MEANINGFUL ADOLESCENT PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, BEHAVIOURAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

VENEZUELAN MIGRANT FLOW RESPONSE IN COLOMBIA



A JOINT CASE STUDY BY THE ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT & PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT SECTIONS. NY HEADQUARTERS





BACKGROUND

Colombia is currently classified as an upper-middle income economy with an advanced legal and political framework. As of 2018, there are around 8 million adolescents in Colombia, making up almost 16.4 per cent of the population.¹

While Colombia has reduced poverty, 17.5 per cent of its population is still classified as living in a context of multidimensional poverty and lack of employment opportunities.² Populations living in rural areas are especially likely to face the challenges of poverty. In 2011, adolescents living in rural areas were 2.8 times more likely than those in urban areas to live in multidimensional poverty.³

THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN COLOMBIA

Negotiations with the armed group FARC-EP⁴ resulted in the 2016 signing of a peace agreement. A peace agreement, however, does not necessarily mean an immediate end to violence or children's rights violations. Reconciliation and peace processes require time and the resolution of several challenges: implementing transitional justice; effective

disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) for children; implementing peace agreements on the ground; and making reconciliation a reality.

Migration from Venezuela poses additional challenges in relation to the already limited social services. As of March 2020, an estimated 1.8 million Venezuelan migrants entered Colombian territory, nearly 1 million of whom do not hold regular migrant status.⁵ Government data from June 2020 estimates that close to 418,839 migrants were under 18 years old.⁶

Departments situated along the border – Norte de Santander, Guajira and Arauca, Bogota and Atlántico – have been the largest recipients of migrant families. Host communities living in these border departments already face great challenges in terms of access and quality of basic services, institutional presence and poverty. Significant numbers of migrants received by Bogotá, Atlántico and Magdalena, in turn, show that a sizable population has already moved into the interior of the country.

UNICEF Colombia has been working to support the country's most marginalized people, including migrants from Venezuela.

UNICEF COLOMBIA'S 'TWIN APPROACH' TO THE MIGRANT FLOW RESPONSE

UNICEF Colombia conducted three rapid assessments in Guajira, Arauca and Norte de Santander in the first half of 2018 to identify the immediate needs of migrant and host communities, the main risks faced by children and adolescents, and the availability and relevance of information for migrant families. The results from the assessments were used to define programmatic actions within WASH, child protection, health and nutrition, education, and communication for development (C4D). Regarding C4D, the assessments allowed the team to identify information needs regarding risks and rumors, access to basic services and safe behaviours, as well as meaningful communication channels available to support migrant families' access to health, education and protection systems.

As these interventions were planned, UNICEF Colombia was mindful of the risk of xenophobia. The experience of other countries has indicated that focusing responses to migration only on migrant communities can heighten xenophobia. From the very beginning of the humanitarian response, UNICEF Colombia employed a 'twin approach', making sure that both host and migrant communities benefited from all four areas of the response (education, WASH, health and child protection).

EDUCATION. UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of Education, Fundación Escuela Nueva and Opción Legal to adapt 'Circulos de Aprendizaje' (Learning Circles), a flexible and inclusive education model for out-of-school children and adolescents. This replicable model allows children with education gaps, including migrant children, to integrate into formal education through a transitional system of learning and child-friendly spaces. The programme offered psychosocial support and aimed to strengthen and restore self-esteem, develop life skills, and include innovative, locally

designed C4D actions to prevent xenophobia and promote a safe and protective environment in school, family and community settings.

WASH AND HEALTH. UNICEF supported "mobile health units" to provide services for migrant populations in 7 different locations prioritized by the Ministry of Health. At the same time, UNICEF worked with the Sub-Ministry of Water and the Ministry of Health to strengthen existing services, ensuring benefits for both migrant and host communities. A total of 145,000 women, boys and girls from migrant population and host communities had access to maternal and child health services with a focus on intercultural, gender sensitive and equitable services. Some of these services included hygiene promotion, menstrual hygiene, provision of water access points in settlements and institutions such as schools, transit points and feeding centres. All actions included WASH as a cross-sectoral priority. These actions reached over 28,000 people with access to water.

