TO HIDE OR FLEE?

Education and the humanitarian situation

in Honduras

NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

NRC

CONTENT

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** is an independent humanitarian organisation helping people forced to flee. Whatever it takes. Wherever, and whenever, we're needed.
NRC is a determined advocate for displaced people. When we witness injustices, we alert the world. We promote and defend displaced people's rights and dignity in local communities, with national governments and in the international arena.

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Executive Summary

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an average of one child per household is out of school in Honduras's most violent areas[1]. Just one third of the current generation can access a secure educational space.

Criminal gang activity has a devastating impact on children's lives. The country has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, and to exert territorial control, criminal gangs restrict or prevent school attendance. They have managed to infiltrate the core of educational establishments, influencing the decisions of principals and teachers. Gang members routinely promote the sale of drugs to minors, extort teachers and students, and carry out recruitment, surveillance and intelligence activities.

Direct threats from criminal gangs have led to the closure of schools or the cancellation of classes. As a result of the violence, children are often obliged to request a school transfer or abandon their education altogether.

At least one of every three children drops out of school after concluding the sixth gradel. The high point of dropouts occurs in the seventh[2] and eighth[3] grades with students between 13 and 14 years of age. This statistic is worrisome as it corresponds to the age range when the num-

1. In 2016, NRC surveyed 1,110 homes to identify the out-of-school population in regions affected by widespread violence – that is, the urban areas of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. The survey identified 1,239 boys and girls out of school between the ages of six and 17 years.
2. According to official data, in the seventh grade the dropout rate was 17.16 per cent during 2014 and 19.77 per cent in the year 2015. See: The Honduran Educational System in Figures 2015. July 11, 2016 http://www.se.gob.hn/seduc/se-informes/
3. The dropout annual rate comparison in eighth grade, shows an increment of 1.46 per cent between 2014 and 2015. See: The Honduran Educational System in Figures 2015. July 11, 2016 http://www.se.gob.hn/seduc/se-informes/.

ber of human rights violations increases.

In today's context, families do not find many alternatives: they can either hide their children, or help them flee. There is a clear relationship between the violence, the absence of institutional protection, and the adoption of personal protection strategies – internal displacement and the search for international protection.

Although it recognises the situation, the government has not managed to prevent displacement or respond systematically to the immediate needs of individuals and families forced to flee their homes. There are no legal frameworks or public policies that specifically promote the protection of and assistance to the displaced population.

Recommendations

For the Honduran government

- The government should accelerate plans to introduce a legal framework that addresses displacement and clearly stipulates the right to education.
- The Secretariat of Education should set aside resources to follow-up on out-of-school children and to provide them with the support necessary to integrate back into the education system – be it formal or alternative education.
- The government should allocate sufficient resources to provide free and compulsory access to quality education for those children most affected by generalised violence.
- The Secretariat of Education must practise policies that adapt to the effects of the violence and that address the structural barriers in the country's educational system.
- The government should ensure that students and families forced to flee violence at school are offered protection, and that the impact of their departure on the education systems is addressed. When possible, they should be able to return.
- The government should ensure that schools are secure environments. It should provide learning spaces for children close to home and prevent the establishment of invisible borders. It should adopt violent-sensitive curricula, ensure that education does not help trigger violence and include quality education as part of the governmental response.
- The government should systematically investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for human rights and criminal law violations that affects access to education for children and youth, in accordance with national and international standars.

Donors and the international community

- The humanitarian response in Honduras should be geared towards the phenomenon of violence related to criminal gangs, and be tailored to meet the needs of internally displaced people or people at risk of displacement.
- Humanitarian actors and donors should recognise the importance of education in Honduras and be ready to intervene in the sector when no other actor (national or local authorities, long-term aid providers) has the means or expertise of intervening in violent areas controlled by criminal gangs.
- Humanitarian donors must offer alternatives to children at risk, including youth.
- Donors and the international community should support prevention programmes that include the local community, families and the children themselves.

Methodology

This report endeavours to analyse how minors in Honduras are affected by the widespread violence, with a special focus on school access and enrolment retention. The document presents its findings based on interviews[4] with people recently displaced and at risk of displacement, representatives of state institutions, civil society organisations, United Nations agencies, international cooperation agencies and international non-governmental organisations; NRC data; and a review of reports and press publications.

The report does not include an exhaustive review of the policies currently being implemented to guarantee access to school, enrolment retention and protection in the classroom for displaced children and children at risk of displacement. Neither does it deepen or analyse the technical and financial matters in the government's education response. Instead, it offers an overview of the context and highlights potential changes in educational practices and policies that could benefit displaced children or children at risk of displacement.

