

BREAKING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

NICARAGUA CASE STUDY

PREVENTING IRREGULAR CHILD MIGRATION
IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO (PICMCA) PROJECT:
Reducing gender gaps and supporting youth employability



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The findings, interpretations and conclusions presented in this case study do not necessarily reflect the views of Global Affairs Canada.

Children Believe, 2021



Front cover image: Francis Benita Rivera López, 23, in her workspace in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. With support from the PICMCA project, she started her own business called “Stilos Alhondra” (Alhondra’s Style).

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KEY TERMS

Affirmative action	Defined by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations as “a coherent set of temporary measures specifically designed to remedy the situation of members of a target group in one or more aspects of their social life, in order to obtain effective equality.”
Agency	The ability of individuals to make their own decisions and influence the community. ¹
Attachment	Attachment to a place refers to the complex bond that unites people within specific spaces and places. It is loaded with meaning and tied to multiple effective, identity, environmental, social and cultural dimensions. ²
Empowerment of women	Promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to make their own choices and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. This also includes transforming relationships, structures and institutions that limit women's opportunities and perpetuate their subordination.
Gender equality	“Gender equality is based on the recognition that, historically, women have been discriminated against and that it is necessary to carry out actions to eliminate inequality and reduce the gaps between men and women. This is to lay the foundations for effective gender equality, considering that the inequality suffered by women may worsen depending on age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic level, among other things.” ³
Gender gap	Refers to any disparity between the status or position of men and women in society. It is often used to refer to the difference between the earnings of men and women, for example, “gender pay gap”. However, there can be gender gaps in many other areas, such as economic participation and opportunities, access to education, health and life expectancy, and political empowerment.
Gender-sensitive approach	When the different needs, capacities and opportunities of boys and girls, women and men are identified, considered and taken into account in the programming process.
Irregular migration	Refers to the movement of people outside the norms of the country of origin, transit or reception, in most cases without the necessary documentation.
Soft skills	The attributes or characteristics of a person that allow them to interact with others effectively. Soft skills generally relate to certain aspects of work and daily life.

¹ Children Believe (2020). Irregular Migration, Youth and Attachment: Voices of PICMCA's youth.

² Ibid

³ UN Women (n.d.) Gender equality technical note. Retrieved from <https://www.legisver.gob.mx/equidadNotas/publicacionLXIII/Igualdad%20de%20Genero.pdf>

KEY TERMS

Social inclusion

"The process of improving the conditions for individuals and groups to participate in society. This involves enhancing the capacities, opportunities and dignity of people who are disadvantaged due to their identity."⁴

Youth

Any person between 18 and 30 years of age.⁵

⁴ World Bank. (2013). Inclusion matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity. New Frontiers of Social Policy. Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16195> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

⁵ Promotion of the Integral Development of Youth, Law 2001 s1(nic).

ACRONYMS

DHS	Department of Homeland Security (United States)
EDUCO	Education and Cooperation Foundation (Spain)
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy (Canada)
FUNIDES	Nicaraguan Foundation for Economic and Social Development
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
INATEC	National Technological Institute (Nicaragua)
INIDE	Nicaraguan Institute for Development and Statistics
INPRHU	Institute for Human Promotion, Nicaragua
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JMS	Jesuit Migrant Service
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
MIFAN	Ministry of the Family, Adolescents and Children, Nicaragua
MIGOB	Ministry of the Interior, Nicaragua
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PICMCA	Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America and Mexico
REN	Nicaraguan Network of Businesswomen
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal ⁶
SICA	Central American Integration System
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
WSA	Women’s Safety Audit
YEM	Youth Employment Model

⁶ The Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all”. The SDGs were set in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030.

FOREWORD

Four thousand kilometres (2,500 miles) is the distance far too many young people from Central America travel every year trying to reach North America in search of a better life. They face perilous conditions during this journey and sadly, some never make it to their final destination.

Young people leave their countries for numerous reasons, including a lack of economic opportunity, poverty and high levels of violence. This is because many of them, especially young women, are not getting the opportunities they need to thrive in their own communities.

Despite the challenging scenario, Children Believe has found that irregular migration can be prevented by targeting its root causes. The solution involves providing youth with the tools and resources to develop their leadership and entrepreneurial skills. We are employing this approach through our leadership of the Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America and Mexico (PICMCA) project and with funding from the Government of Canada.

This case study explains PICMCA's programmatic approach to preventing irregular child and youth migration in Nicaragua, one of five countries where the project is implemented. It also shows the main results and lessons learned. We knew the only way to address the underlying causes of irregular migration would be through a multi-country holistic approach. In addition to providing tools and resources, we needed to bestow equal opportunities for the participation of young women and men, listen to their voices and establish alliances with relevant public and private organizations.

You will read the testimony of a young woman, a leader, who is breaking barriers in her own community and reaching her full potential without having to migrate. Empowering youth and communities are at the core of Children Believe's work. We continue our mission for children and youth so they can create a better life in their communities for themselves and their families.



Fred Witteveen
Chief Executive Officer, Children Believe

INTRODUCTION

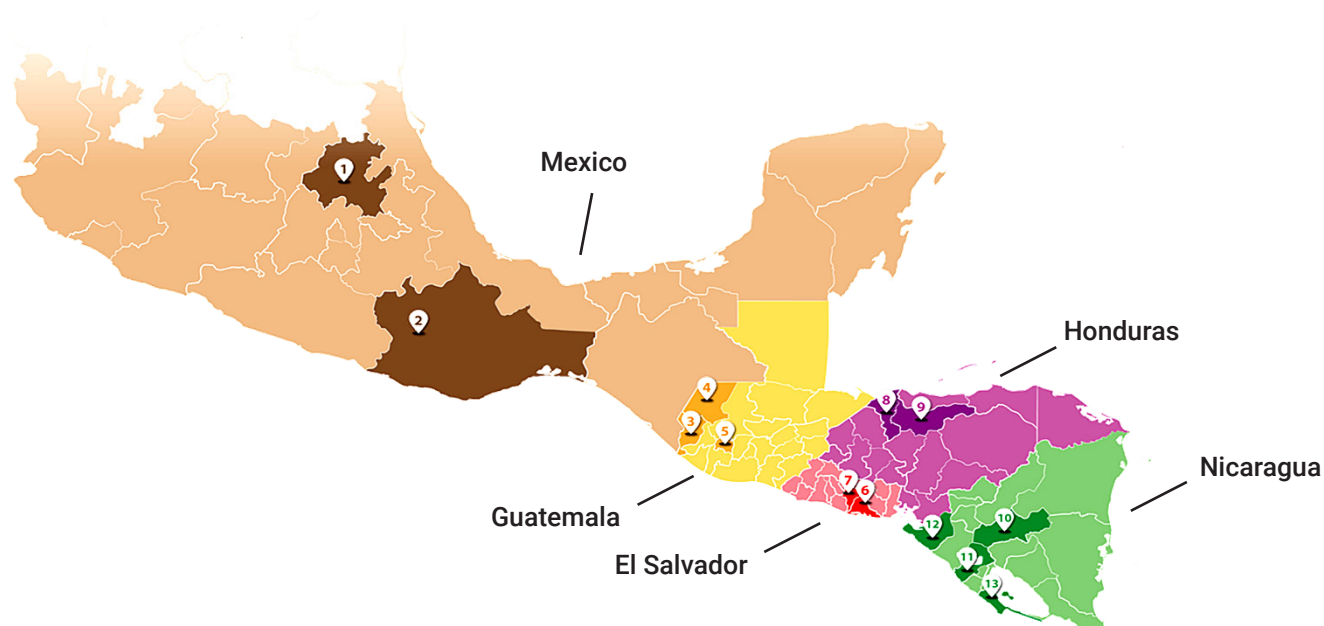
With the Preventing Irregular Child Migration in Central America and Mexico (PICMCA) project, Children Believe set out to improve the well-being of children and youth at risk of irregular migration in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Mexico. Combining child protection measures with training for youth in entrepreneurial skills and promoting their participation, Children Believe created a favourable environment both locally and nationally for male and female youth to take part – young women especially.