PROTECTION. In 2019, Colombia took a major step to address statelessness by granting Colombian nationality to more than 27,000 children born in the country to Venezuelan parents. This was carried out with UNICEF, IOM and UNHCR support. A partnership with the La Guajira University and a local foundation strengthened existing local systems to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of children and adults. There were also efforts to address migrants' vulnerability to gender-based violence (GBV) and trafficking. UNICEF partnered with local governments to strengthen the capacity of partners in implementing the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming⁸.

ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES AND ADOLESCENTS IN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

UNICEF Colombia's C4D community engagement response to the migration flow has three main areas of work:⁹ (a) delivering lifesaving behaviour-focused

information through appropriate local communication channels; (b) promoting community integration and engagement to prevent xenophobia; and (c) ensuring implementation of accountability mechanisms by setting up community feedback mechanisms. Within each area, interventions were developed and implemented in partnership with the affected communities, including adolescents.

This work with adolescents built upon fundamental concepts and key guidance on community engagement, behavioural and social change engagement, discussed below. While a number of interventions were implemented, this case study highlights two methodologies used: participatory design to create an activity in transit centers, and the use of art to counter xenophobia and violence in communities. A third methodology, the Adolescent Kit for Innovation and Expression, is featured as a promising practice applied in other areas of UNICEF Colombia's community engagement and adolescent engagement work, with great potential for crossapplication in the migration context.

METHODOLOGY

The broader community engagement strategy identified and worked with volunteer youth organizations in the most affected states, including Norte de Santander, Arauca and Nariño. By activating organizations' volunteer networks, UNICEF engaged adolescents in their respective communities. This section outlines two approaches used, and a third with potential for cross-application in the migration response.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN FOR TRANSIT CENTRE ACTIVITIES

UNICEF Colombia conducted mini-ethnographies to better understand the needs and experience of the migrants at different points along their journey. They found that adolescents often find themselves

with idle time in transit centres while waiting for their parents. This free time presents an opportunity for engagement with adolescents and their families.

UNICEF involved migrant adolescents in a consultative participatory design process to create an engagement activity for adolescents and their families during this idle time. The result was a paper-based educational game called 'La Travesia' (The Journey), which highlights key behaviours for safer migration. It consists of a poster-sized illustration of a familiar scenario: a mountainside village full of activity, a busy highway dotted with buses and trucks, families in transit walking the roads or resting in open spaces.

Players must search this detailed scene for twelve basic behaviours, designed to raise awareness of risks and promote healthy habits for families on the move. Among them are a mother breastfeeding a baby, a young girl speaking with a stranger, and a father teaching his son about farm animals. Each of the 12 characters come with a short explanation of a related safe migration behavior: breast milk helps protect baby's health; children should stay close to their families and not trust strangers offering gifts or money; children should keep learning even while out of school.

Insights from adolescents in migrant communities and from the implementing partners informed the selection of risks and habits to highlight. Illustrations were based on photographs from field visits, with drafts pre-tested among both migrant and host community families, children and adolescents. The testing gave adolescents a space to verify the clarity of the messages and the cultural relevance of the game.

Due to the transient nature of the migrant communities, it is difficult to measure long-term outcomes on behaviour or attitudes. However, anecdotal evidence shows that adolescents were key agents of behaviour change. While the game engaged the whole family, adolescents played the key role of

remembering the messages from the game. Later, as families continued along their journey, adolescents reminded their parents about the risks and the positive behaviours.