Disclaimer: *The names and specific geographic locations of those interviewed have been omitted to protect their identities.*

4. 34 interviews were conducted in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula (Honduras)

1. Quietly, without anyone noticing

> ***"Last week my eldest daughter's friend was killed. I only allow my four children to leave the house to go to school, and that's because I accompany them."***
>
> Mother of threatened children. Tegucigalpa

In Honduras, widespread violence has created a protection crisis. Criminal gangs exert heavy territorial control in urban areas, where poverty is rampant.[5] Extortion, restrictions on mobility, threats and intimidation, kidnapping, sexual violence and homicides are common.

Criminal gangs follow a hierarchical system of organisation, operation, communications and finance. The National Police of Honduras estimates that the two largest criminal gangs – Mara Salvatrucha 13, also know as MS13, and mob Barrio 18, or simply, 18 – boast approximately 25,000 members.[6]

5. More than half of the population in Honduras – 63 per cent – lives on less than USD 4 per day; 16 per cent live on less than USD1.90 per day. World Bank (2014). See: http://datos.bancomundial.org/pais/honduras.
6. Maras and gangs in Honduras. Insight Crime. November 2015. These data differ greatly from police sources. While the US Agency for International Development (USAID) estimated 36,000 members in a 2006 report, other sources such as the National Programme of Prevention, Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration reduces the figure to 4,728 members.

This context has been likened to a conflict situation. Its impact on the lives of civilians is devastating. Honduras has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Between January and June of 2016, an average of 13 homicides occurred every day. Around 36 per cent – 932 cases – took place in the Central District and San Pedro Sula.[7]

This situation of generalised violence especially affects minors. Girls and boys alike are recruited, threatened, killed, tortured, sexually abused and forcibly displaced. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that more than 4,700 children and youth have been recruited to join criminal gangs in Honduras.[8]

According to evidence collected for this report, boys and girls participate in criminal gang activities from the age of eight. They are coerced into surveillance activities, collecting information, extortion, and trafficking narcotic drugs. There is a clear correlation between "used" minors and the number of arrests under charges of extortions.[9] In 2015, three out of 10 criminal gang mem-

7. Bulletin Number 42 January-June 2016. Observatory on Violence of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH). September 2016. See: http://www.iudpas.org/pdf/Boletines/Nacional/NEd42EneJun2016.pdf.
8. UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons report on his mission to Honduras. The Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly. April 2016. Page 5.
9. In 2013, 19 per cent of criminal gang members arrested

bers arrested for extortion were minors.[10]

During the first half of 2016, the rate of homicide victims aged between 10 and 14 years was 61 per 100,000 inhabitants. The rate increases dramatically for the 15 to 19 year old age bracket: 102.8 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

This violence affects boys and girls differently. For each violent death of a woman between January and June of 2016, ten deaths of men were recorded. This proportion follows the same pattern for minors. Girls, meanwhile, tend to suffer more from sexual abuse and exploitation. In the last ten years, more than fifteen thousand cases of sexual abuse against girls[11] were reported and according to the Special Prosecutor for Children, sexual abuse doubled in 2015.[12]

In 2016 the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) surveyed school dropouts in San Pedro Sula and identified that, in areas with criminal gang presence, one in five households had a minor who was already a parent. Of those surveyed, 82 per cent were girls who did not have the support of the child's father. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) warns in a 2016 report that one in four women between 14 and 19 years old in Honduras had been pregnant at least once[13].

> ***"Every female classmate I had in the sixth grade fell pregnant, except three. We were twenty-four. The male classmates continue to study."***
>
> Adolescent in San Pedro Sula

Minors with children and single underage mothers are particularly vulnerable population groups. They face specific risks of exploitation and abandonment in gang-controlled areas. Generally, these children and youth have humanitarian needs associated with shelter, food and education. According to NRC, their households, when affected by violence, struggle to pay rent as their scarce economic resources gradually deplete.

Despite the gravity of the situation, families do not usually turn to institutional protection mechanisms. NRC interviews corroborate the "climate of mistrust of the society on public institutions, the police, the army, and a situation of corruption and impunity" suggested by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons[14]. The testimonies even suggest that going to institutional mechanisms could pose risks associated with criminal gang retaliation.

> ***"It's not worth reporting. In June a neighbour was killed, a police officer's son. The family left the neighbourhood. They didn't investigate even though he was the son of a police officer. The only thing you get if you complain is that they know and go after the rest of the family."***
>
> Mother of a murdered young woman.

The national Ombudsman estimates that over 80 per cent of human rights violations

for extortion were minors. Data from the National Anti-Extortion Force (FNA), quoted by the press. See: http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1010649-410/en-9-crece-cifra-de-menores-extorsionadores-en-honduras.