Our efforts support youth empowerment which, in turn, helps them overcome the structural barriers forcing them to migrate irregularly.

Children Believe leads the implementation of PICMCA in partnership with US-based NGO ChildFund International and Spain-based NGO EDUCO. The project timeline is from March 2017 to June 2021.

The five-year regional initiative is funded with the support of the Government of Canada and will reach 130,000 beneficiaries. To ensure the sustainability of the program, Children Believe established partnerships with private and public sector institutions, such as the National Institute of Technology (INATEC) and the Nicaraguan Network of Businesswomen (REN in Spanish).

DIAGRAM 1: PICMCA'S REGIONAL SCOPE AND THE AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO⁷



⁷ Areas of implementation in Diagram 1: 1) Hidalgo, 2) Oaxaca, 3) San Marcos, 4) Huehuetenango, 5) Sololá, 6) Usulután, 7) San Vicente, 8) Cortés, 9) Yoro, 10) Matagalpa, 11) Managua, 12) Chinandega and 13) Rivas.

This case study shows how the Youth Employability Model (YEM), along with positive affirmation measures in favour of young women living in vulnerable conditions, can support the prevention of irregular migration. It is centred on initiatives developed by Children Believe Nicaragua.

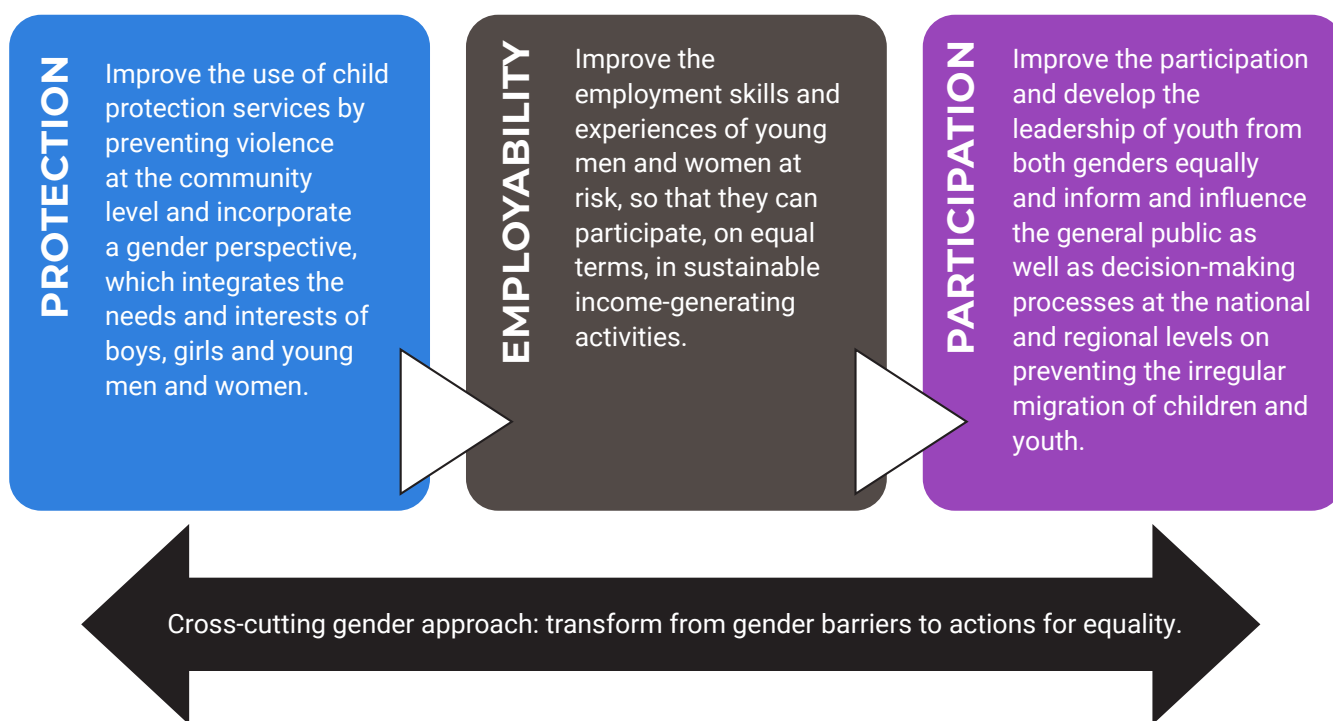
PICMCA, also known as CONFÍO in Spanish, identified three underlying causes for irregular youth migration in its baseline study: one, high levels of crime and/or violence caused by socioeconomic conditions and drug trafficking; two, limited work and educational opportunities, and the consequent social

exclusion of young people; and three, the lack of awareness among children and adolescents about the dangers of irregular migration.

For these reasons, the programmatic approach of the project incorporates child protection, employability and entrepreneurship, and youth participation.

This approach requires alliances with key stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors, and consideration of the gender barriers that interfere with the equal participation of youth.

DIAGRAM 2: PICMCA PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH



To improve the employability of youth involved in the project, Children Believe implemented a **Youth Employment Model (YEM)** methodology developed by ChildFund Alliance.⁸ The approach of YEM is unique because it recognizes “soft skills”, such as behaviour in the workplace, decision-making and personal responsibility, as important and needed proficiencies beyond vocational training for young people to enter the workforce.