ART TO COUNTER XENOPHOBIA AND VIOLENCE

Another example of adolescent engagement is from Norte de Santander, where there was a need to address xenophobia and violence in the community. UNICEF engaged partner youth organization Fundación Cultural y Social 5ta con 5ta Crew in an adolescent-led participation initiative using art to counter these threats among the host community and migrant populations.¹⁰

Adolescents and youth led the engagement strategy from the beginning of the design stage, where they proposed interventions and activities in response to their territory's local needs, priorities and preferences. This participation was sustained all the way to implementation of the projects. UNICEF supported the partner organizations by providing art supplies and technical assistance. The youth organizations gained new tools and technical knowledge such as the C4D approaches, qualitative and quantitative methods to measure attitude and knowledge, and the implementation of accountability to affected population (AAP) mechanisms. 11 AAP mechanisms are put in place to ensure constant feedback (through qualitative and quantitative methods) from communities to improve, adjust and guide activities and services delivered by UNICEF and implementing partners.

The diversity and flexibility of the mechanisms allow UNICEF and partners to generate a space of trust and permanent dialogue with the communities, while allowing for inclusion of those from marginalized groups.

The resulting intervention was a mobile art school of graffiti, breakdance, hip hop and community theater to strengthen capacities of adolescents and young

leaders as agents of change; a series of workshops led by the partner 5ta con 5ta Crew, and several community events led by adolescents and youth to promote community integration and positive narratives about migration. In these sessions, young people discussed xenophobic messages in social media, learned about their rights and the importance of respect and peaceful coexistence. Through this intervention, young people created meaningful interactions with others without prejudice and without caring where they were born or currently live.

At the end of the workshop series, participants produced art projects that captured the lessons they learned and promoted individual reflection and behaviour change. The public art projects were displayed in shelters for migrant populations and public parks, while the smaller art pieces were exhibited at the 5ta con 5ta Crew Foundation's headquarters. Outcomes of this initiative included the improvement of adolescents' skills, self-image, confidence, leadership and resilience. The workshops promoted a number of positive behaviours with regard to community integration: positive attitudes towards migration, positive attitudes towards adolescents' role in communities, cultural integration of host and migrant communities through public art, and the prevention of xenophobia.

UNICEF has since scaled up this partnership, working with the Foundation as an implementing partner for a new initiative to engage adolescents and their communities through community radio. Young leaders and adolescents are engaged as media producers of radio broadcasts, podcasts, rap songs, and tutorials that pertain to using art as a vehicle for social change, and promote safe behaviours (hygiene, healthy habits, learning at home and violence prevention) related to COVID-19.

The underlying community engagement, behaviour and social change strategy is now being used in 17 departments of Colombia to promote empowerment, resilience and prevention of COVID-19. It is based on joint work with indigenous, Afro-descendant, migrant,

LGBTI, young and local community radio, digital collectives and alternative media. It has three main pillars:

- Evidence-based participatory and collaborative media production to foster resilience, empowerment and community integration
- Strengthening local radio and alternative communication platforms to promote more sustainable and more culturally relevant interventions
- Community rumour tracking to build relevant information

Through the community engagement strategy, UNICEF has reached 2,183,104 people, directly involved 2,560 people in the local production of information, and engaged 3,561 people in feedback mechanisms that facilitate AAP.

Access to communication channels is not only related to the physical capacity to connect to the internet or have a TV or a radio. Access to communication is also related to the access individuals have in certain media. Working with community radio and alternative media may not give UNICEF a national reach, but it ensures that the information UNICEF provides to communities is relevant and meaningful, as it is transmitted through relevant media. Effective communication must be horizontal, that is, not just top-down from authorities to communities, and participatory, rather than produced at the center and disseminated. Messages must be adapted, produced and defined by communities in order to reflect their concerns, beliefs and priorities. UNICEF C4D works with four implementing community-based partners in this area and messages are available in Spanish and indigenous languages such as Wayuunaiki and Uitoto.*

ADAPTATION AND LOCALIZATION OF THE ADOLESCENT KIT FOR EXPRESSION AND INNOVATION

The Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation¹² is a toolkit developed by UNICEF Headquarters to develop skills and bring about positive change in the lives of adolescents through arts and expression. While currently implemented throughout Colombia in contexts not specific to migration, it has great potential for application in response to the migrant influx.