10. Ibidem.
11. Observatory on Violence of UNAH.
12. Criterio. See: http://criterio.hn/2015/06/22/abuso-a-menores-en-honduras-se-dispara-en-200/Criterio. See: http://criterio.hn/2015/06/22/abuso-a-menores-en-honduras-se-dispara-en-200/
13. Wradio. See: http://www.wradio.com.co/noticias/internacional/estudio-alerta-que-640000-jovenes-ni-trabajan-ni-estudian-en-honduras/20161020/nota/3279984.aspx
14. UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. Page 6.

in Honduras remain in impunity.[15] Unverified estimates suggest that 97 per cent of murders go unsolved, which indirectly encourages homicides by establishing a level of impunity.[16] The failure to protect citizens from the consequences of such violence causes the population to avoid denouncing human rights violations and interacting with security bodies. This, in turn, directly affects the protection of minors and even, as argued later, affects school enrolment.

Due to impunity[17] and distrust in public institutions, the network of support and protection for children is often limited to family ties. Occasionally, adults establish a direct dialogue with the criminal gangs to try to protect them. But the lack of institutional mechanisms to protect citizens increases their risk of death when doing so.

In this context, families do not find many alternatives: they can either hide their children, or help them flee. There is a clear relationship between the violence, the absence of institutional protection and the adoption of personal protection strategies – internal displacement and the search for international protection. As a protection measure, children and youth on occasion hide in their homes, isolated, in conditions similar to confinement. in a situation similar to that of confinement.

Article six of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that: "State Parties shall ensure to the extent possible the survival and development of the child."[18] A boy locked in his house who fears for his life, without access to school, is missing out on opportunities to build his future.

When possible, families – or just the threatened child – seek refuge with friends or extended family. In some cases, they remain largely or completely confined for fear of being identified by their attackers. As a last resort, endangered children flee their homes. The constant movement and self-imposed confinement of many displaced people disrupts nearly all their normal daily activities. It even affects their school enrolment retention. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced People states in his report on Honduras that "the impact of this phenomenon on the child population is obvious and worrying."[19]

> ***"We moved to another neighbourhood, but we found ourselves once again with those who threatened my son. So now my children do not leave the house and we are trying to leave the country."***
> Parent, Tegucigalpa.

According to the study Characterization of Internal Displacement in Honduras,[20] in the last ten years there have been more than 78,000 displaced children under the age of seventeen, or around 43 per cent of the total number of displaced people. Minors considered to be dependent – under the age of fourteen – represent 36 per cent of the displaced population.

This data, and the interviews conducted

15. National Commissioner of Human Rights. See: http://conadeh.hn/defensor-del-pueblo-impunidad-entorpece-el-goce-efectivo-de-los-derechos-humanos/
16. Ibid
17. Honduras es un país con un elevado índice de impunidad. El Herado. See: http://www.elheraldo.hn/inicio/837547-331/honduras-ocupa-s%C3%A9ptimo-lugar-en-%C3%ADndice-de-impunidad-informe-2015.
18. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – Excerpts, article 6.2
19. UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. Page, 6.
20. Characterization of internal displacement in Honduras. Inter-agency Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence. November 2015. Page 12.

for this report, indicate that a significant number of displaced families have several children. This could support that a relationship exists between the decision to flee and the existence of grave threats against children.

At present, the Honduran government has not been able to prevent displacement or respond systematically to the immediate needs of displaced families. Despite some efforts, no effective measures have been implemented to promote the protection of civilians prior to displacement. There is acknowledgment of the situation, but there are no legal frameworks or public policies that specifically promote the protection of and assistance to the displaced population.

Consequently, minors flee quietly without anyone noticing. Keeping a low profile during escape is hard on families. NRC reports that one in five families forced to abandon their homes leave behind all household items. As a result, they have basic needs such as mattresses, blankets, hygiene kits and kitchen utensils.

Additionally, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons has mentioned that "internal displacement is a precursor for migration, since there are no viable options for internally displaced persons to provide security and livelihoods in Honduras."[21] According to the UN High Commissioner for the Refugees (UNHCR),[22] the reception of Honduran children in migration centres outside the country increased 83 per cent between 2012 and 2013.[23] In 2015, 5,401 minors attempted to cross the US border without papers. The US government recorded more than 10,468 cases of unaccompanied Honduran children between October 2015 and September of 2016 – nearly double the 2015 figure and more than six times 2013 statistics.[24] According to the UNHCR report, 59.5 per cent of minors from Central America fled violence and insecurity in their country of origin.

