current state of knowledge on child and family migration in the Darien Gap, including availability and quality of data, and knowledge of cross-border movements.**
- **Surveying and synthesizing the state of knowledge and research related to:**
  - **legal identity** and child and family displacement migration in LAC, with an emphasis on how legal identity challenges link to child protection risks and system strengthening, trafficking/smuggling, health (MHPSS), durable solutions, gender, etc.;
- **Reviewing temporal care and cross-border data management good practices**, as well as analogous learnings in child migration research from other regions (i.e., ECARO);
- **Identifying regionally specific and globally generalizable theoretical and empirical gaps in our knowledge and establishing key research priorities** in relation to the workshop's main themes;
- **Facilitating opportunities to foster new collaborative relationships, and deepen existing partnerships, around evidence-generation and action** between stakeholders, including North-South academic knowledge partnerships.