



# Neither “criminals nor “illegals”: children and adolescents in the migrant smuggling market on the US-MX Border

Preliminary Report

DHIA

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## Introduction

The present document constitutes an overview of the facilitation of irregular migration on the US Mexico border from a human rights perspective. The result of an NGO-academic partnership, it specifically outlines the contexts and challenges faced by boys, girls and adolescents who work in the migrant smuggling market in the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso corridor.

Most discourses involving US-bound migration focus on the experiences of adult migrants. Furthermore, the majority of these experiences are described as inherently clandestine or even criminal in nature. This has facilitated on the one hand the dissemination of a discourse framing adult migrants as “illegal” or “criminal,” while on the other, the propagation of narratives that define their journeys as the result of the actions of powerful mafias or organized crime.

As scholars and community activists, we acknowledge and condemn the criminal acts committed against migrants. Our work on the US Mexico border has made us keenly aware of the vast range of violations to the most basic rights of people on the move, and to their targeting by criminal organizations not only in our region but around the world. However, the predominance of an organized crime perspective in migration facilitation has often led to the role of states at creating unsafe conditions for migrants to be obscured, and for migration facilitators to be monolithically described as evil predators who take advantage of the vulnerability of migrants.

In the pages that follow, we offer a critical view into the migrant smuggling market on the US Mexico border by documenting the experiences of a specific group of actors: the minors who work as agents of mobility processes, and who are known in policy circles as circuit boys, girls and adolescents, or CBGAs. Our report does not pretend to provide a complete or definite account of one of the most

stigmatized markets of contemporary discourses of migration and security. Instead, it is an invitation to acknowledge the impact of smuggling facilitation within border communities, and a call to articulate solutions that may reduce the incidence and risk levels faced by the children and youth of the US Mexico border.

## Context

Ciudad Juárez (Juárez) is a city of almost 1.5 million residents located on Mexico’s Northern border in the state of Chihuahua. It is a migrant transit, origin and destination community. On a daily basis people arrive or leave the city attracted by the opportunities in the manufacturing or *maquiladora* industry. Many Central American and Mexican migrants also transit through Juárez on their way to the United States, given the city’s location on the US-Mexico border and its proximity to the US city of El Paso, Texas. Juárez has also experienced significant out-flows following waves of violence tied in large degree to Mexico’s anti-drug trafficking policy.

Along with the city of El Paso, Juárez has historically constituted a binational, multicultural community. Many of the region’s contemporary challenges (security, trade and migration, to name a few) are rooted in the very nature of Juárez and El Paso as border cities, and in the longstanding political pressures to control the border and monitor regular and irregular migration flows. While El Paso has been engaged in an effort to portray itself as one of the safest cities in the United States, it has often been in contrast to Juárez, which is often referred to as one of the most dangerous city in the world.

Juárez has indeed endured a long battle with marginalization and inequality which has been manifested in part through periods of violent activity. The city has been one of the communities most

impacted by the Mexican government's strategy against organized crime, especially the one targeting drug trafficking organizations operating along the country's northern border. The official measures to counter the impact of criminal actors have increased the levels of violence witnessed and endured by the general population, while the disregard for and the criminalization of the most vulnerable residents of the city has only worsened. It is estimated that about 12,000 boys, girls and adolescents in Juárez have lost a parent as a result Mexico's government "war on drugs."<sup>1</sup> Kidnapping, extortion, armed robbery and murder rates are high in the city.

Furthermore, the socio-economic and security challenges that Juárez faces impact children and youth disproportionately. According to data from Ciudad Juárez's network for Children's Rights, boys, girls and adolescents in the city constitute about 35% of the city's total population, and face critical needs in the areas of education, recreation, health services and culture. Dropout rates are high among youth and drug use is common. It is also not unusual to find children and youth working in the informal economy, performing often hazardous forms of labor in high-risk parts of the city.