The Adolescent Kit draws from programmatic approaches in psychosocial support, life skills education, child protection, social cohesion and peacebuilding. UNICEF Colombia has adapted and localized the Adolescent Kit to the current Colombian context, and in 2019 implemented it as part of the Adolescentes En Movimiento initiative around the country.

Adolescentes En Movimiento is a network of children and adolescents formed to strengthen the dissemination of children's rights, peaceful coexistence, participation and leadership in local communities through workshops and local mobilizations. Through the "Activate" (Activate) workshops, adolescents engage in activities designed to strengthen their competencies in five areas:

(a) conflict resolution and problem management,

(b) critical thinking and decision-making, (c) communication and expression, (d) creativity and innovation, and (e) empathy and respect.

Participants join 'circles' of 20–25 individuals from local communities, ¹³ led by adolescents who participated in UNICEF projects as younger children. Nineteen adolescent circles have convened across six areas of the country: Nariño, Cundinamarca, Antioquia, Cauca, Sucre and Córdoba. Thirty-nine new circles are in a construction phase – in Atlántico, Norte de Santander, Casanare, Boyacá, Guainía, Huila and San Andrés – as a result of joint actions with child protection, social inclusion and education. Adolescentes En Movimiento has engaged nearly 7,000 children, adolescents, and

^{*} La Otra Juventud Foundation (The Other Youth), Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu Foundation (Wayuu Women Force), Nimaira Indigenous Foundation, and Horizonte de Juventud Foundation (Horizon Youth Foundation).

THE ADOLESCENT KIT, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

In early 2020 Colombia was affected by the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Early on, the Government declared a state of emergency, instituting a lockdown and closing schools to control the spread of the disease. These measures remained in place by December 2020, and have given rise to secondary effects on adolescents and their families.

Through the Adolescentes en Movimiento por sus Derechos Initiative ('Adolescents for their Rights'), UNICEF helped keep adolescents engaged during the lockdown. 14 The Adolescent Kit was adapted into a series of activities that can be easily done at home while complying with prevention measures. These were distributed digitally to a network of over 3,000 young people who passed them on to their communities through WhatsApp, Facebook and other digital channels.

The first activity highlighted the importance of self-care. Over 1,400 adolescents around the country shared videos and pictures of how they were taking care of themselves during the lockdown. In partnership with the Communication Section, these contributions were then shared on the UNICEF channels such as blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with the hashtag #YoMeQuedoEnCasa (#IStayAtHome) and #AdolescenesEnMovimiento (#TeensOnthe Move), achieving 6,551,129 impressions and 48,161 interactions on Facebook alone.

To involve adolescents in the creation of these activities, a weekly call consults about 20 adolescents on their needs, how they think UNICEF can do better, their feedback on proposed new activities, and proposals for other ideas. After they complete the activities, they share their work and feedback with UNICEF.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, four competencies have been prioritized: (a) identity and self-esteem; (b) coping with stress and managing emotions; (c) hope for the future and goal-setting; and (d) problem-solving and managing conflict. Nineteen activities adapted from the Kit had been shared to strengthen their life and leadership skills and promote self-care, safety and COVID-19 prevention. Thirty informative bulletins on prevention reached over 2,000 adolescents. UNICEF was able to adapt to an emergency situation with a view to ensuring learning opportunities for adolescents by implementing action-oriented participatory approaches.



When I do this activity, I realize that identifying difficult relationships helps me overcome barriers in my life, but I also learn to appreciate more positive ones, to take care of them.

 Tatiana Díaz, 13, talking about what she learned from the 'Relationship Map' activity in the Adolescentes En Movimiento circle she participated in.

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youth in these areas, who in turn reach out and engage more peers. Among adolescent participants, 54 per cent are girls and 46 per cent are boys, while 18 per cent come from indigenous communities and 16 per cent were victims of armed violence.

Lessons learned from prior implementation, the translated methodology and locally adapted tools will help facilitate future utilization of the Kit in the migration response. UNICEF Colombia's adolescent, child protection, and child survival and development teams have worked together to implement the Adolescent Kit in safe spaces at points of arrival along migrant routes. Another area of collaboration will center on integrating the Adolescent Kit in the work of the C4D team with volunteer youth organizations.