The majority of children trying to seek safety in the US are deported. According to the official data, more than 5,000 Honduran minors were deported in 2015. Minors who return have exhausted their financial resources and many are afraid to return to their gang-controlled neighbourhoods. In a number of cases identified by NRC in migrant reception centres, deported minors or their families lack the funds needed to settle in another part of Honduras. These conditions necessitate an active humanitarian response of providing accommodation, food assistance and education. Such a response would reduce risks and help stop the cycle of displacement and fear.

21. UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. Page 6.
22. From the profiles of minors who are unaccompanied and/or separated in their assisted return from Mexico. Uprooted. UNHCR. 2014. See: http://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=fileadmin/Documentos/Publicaciones/2014/9828.
23. El Heraldo. See: http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1011029-466/se-duplica-migraci%C3%B3n-de-menores-de-edad-hacia-estados-unidos.
24. U.S. Customs and Border Protection. See: https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016

2. Violence in the neighbourhoods, with education at risk

> ***"Perhaps they asked our son where he came from and he told them. Perhaps they were from an enemy different from the one that controls our neighbourhood and that's why they killed him."***
>
> Father of a young man recently murdered

Criminal gangs have clear and violent social control over the areas where they are present, which adversely affects the physical, psychological and social development of children.

Using violence, criminal gangs aim to consolidate or increase control over neighbourhoods. In Honduras, the geographical presence of criminal gangs is very fragmented and consequently, some urban areas are transformed into real battlefields as they vie for control of territorial patches.

Criminal gangs establish borders that delimit the areas controlled by armed groups. Citizens identify houses, streets, recreation spaces and businesses to differentiate the established borders. Neighbourhood centres are also identified as risk areas – places or houses devoted to torture and murder, training gang members, and housing for gang members, be it through ownership or occupation. Interviewees asserted that they have been stripped of their homes, through threats or murder, because the location was strategic for territorial control.

> ***"Every person has the right to move freely, leave, enter and stay in national territory. No one can be compelled to move domicile or residence, except in special cases and with the requirements that the law establishes."***
>
> Article 81, Constitution of Honduras

In practice, boundaries restrict access to neighbourhoods and limit mobility between territories controlled by different criminal gangs. Access restrictions are accompanied by a control of information on the number and identity of criminal gang members, drug trafficking, strategic activities, places, and businesses. These measures also endeavour to prevent violent action from rival criminal gangs. Mobility restrictions particularly affect

men, who are generally considered more suspicious because of their gender. They also constrain or prevent minors from participating in sports competitions, cultural exchanges or social celebrations. Sometimes, they cause situations akin to confinement,[25] which temporarily limits access to different public services such as healthcare and school.

> ***"A school had formed a music band and another school of a neighboring colony invited the band to participate in a celebration. After the celebration, when the whole band was on the bus, the transport was detained at gunpoint by some Mareros [members of a criminal gang]. Jumped in, identified a boy band member as an inhabitant of a colony [district] controlled by a rival gang, grab him down the vehicle and killed him in front of all their classmates. The director of the band who was his teacher, attempted to mediate and even offered to be killed instead of the boy, but nothing stopped them."***
>
> Secretariat of Education official.

In the neighbourhoods, children and their families are subjected to night-time curfews and schedules that prohibit free use of streets and public spaces. Inhabitants must comply with rules and codes – for instance, those admitted to a gang-controlled area by vehicle must allow them to search their transport. Through extortion, threats and killings, criminal gangs also restrict public transportation routes,[26] which has hurt the supply of transport services in these areas. As a result, locals cite limited emergency transport to health centres and issues commuting or bringing their children to school.

> ***"Electricity at the bus stop has been stripped as a scare tactic....The lighting that was there had been provided by a former bus owner, who was murdered less than two months ago. There are currently only three buses transporting passengers. The rest have left for fear of losing their lives."***
>
> International Information Organization.

Territorial control threatens and limits the use of public recreational spaces, which are fundamental for children's physical and social development. Recreational spaces are frequently occupied or used by criminal gangs, increasing the fear of those who enjoy these public spaces. Sometimes, massacres occur, evidencing the risk faced by children and youth who make use of these spaces. This has happened in Colonia Felipe Zelaya (San Pedro Sula) in 2010, in Comayagüela in 2014, and in Tegucigalpa in June 2016.[27]

25. "A population is confined when it suffers from limitations on its free mobility for a period equal to or greater than one week, and also has limited access to three goods or services, such as education, health, water and sanitation, livelihoods, among others " Humanitarian access, mobility restrictions and confinement. OCHA Colombia, September 2014.
26. From January 2010 to September 2015, 1,089 workers were killed in the public transport sector in Honduras; 11.6% (126) lost their lives in 2010 and 26.6% (290) in 2015, an increase of 130.2% in six consecutive years. On average, there have been 15 monthly deaths of people working in the public transport sector. Observatorio de la Violencia. Special bulletin, number 47. September 2016.
27. Digital Process. See: http://www.proceso.hn/component/k2/item/59878.html.

