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The Phenomenon of Unaccompanied International Migrant Children in Nariño - Colombia and their State of Exposure to Vulnerability Factors in Transit Circuits

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Abstract

International migration in border territories converges in multilevel territorial dynamics that are linked to different forms of vulnerability, risks, and violence. These forms of vulnerability, risks, and violence tend to be concentrated in specific segments of the migrant population, particularly women, children, and adolescents. This article presents as a research product a situated analytical description of migratory processes of unaccompanied international children and their state of exposure to vulnerability in migratory transit circuits in Nariño Colombia. The problem was typified in two categories: to characterize the population segment of unaccompanied international migrant children and adolescents in a migratory transit situation (in terms of socio-demographics, migratory movements, and transit routes) and to determine their state of exposure to vulnerability factors. The research had a qualitative-quantitative approach with an exploratory-descriptive scope. The type of sampling applied was non-probabilistic with a multiple case study

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sample and triangulation analysis method considering the criteria of pertinence and relevance. The analysis was based on the following axes: territories, subjects, and transits versus dimensions and factors of vulnerability. The results showed individual and collective migration processes of unaccompanied international adolescents between 16 and 18 years of age. Exposure factors in the geographic and physical dimensions showed a greater proclivity to suffer gender-based violence and other forms of violence that emerge from trans-territorial dynamics in areas of influence sensitive to armed conflicts, which converge with their transit circuits. In addition, it was found that this segment faces systems of multidimensional violence at the levels of communities, territories, and institutions that reproduce an effect of expulsion, marginalization, and segregation as a result of the geopolitics of the territories in Nariño, border migration management, but also of the traditional protection model based on family reunification and humanitarian aid.

Keywords: international migration, unaccompanied children, dimensions and factors of vulnerability, borders.

Introduction

Evidence based on data indicates that in the regions of Nariño and Putumayo in Colombia, the migratory movements of children between the ages of 0 to 17 years, during 2020, approximated 416,778 according to information collected through the Migratory Control Posts of Puerto Leguizamo, Marítimo de Tumaco, Chiles, Rumichaca, and San Miguel. Of these movements, 50.4% represented female children and 49.5% represented male children. Only in Nariño, the August 2021 cohort showed a greater number of foreign children than Colombian children in the local territory, distributed between 59% and 41% respectively. (Migración Colombia, 2022). On the other hand, the Observatorio Nacional de Migración y Salud of Colombia, during 2019, reported that cases of gender-based violence (GBV) in the foreign child population aged 0 to 19 years accounted for 62% of the cases identified in the province. The remaining 38% represented migrant youth and adults on a population scale. Of this 62%, female children accounted for 48% of the cases, while 14% were male children. 64% identified themselves as Venezuelan nationals, 15.7% from the Congo, 13.7% from Ecuador, and 3.9% from South Africa (Observatorio Nacional de Migración y Salud de Colombia, 2020).

According to its migratory profile, Nariño is recognized as both a border territory and a transit territory. Geographically, it is located in the extreme southeast of Colombia, bordered to the north by the province of Cauca, to the south by Ecuador, to the east by the province of Putumayo, and to the west by the Pacific Ocean. It is made up of sixty-four municipalities and two main cities; it also has a triple border in the Pacific, Andean, and Amazon regions, where mixed regional, cross-border,

trans-territorial, and transcontinental migratory movements converge, contributing to the reconfiguration of South-South migration (see Figure 1).



Note: Adapted from the Geographic Society of Colombia. Academy of Geographic Sciences, José Agustín Blanco Barros, 2002, Atlas of Nariño IGAC. (https://imagenestotales.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/narino_05_division.jpg).

Figure 1. Geographic limits of the province of Nariño in Colombia

The dynamics of the migratory transits of unaccompanied children and adolescents across international borders continues to be characterized as a minimal proportion of international movements (Pacecca, 2014: 14). This condition has in part made their study difficult. In fact, the understanding and analysis of these movements in particular continues to be scarce. It is possible to understand the complexity of the visibility of this population due to the geopolitical dynamics that are traced between the governance of migration, States and borders, and the difficulties in the relations of interaction, integration, social, and community inclusion. In addition, there are serious limitations in the collection of information, in the conceptual structure of the data, in the invisibility of experiences that continue to act to the constant disadvantage of this segment. However, the issue of vulnerability exposed in border areas becomes even more extreme for unaccompanied children during their migratory transit.

In any case, approaching the field of migrations and migration processes continues to be a challenge for experts in epistemological and methodological terms. However, in an attempt to approach an understanding of the complexity of the problem, it was proposed to address the issue of vulnerability from the perspective of systems, as first presented by Chaux (1993: 11) in his work *Global Vulnerability*. Some assumptions from the theory of disasters as a social phenomenon proposed by Cardona (2002: 10) in *Vulnerability and Risk from a Holistic Perspective* were also collected. Both concepts were recognized as complementary in providing general and specific notions of the issue in the specific context of migration, the dimensions, and factors of vulnerability.

Likewise, there is no single definition that establishes and determines how to approach migratory transit, but there are conceptual approaches to its study as a product of international migration. In this sense, Gonzales (2017: 17) has highlighted three key components that shed light on what migratory transit entails. One of them seeks to recognize that transit circuits are part of the migration process, but not all migration processes require transits. Another important thing to understand is that migratory transits are inherent to migratory paths and routes. In other words, thinking about transit implies thinking about journeys and, consequently, thinking about migratory routes. This is due not only to the type of actors and ideologies involved in the phenomenon but also to the trajectories they follow, which have the virtue of linking local or trans-territorial border territories with international borders.

There is already a classification of the subjects inserted in transit, and according to Gonzales (2017: 23), they are identified as migrants in an irregular administrative situation or undocumented migrants involved in migration on foot. In the local context due to territorial dynamics, individuals who are part of regular migration and with papers may become undocumented individuals and start to make migratory transits, whether trans-territorial and/or international. In short, it is also clear that people in transit are recognized as people who cross a geographic space (trans-territorial or international) without the intention of settling down.

In the absence of a culmination of the origin-destination migratory circuit, it is possible that the subject may follow one or more trajectories, either voluntarily or forced. Bridge territories or host territories play an important role in this regard. On the one hand, transit, like any other type of migratory flow, derives a series of social processes that are dynamized according to the historical and social contexts of the territories. On the other hand, since they represent geographies located between the origin-destination circuits and become places of reception, it is difficult for them to determine a time limit for their stay for various reasons.

Empirical experience has constructed a categorization of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents that highlights their heterogeneity in terms of their social relationships and their migratory processes in specific, differentiated, and multiple contexts. This categorization, according to Velázquez (2020: 108), has also highlighted the existence of the autonomous migration of children and identifies five key categories associated with its denomination (See figure 2).