It also considers life circumstances which can influence a young person’s employability or preparedness for work. These can include, for example, serious health issues, the level of responsibility of caregivers/guardians in the home, or the lack of basic literacy and numeracy. Through YEM, key skills are instilled as part of holistically addressing the needs of youth.

⁸ ChildFund Alliance (CFA) is a global network of 12 child-focused development organizations working to create opportunities for children and youth, their families and communities. Children Believe is a member organization of the Alliance.

The model employs five components to help youth transition into the workforce:

- 1) Market research;
- 2) Technical skills training and production support;
- 3) Basic business training;
- 4) Life skills training; and
- 5) Mentoring.

The way in which each component is applied varies according to the country context. In Nicaragua, PICMCA focuses on three pillars:

- 1) Life and agency skills;
- 2) Promoting youth entrepreneurship; and
- 3) Access to seed capital.



The programmatic approach of the project is based on child protection, employability and entrepreneurship, and youth participation. (Pictured: Glenis Vivas, 21, a PICMCA project participant)

Taking varying life circumstances into account, the model proposes that the preparation for employment should include developing skills that young people will need to successfully move into adulthood.

The intention is that all youth seeking employment, regardless of their life circumstances, should have the proficiencies they need to be economically active.

On the other hand, the model is based on the idea that it is necessary to give young people a basic understanding of the world of business and how it works. The poorer and

less experienced the target group, the more important it is to provide a foundation to help them find their place in the broader economic system.

Financial literacy will help youth manage their new income to meet current and future needs. With a basic business foundation, those who are self-employed will receive the additional skills they need to run their businesses.

Finally, the model operates under the premise that since formal employment opportunities are often limited in developing countries, self-employment is expected to be a more realistic option. By allowing the market to guide where to work or what to produce, young people will embark on a business activity that will result in a significant improvement in their income.

IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND NICARAGUA

Nicaragua is in the Central American isthmus, a sub-region of the American continent. Due to its geographical proximity to the United States of America, it is an international migration route for thousands of people trying to reach North America. In addition to being a transit route, Central America has a long history of internal and external migration associated with political-military conflicts, socioeconomic crises, climate variability and natural disasters. In 2019 alone, these push factors resulted in the detainment of about 621,600 Central Americans on the southern border of the United States who were attempting to immigrate irregularly, according to data from the United States Border Patrol.

A particular characteristic of the migratory phenomenon in Central America is unaccompanied migrant minors; these are children and adolescents under 18 years of age who try to cross the border without a parent or guardian. In 2016, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported that 68,541 unaccompanied children had attempted to cross the border.

The reasons why Central American children and youth attempt to emigrate irregularly are multiple and complex. According to the results of the PICMCA baseline study, many are fleeing violence and/or lack economic opportunities, and they are unaware of the risks of irregular migration.

In the case of Nicaragua, the Migratory Profile (International Organization for Migration, 2012) reveals

that the majority of Nicaraguan migrants regularly migrate since they do not need passports or visas to cross the land borders of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Panama. Migration becomes irregular when people move by land without a valid passport and visa⁹ to enter the borders of Mexico, Costa Rica and the United States of America.

As of 2010, according to the IOM Profile, Costa Rica and Panama are the key countries of attraction and destination for Nicaraguan workers. This is due to their proximity to Nicaragua, a lower cost of living and the ease of travel to get there.

They also have a high demand for seasonal-, medium- and long-term work. In recent years, the main destinations for Nicaraguan migration have been the United States (43.7 percent), Costa Rica (42.8 percent) and, followed at a distance, Spain (3.75 percent).¹⁰

Since 2018, Nicaragua has been in unfavourable economic and political circumstances, which have generated important changes in the institutional and socioeconomic context of the country. The force of the push and pull factors of irregular migration during this time was evidenced by the difficulties or the lack of access to jobs or sources of work and education, and the promotion of entrepreneurship as a way of life to improve the well-being and security of citizens.¹¹

⁹ Nicaragua's Migratory Profile. International Organization for Migration. Managua, 2012. Taken from the Mid-Term Review Document, PICMCA 100220.

¹⁰ Data available in: <https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/nicaragua> Taken from the Mid-Term Review Document, PICMCA 100220.

¹¹ Taken from "Annual Report of Outcomes, PICMCA Project -150620".

Following research conducted by the Jesuit Migrant Service (JMS),¹² a new migratory wave of mostly young men and women (69.8 percent of the migratory population) was generated and has accentuated the validity of a phenomenon that is seeing a feminization of migration.

This is due to the increase in young and adult migrant women in relation to the traditional predominance of migrant men.

Nicaragua's economic prospects are unfavourable and the drivers of migration have exacerbated the issue.

According to World Bank estimates, the country will accumulate more than \$1.64 billion in losses due to a fall in Gross Domestic Product (-3.8 percent in 2018 and -5.7 percent between 2018 and 2019).¹³

However, according to a study conducted by the PICMCA project in 2017 on "Irregular Migration, Youth and Attachment", the pull factors are encouraging.

The study findings indicate that most young people feel intricately linked to their community, customs, traditions and natural environment which, if combined with an improvement in their economic situation and the possibility of studying, are very attractive factors in deciding not to migrate. These premises served as a guide for PICMCA's actions in the prevention of irregular migration.



In the past, irregular migration was predominantly made up of adult males. This has changed in recent years with nearly 70 percent of the migratory population now being young men and women.

¹² Migration in the context of sociopolitical crisis and violation of Human Rights in Nicaragua. December 2018. Jesuit Service for Migrants.

¹³ Status report. November 2019. Nicaraguan Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUNIDES).

WHERE PICMCA OPERATES IN NICARAGUA

In Nicaragua, Children Believe carries out the PICMCA project in conjunction with three partner organizations: the Institute of Human Promotion (INPRHU) in Managua; the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Chinandega and Rivas; and EDUCO in Matagalpa.

PICMCA focuses its actions on a geographic area of 14 communities, in urban and semi-rural neighbourhoods, in four cities: Managua, Chinandega, Matagalpa and Rivas (see Diagram 3). These cities have the highest rates of regular and irregular migration as well as vulnerability (economic, educational, climatic and social). According to the Migratory Profile of Nicaragua (IOM, 2012), they have the highest percentage of emigrant populations: Managua (26.1 percent), Chinandega (11.5 percent), Matagalpa (6.1 percent) and Rivas (5.9 percent). Table 1 on page 15 presents the most frequent scenarios, the main destinations for community members and the factors that lead to migration.



With support from the PICMCA project, Judy Rivera, 18, set up a beauty and makeup salon in her community in Las Torres, Managua.