2.1. Education threatened by violence

> ***"One of the ringleaders approached the educational facility to talk to the director, warning him that from now on, no student belonging to another neighbourhood could continue studying at this school."***
> International Information Organization.

The fight for territorial control affects schools. It causes absenteeism and dropout, and compromises the continuity of classes. Three thousand students in San Pedro Sula request school transfers annually, citing problems with criminal gangs.[28] According to the Francisco Morazán local authorities, approximately 360 schools in the district are under threat.[29]

Criminal gang activity infringes on the right to education. In the capital city Tegucigalpa, 15 schools cancelled night sessions between April and September of 2016, affecting more than 3,600 students and at least 48 teachers. On occasion, direct threats cause schools to close, which happened in May 2016.[30]

> ***"As a result of the attacks and threats, 51 pupils requested to be transferred from a school and changed educational centres. Some went to 20 de Julio, others to Renacer and others to another programme."***
> Threatened teacher.

Criminal gangs restrict or prevent the school attendance of students who live in neighbourhoods where a rival gang is present. They threaten children who must cross gang-imposed borders to reach school. Teachers who cross borders on their daily commute face a similar situation. They are intimidated, threatened, and as a result, their job performance suffers.

> ***"I worked as a teacher in a school in the neighbourhood. I requested to be transferred because I was constantly threatened. Now I am temporarily out of work. Even if they allow me to return, I will not do it. I don't know what will happen to me."***
> Threatened teacher

Criminal gangs sometimes impose restrictions on personal clothing. Interviewees stated that in some urban areas, children cannot wear certain brands of shoes because the controlling criminal gang prohibits them. They have also succeeded in imposing a sign language, which minors must incorporate into their body language. Students, especially children, say that using the code is a measure of self-protection to be able go to and from school safely.[31]

Displaced people are especially vulnerable in these situations, as they want to maintain a low profile in their new environment. When a displaced child begins school in a new place, he or she must

28. La Prensa. See: http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/984645-410/unos-3000-alumnos-piden-traslado-cada-a%C3%B1o-por-violencia-y-maras.
29. Aleteia. See:http://es.aleteia.org/2016/04/16/honduras-las-escuelas-buscan-escapar-de-la-violencia/
30. El Heraldo. See: http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/959564-466/colegios-de-la-capital-de-honduras-vuelven-a-impartir-clases-con-normalidad.
31. Based on their personal experience, people interviewed affirm that to ignore these codes increases the risk of death among children and adolescents.

quickly learn the restrictions and codes of the ruling criminal gang to avoid raising suspicions of his or her new whereabouts.

Interviewees suggested that minors who do not live in the same neighbourhood as their schools must pay a fee to access the buildings. Young female students are often targeted because they are not considered as a risk for the band and are seen as easy prey.

School bus drivers, likewise, are affected by extortion and other controlling measures. In the first quarter of 2016, a school bus driver was killed while driving students home from the school Cerro Dos in Tegucigalpa. A student was also injured.[32]

Criminal gangs have succeeded in infiltrating the schools themselves, influencing the decisions of principals and teachers. Gang members routinely promote the sale of drugs to minors, extort teachers and students, and carry out recruitment, surveillance and intelligence activities. The Secretariat of Education's Unit for the Prevention of Violence recognises these practices and considers them a threat against access to enrolment and retention.

Threats, intimidation or coercion against teachers leads them to approve advancement of students linked to criminal gangs, which allows gang members to continue criminal activities within the schools. School faculties, too, must follow the requirements and conditions laid down by the criminal gangs. The Unit for the Prevention of Vio-

32. El Heraldo. See: http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/934741-466/honduras-asesinan-a-conductor-de-microbús-escolar-en-la-colonia-cerro-grande.

33. It is usual practice in the Honduran public education system for parent associations to finance faculty salaries, which complements the public funding. Criminal gangs are exploiting this to achieve high levels of influence.

lence has reported that criminal gangs finance teacher salaries and influence the functioning of schools, which depend on the funding to provide adequate services[33].