Type	Description
Separated from their parents	NNAs who were separated while traveling with their parents.
Travel with acquaintances	NNAs traveling without their parents, with an acquaintance or distant relative. Family reunification-influenced journey.
Traveling for family reunification	Unaccompanied and uncared NNAs. In the process of family reunification.
They travel for their own reasons	NNAs traveling alone for their own reasons. No intention to regroup. Autonomous migration.
They travel by choice of their parents	NNAs traveling by decision of their parents or relatives. Without family reunification. In order to give them a better quality of life.

Note. Adapted from Velázquez, C. (2020). Unaccompanied migrant girls and boys. A defense of their right to participate as new actors (p. 108). Spain: Complutense University of Madrid.

Figure 2. Classification of the unaccompanied migrant children segment.

Two other categories were identified in the segment of the unaccompanied who are inserted in contemporary migration dynamics: those children who travel without the intention of reuniting with their families, who consider the migration project as a life project and are part of autonomous migration. And those children who make their migratory journey alone but who, belonging to a consolidated family group, their migratory purpose is to broaden their life prospects and professional development.

Methodology

The empirical approach focused on international child migration and the segment of unaccompanied, documented, and undocumented international migrant children and adolescents intercepted in transit circuits on the Ipiales-Pasto route in Colombia. Specifically, the formulation of the problem was delimited for the period 2018-2021 and sought to solve the question: What has been the state of exposure to vulnerability factors in the migratory transit of unaccompanied international migrant children and adolescents in the local context?

The fieldwork was conducted at an exploratory and descriptive level and inquired about the state of exposure to vulnerability factors of this population segment. It was an inductive-propositional process with non-probabilistic sampling and multiple case study samples. Method of analysis by triangulation that was structured according to the intervention of the object of study in the components flows, subjects, and territories, facing the question dimensions and factors of vulnerability oriented to the territorial context of the province. Based on an aprioristic categorical description, some existing concepts and individual variables already detected by empirical experience, taken from national and international sources of information and institutional data, were studied independently. Technically, multiple instruments were used for the collection of information: interview type, simple format of migratory characterization, observation pattern, and the review of other secondary sources of information (Hernández Sampieri, *et al.* 2014).

The variables that defined the problem are summarized in Figure 3.

		Qualitative Description		Quantitative Description	
Var 1.	Unaccompanied international migrant children and adolescents.	Primary Data	Age, sex, gender, nationality.	Primary Data	Monetary resources in transit
			academic background, immigration status,		Average income
			country of destination and origin of the migrant;		Occupation
			access to housing, food, and health care;		Work location
			vulnerability in transit processes;		
			migratory flows; migratory routes;		Inflows and outflows
			status of the transit process;		Nationality
			CI: Certificate of Identification;		Sex
			forms of income; modalities of travel;		Migratory status
			drug use.		
Var 2.	Vulnerability factors.	Primary Data	Violence in transit processes	Secondary Data	Violent acts or actions:
			Gender-based violence in transit processes		Physical damage; # of victims
			Violence associated with CA in transit processes		Gender-based violence
			Other violence		Violence associated with CA.

Figure 3. Variables that define the problem.

The procedures for obtaining secondary data were obtained from the review of report-type documents, research articles, and open access institutional databases. Among them: the National Observatory of Migration and Health (ONMS), Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario de Colombia (DHH and DIH), Sistema Integrado de Violencia de Género en Colombia (SIVIGE), Observatorio Nacional de Violencia de Género (ONV), Analítica Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familia (ICBF), and Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores Colombia (Estadísticas Migración Colombia, 2022).

The procedures designed for the fieldwork were applied around community kitchens for migrants and refugees, set up along the Ipiales-Pasto road. Unaccompanied international migrant minors between the ages of 16 and 17 were interviewed. The interviews were conducted on the road and were developed gradually with prolonged stays because this segment of the migrant children population is difficult to access, and they also use different trails (roads) to enter the territory.

The observation and inquiry adopted an active and direct participation based on a pattern that included categories related to the physical environment or surroundings (understanding the territories), social environment (assuming migratory flows), and human environment (understanding the subjects and vulnerabilities visible to the observation).

The semi-structured interview included questions regarding exposure to situations of vulnerability and forms of violence. It was oriented towards a list of concepts as a set of categories that inquired about their migratory experience, socioeconomic characteristics, their journeys, migratory routes, access to and consumption of drugs. The design was structured as the fieldwork progressed. An analytical perspective with qualitative-quantitative approach was considered. The processing of the secondary data information was carried out using frequency statistics in Excel/XLSTAT-22.

Results and Discussion

Migration flows of NNA international migrants in Nariño

The migratory movements of international children in general that circulate through the national and local territory are very diverse. At the national level, Nariño contributed 15.8% of international events of infant flows for 2018, while 17.3% for 2019. However, between 2020 and 2021, these movements decrease to 4.4% and 0.3%, respectively (Migración Colombia, 2022).

In terms of event intensity, the participation of NNAs aged 0-17 years increased between 2018 and 2019 and is expected to decrease substantially by 2020 and 2021 as a result of containment measures taken by national governments due to

the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it should be noted that the closing of borders, particularly in southern Colombia, also led to irregular transit migration and new openings of illegal border crossings (Liguori, 2022).



Note. The graph presents from a general perspective the intensity of migration flows of international children and adolescents during the period from 2018 to the first quarter of 2022 at the national and local levels. Abbreviations indicate: FM-Col: Colombia migration flows, FM-Nar: Nariño migration flows. The acronym NNA: children and adolescents. Source: Prepared by the authors with Open Data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, 2022.

Figure 4. Migratory flows of international children between Colombia and Nariño 2018-2022

In the border territorial context, the movement of international children in transit conditions constitutes another type of migratory flow and dynamics. Although mobility processes related to the Haiti and Cuba phenomenon or migration from Ecuador, Brazil, and Chile that circulated through the PCM Rumichaca International Bridge between 2018 and 2020 were not included due to the instrumentalization of the information and in part to the structure of the open access sources, the flows into the country confirmed intra-regional childhood migration processes and transcontinental migration patterns (North America, Europe, and Asia) through the territory.

Regardless of the intensity of migratory flows, Chile contributed the highest proportion of inflows of national infants, i.e., Chileans in migratory transit status during 2018 and 2020.