DIAGRAM 3: WHERE PICMCA IS IMPLEMENTED

- Managua:** Barrios Las Torres e Hilario Sánchez
 - ▶ Implementing partner: INPRHU
- Chinandega:** Municipalities of El Viejo, Somotillo and Santo Tomás del Norte
 - ▶ Implementing partner: IOM
- Rivas:** Cárdenas, Belén (Escalante Belén), Tola (Las Pilas Coyol), Santa Teresa (Ochomogo) and Potosí
 - ▶ Implementing partner: IOM
- Matagalpa:** Palcila, Los Lipos, Waswali Abajo and El Progreso (rural communities)
 - ▶ Implementing partner: EDUCO



TABLE 1: MIGRATION SCENARIOS OF THE COMMUNITIES WHERE PICMCA OPERATES

City	Migration scenarios and destinations	Location
Managua	The main destinations are: Costa Rica, the United States, Mexico and, to a lesser extent, Spain. The highest migrant population in Nicaragua is from this city.	The capital of the republic. Located on the western coast of the country, southwest of Lake Xolotlán.
Chinandega	Chinandega shares borders with Honduras. The main destination is El Salvador. The highest percentage of Nicaraguan residents in El Salvador come from Chinandega. Migration is typically seasonal for agricultural work. Chinandega has the second-highest migrant population (11.5 percent), while the total population for this city represents 7.6 percent of the national population.	Located 137 kilometres from Managua, on the northwest side of the country.
Matagalpa	The main destinations are: the United States, Costa Rica, Panama and Spain.	Located on the northeast side of the country, 135 kilometres from Managua.
Rivas	Rivas shares a border with Costa Rica, which is the main destination of its migrating population. This migration is favoured due to historical and family roots. Regulated migration is stimulated by the demand for Nicaraguan workers, while irregular migration occurs through 32 blind spots along the southern border.	On the southwest side of the country, 102 kilometres from Managua.

Source: 2012 Nicaraguan Migratory Profile, IOM.

A more general scenario reveals that Nicaragua is a country of youth. The Nicaraguan Institute for Development and Statistics (INIDE in Spanish) projected that by 2020, three out of every 10 people in Nicaragua would be between 15 and 29 years old, and six out of every 10 youth would live in urban areas.

In terms of the Economically Active Population of the country, 40 percent is in this age range. Nicaragua also has the highest proportion of teenage pregnancies in Latin America; teen pregnancies account for 26.3 percent of the country’s pregnancies overall.

This means that 110 of every 1,000 adolescent women (between 15 and 19 years old) are mothers.



Nicaragua has a high population of youth. It was projected that by 2020, three out of every 10 people in Nicaragua would be between 15 and 29 years old. (Pictured: Francis Rivera, 23, with her family in Matagalpa)

THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN NICARAGUA

To improve the well-being of boys, girls and youth (young men and women) who are at risk of irregular migration, the implementation of PICMCA is supported by normative frameworks at the international and national levels, which protect the human rights of children, youth and women. Moreover, the project is enriched by specific policy approaches to international cooperation from the countries that make its implementation possible, such as Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP).

The project integrates the approach of the rights of children and the fundamental principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

These are:

- The best interests of the child;
- Survival and development;
- Participation, addressed in the project through the involvement and leadership of youth; and
- Non-discrimination, reflected through the promotion of gender equality and the respect and inclusion of vulnerable groups traditionally discriminated against (LGBTIQ).

At the national level, the project is supported by Law 287, a code on the Protection of Children and Adolescents (1998), which "regulates the comprehensive protection that the family, society, the government and private institutions must provide to boys, girls and adolescents." Law 392, the Promotion of the Integrated Development of Youth (2001), offers special support to this project as it seeks to "promote the human development of young men and women; guarantee the exercise of their rights and obligations; establish

institutional policies and mobilize resources from the government and civil society for youth."

To confront gender violence, which affects the lives of women, and to develop healthy masculinities, PICMCA is backed by Law 779, the Comprehensive Law against Violence against Women.

This law seeks to promote the right to a life free of violence and prevent, punish and eradicate gender violence (2012). Due to its links with the causes and consequences of irregular migration, this project also assumes the principles of Law 896, the Law against Human Trafficking (2015).

Following the interest of supporting actions in favour of young women and their development under conditions of equality, the project aligns with Law 648, the Law of Equal Rights and Opportunities, which seeks to make equality and equity effective in the enjoyment of human, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights between men and women.

PICMCA integrates a youth approach. It recognizes the role of adolescents and youth as central to achieving their rights, their potential and capacity to participate actively and their ability to be protagonists in their own development and that of their families, communities and country.

It also recognizes a diversity of identities and socio-cultural expressions in young people. Furthermore, this approach is based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination, as human rights are not conditional under any circumstances, physical appearance, sexual orientation, economic resources or any other grounds for discrimination.

The project takes on the governance of migration and the approaches of protection, which in Nicaragua are stated in Law 761, General Law on Migration and Foreigners (2011). This aligns with both the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990), and Law 655 for the Protection of Refugees (2008).

Finally, the project reflects the approaches of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) in three of its gender policy objectives:

1. Improve the protection and promotion of the human rights of girls and women.
2. Increase the participation of women in decision-making processes, particularly regarding sustainable development and peace. This policy is instrumental in helping achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. Provide girls and women with more equitable access and control over the resources they need to ensure economic and social equality. This policy also ties to both the Global Pact for a Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which, in its second objective, seeks to "minimize the adverse and structural factors that force people to leave their country of origin", and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is the international framework of reference for the participation of children and adolescents and the free expression of their opinions.



The PICMCA project recognizes adolescents and youth as central to their rights, their potential and capacity to participate actively and ability to be protagonists in their own development and the development of their families, communities and country. (Pictured: Judy Rivera)

PICMCA: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PREVENTION OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

To respond to the three main causes of irregular migration identified in the PICMCA baseline study, the prevention model developed by the project is based on three programmatic axes: one, protection; two, employability/ entrepreneurship; and three, youth participation and leadership. It includes the establishment of alliances with actors from the private, public and community sectors, and the incorporation of a gender perspective to guarantee equal conditions for the young women and men participating in the project.

1. Protection as one of the main lines of work

To ensure greater protection for young people, PICMCA sought to improve the knowledge of officials from the Nicaragua Ministry of the Family, Adolescents and Children (MIFAN), who are part of the child welfare system, and those from the Ministry of the Interior (MIGOB) involved in the prevention of violence, gender, irregular migration, human trafficking and the rights of children and adolescents. This was achieved through the direct training of officials, including decision-makers, who are in positions to pass on their knowledge to others.