Among those who work, a group that faces extreme vulnerability and that has been largely ignored in the migration discourse is that of the boys, girls and adolescents who live in the neighborhoods in the proximity of the US Mexico border fence, and who make a living facilitating the crossing of irregular migrants or of illegal drugs into the United States. In some government and academic documents this population is referred to as "circuit minors," given the circular, cyclical nature of their experience. Not targeted for prosecution in the United States, and

unlikely to face criminal charges in Mexico, CBGAs cross the border irregularly into the United States to transport drugs or irregular migrants, and are if apprehended repatriated by US authorities to their Mexican counterparts. These in turn assume custody of CBGAs until a parent or mentor claims them. The repatriation of the CBGAs back to their community however translates into them almost automatically reentering the activities that got them in contact with authorities in the first place. From this cyclical experience comes their designation as "circuit" population.

### **Methodology**

Between the months of June, July and August of 2017 we collected data on the conditions faced by boys, girls and adolescents identified as "circuit minors" in Juárez. We identified publicly available data concerning the work of authorities in charge of CBGAs, collected conference and symposium presentations, along with official reports on minors involved in border crossing facilitation. We also surveyed government employees, community activists, and members of NGOs to identify their knowledge of the dynamics of this population.

In order to supplement these data we also conducted observations in the parts of the city identified as zones of high migrant smuggling and drug trafficking incidence and where CBGAs were active. We organized visits to neighborhoods identified as the place of residence of most CBGAs. Following our visits we exchanged notes and information that would allow us to better understand the conditions in the field.

This preliminary report does not include formal or structured interviews with CBGAs and/or their families, given the risk factors they face as a result of the

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates from the Human Rights Commission for the State of Chihuahua, *Nuevo Día, Archivo Digital*, 10 July 2011.

<https://www.adendi.com/archivo.asp?Xnum=1012151&year=2011&mon=7>

criminalized nature of their activities, and the specific laws that protect their privacy as minors. To reduce the impact of the absence of this fundamental source of data we drew data from multiple sources. DHIA's two consultants were also formerly employed by the local shelter in charge of tending the needs of CBGAs and were aware of their particular dynamics, while another one of our researchers has conducted extensive work among smuggling facilitators on the US Mexico border and abroad, and has experience as an expert witness on smuggling cases involving CBGAs. Combined, these professional experiences allowed us to conduct targeted observations and to be able to critically analyze the data shared during interviews and those present in documents from governmental and non-governmental organizations.

In sum, the sources and the analysis combined provide an overview of the socio-economic contexts faced by CBGAs, their families and their communities, and allowed researchers to identify some preliminary trends, as well as potential mechanisms for action, which are shared in this report.

### **Who are involved in Circuit Activities?**

The term "circuit minors" to designate the boys, girls and teenagers who participate in the facilitation of irregular border crossings in connection with the drug and migrant smuggling markets was initially coined by Mexican authorities. According to interviews with staff at a migrant reception center in Juárez, the Mexican authority in charge of migration, the National Institute for Migration (Instituto Nacional de Migración or INM) and Mexico's welfare agency (Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia or DIF) were the first to use the term in the context of presentations and internal reports. Both institutions are in charge of providing services to CBGAs

upon their repatriation. The term also sought to distinguish this population from the rest of migrant children and youth, given its particular characteristics.

CBGAs are indeed young men and women under the age of 18 who participate as facilitators of irregular migration or in drug trafficking activities along the US-Mexico border. They receive financial compensation for their services. While both migrant smuggling and drug trafficking are typified as serious crimes by Mexican and US law, they are hardly ever prosecuted when committed by minors, a gap that has allegedly been exploited by criminal organizations to recruit and employ them. The participation of children and youth in these markets, while at times the result of coercion, is most often described by CBGAs as voluntary, as it is habitually the result of invitations from peers and family members. Yet it is fundamental to keep in mind that a minor's decision to participate in illicit activities is far from unconstrained, shaped by complex social, cultural and economic dynamics.