Table 1. Entry of international migrant children in transit condition in Nariño 2018-2021

Year	Country	Migratory transit	NNA transit	NNA transit %	Country	Migratory transit	NNA transit	NNA transit %
2018	Venezuela	763072	115320	15.1	Chile	3088	541	17.5
	Ecuador	79957	9758	12.2	Mexico	1145	42	3.7
	Peru	10210	880	8.6	Europe	21461	459	2.1
	U.S.	3284	216	6.6	Asia	2678	31	1.2
2019	Venezuela	552957	140772	25.5	Chile	2394	578	24.1
	Ecuador	86069	11083	12.9	Mexico	1105	77	7.0
	Peru	9387	1106	11.8	Europe	20267	519	2.6
	U.S.	2824	170	6.0	Asia	2591	45	1.7
2020	Venezuela	20893	3643	17.4	Chile	381	81	21.3
	Ecuador	8593	1046	12.2	Mexico	115	6	5.2
	Peru	1520	233	15.3	Europe	2857	57	2.0
	U.S.	312	19	6.1	Asia	196	1	0.5
2021	Venezuela	868	93	10.7	Peru	28	6	21.4
	Ecuador	2520	481	19.1	Europe	214	10	4.7

Note. The table shows the entries of international migrant children and adolescents in transit between 0 to 17 years old from the Migration Control Post (PCM) of Rumichaca in Nariño distributed by year and country of nationality during 2018-2021. It links the analytical categories transit and tourism. Acronyms: NNA: indicates children and adolescents, PCM: indicates Migration Control Post. Source: own elaboration with Open Access Data Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, 2022.

On the other hand, the intra-regional migratory dynamics that registered the highest outflows of children were mainly led by the Venezuelan, Chilean, and Ecuadorian phenomena (Migración Colombia, 2022).

As Pavéz Soto (2017) mentions, this population continues to contribute flows of entry, exit, and return to the migration dynamics that occur within the country but also to the mobility patterns in the Americas (2017: 99). Indeed, the segment of unaccompanied migrants in transit reconfigures new dynamics and similar complexities not only because of the geographies they cross but also because of the population group they join, the degree of autonomy they may possess, the ways in which they make their migratory journey, and the internal dynamics that unfold in the transit territories.

NNA profiles of unaccompanied international migrants, flows and migratory routes in transit through Nariño

The execution of the field exercise provided a brief characterization of the population segment in terms of its characteristics, flows, and migratory routes. The specific encounters on the Ipiales-Pasto route made it possible to identify unaccompanied international adolescent migrants between 16 and 17 years of age from various Venezuelan states, among them: Lara (city of Barquisimeto), Carabobo (city of Valencia), Guárico (municipality of San Gerónimo Guayabal), and Caracas (State of La Guaira). According to the information gathered, these adolescents decided to join the migratory dynamics in order to contribute to the economic development of their family nucleus, which is made up of the mother head of household, siblings, and grandparents, as well as to flee from experiences of intra-family violence or social, economic, or political violence.

For some, this journey is done with the consent of their mothers and relatives. They can travel collectively with like-minded friends from their home country. This is the beginning of a migration project considered feasible because of the economic resources they have to reach the destination country and end their journey. Their migratory purpose is to reestablish their life project, a feeling that has led them to develop communication strategies and networks from their places of origin to guarantee their success in their destination countries. This type of strategy consists of maintaining contact with friends already known who have somehow managed to integrate in other countries, either through any type of work relationship or by working in a formal or informal way but with secure remuneration. With this type of assistance, they hope to obtain secure employment, status, or job placement.

For others, it is the fourth or fifth metamorphosis of their migratory journey. They have left their home and country of origin since they were very young, around the age of six, but continue on a permanent transit circuit through several South American countries. They travel autonomously, mainly alone and in silence, without the consent or knowledge of their immediate family, without establishing any contact network for safety and security reasons.

Both groups share the same desire; as a result of their migration and their stay in destination countries, there are purposes to develop their human potential, meet their own needs, overcome their basic conditions, find employment, continue their academic training, and improve their quality of life in general. However, these purposes have been truncated by various actions derived from the migration policies that have been adopted by the border management in several South American countries, in addition to internal social dynamics. Actions that have forced them to return to their countries of origin or, even more seriously, to seek other destinations, which implies the extension of their migratory journey. They face different institutions, ideologies, strategies, and cultural systems that, in terms of discourse and practice, operate in the territory and in the governance of

migration. Government institutions, restrictive policies, migrant smuggling groups in transit (which they form or are victims of), and others related to armed conflicts are also involved in their journey.

This has resulted in negative migration experiences that not only hinder the course and pace of the migration journey but also increase their exposure to vulnerabilities. In many cases, these are complex experiences that are more likely to occur in individuals who migrate alone, without a plan, contacts, or networks. On the southern border alone, there are more than 40 trails used for smuggling, drug trafficking, or migrant smuggling. In general, these passages are used by various illicit economies.

Some of these trails are part of the Andean Altiplano or central part of the Andes Mountains, are recognized as informal crossings between internal cross-border territories that connect Ecuadorian territory with Nariño territory, border city (Ipiates), main city (Pasto), and include the Pan-American Highway. The choice of their routes depends on how they enter the country, which determines whether their border crossing is by PCM or by trail. According to those interviewed, their entry through Nariño was mainly through illegal crossings between Ecuador, Ipiates, and Pasto (see Figure 5).

According to their testimony, the projected destination countries could be the United States, Ecuador, and Peru. Adolescent males were more likely to enter the national territory, while the segment of adolescent females contributed to the greater intensity of outbound migration flows through the territory. Thus, these transit experiences confirm that the flows of international migrant children in Nariño continue to be greater per departure. It is important to know that most of the adolescent women entered through informal border crossings (57.1%), few crossed through Migration Control Posts (5.4%). In addition, several of the male adolescents interviewed entered the country by trail or informally. There were recurrent cases of male adolescents who did not have a National Identification Certificate, while only a proportion of female adolescents transited with a birth certificate or Special Permit to Stay. But a large proportion of those interviewed had no identification (62.5%) at this point in the journey.

The migratory routes they need to take depend not only on the estimated time required to reach the destination country but also on the historical moment the territories are going through, the distance of the journey, and the type of transportation they can obtain. The experiences of some interviewees confirmed migratory journeys from South American countries such as Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador. To make their journey, they form permanent collective alliances with friends, siblings, and/or romantic partners. Or they simply develop self-organizing processes with circumstantial and improvised links with acquaintances en route; in both cases to legitimize their security and protection. (See figure 6.)



Note. The Figure shows some informal routes that border northern Ecuador and are recognized as international border crossings, highlighted with orange dots. Other migratory routes demarcated within the territory are recognized as transboundary migratory crossings highlighted with green dots. They also represent another form of migration flows for the undocumented international migrant population and for the segments of unaccompanied and adolescent children in Nariño. Source: own elaboration, 2022.