> ***"In one of the centres I recently visited, the director admitted that the criminal gang paid a teacher and in return, he left the school door unlocked so the gang could use it at night for their business."***
>
> An official of the Secretariat of Education

To respond to the situation, the government has taken steps to militarise educational institutions affected by criminal gangs. Members of the Military Police and the National Police, armed and in uniform, patrol the entrances and perimeters of these schools. They routinely conduct searches and sporadically arrest students.[34] This practice is publically opposed by the educational community and human rights organisations.

By not taking appropriate prevention and protection measures, and failing to uphold strict compliance with legal human rights provisions, the public forces could unnecessarily put students' lives at risk. Using minors to obtain information on criminal gangs could lead to the identification of students and increase their risk of death.

34. El Heraldo. See: http://www.elheraldo.hn/tegucigalpa/947307-466/educaci%C3%B3n-prev%C3%A9-militarizar-a-otras-tres-instituciones.

2.2. Looking for a way out

"A mother came asking me for 15 days of leave for her boy. An excellent child, 9 or 10 years old. I told her that 15 days was a lot. She begged. Finally, she explained that she sent her son to the United States illegally. Don't do it, I told her. She replied: teacher, this neighbourhood is not for my children…. Today they are in Guatemala. The 15 days are for in case they fail, so my boy can return to school without losing his spot."

Teacher at an educational centre, Rivera Hernandez.

As a result of the widespread violence in Honduras, displaced children, and children who are at risk of displacement are forced to transfer schools. Transfer requests in gang-controlled areas could be interpreted as a measure to mitigate risks of violence and human rights violations, or as a consequence of forced displacement.

School transfers are a measure established by the Secretariat of Education that saves lives and promotes access to education for these vulnerable populations. Government entities are supposed to identify the reason for the transfer; but frequently, parents and guardians do not reveal the actual reasons for the request. Fear and distrust in public institutions primarily motivate such decisions.[35] Unfortunately, the lack of effective means to promote confidence in the institutions and confidentiality in the handling of the information, constrains an effective and timely response from the Secretariat of Education. Ultimately, children and youth are denied safe spaces for learning.

In accordance with the Secretariat of Education, school transfers must take place quickly and efficiently. There are efforts to uphold this stipulation; yet the testimonies collected for this report contradict the procedure's supposed effectiveness. One of main barriers working against timely school transfers, according to interviewees, is unwillingness from school directors. Administrative, academic and curricular matters[36] as well as lack of enrolment space, also hinder successful school transfers.

Some minors who cannot transfer schools drop out. Interviewees reported that widespread violence and barriers related to relocating schools indirectly motivate drop outs.

An analysis of a violence-affected school in San Pedro Sula revealed that dropout rates tend to progressively increase in relation to grade level. In the third grade, 7.5 per cent of boys and girls drop out; 8.5 per cent of fourth graders drop out; and in the seventh grade, 17 per cent leave school.

Despite government efforts to ensure enrolment retention,[37] official figures also show a worrying dropout[38] rate. Almost one in three

35. The 2012 LAPOP-PNUD survey names the top countries whose police are considered to have ties with crime: Honduras (63 per cent), Guatemala (61per cent) and Bolivia (60 percent). UN Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Report on Human Development 2013-2014.

36. As of September 2016, the system ended; transfers are no longer permitted. During research for this report, NRC and Link consultants were present at a case brought before a responsible district and were able to affirm the administrative difficulty of these transfers.

37. Between 2010 and 2012, dropouts declined progressively. On average, just 1.10 per cent of primary students had left school. But in 2013, dropout averages increased to 1.26 per cent. See: http://www.se.gob.hn/media/files/articles/PEI_SE_18mar2015.pdf.

38. In 2014, the Secretariat of Education's System of Education Statistics (SIEE) changed to the System for the Registration of the Administration of Educational Centres (SACE). According to the new system, dropout rates range between 6.03 per cent and 10.33 per cent depending

children in Honduras drops out of school before completing secondary school. The high dropout rate in the seventh[39] and eighth[40] grades, where students are 13 and 14 years old, coincides with the age range where human rights violations against minors increase.

> ***"I took [my son] out of school. His dad lives in the United States. He told me to not let him to leave the house, that he would buy him a ticket....He left in July. The following month, [the gang members] called me. 'We are going to come to your home, we'll kill your son, we'll kill him.' My 12 year-old, I took him out mid-October. He did not take the final exams. In a phone call, they told me that they would kill him. This year he has not gone to school. He's at home, not studying. We don't take walks. The father said for him not leave. I don't want him to realise, I don't want him to be raised with a fearful mentality."***
>
> Mother of two threatened minors.

When boys and girls finish the sixth grade, there is a third reduction in the availability of high school places,[41] which limits access and enrolment retention. As a result,

on the grade; in 2015 the dropout rate varied between 4.88 per cent and 9.38 per cent. being able to check the administrative difficulty of these transfers.