RESULTS

In 2018, 18 participatory community strategies led by young people and social organizations were implemented to promote safe behaviours and actions through theatre, dance, weaving and rap music. After a year of voluntary work with UNICEF in the migration response, several volunteer youth organizations became implementing partners with formal Programme

- Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with UNICEF. In 2019, adolescent and young leaders led community activities on prevention of xenophobia in which 12,614 people participated.
- → In 2019, Adolescentes En Movimiento engaged nearly 7,000 children, adolescents and youth who then engaged more peers. Among adolescent participants, 54 per cent are girls and 46 per cent are boys, while 18 per cent come from indigenous communities and 16 per cent were victims of armed conflict.
- → Feedback from 2019 regarding the adolescent-led community strategies showed that participants noticed their parents, teachers and community leaders provided more support after seeing the skills and knowledge they had acquired through the programme. At the community level, they witnessed a more positive attitude towards adolescent and youth activities. For example, local authorities invited them to improve and support public spaces with more art initiatives.
- → Today, the partnership with the C4D implementing partners has been sustained, and they are now being integrated into the humanitarian structures responding to the migration influx.
- → By the end of 2020, the C4D strategy based on community and youth engagement had been rolled out in 17 departments of Colombia to promote empowerment, resilience and COVID-19 prevention. The strategy had reached 50,157 people through community radio; 13,000 people participated in local production of information, and 9,000 people participated in AAP mechanisms to ask questions and express concerns, and to evaluate and give feedback to UNICEF's C4D strategy.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Collaboration, along with the 'twin approach' addressing both host and migrant communities in programming, reduces xenophobia.
- → Adolescents and their creative use of public art can be a powerful vehicle for communicating with communities around very sensitive topics.

- → A mini-ethnography to observe and interview migrants in various locations and points along their journey helped to better understand the length and nature of their stay at various facilities and uncovered information gaps.

 These insights informed the strategy behind the messaging and communication channels to engage adolescents and their families.
- Resulting from engagement and participation efforts, two key facilitating factors for increasing the number of adolescents engaged were:

 (a) engaging adolescents who saw the programmes as practical for their daily lives and who invited other adolescents to join; and (b) inviting adolescents to be part of the strategy as agents of change and media producers, capable of design, implementation, change and evaluation of the activities. Adolescents, young leaders and media producers locally produce the information that is relevant and speaks to their development priorities, beliefs and concerns.
- → Local youth organizations that are already established in the communities, have strong local networks, and have experience working with volunteers make the most effective partners. They were able to implement quickly and give input on how to adapt interventions to the local context. Tailoring activities to fit the community setting maximizes their uptake.
- Existing tools and materials for adolescent engagement adapted for one sectoral programmatic area may be leveraged in other sectoral areas. This is due to the fact that meaningful and active adolescent participation cuts across all UNICEF programming. Therefore, such adaptation of tools and materials must be explored and promoted in both development and humanitarian settings.
- The emergency response to the migration flow called for an increased field presence in remote and hard-to-reach areas where government presence has historically been limited. It also called for strong linkages with development workstreams. Working with a wider array of partners with a solid track record enables a smooth transition to

longer-term development work. For example, the collaboration with community-based partners strengthened the relationships and programme implementation in terms of: (a) Cultural relevance: initiatives are adapted and implemented by partners that live in the communities and understand local dynamics and perspectives; (b) Sustainability: the partners will continue to work at the local level; (c) Legitimacy within the communities: partners working on the ground are recognized as role models; and (d) Recognition of community actors as active agents and leaders in their own environments.

CONCLUSION

UNICEF's strength in community engagement, behavioural and social change is built upon the conviction that people should remain at the center of development and humanitarian work. Where the focus is on the engagement of adolescents specifically, the situation calls for a nuanced understanding of the needs and opportunities particular to this age group. Strengthening life skills and competencies of adolescents not only helps them achieve their full development potential but can also help build their ability to meaningfully and systematically participate in decision-making.