Figure 5. Informal international and trans-territorial border crossing points and migration routes in Nariño

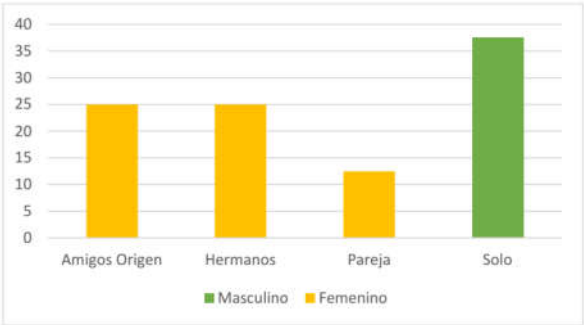


Figure 6. Collective alliances and self-organizing processes of unaccompanied international adolescent migrants

In host or bridge territories, the continuity of their migratory journey depends on their ability to raise money. The attainment of economic resources is subject to the daily collaboration of the people who live in the local-peripheral areas. They may receive help while exchanging candy for coins, cleaning, unloading merchandise, or doing any other informal work including prostitution or begging. Their resources vary from \$3,000 to \$25,000 (Colombian pesos) per day, which could represent an average of \$2.85 US dollars. Consequently, precarious economic conditions are understood as forcing adolescents to remain for several days, even months, in the host territory, that is, in a migratory transit situation. According to Palma (2015), the mere fact of possessing resources to cover the costs of their initial displacement places them in a spectrum of capital accumulation capacity (p. 20). However, their entry into conflict-related territories also places them in states of constant exposure to vulnerability and violence.

In context, their housing possibilities depend on the willingness of the people in the peripheral communities and the informal jobs they manage to do. There is no possibility of staying in a shelter or transit home provided by humanitarian aid and/or state institutions for the migrant population. They avoid the national protection system, avoid proximity to the health system so as not to be reported to the Childhood and Adolescence Police, avoid being involved in family reunification processes or deportation processes to their country of origin. A proportion of those interviewed were forced to sleep on the streets (37%), mainly male adolescents (25%) but also female adolescents (12%). Most of them sought to stay in hotels (62.5%), partly because they had their own monetary resources brought from their country of origin or obtained in bridging territories as a result of insecure informal jobs. Although, in common, none of the participants encountered difficulties in accessing food.

The issue of vulnerability, risks, and violence in international and unaccompanied migrant NNAs in transit contexts in Nariño

The Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) and the Administrative Process for the Restoration of Rights (PARD) program are part of the National System for the protection of children and adolescents of nationals or foreigners within the country. The System has classified actions of violation based on the Colombian Code of Childhood and Adolescence (Decreto No. 4840 de 2007 - Reglamento de Ley 1098 de 2006, 2021) and, (Ley 1878 de 2018, 2023). This classification associates vulnerability with various forms of violence, including violence due to abuse, sexual violence, abandonment with or without disability, high permanence on the street, living on the street, child labor, special care conditions, threats to integrity, and other reasons. All of them were assumed as analytical categories located according to the events recorded in Nariño during the estimated study period (Bienestar Familiar de Colombia, 2013).

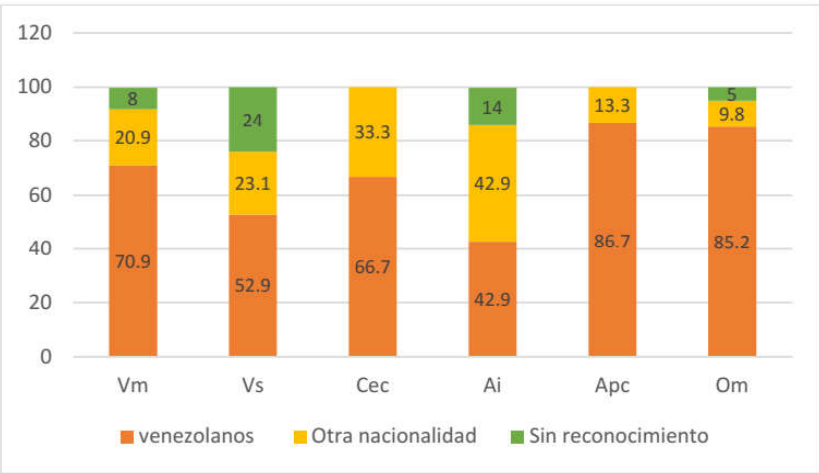
The code of childhood and adolescence is the cornerstone of comprehensive protection of minors in Colombia. In its exercise, comprehensive protection works on two axes: prevention of threats and violations and immediate reestablishment of their development (principle of the best interest of the child). The latter condition is usually the reason for admission to administrative restoration of rights proceedings. The reasons for admission can be understood as acts that violate the rights of protection, personal integrity, or that constitute victims of crime to children and adolescents (NNAs). In turn, they can be recognized as actions that derive from situations of risk, vulnerability, or emergency. As a result of the declarations made by resolution for violation of rights, it is the competent authority that orients reinstatement measures (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar ICBF & Ministerio de la Protección Social, 2018).

Each of the categories defined by the System represent reasons for children to enter the Program. Although it was not possible to find subcategories that specify the income of NNAs in the “violence due to mistreatment” or “other reasons” variables, these are of little depth to understand the context of the phenomenon in the context of foreign migrant minors. However, it is understood that these categories represent not only *de facto* actions but also actions of violation of human rights and children’s rights, as well as the systematic violation of other related mandates concerning national and international migrant children in Colombia, whether accompanied or unaccompanied in any of the places or territories at the national and international level.

In border territory (TF) and main city (CP), the reasons for entry of foreign children to the Program during 2018 - 2021 were processed by violence due to abuse (Vm), sexual violence (Vs), special care conditions (Cec), threats to integrity (Ai), other reasons (Om), and high permanence in the street (Apc). See figure 7.

Nationally, admissions of unaccompanied Venezuelan migrant children approached 723 cases between 2019 and the first quarter of 2022. In Nariño, this type of inflows was relatively minimal compared to the amount of transit migration flows and intraregional and transcontinental irregular inflows experienced in the same period of time. (See table 2).

Unlike previous periods, for 2021 and the first quarter of 2022, the distribution by income in protective services was estimated for other age groups: 6 to 11 years old and 12 to 17 years old. This distribution confirms a high participation of unaccompanied Venezuelan migrant children and adolescents between 12 and 17 years of age during 2021-2022. And higher frequency of cases of adolescent girls and women during the first quarter 2022 (See table 3).



Note. The figure shows the distribution of reasons for entry to the PARD Program by foreign children and adolescents according to their nationality. Includes Ipiales (TF) and Pasto (CP) during 2018-2021. Abbreviations indicate: TF: border territory; CP: main city. Source: Prepared by the authors with Open Data from the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF). Admissions to Administrative Processes for the Restoration of Rights (PARD). Updated February 2022.