39. Between 2010 and 2012 the desertion declined progressively, achieving that - on average - only 1.10 percent of primary students left school. However, in 2013 the average percentage of the desertion was increased to 1.26 percent. See: http://www.se.gob.hn/media/files/articles/PEI_SE_18mar2015.pdf

40. In 2014 the system of education statistics (SIEE) passed to the system of administration of Educational Centers (SACE). According to the new system, the school dropout rate ranges between 6.03 percent and 10.33 percent according to school grade; during the year 2015 the desertion varied between 4.88 percent and 9.38 percent.

they face greater exposure to child labour, sexual violence and forced recruitment.

> ***"We have 1,600 students and are overwhelmed... The director wanted to expand, but he was reprimanded for opening classes without a budget. There are classes with 45, 50, up to 60 students. In the end, we have to choose based on who exceeds a certain score. We are accomplices."***
>
> Teacher, Tegucigalpa.

Another obstacle limiting enrolment retention is the lack of proper school infrastructure. In the Sosa, a neighbourhood located in the capital and dominated by three criminal gangs, six schools have 1,426 boys and girls. This implies that only 25 per cent of the school demand is met in this area.

The displaced population is particularly susceptible to the negative effects of this lack in school infrastructure. Despite efforts from the Secretariat of Education, the education sector has not implemented any special measures to promote school access or enrolment retention for displaced children or children at risk of displacement. It is necessary for the Secretariat of Education to practise policies that adapt to the effects of the violence and that address the consequences of the structural barriers in the country's education system.

> ***"The older ones didn't study. I wanted them to graduate, but it wasn't possible. All my children have fled."***
>
> Parent, Tegucigalpa.

A third of the current school-aged generation in Honduras is in want of a safe place to learn. According to World Vision, 27 per cent of boys and girls between 12 and 17 years old are not studying or working in Honduras,[42] and UNFPA estimates that holds true for 640,000 girls in the country.[43]

The situation in urban areas, where criminal gangs are present, is more alarming and worrying than in the rest of the country. In 2016, NRC determined that an average of one child per household is out of school in Honduras's most violent areas.[44]

It is vital that the government makes an effort to quantify and calculate the resources needed to provide free and quality education to displaced minors and those at risk of displacement. No boy or girl should pay the cost of the widespread violence and lose out on learning as a result of forced displacement.

It is urgent that the government significantly increases the education budget for primary, middle and secondary schools. Data on education funding are worrying. According to Plan International,[45] Honduras invests just 82 cents per day for a child, while Costa Rica invests USD 4 per day per student. By contrast, member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation

41. Enrolment from the first to the sixth grades is 1,102,573 students, in comparison with 132,146 students enrolled in the seventh to ninth grades. This means, de facto, the dropout rate is of nearly two thirds of the school population.
42. Ultima hora. See: http://ultimahora.hn/content/visi%C3%B3n-mundial-el-27-de-menores-de-12-17-a%C3%B1os-no-estudian-ni-trabajan-0
43. Proceso Digital. See: http://www.proceso.hn/mas-noticias/item/133575-estudio-alerta-que-640-000-jovenes-ni-trabajan-ni-estudian-en-honduras.html.
44. In 2016, NRC surveyed 1,110 homes to identify out-of-school minors in violence-affected regions in the urban areas of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. The survey identified 1,239 boys and girls out of school aged between 16 and 17 years.
45. Tiempo Digital. See: http://tiempo.hn/plan-internacional-educacion-en-honduras/

and Development (OECD) invested an average USD 23.22 per day for a primary-level student and USD 27.34 for a student attending secondary school.[46] If the government cannot respond to education needs, minors who are displaced or at risk of displacement will be forced to leave school.

A displaced family's economic situation tends to deteriorate quickly and generally, households cannot afford the fees, uniforms and transport costs of a new school. Without safe spaces to learn, displaced boys and girls out of school are easy prey for criminal gangs. Displacement can also change the roles of those traditionally responsible for the family economy. On occasion, as interviewees confirmed, children take up work to help support their parents.

Without adaptable measures, educational programmes and flexible pedagogic models,[47] the government will continue to indirectly promote dropouts among displaced minors displaced.

> ***"I supported my family, had two jobs, and my five children studied. When my house was burned, we fled and lost it all. Now I…have no work. Luckily, my small children can go to the village school without uniforms. I don't know how I'll get them uniforms for next year. My eldest son, who is 15 years old, has left school and is the only family member with a permanent job. He supports us."***
>
> Displaced parent in rural area

It is now critical to rapidly identify and characterise school absences and dropouts. In some cases, affected students decide to return to school after stopping for a short period of time. But if a student's family does request a return to school after an absence, educational institutions must have a timely and effective process to protect the minor. Interviewees indicated that currently, transfer requests could result in possible forced displacement or a search for international protection.