In alliance with IOM, SOS Children's Villages and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the project made an impact on the MIFAN institutional agenda. This was evidenced by the incorporation of irregular migration and the protection of migrant children as a theme in a strategy the Ministry implemented called "School of Values for Fathers and Mothers".

The Ministry strategy promotes the protection of children through a comprehensive family care model and it now includes a methodological guide for the "Prevention of irregular migration and protection of migrant children and adolescents".

This strategy, which benefits migrant children and youth or those in danger of migrating irregularly, is also sustainable as families are the main beneficiaries and the Ministry's objective is to work at the community level.

2. Keys to economic empowerment: The employability and entrepreneurial capacity of young people

To respond to the challenge of youth unemployment, the PICMCA project in Nicaragua applies the Youth Employment Model (YEM) in an adapted manner. This model has also functioned as a guide for training and promoting entrepreneurship among the young people linked to the project.

In the case of Nicaragua, the project focuses on the application of three pillars to increase the probability of obtaining a job or starting a small business: one, technical courses; two, life skills; and three, business development.

1) Agency and life skills

Through PICMCA partner organizations, 268 youth (158 of whom are women) in Nicaragua developed competencies in life skills (or soft skills) that are most required by companies as well as the vast majority of occupations. Each young person participated in 60-hour courses taught by the National Technological Institute (INATEC), which moved online in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Well-known digital platforms were used, such as Train Yourself for a Job, which facilitates self-learning with a simple interface for those with limited internet access.

Developing and strengthening these life skills enabled young women in particular to complement their economic entrepreneurship activities. They learned about managing

emotions and feelings, assertive communication, good interpersonal relationships and positive attitudes and beliefs.

By offering 10 technical courses through this project, it has allowed for a high participation of young women at risk of irregular migration. As will be discussed in the section about gender perspective, throughout the life of PICMCA, the majority of participation from young women has been promoted as a measure of positive action to help overcome gender barriers.



The PICMCA project in Nicaragua promotes the entrepreneurship of young people. It has proven to be a valuable experience for youth like Glenis Vivas, 21, a project participant pictured in Rivas, Nicaragua, where she runs her business.

The initiative has created strategic alliances with institutions to open training opportunities to young people from four cities. For example, INATEC has allowed the development of technical courses that eliminate stereotypes, roles and traditional gender attributes, such as cost accounting, English courses, computerized cash register courses, graphic design, operating systems and office automation.

This effort has resulted in 236 youth (141 women) being trained in technical courses, improving their skills and knowledge, obtaining a job and/or starting a business, a reduction in experiences of occupational segregation and raising their technical level and qualifications.

2) Promotion of youth entrepreneurship

The measures taken by PICMCA to promote the entrepreneurship of young people in Nicaragua has proven to be very useful for those whom had already started a small business. Young entrepreneurs reported that after receiving training, they had a better understanding of how to estimate production costs and profit margins.

Young people at a higher risk of irregular migration, such as teenage mothers and members of the LGBTBIQ community, have also benefitted; 169 young people (100 women) completed business or entrepreneurship training courses to develop their skills and learn basic elements of entrepreneurship, such as developing their own business plan.

The courses were reinforced by learning processes developed through an alliance with the Nicaraguan Network of Businesswomen (REN in Spanish) and other private sector entities or companies at the local level.

Courses included:

- Employability forums (112 youth, 77 women);
- Workshops on social media (85 youth, 45 women);
- Workshop replicas on social media carried out by youth whom were trained (667 people, 393 women);
- A training workshop on client service (four youth, two women); and
- Mentorship with three entrepreneurs (three young women).

3) Access to seed capital

Providing seed capital has helped support the business ideas of some of the young people involved in the project. Children Believe, in coordination with partner organizations, organized competitions to select business proposals that would be financed through the donation of materials and equipment. This support would enable the young person to develop their new or established business ideas or projects with the potential to generate sustainable income and/or added value in the medium-term.

Affirmative actions were implemented to encourage the participation of young women in these competitions. Among the criteria considered in the tenders were new or already established projects that could generate sustainable income and/or added value in the medium-term, and that would have an environmental-protection approach. To date, 36 young people (25 women) have received the needed equipment and material for their businesses from the project.

3. Participation and leadership of youth in communities

PICMCA is improving the leadership capacity of young women. It is increasing their participation in activities that inform and influence decision-makers at both the local and national levels on how to address irregular migration.

A total of 118 young people (67 of them women) in Nicaragua participated in the creation of five Youth Agendas (one national and four local) on the prevention of irregular migration from a gender perspective. The agendas synthesize the context and realities of young people, their perceptions of gender inequalities and their main concerns.

The end goal is to integrate these Youth Agendas into public policies, programs, projects, investment plans and/or budgets of the guarantor institutions at the local and/or national level.

Examples from Rivas and Chinandega demonstrate the efficacy of these agendas. Here, youth presented their agendas before the Departmental Tables Against Trafficking in Persons, which was led by the Ministry of the Interior. This resulted in the inclusion of the issue of irregular migration in the local public agenda.

Opportunity to participate and contribute

PICMCA is developing the leadership capacity of young people on various topics. Among them are: gender; leadership; civic participation and a culture of peace; migration; and violence prevention. The project also promotes spaces for reflection on gender and new masculinities, where young people reflect on the stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity and other alternative masculinities based on horizontality, consensus and relationships between equals. These experiences are helping young men become more committed to gender equality.

The creation of four local youth committees, one for each project intervention area, has been supported to assist local project technicians in developing methodologies among peers.

These four committees have a non-hierarchical structure (horizontal organization) and are characterized by gender parity in their composition; 52 percent of the participants are women, 41 percent are men and 7 percent belong to another gender. Committee members led the design and presentation of the Youth Agendas, the implementation of community campaigns, the women's safety audit and the collection of data for the technical report.

The prevention of irregular migration and the promotion of equitable relationships and gender equality among young people are the main actions on the agendas of these committees.



Youth lead the design and implementation of community campaigns to share awareness-related messages about the risks of irregular migration in schools and other community centers.

Increased awareness of the risks of irregular migration and the rights of children and youth

Through PICMCA, youth were offered opportunities to share their stories and hear the stories of others. This helped create awareness of the inherent risks involved in the decision to migrate irregularly and, at the same time, the importance of knowing and exercising one's human rights.

Youth have led the design and implementation of community campaigns to share awareness-related messages about the risks of irregular migration in schools and community centres. For example, the youth who participated in the Rivas project created a play called "A trip to reality" that showed the risks experienced by migrants who decide to migrate irregularly.

CREATING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Gender equality and inclusion are part of a cross-cutting human rights approach embedded in the PICMCA project. They are reflected in the promotion of improved access to livelihood assets and services for people at risk of irregular migration due to factors related to the environment, as well as due to social and personal contexts.