Figure 7. Reasons for entry to PARD Program in TF and CP on the basis of nationality 2018-2021

Table 2. Admissions to PARD of unaccompanied Venezuelan migrant children in Nariño 2018-2020

Year	No. Cases of unaccompanied NNAs	0 to 5 NNAs		6 to 13 NNAs		14 to 17 NNAs		Male NNAs		Female NNAs	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2018	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d
2019	42	4	9.5	1	2.4	37	88.1	23	54.8	19	45.2
2020	11	2	18.2	3	27.3	6	54.5	6	54.5	5	45.5
Total	53	6	11.32	4	7.55	43	81.1	29	54.72	24	45.3

Note. Frequency approximation of unaccompanied Venezuelan migrant children in SNBF by year and age group in Nariño during 2019-2020. The acronym NNA indicates children and adolescents. Abbreviations indicate F: frequency, S.d: no data. Source: Prepared by the authors with Open Data from the ICBF's Mission Information System (SIM). Statistics on Venezuelan migrants in service of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF). Update as of May 2022.

Table 3. Admissions to PARD of unaccompanied Venezuelan migrant children in Nariño 2021-2022

Year	Total Regional	6 to 11 NNAs		12 to 17 NNAs		Male NNAs		Female NNAs	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2021	18	1	5.6	7	94.4	9	50.0	9	50.0
2022	6	2	33.3	4	66.7	2	33.3	4	66.7
Total	24	3	12.5	21	87.5	11	45.8	13	54.17

Note. Frequency approximation of unaccompanied Venezuelan migrant children in ICBF services by age group, according to gender during 2021-2022 in Nariño. The acronym NNA indicates children and adolescents. The abbreviation F: indicates frequency. Source: Prepared by the authors with Open Data from the ICBF's Mission Information System (SIM). Statistics on Venezuelan migrants in service of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF). Update as of May 2022.

Other forms of violence that have an impact on international migrant children are particularized in contexts of armed conflict according to the geopolitical and social dynamics of the territories and are considered complex in scenarios of occurrence. This exposure to vulnerabilities involves de facto actions of illicit recruitment or use, utilization and sexual violence by Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs), or Organized Armed Groups (OAGs), and/or Organized Criminal Groups (OCGs) outside the law.

Although there are difficulties in accessing information on these typologies, especially for child and adolescent international migrant victims, the National Family Welfare System (SNBF) approaches the issue of illegal recruitment through processes of child disengagement. That is to say, the reading it proposes is in terms of the number of victims but also in terms of unlinked children. These cases of victimization against childhood population in contexts of armed conflict in Nariño identified 66 cases between 2018-2021. In 2018, they represented 49.3%; for 2019, 16.6%; for 2020, 30.3%; and for 2021, 9%. Just up to 2020, only 1.5% were identified as involving international migrant minors (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar ICBF, 2022). It can be understood that, although the dynamics of recruitment of children continue to increase, their possibilities of access to disengagement processes are decreasing. (See table 4).

Table 4. Childhood victims of illegal recruitment by IAGs in Nariño, according to gender between 2018-2021.

Illegal Armed Group (IAG)	No. cases recruited by IAGs	% cases recruited by IAGs	Male NA victims		Victims NA women	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
OAGs	57	86.4	51	77.3	6	9.1
FARC	5	7.58	5	7.58	0	0.00
Gulf Clan	2	3.03	1	1.52	1	1.52
ELN	2	3.03	2	3.03	0	0.00
Total	66	100.0	59	89.39	7	10.61

Note. The Table presents the cases of victimization of regional children by illegal recruitment by Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs) in Nariño during the 2018-2021 period. Includes discrimination of victims by gender. The projected cases of victimization are associated with processes of disengagement of children in the territory. The acronym indicates NNA: children and adolescents. OAGs Organized Armed Groups. ELN: National Liberation Army. FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. Source: Prepared by the authors with Open Data from the National Observatory on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and ICBF 2021.

The issue of forced displacement is recognized as another type of vulnerability and violence that has an effect on international migrant children in territories or areas of occurrence related to armed conflicts. The cases of victimization against this segment are not isolated to regional children’s collectives or internal mobilities. There is an increase in regional children in contexts of migration and children in constant migration as a result of this typology and international migrant children inserted in these dynamics.

As of 2018, internal migratory movements of infants in Nariño are recognized and increased until 2021. A proportion of them were identified in processes of forced migration or victims of forced displacement. Just for 2019, records were found of international migrant children inserted in internal migration cycles and a proportion of them victims of forced displacement. (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar ICBF, 2022)See table 5.

Table 5. Regional and international migrant children victims of forced displacement in Nariño 2018-2021.

Year	No. Local children	Children migrants internal		Children internal migrants by DF		Children migrants international		Children my victims by DF	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2018	8386	25	0.30	17	68.0	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d
2019	10519	51	0.48	21	41.2	35	0.33	15	42.9
2020	11322	760	6.71	25	3.3	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d
2021	12949	1088	8.40	44	4.0	s.d	s.d	s.d	s.d

Note. The Table presents regional and international children victims of displacement due to armed conflict during the 2018-2021 period in Nariño. The abbreviation DF means forced displacement. F indicates frequency. The cases reported in the last two categories refer only to Venezuelan migrant children. Source: own elaboration with Open Data Population victim of forced displacement due to armed conflict, with accompaniment process by ICBF mobile units, 2022.

Dimensions and factors of vulnerability in the migratory transit of unaccompanied international adolescent migrants in Nariño

The exposure to vulnerability factors of unaccompanied international adolescent migrants who were interviewed en route varied by geographic area and route. This segment is permanently exposed to events of physical fragility but also suffers victimization due to social vulnerability due to the difficulties of adaptation and community integration in the bridging territories, in addition to their limited possibilities for obtaining resources in peripheral urban spaces. Some of the physical fragility events they experienced were injuries, threats and intimidation, robbery, armed robbery, attempted homicide, and sexual abuse. Attempted homicide events were recurrent in male adolescents. According to their testimony, some were thrown from the vehicles while they were in motion. The victims recognize that these actions were committed by Organized Crime Groups (BCO) or Organized Criminal Groups (OCGs).

It was most common to identify categories of psychological violence, followed by physical violence and sexual violence. Cases of psychological and physical violence were most frequent among male minors and represented a significant proportion of the female population. Although, in general, experiences of sexual violence in migration contexts victimize women and adolescent girls and women more frequently, the number of cases continues to be reported to a lesser extent. The dynamics of this violence according to the experience of the interviewees based on gender are represented in Figure 9.