According to data from SIPINNA (the Mexican government's Program for the Protection of Boys, Girls and Adolescents), in 2016 there were a total of 376 individual cases involving CBGAs in the city of Juárez. Between January and April of 2017, an additional 78 cases were identified. The vast majority of children and youth reported being involved in the facilitation of migrant smuggling.

CBGAs ages range from 11 to 17. While the practice is highly gendered (most documented cases involve males), young women and girls are also active in the market, although their presence is considerably less visible and in fact their roles tend to be considered peripheral or unimportant.<sup>2</sup>

Another important characteristic of the population is that they are long-time

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<sup>2</sup> See: Sánchez, Gabriella. "Women's Participation in the Facilitation of Human Smuggling: The Case

of the US Southwest." *Geopolitics* 21.2 (2016): 387-406.

residents of the neighborhoods in the immediate proximity of the US Mexico border fence –a location essential for the facilitation of migrant smuggling and drug trafficking. Reports and interviews indicate that most CBGAs live in the northwestern sector of Juárez, in neighborhoods like Felipe Angeles, Rancho Anapra, Puerto Anapra and Lomas de Poleo, Ladrillera de Juárez and Siglo XXI. In the northeastern sector, CBGAs live in Riveras del Bravo, Tierra Nueva and Portal del Roble (fig. 1).

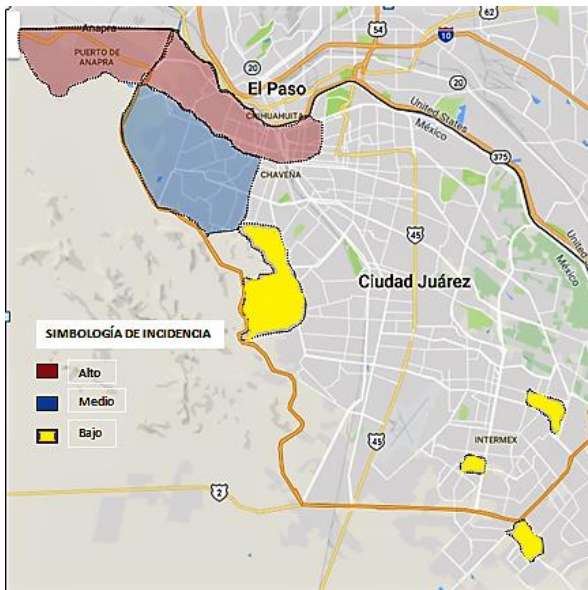


Fig. 1. Areas of CBGA Residence and Activity.  
Source: Monitoring and Follow-Up Center

Most CBGAs believe participating in these markets constitutes a legitimate income-generating activity, especially in light of the lack of work, education and/or recreational opportunities they face. CBGAs profit from their knowledge of the geography of their neighborhoods in a market where their lack of formal education is not a barrier to employment. In this sense it is fundamental to keep in mind that virtually all CBGAs have dropped out of school by the time of their first apprehension. Most CBGAs drop out of school by the time they reach 6<sup>th</sup> grade,

while the few who decide to remain abandon their studies during 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Drug and alcohol use are common among CBGAs. In addition to tobacco and alcohol, marijuana and solvents are also used. Some report cocaine and methamphetamine use. Typically, drug use begins between the ages of 12 and 15 when introduced by friends and family members, who are often also the source of the substances.

Contextually, it is also important to refer to a central component of Juárez’s economy: the manufacturing plant system or *maquiladora*, which employs thousands of *Juarenses*<sup>3</sup>, including the parents of many CBGAs. Since the 1960s the *maquiladora* has provided thousands of entry-level jobs in the city. Its workers may earn slightly higher salaries than those available in other industries, plus the jobs it provides require no specialized education or experience. They rely however on a system of long-hour shifts, repetitive and menial tasks and no possibilities for advancement. Salaries are dependent on production quotas and performance levels, what results on laborers often having to work additional shifts which imply spending most of the day or night away from home. Minors report their parents – particularly their mothers<sup>4</sup> – often pick-up additional shifts. The care of younger children is often assigned to older siblings or relatives if any are available, although in many cases, parental supervision is altogether lacking.