Young people in Central America face structural barriers which make them vulnerable to irregular migration and the risks that it entails. Young women face specific barriers based on gender. Among the barriers are the lack of a support system for young mothers and unpaid care work. In rural contexts, such as within our intervention communities in Guatemala and Nicaragua, the ability of young women to participate in the project has been limited due to domestic work and family care, which reduce the time they can invest in self-realization activities.

In planning PICMCA, the barriers to young women's participation in the project, such as the following, were anticipated:

- Cohabitation and early pregnancies. High rates of adolescent pregnancy, early unions and sexual violence against girls are among the largest hurdles to achieving gender equality in Central America and Mexico. Nicaragua has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Latin America.
- Unpaid work, which hinders the availability of young women to seek paid work.
- The distance required to travel, along with possible safety risks. This is especially true for adolescents and women in rural contexts, such as in the communities of Matagalpa.
- The absence of a support network.

Project activities are aimed at changing gender relations, transforming discriminatory practices, enabling participation in leadership/governance and community organizations, and



PICMCA offers life skills/soft skills in employment training, which is crucial for young women in particular. It promotes the self-confidence, assertiveness, decision-making and leadership skills needed to be successful in the business world. (Pictured: Ledys Osorto, 19, owner of Delicias Caf'Arte in Somotillo, with a customer)

influencing decision-making and structures. Women and men have equal access to training programs and productive resources. But when seeking to attract women and other vulnerable groups, the barriers they face are taken into account and addressed.

For example, in the case of young women whose partners resist and distrust project activities, community facilitators intervene. They show what the activities consist of and help the partners see the potential benefits of accessing training opportunities for the personal development of the young women involved and the well-being of their families.

Beyond this, the promotion of life skills/soft skills in employment training is crucial for young women as it counteracts the parenting norms they have been exposed to since childhood. These norms do not promote the self-confidence, assertiveness, decision-making and leadership skills needed in the highly competitive and challenging labour market/business world.

Some of the measures being taken by PICMCA to support young women are:

- **Second chances:** Young mothers who have dropped out of school have a second chance to get an education.
- **Affirmative actions:** Access to training opportunities and seed capital, won through a competition, allow promotion of new, sustainable business ideas.
- **Creation of gender-sensitive training environments:** Flexible modalities and spaces are being adapted for boys and girls.
- **Mentoring and positive role models:** Young women are encouraged and receive support from a business organization, led by women from REN, to pursue self-employment.

- **Flexible modality:** To include young mothers with their children in training initiatives, the delivery of programs that generate income have flexible hours. This emerged as a lesson learned, since the training offered to women must consider factors of environmental, personal and social vulnerabilities. For example, geographic dispersion, especially in rural areas, and the multiple responsibilities of women.
- **Friendly spaces:** To ensure the full and effective participation of women who do not have a support network, that is, someone to take care of their children while they train, the project adapted its learning spaces so that women can attend with their children. This includes providing supplies and space for children's educational games.
- **Participation of young women:** Both young men and women take part in the project. However, following the guidelines of the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), women have greater participation in training spaces (60 percent on average).

BOX 1: SUCCESS STORY SEWING DREAMS AND MAKING THEM COME TRUE

Francis Rivera is 23 years old and lives in Matagalpa, 130 kilometres from Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. PICMCA provided her with soft skills/life skills training, seed capital, equipment (three semi-industrial sewing machines and a clothes iron and raw materials (fabric and thread). She started her own business called "Stilos Alhondra" (Alhondra's Style) to manufacture and distribute clothing. Having her own business is now no longer a dream.

This is Francis' story in her own words:

"I am now manufacturing and marketing clothes for girls, teenagers, youth and women (blouses, dresses, skirts, suits and accessories. I have improved the marketing strategy of my products; I carry out retail and wholesale transactions in different territories from

the municipality of Matagalpa. I use social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp) to promote my products. My monthly income has improved; it now ranges from \$432 to \$643 (US dollars).

"I am a young entrepreneur; I am the owner of my own business. I have a business plan. I have improved my skills to run a business; I can calculate the production costs and selling prices of my products."

- Francis Rivera

I have developed a sales and distribution plan for my products. I can calculate the depreciation of my equipment; I didn't know how to do that calculation.

I have learned how to calculate the profit margin per month and year, and how to allocate a percentage of my income to renew my fabric inventory. I have a notebook where I have written down my income and expenses from my business. I have improved my income in the last 12 months and with my earnings, I am building my own house to give greater security and protection to my daughters and my son.

Now I have more confidence in myself; I have improved my self-esteem. I make my own decisions about my life, I accept myself as I am, I feel more capable of facing the different situations of my daily life positively and I acknowledge myself as having rights. I feel more capable of achieving what I set out to do.

I have improved my communication skills (I can express myself better in public, I can communicate better with other people in a direct, honest and respectful manner). I am tolerant and respectful of other people's opinions.

I know how to protect myself in situations related to violence and I know who the guarantor institutions are; where to request support in situations related to violence (National Police, Police Station for Women and Children, Ministry of the Family), and general civil society support (Women's Group from Matagalpa).

I have developed my leadership skills. I am actively participating in the territorial youth committee (in the youth committee, we do not have a board of directors; we only elect two representatives per community. I am one of the representatives of the Los Lipes community. The committee is made up of six women and four young men. Decisions are made democratically and leadership is exercised mainly by women).

I participated in the creation of a Territorial Youth Agenda for the Prevention of Irregular Migration (it includes the main problems that affect us and we identify alternative solutions), and in the presentation of



Francis Rivera, a 23 year old from Matagalpa and business owner of Stilos Alhondra.

the agenda to local authorities.

I think that the project has contributed to the prevention of irregular migration by strengthening our knowledge about human rights, gender, migration and the risks of irregular migration. It strengthened our participation and developed our leadership capacity. It also allows us to access technical courses, supports us in defining our business plans, strengthens our skills on how to run a business and finances youth-led ventures by providing seed capital to develop our entrepreneurial capacity.

"This has allowed me to improve my technical skills, have an entrepreneurial mindset and earn a higher income."

PICMCA PROJECT RESULTS

The PICMCA project in Nicaragua will reach 6,465 beneficiaries (55 percent women) through five years of implementation. The following summarizes the main results of the project at the individual, community, institutional and knowledge-building levels.

DIAGRAM 4: KEY RESULTS FROM THE PICMCA PROJECT

6,465 Beneficiaries

(55% women) reached through 5 years of implementation.

4 MOU'S AND AGREEMENTS



signed with private sector organizations and financial institutions.

96% COMPLETION RATE

for demand-driven technical courses.



83% NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, AND NGO PROGRAM STAFF

increased their score when tested on knowledge about preventing and protecting children from violence.

30% REDUCTION



in young people's intention to migrate to another country.

2 CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM ORGANIZATIONS

strengthened to foster coordination, understanding and inter-institutional learning.



150,000+ PEOPLE REACHED

through radio, social media and outdoor advertising by youth-led community and national awareness campaign activities on the risks and alternatives to irregular migration.

623 INCLUDING **64** OFFICIALS DECISION-MAKERS

improved their skills and knowledge about human rights and child protection.



187 YOUTH CONNECTED

(116 women) to apprenticeships and mentoring to increase their employability through partnerships established with the Nicaraguan Network of Businesswomen.



Judy Rivera, owner of a beauty salon supported by the PICMCA Project, in Managua with her family.

Four young lives transformed

The impact of the program's prevention model is evident in the changes and personal transformations of four young women, aged 19 to 23, from the municipalities of Managua, Somotillo, Matagalpa and Rivas.

Their experiences affirm the positive impact of PICMCA in altering the direction of their lives and helping them improve their well-being.

Their testimonies express transformative change through descriptions of their realities and feelings related to: a strong attachment to their communities and country; sensitivity to gender issues and equal opportunities; preparedness for everyday life; their technical capacity to consolidate and expand their commercial companies; as well as their willingness to actively participate in and shape

processes of social transformation and development in their communities.

Tables 2 and 3 are a collection of statements made by the young women and explain the situations they found themselves in at the start of the PICMCA project, and the positive changes that occurred for them after three years had passed. Despite their initial situations, none of the young women reported having the intention to migrate by the end of the project. In the four areas of the project's intervention, the intention to migrate among participants was reduced by 30 percent, exceeding the project goal of 20 percent.

The reason for this is tied to the young people's deep attachment to and pride in their communities, as well as having close relatives who have had traumatic experiences due to regular and irregular migration.

TABLE 2: THE SITUATIONS AND FEELINGS OF YOUNG WOMEN AT THE OUTSET OF THE PICMCA PROJECT

Situation	Feelings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My life is not good (single mother at 18 years old. Currently aged 23 with two daughters and a son). • I finished high school with a half scholarship to become an architect, but dropped out of college because my father lost his job. • I was unemployed due to the pandemic and could not find a job. • I witnessed the experiences of my parents, siblings and friends who have migrated due to economic hardships and poverty. Some have returned due to insecurity and the lack of protection for their children. • I thought I would not be able to overcome poverty. • I had little to no knowledge about my rights, about migration and the risks of irregular migration. I did not participate in any decision-making space in my community. • I could not find alternatives to support my family and generate an income. • Although I was part of a group in my community, I was not actively participating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very sad, feeling down, hopeless. • Many fears, doubts and lack of confidence in myself. • Fear of being rejected or criticized (by society and by my family) and to say “no”. • It was difficult to express my feelings and emotions. • I was shy, introverted and insecure. I did not talk much with others (just with family members); it was hard to communicate with others and I did not express my opinions freely because I feared making a mistake. • Lack of confidence in my abilities.

TABLE 3: THE SITUATIONS AND FEELINGS OF YOUNG WOMEN AT YEAR THREE OF THE PICMCA PROJECT

Situation	Feelings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My life makes sense now. • My income has improved. • I know that you can get out of poverty. • I have a company and a business plan, which allows me to dream and know where I am heading. • I will continue my college studies and will graduate because now I can. • Even after I graduate, I will continue working on my business. • I have improved my knowledge of the rights of women and youth. • I learned that we have the right to participate and associate, to hold public office, the right to an education, the right to have a job, and so on. • I learned that women can work outside of our homes and that housework and childcare are shared responsibilities with men. • I’m staying in my country; it is possible to progress through hard work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel incredibly grateful, super happy, excited, motivated, proud, encouraged; it makes me want to cry with joy. • I trust my skills. • I feel better knowing I can provide for my family and my children. • I socialize more respectfully with other youth; I have changed. • I have more confidence in myself; I participate and speak without feeling ashamed. I have improved my self-esteem. I make my own decisions about my life. I accept myself as I am. • I feel more capable and strong. I no longer see black clouds over me; I know that I can achieve what I set out to do. • I am happy to serve my community and contribute through talks so that other young people know the risks of irregular migration. • I acknowledge myself as an individual with rights.



“I have a company, a business plan, which allows me to dream and know where I am heading.” The PICMCA project helped Ledys Osorto, 19, start her own business in Chinandega, Nicaragua, called “Delicias Caf’Arte”; a cafeteria that offers healthy food and beverages. Her dream is to expand her business to include cultural activities.

Three years after launching the PICMCA project, the change, self-perception and empowerment of the young women in particular who actively participated in the different activities of the initiative are visible. For instance, 96 percent of young people completed the employability process of the Youth Employment Model.

Now, young women show greater self-esteem and recognize themselves as entrepreneurs. Thirty-three young people have received seed funding to support their small businesses. They recognize themselves as proud, capable and having a vision. They have grown personally and technically. They have improved their lives, their environments and those of their families. And they are convinced that they can succeed in their country of origin.

Positive change at the community level

PICMCA has spurred tangible positive change in Nicaraguan communities, including:

- The institutionalization of the prevention of irregular migration and the rights and protection of the migrant population in guarantor institutions. This was seen through their incorporation of the School of Values methodology to share child-friendly information on irregular migration at the community level and in

educational programs provided by The Ministry of the Family, which leads the child welfare system in Nicaragua.

- Increased awareness of youth, parents, caregivers and community members on the risks and alternatives to irregular migration. This was attained through youth-led community and national awareness campaign activities which reached more than 150,000 people through radio, social media and outdoor advertising.

Improved protection systems and strengthened public institutions

PICMCA has fortified protection systems and public institutions in Nicaragua through:

- The inclusion of irregular migration as part of the public agenda, especially within the institutions most involved in providing adequate protection to the target population of the project, namely at-risk youth aged 15 to 25 in areas prone to irregular migration.
- Improvement of skills and knowledge about human rights, protecting children from violence and gender mainstreaming, among 623 officials, including 6 decision-makers, such as departmental delegates and border agents who work on the front line. Eighty-

three percent of officials achieved a 20 to 25 percent improvement in these areas. This was verified with pre- and post-training tests.

- An increase in the technical capacities of front-line personnel in relation to preventing irregular migration and gender mainstreaming when assisting the migrant population at the country's border posts.
- Strengthening the Formal Child Protection System (also known as the Wellbeing System) by raising the technical capacities of decision-makers and technical staff working in social services, to establish positive community relations with the system.
- The strengthening of institutional alliances and the coordination of the Child Protection System Organizations to foster understanding and learning among two public organizations, the Ministry of the Family and the Ministry of the Interior.