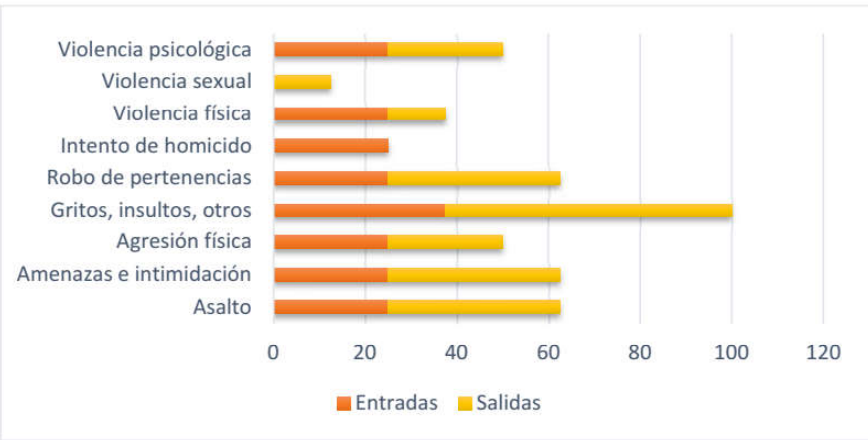


Figure 8. Typology of violence in unaccompanied international adolescent migrants according to entry and exit routes

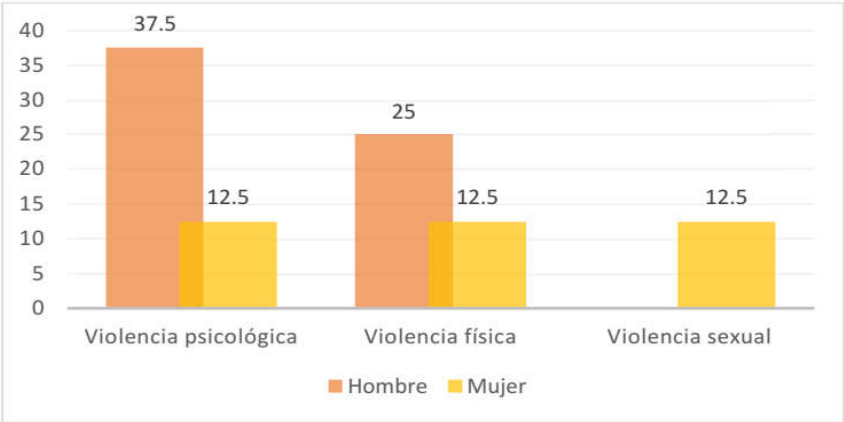


Figure 9. GBV experienced by adolescent international migrants in transit migration.

The social contexts in which they develop, the circumstances, and situations they are going through have facilitated access to and consumption of psychoactive substances, which is a common practice that has been strengthening states of vulnerability, risks, and violence in their transit circuits. Respondents experienced recreational use of traditional psychoactive substances. They preferably use more than one substance and consume alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, weed, and glue, according to their economic condition. Frequency of use may be occasional, regular, or frequent. Male adolescents reported more cases of consumption with weekly frequency and probability of occurrence between three to two times per week, although there are cases of daily consumption. In proportion, 0.5% of adolescent women reported consuming at least one type of psychoactive substance daily.

Dimensions of vulnerability

Key concepts of Global Vulnerability applicable to the study of multiple cases point expressly in a social sense to the identification of subjects in prone areas and to the possible deficiencies of resilience of all social actors interacting in such spaces along with their capacity to absorb events (Wilches-Chaux, 1993: 14). From a holistic perspective, for the individual and collectives there is a predisposition or susceptibility to suffer damages that involve not only the physical condition of the subjects but also their political, economic, and social condition. As Cardona (2001) refers: "...vulnerability can be defined as a risk factor of a subject or system exposed to a hazard, corresponding to its intrinsic predisposition to be affected or to be susceptible to damage. Vulnerability, in other words, is the physical, economic, political, or social predisposition or susceptibility of a community to be affected or to suffer damage in the event of a destabilizing phenomenon of natural or anthropic origin (Cardona, 2002: 3)

In this sense, the phenomenon brings together in an integrative manner the condition of unaccompanied international adolescent migrants as individuals but also as collectives that converge in a multidimensional system (territories, communities, institutions) in transit circuits and in the world migration system but at the same time are excluded from the Colombian migration system. This conditions them to situations of marginalization and segregation, being expelled from the economic, political, cultural, educational, and social protection logics from bridge or host territories to destination territories.

Physicality

Represents geographic areas prone to risks and situations of vulnerability. Areas located in border territories, the main city, and other municipalities of the province that are largely linked to cartographies of violence due to armed conflict, illegal economies, drug trafficking, and migrant smuggling were highlighted. Some areas related to conflict dynamics are the Pacific Region, the Central Region, the Andean Highlands, the Eastern Region with the Cauca border, and the triple border: Andean, Amazonian, and Colombian-Ecuadorian (Fundación Desarrollo y Paz, 2021). In these zones, migratory flows of tourist transit and mere transit converge, which are possible to identify if we consider the relationship between the migratory "province and host city" categories.

The vulnerability of the territories leaves this segment at a permanent disadvantage either during their journey or in bridging territories. The informal routes they take in border territory to continue their migratory journey are highly insecure due to the multiplicity of illegal economies that operate there along with the dynamics of BCO or OCGs operations on the southern Colombian-Ecuadorian border in particular (Caicedo Zambrano, *et al.*, 2021).

The observation pattern applied on the road, in the territories or environment category, revealed risk situations due to the existence of a high volume of vehicular traffic, from cargo trucks, minibuses, buses, and private vehicles. The same applies to the transit of foreigners and flows of migrants in transit in inbound and outbound mobility, which facilitates their smuggling and related crimes among peers or adults.

The theft of identification documents is a victimization event that cuts across social and economic dimensions. This was a common characteristic among those interviewed, which easily placed them as undocumented or stateless persons in transit, in bridging territories, and most likely in destination countries. This increases their physical vulnerability to victimizing actions such as attempted or actual homicide, abuse, and sexual exploitation. It not only hinders regularization processes but also protection and verification of national, personal, and human identity.

Deficiencies in resistance and the capacity of the actors that interact in these areas, specifically the Ipiales-Pasto route, are limited. The levels of community and institutional response to this segment of migrant children are precarious; there is little response that provides comprehensive coverage to the needs of this population in material and ideological terms. Although they have access to soup kitchens, most of which are provided by humanitarian aid, they lack access to shelters or transient homes where they can spend the night. Nor is it feasible to access medical care or identity recognition processes for fear of being reported to the Childhood and Adolescence Police and subsequently to processes of restoration of rights based on the modality of family reunification, deportation, or return.

They seek to insert themselves into local development processes but are impeded by traditional protectionist models, by the governance of violence resulting from illicit economies in the territories, by the conceptualization of the migration, governance, and border management system exclusively in the Venezuelan case. This forces them to hide in depressed sectors and contexts that are a characteristic of the peripheral territories and in a situation of street habitability.