Family structure is also significant to the CBGA experience. Single-parent households are common, often led by women.<sup>5</sup> The families of many CBGAs often undergo changes, as parents enter into or end romantic relationships or new relatives move in or out, which involves constant adjustment or readjustment

<sup>3</sup> Juárez’s residents.

<sup>4</sup> An important critique of the *maquiladora* industry has being its dependence on women’s labor.

<sup>5</sup> There was a tendency among state representatives to blame mothers for what they labeled as their inability to “control” their children.

periods to new parental or parent-like figures within an already hectic family context.

Like their children, parents or guardians have low educational completion rates, what in turn limits their employment options in the mainstream economy. For those not working in the maquiladora, jobs in the service and hospitality industry, or employment in the underground economy are some of the few available options. In some cases parents also participate in highly precarious occupations themselves like drug trafficking, sex work and migrant smuggling.

The communities where most CBGAs live lack basic services (running water, sewage, electricity or sanitation). During our visits to the neighborhoods we noticed the prevalence of unpaved streets and the lack of access to safe, reliable public transportation. The neighborhoods also lack recreational, educational and cultural spaces. CBGAs sense of community is limited to their neighborhoods and their interactions with friends and family members. Locales like museums, parks or libraries are neither available nor known to most of them.

### **What are the roles of CBGAs in smuggling facilitation?**

Given the absence of viable social mobility mechanisms within their communities, including the perceived lack of prospects arising from attaining formal education, employment in the informal economy becomes an income generating option for marginalized, working-class youth and children in Juárez. The proximity of El Paso also makes Juárez highly strategic in the drug trafficking and migrant smuggling markets. The knowledge children and youth possess of their communities stands in this context as a desirable trait among those who work in the facilitation of irregular border crossings. It is widely believed among advocates that smuggling and drug trafficking groups opt to recruit local

children and youth for the completion of tasks as they are unlikely to face criminal charges on either side of the border due to their age. Some researchers have referred to some of these practices as forced labor, and in some random instances as constituting a form of human trafficking. However, the vast majority of CBGAs from the border enter the migrant smuggling and the drug trafficking markets attracted by the income generating potential of the practice. Most are recruited by friends and family members (usually their peers or older siblings). Other times, the families of CBGAs themselves have been involved in migration facilitation or drug trafficking processes as a survival strategy, in which case the CBGAs simply join the economic dynamics of the family. In some cases despite their own efforts to evade or escape from their activities, CBGAs are forced to participate in the market by organized criminal groups.

The following tasks are the most commonly reported by CBGAs in the context of their participation in smuggling:

**Hawk (*halcón*):** surveillance. Follows the movements of the US Border Patrol; notifies the group if a crossing can be carried out and what route to use.

**Hare (*Liebre*):** decoy. Distracts Border Patrol officers so that the guide can cross drugs or people without interruption.

**Guide (*guía*):** prepares and walks the migrants through their crossing process.

**Recruiter:** contacts youth and children in nearby neighborhoods and extends them invitations to participate promising financial returns.

CBGAs receive financial compensation for their participation. Their earnings vary depending on their role, the crossing point, the number of people they transport and their level of effectiveness. They also report collecting higher fees when crossing migrants from countries other

than Mexico. Almost invariably, CBGAs generate an income higher than the one derived from being employed in the formal or informal economies. CBGAs share their earnings with their families and in some instances, become the sole providers of their households. They often disclose feeling obligated to support their families, and therefore remain working in the smuggling or trafficking markets despite the risks of the crossings or uncomfortable interactions with more senior facilitators. There is also significant tension when the minors work for or alongside their own family members and wish not to continue in the market. On occasion, they may even opt to turn themselves to US authorities seeking protection, although this decision may backfire. A case documented by our researchers involved a male teenager who requested US immigration authorities not to be sent back to Mexico, as he feared being forced to continue working in smuggling. His request, however, was ignored and he was immediately repatriated, despite having a record of multiple apprehensions. Most CBGAs are merely processed and immediately repatriated to Mexico upon their apprehension without being screened for protection, and returned to the same communities they are trying to escape from or evade.