Schools must be transformed into safe, protective spaces.[48] There is strong evidence that education is a vital service in crises. The government must ensure that affected populations are a priority. Special attention must be allocated to displaced boys and girls. They should be at the centre of the education sector's response.

Principle 23 of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement reiterates that every human being has the right to education, and that authorities must assure internally displaced people, especially young people, access to education.

The government must provide free education to all displaced children and children at risk of displacement, within reasonable distance to their homes. Schools should design and implement contingency plans that work to prevent human rights violations, conflicts and forced displacement.

46. Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators. See: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/9616041e.pdf?expires=1479781583&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9FD0E7E482D6488443C52338F8BF03DA. P. 180-

47. The Educatodos programme, although focusing on adult literacy, is an alternative for underage dropouts who are over the age limit for basic education. This alternative model seeks to adapt to the reality, allowing students to enrol at any time of the school year. But the programme is not exempt from administrative barriers, costs of materials and monthly fees.

48. Interviewees do recognise that teaching faculty monitor children affected by criminal gang activities. They provide support to minors and their families where the minor is threatened and even, in some cases, teachers claim to engage in dialogue with gang members to minimise risks. These types of actions are not considered official or institutional, and consequently, may increase the risk of death or displacement of the faculty member.

3. Recommendations

The Honduran State:

- The government should accelerate plans to introduce a legal framework that addresses displacement and clearly portrays the right to education. Moreover, the response cannot wait for the legal framework to be put in place. The government should focus on developing prevention and protection measures to provide access to safe education in close collaboration with experienced civil society organisations.
- Violence-affected children receive sporadic or no support. Children and youth living in precarious conditions, without access to education, is a recipe for disaster. We strongly encourage the Secretariat of Education to set aside resources and mechanisms to follow-up on out-of-school children and to provide them with the support necessary to integrate back into the education system – be it formal or alternative education.

- The government has in recent years demonstrated a willingness to strengthen its education sector, but these efforts have yet to come to fruition in more violent areas. The government should allocate sufficient resources to provide free and compulsory access to quality education for those children most affected by generalised violence. Likewise, resources to prevent criminal gangs from financing teacher salaries may determine the functioning of some schools.
- -Generalised violence is a key barrier to education. The high dropout rate in the seventh and eighth grades holds particular consequences for children aged 13 and 14 years, as it coincides with the age range where human rights violations against minors increase. It is necessary for the Secretariat of Education to practise policies that adapt to the effects of the violence and that address the structural barriers in the country's educational system.

- The government should ensure that children are safe in school. The Secretariat of Education should establish preventive measures, such as early warning systems, and a rapid response system in all schools affected by violence.

- The government should ensure that students and families forced to flee violence at school are offered protection, and that the impact of their departure on the education systems is addressed. When possible, they should be able to return.

- The government should ensure that schools are secure environments. It should provide learning spaces for children close to home and avoid invisible borders. It should adopt violent-sensitive curricula, ensure that education does not help trigger violence and include quality education as part of the governmental response.

- Students should be protected on their way to school. The government should take all necessary steps to promote access to school, including clear public statements declaring that access to a child's education cannot be limited under any circumstances, including measures imposed by criminal gangs.

- The government should systematically investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for human rights and criminal law violations that constitute violence on education, in accordance with national and international standards.

Donors and international community

- The humanitarian response in Honduras should be geared towards the phenomenon of vio-

lence related to criminal gangs, and tailored to meet the needs of internally displaced people and people at risk of displacement.

- Humanitarian actors and donors should recognise the importance of education in Honduras and be ready to intervene in the sector when no other actor (national or local authorities, long-term aid providers) has the means or expertise of intervening in violent areas controlled by criminal gangs.

- Education must prove an effective means of protecting and reducing the negative effects of the violence on students' physical, psychological, social and emotional development. Humanitarian donors must offer alternatives to children at risk, including youth.

- In times of crisis when the Honduran education structure lacks adequate and effective response, and when children can no longer go to school, humanitarian aid should be the sole instrument providing children (particularly the most vulnerable) access to educational activities.

- Prevention is an obligation of national governments, who are bound to apply international norms. But humanitarian actors, too, have an essential role to play in Honduras. This includes responding to the many complex reasons for the recruitment and use of children. Donors and the international community should support prevention programmes that include the local community, families and the children themselves.

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