One of the reasons that led to the Temporary Protection Status (ETP) for Venezuelan migrants was based on the change of intention or mood that this population had in principle, expressing their desire to move from temporary residence to settle temporarily in Colombian territory (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2021). The efforts of the State and the International Cooperation regarding the phenomenon and the governance of Venezuelan migration focused on the temporary condition of migratory transit and on the legal or administrative condition of regularization of the migrant population. That is, those migrants who, being in extended transit processes, have managed to acquire regular migratory status. Thus, the programs, projects, and initiatives offered by the State together

with the distribution of humanitarian aid are built and developed from normative contexts aimed at the regularized migrant population.

Despite the regulatory, legal, or administrative efforts and the implementation of flexible migration policies that allow stabilizing, improving, and securing Venezuelan migration in the country, the segment of unaccompanied international child migrants is recognized outside the political, social integration, economic, and cultural integration processes. They are excluded from the framework of application of the Temporary Protection Statute (ETPMV) unless they voluntarily wish to join the Administrative Processes for the Restoration of Rights (PARD), which prioritizes actions for family reunification and is the only link to obtain security and protection in bridging territories.

Economic dimension

The socioeconomic context of the peripheral sectors where they are inserted, within the bridge territories (Ipiales-Pasto), is unfavorable and precarious. The processes of economic inclusion in these places are discontinuous and irregular, and they are categorized as sectors with widespread marginality not only in their economies but also in the social, cultural, and political spheres. With the irruption of adolescent foreign migrants within these sectors, social interactions were recognized as exclusive, with marked levels of segregation and social exclusion.

Indeed, after having been robbed of their belongings (money, cell phones, ID, etc.), they hope that the recovery of their economic resources can take place in these spaces. In this way, they are at the expense of the help or collaboration that they can receive from some people of the sector: coins, shoes, clothes, blankets to spend the night, and thus protect themselves from the weather conditions. Consequently, its transit status is extended.

One of the community kitchens for migrants and refugees connects to Comuna Cinco in the main city and is part of one of Pasto's highly vulnerable sectors. Two types of multi-causal and multi-sectoral urban violence are known to converge in this geographic area. Multi-causal violence is characterized by the absence of the State in relation to the habitability of vulnerable groups, inequity in the supply of opportunities, and sectoral exclusion due to the actions of illegal social groups that exercise control over the territory, known as gangs. These groups are linked to organized crime resulting from drug trafficking and micro-trafficking, which in turn result in related activities that affect the social and community interaction of the inhabitants, particularly the young population. They operate through intimidation, fear, and kidnapping. Meanwhile, multi-sectoral violence is characterized by the intervention of political, economic, family, and social factors linked to dynamics for control of public space (Obando Guerrero, et al., 2020).

In this sense, the socioeconomic space of interaction for this segment of children is restrictive, limited, and fragmented. Crossing the border or leaving the periphery implies encountering institutionalism as other migration management

regulations: deportation or expulsion, which are in contrast to their real needs. The attainment of economic resources is obtained by begging for alms in bridge territories, which in reality is no longer a "contribution." They work in informal jobs such as cleaning cars, loading or unloading merchandise onto trucks or mules, clean-up work, or prostitution, which allows them to receive whatever help they can get, no matter how little it may be. These situations condition and force this segment of children to become involved in exploitative child labor and worse forms of child labor.

Social dimension

This dimension assumes processes of internal cohesion that individuals or collectives possess in the absence of effective leadership, in the manner proposed by Wilches (1993). But according to Cardona (2001, p. 3), this dimension of vulnerability is also considered a permanent condition over time that is linked to cultural and developmental aspects of the communities.

In the context of the phenomenon, this dimension pointed to processes of self-organization in conditions of transit, autonomy, and collectivity, as well as to the reasons that motivated their migration.

In scenarios sensitive to expressions of violence and violation of rights at any stage of the migratory journey, there are no positive processes of integration and social interaction; on the contrary, they diminish for this segment of children. On the other hand, social interactions based on conflicts, gender-based violence or other related violence, those derived directly or indirectly from institutionalism, State governance, and the issue of control and containment of migration between the State and intergovernmental agencies are intensifying. In other words, in this context, exposure to conditions of vulnerability increases considerably.

In short, the reality of the situation makes it clear that there are other types of interactions in transit circuits and bridge territories where violent actions and rights violations against this segment of the population converge, regardless of the migratory routes taken, whether autonomous or collective. Moreover, movement between one territory and another depends not only on the pocket resources of the children but also on the violence they perceive and experience. They depend on the possibilities of social interaction, on the community and institutional response to the satisfaction of their needs.

As a result, the violence perceived and experienced by them will provoke changes in the elaboration of their migratory trajectories. They move from self-organizing processes to groups organized solely to meet security and protection needs. In this sense, they form relationships as couples, friendships during transit, or circumstantial peers from their country of origin. Depending on the possibilities of integration in bridging territories and personal experiences en route, relationship building can go from circumstantial to close or vice versa.

The location of this segment of migrant children in prone areas, as well as their lack of resilience in transit contexts, their insufficient economic resources, as well as their economic dependence, their difficulties and impossibility to access comprehensive services, their limited possibilities to act and/or manage as an organized group, or to self-organize together with the imposition of migration management processes with other institutional sectors, determine the magnitude of their vulnerability.

Vulnerability factors

Vulnerability factors made it possible to consolidate experiences or events of vulnerability and physical fragility associated with migratory transit. These experiences refer to cases of gender-based violence (GBV), other forms of violence, and victimization by organized criminal groups (OCGs). In bridge territories, border territories (I) and in the main city (P), GBV in these geographic areas potentiates states of physical fragility on children due to the social dynamics experienced within these territories. Between 2019 and 2021, the frequency of cases was higher in Pasto than in Ipiales, but in both areas their propensity was found to be higher in female infants.

The area of influence factor extends to municipalities related to armed conflicts, which are municipalities traditionally known for having this problem, or border territories or main city, but it is also linked to “new” areas of influence or other municipalities precisely those that have been qualified as having the capacity to assimilate a migrant population. Regardless of the administrative situation of the subject and the migratory process carried out, they must converge with the intervention of various criminal groups such as IAGs, OCGs, BCO, ISGs, local gangs, or international criminal groups such as the Tren de Aragua, who operate locally, trans-territorially, internationally, and trans-continentially.

The social fragility factor is understood as a predisposition to vulnerabilities resulting from marginality, social segregation, disadvantage, and relative weakness due to their own socioeconomic conditions. Cardona puts it this way: “... predisposition arising as a result of marginality and social segregation... and their conditions of disadvantage and relative weakness due to socio-economic factors” (2001: 14).