UNICEF Colombia has built its efforts on foundational guidance and tools while adapting and contextualizing interventions to ensure they are relevant to local communities. Research and a mini-ethnography, for example, informed the design and implementation of key engagement and communication activities with migrant communities. Participatory approaches in the design of interventions helped make activities like the La Travesia game relevant and relatable. Youth-led implementation of the art workshops to counter xenophobia and violence as well as the Adolescentes en Movimiento activities not only helped increase their uptake but also supported the development

of local adolescents' life skills and strengthened local production of information and resilience and empowerment processes. In addition, localization, adaptation and testing of the global Adolescent Kit paves the way for its potential application to adolescent engagement in the migration response.

The successes and lessons learned from these interventions in addressing host and migrant communities can also serve as examples of important entry points in other humanitarian and development contexts. By identifying programming areas that could benefit from collaboration, reflecting on existing building blocks that can be leveraged, and harnessing the latest developments or available tools, teams can begin to shape new ways of working together to integrate cross-cutting approaches that ensure meaningful adolescent engagement.

Having an integrated cross-cutting approach within the UNICEF mission and vision for the Colombia Country Office leads to a broader integration of community and adolescent engagement into the strategy that drives the organization's ability to achieve results for children. Such integrated thinking will be highly beneficial for the country office as it puts together a new Country Programme Document (CPD) for 2021-2024.

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ENDNOTES:

- Colombia National Census 2018 (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2018), https://www.dane.gov.co/index. php/estadisticas-por-tema/demografia-y-poblacion/censonacional-de-poblacion-y-vivenda-2018
- 2 Colombia National Census 2019 (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2019), https://www.dane.gov.co/ index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/pobreza-y-condicionesde-vida/pobreza-y-desigualdad/pobreza-monetariay-multidimensional-en-colombia-2019#pobrezamultidimensional-nacional-y-departamentos
- 3 UNICEF, Colombia Country Programme Document, September 2015.
- 4 The FARC-EP guerilla group has the largest number of combatants and the biggest territorial presence in Colombia. The long conflict involving the FARC-EP is associated with 7.2 million declared victims, of whom 31 per cent are boys, girls and adolescents. The conflict has resulted in 930,000 deaths and over 6 million internally displaced people, as noted in the Colombia country programme document (2015).
- 5 Migración Colombia, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. Radiografía: Venezolanos en Colombia, 31 de Marzo de 2020.
- 6 Migración Colombia, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. Venezolano En Colombia, Corte a Junio de 2020, https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/infografias/venezolanos-en-colombia-corte-a-30-de-junio-de-2020
- 7 Xenophobia is defined by the ILO, IOM and OHCHR as "attitudes, prejudices, and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity." See https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/taskforce/docs/wcar.pdf

- 8 The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming are available online at https://reliefweb.int/report/world/inter-agency-minimum-standards-gender-based-violence-emergencies-programming
- 9 In UNICEF, Communication for Development (C4D) is defined as a systematic, planned and evidence-based strategic process to promote positive and measurable individual behaviour and social change that is an integral part of development programmes, policy advocacy and humanitarian work.
- 10 Fundación Cultural y Social 5ta con 5ta Crew is a youth organization that uses music and art to engage young people aged 12 to 21 years.
- 11 The qualitative methods taught to the partners include the use of participatory videos and the 'most significant change' approach.
- 12 More information about the Adolescent Kit is available at https://www.adolescentkit.org/
- 13 These local community participants were mostly composed of Colombian adolescents. While there were some Venezuelan migrants living among those communities and participating in the activities, the programme itself was not targeted specifically for migrants.
- 14 Adolescentes en Movimiento was formerly known as Nuestro UNICEF. The name was changed in 2020 with the aim of making it more inclusive. The full name is the National Participation Network of Adolescents Moving for their Rights, but they are more commonly referred to as 'Adolescents en Movimiento'.