Proactive engagement with private sector entities

The PICMCA project achieved positive relationships with private partners, resulting in:

- Four MOUs and agreements with the private sector and financial organizations, which linked 187 youth (116 women) to apprenticeships and mentoring to increase their skills for greater employability. This was achieved in partnership with the Nicaraguan

Network of Businesswomen, the largest women-led business organization in the country.

- The development of strong collaboration through a shared values approach, which proved to be effective in deepening the impact of the intervention as both organizations identified a common goal. Private institutions also benefited from the expertise of Children Believe in areas such as gender and protection.

Building on the knowledge gained

The PICMCA project enhanced knowledge about irregular migration in Nicaragua through:

- The addition of new information, drawn from PICMCA studies and data, that enriches the existing body of knowledge on preventing irregular migration among children and youth. Research in this area has previously focused on understanding the push and pull factors of migration and has overlooked the reasons why youth decide to stay in their communities (known as "attachment").
- Validating the use of existing methodologies in different contexts through the project's urban and semi-rural approach. This proved to be the case for the Youth Employment Model (YEM), Youth Agendas and Awareness Campaigns, which focused on the risks and alternatives to irregular migration, and the Women's Safety Audit participatory methodology.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PICMCA EXPERIENCE

The PICMCA project established a logical and cohesive proposal focused on the need to serve youth in an adverse socioeconomic context where the push and pull factors of irregular migration have worsened.

The project recognizes the importance of working in partnership; reaching and strengthening both public and private organizations, civil society and women-led organizations.

This collective-impact approach is particularly necessary for interventions with high levels of complexity, such as in PICMCA, where the central objective is to prevent irregular migration – a phenomenon influenced by multiple factors. The level of complexity of the problem addressed by the project requires that its implementation be supported by multiple actors at local and regional levels.

The regional scope of the project has provided opportunities to raise awareness about the issue of irregular migration on a greater scale. It has also facilitated the creation of a platform to promote the voices of young people from different backgrounds across the region. This was the case for the youth-led regional campaign, “My nation is in my heart”, which highlights the risks of irregular migration from the perspectives of young people and offers alternatives.

The campaign was designed in Nicaragua and tailored to the specific contexts of each participating implementation country. Organizations with regional reach, such as the Mexican non-profit Fundación Azteca, have joined the campaign to broaden the reach of its message. The regional



Leydis Osorto, a PICMCA project participant wearing a “My nation is in my heart” t-shirt.

perspective has also created opportunities to share findings from the youth-led initiatives with regional supranational organizations. This was the case with the Central American Integration System (SICA in Spanish).

Establishing alliances with private sector institutions provided youth with unique spaces to interact and learn from potential employers. This increased their ability to enter the job market and secure a livelihood since they had been trained in relevant technical courses and developed the skills demanded by the Nicaraguan labour market.

When planning and executing interventions, it is essential to work from an ecological approach which considers the influence of the individual, family, peer, community and social setting on a national level.

In this sense, it is crucial to strengthen community structures, local partnerships and youth organizations to be responsive to the needs of young people and have it reflected in their solutions to irregular migration.

It is also crucial to train officials from public service organizations as this contributes to the institutionalization of efforts to prevent irregular migration from a rights perspective and to protect the migrant population. It also contributes to the continuity of these processes by establishing inter-institutional coordination on the issue.

Investing in the life skills and abilities of young people, especially women, is effective because it strengthens their level of attachment and prevents irregular migration. It is also a strategic way to overcome gender gaps that affect young women.

Promoting the participation and organization of young people in general has also proven to be valuable as it develops their capacities and agency. Further, this strategy can be credited not only for the personal and professional development of young people, but also for strengthening family and community dynamics.

Gender equality and inclusion, as part of a human rights approach, are key cross-cutting themes for the project.

They are reflected in the strategies to improve access to livelihood assets and services for those in vulnerable conditions and at risk of irregular migration. This approach requires program policies geared towards including people whom are more vulnerable or likely to be excluded, particularly women. Establishing a shared understanding of



Investing in the life skills and abilities of young people, especially women, is a strategic way PICMCA helps overcome gender gaps, strengthens local attachment and prevents irregular migration. (Pictured: Glenis Vivas)

this gender-equality-and-inclusion approach has been a significant challenge and required the introduction of concepts of gender and social inclusion for staff and partners.

The project demonstrated specific challenges related to women's participation, especially those living in harder to reach areas, such as rural women. Childcare obligations made women's participation difficult, therefore the intervention required an understanding of the vulnerabilities of specific groups and the need for incentives/affirmative actions. As a result, a gendered tool for institutional self-evaluations was developed. It is a participatory instrument which allows one to measure the mainstreaming of the gender approach at different levels of a partner organization. The tool identifies the most strategic aspects that a partner organization works on to ensure a cross-gender approach.

WHAT'S NEXT: FUTURE STEPS TO MITIGATE IRREGULAR MIGRATION

The significant gains made through PICMCA in Nicaragua should not be lost; the momentum for positive change can continue. Ongoing efforts to prevent irregular migration of children and youth in Nicaragua should include:

- Strengthening communication with partner organizations in the implementation of interventions to intensify the exchange of experiences, the learning process and the comparison of methods for gender mainstreaming.
- Inviting community group leaders to design/ implement local-based solutions; youth must participate in and lead the formulation of local-development proposals in their communities.
- Continuation of promoting alliances with private companies, financial institutions, public institutions and youth organizations to stimulate links and optimize resources.
- Maintaining efforts to strengthen the young entrepreneurs who have been able to establish themselves since their involvement in the intervention to increase their productivity and ability to differentiate their added value.
- Fortifying the community/non-formal protection system to follow-up on the skills development processes that have been attained with guarantors from the formal system.



With help from the PICMCA project, Leydis Osorto has maintained a strong connection with her family and community in Chinandega, Nicaragua, and now proudly operates a business of her own.



Children Believe works globally to empower children to dream fearlessly, stand up for what they believe in – and be heard. For 60+ years, we've brought together brave young dreamers, caring supporters and partners, and unabashed idealists. Together, we're driven by a common belief: creating access to education – inside and outside of classrooms – is the most powerful tool children can use to change their world.

A member of ChildFund Alliance, Children Believe is part of a global network of 12 child-focused development organizations working to create opportunities for children and youth, their families and communities. ChildFund helps nearly 23-million children and their families in more than 70 countries overcome poverty and underlying conditions that prevent children from achieving their full potential. We work to end violence against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children and youth to create lasting change and elevate their voices in decisions that affect their lives.

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