In perspective, these elements are maintained during transit as in bridge territories. Their relative weakness in terms of socioeconomic conditions is also revealed through access to and type of drug use, confirming the relationship between type of substances consumed and socioeconomic conditions. The populations of unaccompanied international migrant children are the most vulnerable within the migration phenomenon due to their intrinsic condition as children, their situation of poverty, economic dependence, insufficient income, difficulties and impossibilities of access to services, lack of protection in transit processes and/or in bridge territories, and lack of development.

Territories condition the exposure to certain types of violence in greater or lesser intensity according to their geopolitical characteristics, governance, and control of armed actors in prone areas and the influence of illicit economies, with the dynamics of social integration and community integration (which may result in expressions of social vulnerability: rejection, repudiation, xenophobia, misogyny, marginalization, and segregation, among many others). In other words, some territories are more violent than others. However, the internal dynamics in areas or regions related to armed conflicts corroborate their interest in the most vulnerable bodies: adolescent women and men. In particular cases, those of unaccompanied international migrant children due to their permanent state of marginalization and social segregation (See Table 6).

Table 6. Exposure factor in unaccompanied international migrant children (IMINA) in Nariño.

Factors		Sources	Description	Categories
Exposure	Areas of influence	EAI-IAGs-OCGs-BCO Intervention and GDV Tren de Aragua (TA).	By areas of coca cultivation, in Ipiales (tri-border territory: Andean, Amazonian, Ecuador-col).	Illegal child recruitment
				Forced displacement
				Sexual freedom and integrity
				Linking IAGs activities
		Intervention of Illegal Social Groups (ISGs or BCO, local gangs.	In bridge territories, in extended transit condition, in Comuna Cinco.	Drug and micro-trafficking
				Territorial control
				Kidnapping
		Municipalities related to armed conflicts in border territory, main city, and other municipalities.	Distribution of regular and irregular migrant population in municipalities of the province, in autonomous or collective migration processes. Migración Colombia.	Child population distribution by municipality
		Migratory flows of tourism and migratory transit, by province and city of lodging (Ipiales, Pasto, other municipalities).	Migratory transit events (tourism and transit categories), filtered by province and city of lodging. Migración Colombia.	Intensity of events

Factors		Sources	Description	Categories
Exposure	Physical frailty	Physical harm experienced by international adolescent migrants in conditions of migratory transit and/or bridging territories.	De facto actions against the population and typologies of violence.	Cases of threats and intimidation
				Cases of shouting, insults, mockery, rejection
				Armed robbery case
				Cases of psychological violence
				Cases of sexual violence
				Cases of physical violence
				Cases of theft of belongings
				Cases of document theft
				Cases of physical aggression
				Cases of attempted homicide
				Cases of child labor and worst forms of child labor
Social fragility factor	Marginality, social segregation, disadvantage, and socioeconomic conditions	Socioeconomic characteristics of unaccompanied adolescent migrants, economic insertion capacity, and substance use.	Experiences of unaccompanied international adolescent migrants in migratory transit and/or in bridge territories.	Socioeconomic characterization
				Economic insertion capacity
				Type of substance and frequency of use

Conclusion

Unaccompanied adolescent international migrants were identified on the Ipiales-Pasto route, traveling alone, for their own reasons, with no intention of making family reunification trips, and who are part of autonomous migration. Some represent households made up of mothers who are heads of household; that is, they are part of collectives that lead a matriarchal migration. In concerted trajectories, female adolescents' migratory processes are linked to forms of patriarchy that are materialized through agreements or alliances with the mother head of household. For these adolescents, the intention is focused on achieving economic independence, while for their mothers it is focused on strengthening the family economy.

Others begin their journey of their own accord in autonomous migratory journeys. Specifically, they were represented by adolescent males with individual motivations that took the form of fleeing experiences of violence in their families and/or in socio-political contexts. Economic resources are scarce to make the crossing and to obtain them in bridging territories. By default, their transit is extended. It is a self-organizing form with circumstantial relational links that cannot be linked to migrant support networks nor to other migrant networks. Although it is an intentional construction of self-protection, this potentiates its simultaneous irruption to dimensions of vulnerability that derive events that limit and condition its response and survival capacity. These groups are influenced by the limited capacity of the territories to respond to the possibilities of interaction and integration for this particular segment.

The areas of influence are home to a migrant population with a vocation to stay as tourists or merely in transit. In the municipality of Cumbal alone, operations of the Bloque Occidental Alfonso Cano, the Gente del Orden, Los Contadores, and the Frente 30 Rafael Aguilera were detected in 2020 and approximately 753 Venezuelan refugees were registered during 2019 to 2022, according to data published by Migración Colombia. In addition, Cumbal as of 2023 was identified as one of the municipalities with the highest risk of violence against female leadership.

It is important to note that the population distribution of Venezuelan migrants by municipality is approximate and excludes other nationalities coming from different international and transnational migratory processes. If the migratory flows make it possible to identify movements of international and transcontinental children in transit processes, whether as tourists or merely in transit, other than Venezuelan children, presumably they are part of autonomous and/or concerted journeys that are being located in municipalities occupied by Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs) or other armed criminal structures. In any case, a categorical disaggregation of the population distribution of international children in these municipalities is unknown.

The effects of the instrumentalization of information on migrations in the local territory about unaccompanied migrant minors constituted the main limitation at the time of approaching the study, the institutional statistics published in open information systems with complexity managed to approximate the situated reality of the phenomenon. Finding that no host community has the legal disposition to shelter and care for this segment, without orienting the institutional protection measures available to the Colombian State in conjunction with the ICBF (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare), made it necessary to modify the empirical framework, and in effect, to show that this is a segment of international migrant children that, by characterizing a form of migration that does not seek family reunification, is in a state of absolute lack of protection.

Regarding this study, the lines of improvement of theoretical order would require a coupling with the theories of contemporary migrations to deepen the phenomenon. Beyond the classic economic approaches, it could be articulated with some social lines that incorporate holistic and gender approaches, and include national and domestic, international, bilateral, or multilateral dimensions and highlight subjective aspects of the perception of migration.

Practical and methodological improvements in the field of contemporary migration are still under discussion and construction. Practical, epistemological, and methodological approaches to address complex social phenomena continue to be developed from different disciplines. However, this study could be improved through the use of multi-site ethnography to expand the observation of the phenomenon in different local or border territories. On a practical level, it is necessary to recognize the geographical complexity of the territory in the face of the access of irregular migratory routes (more than 40), which in effect, would imply the use of techniques that contribute to improve the observation patterns of the reality of the phenomenon and of the segment of unaccompanied international migrant children in conflict contexts.

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