### **Risks**

The participation of CBGAs in human smuggling and drug trafficking pose grave risks to their personal safety. They constantly face situations where their physical and emotional integrity is compromised. These risks are extended to their families, who must cope with their apprehensions, but also with the potential consequences that arise from the

participation of their children in clandestine, criminalized and often violent markets.

The crossings are inherently dangerous. CBGAs as well as migrants travel long routes and remote and unsafe sections of the border at different times of the night and day. CBGAs report working along stretches where they must cross canals or reservoirs where they can be washed away by water currents and even drown. Crossing the border separating the US from Mexico often implies climbing the fence which may pose life-threatening consequences in the event of a fall; manipulating the tools used to cut through metal may cause injuries or infections when wounds go untreated; walking on foot the hills and dunes surrounding the periphery of Juárez also involves the likelihood of injuring and/or breaking limbs, or being bitten by insects and reptiles.

CBGAs also endure physical and verbal abuse by adult actors, who include their friends, family members and neighbors and the authorities on both sides of the border. CBGAs often remain in the market as a result of threats from their employers to hurt their family members in the event they fail to deliver a group of migrants or a load of drugs or decide to quit the job. Also troubling are the reports of constant intimidation as well as verbal and physical abuse on the part of the US authorities, primarily US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), in the course of apprehension and/or repatriation procedures.

Cases of CBGAs being forced to reveal details regarding their employers have been reported to Mexican authorities<sup>6</sup> and

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<sup>6</sup> Although beyond the scope of this report, the [Juvenile Referral Program \(JRP\)](#), implemented by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in 2014, involved the apprehension and detention at secure facilities in the United States of an unknown number of Mexican boys, girls and teenagers residing in locations along the US Mexico border

and identified as involved in the local drug trafficking and human smuggling market. From its inception in May 2014 to September of the same year, [a total of 209 boys, girls and adolescents were referred to the program](#). In the first 17 months of its implementation the [ACLU reported](#) over 600 Mexican children and youth had been in



documented by migrant and civil rights advocates.<sup>7</sup>

On the Mexican side, there are also reports of mistreatment and negligence, apparently the result of unawareness on the part of the Mexican authorities of the rights that protect repatriated boys, girls and adolescents. CBGAs report not being allowed to communicate with their family members, or not being contacted by consular authorities during their apprehension to be informed of their rights. Furthermore, there are no age-appropriate tools and protocols to identify cases where the child or youth may be at risk if returned to his or her family and/or neighborhood. All of these actions combined underline the significant levels of vulnerability CBGAs face, and the need of specific actions to tend to their needs.

### **CBGAs and the state**

CBGAs as a vulnerable population have remained largely invisible in migration discourses on both sides of the border. In Mexico, given the lack of protocols to protect them –to the law they are simply unaccompanied minors– they are only subjected to administrative processes following their repatriation. There are no mechanisms in place that may allow for their identification as vulnerable youth or children,<sup>8</sup> leading them not to receive the help they need to interrupt the cyclical pattern of their activities. Furthermore, as a result of being participants in a highly stigmatized market, they are frequently thought to be inherently inclined to engage

in criminal activity and are excluded from any restorative justice initiatives.

In Mexico, the state is responsible for guaranteeing the wellbeing and safety of CBGAs along with other government agencies. However, up to this moment this population has remained absent from Mexico's conversations on migration and security. This is particular concern as the involvement of boys, girls and adolescents from the border in migrant smuggling and drug trafficking is not limited to Ciudad Juárez. Cases have been reported in cities along the entire US Mexico border, in the states of Arizona and New Mexico, and also in the South-Texas corridor and its corresponding Mexican cities (Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa and Matamoros), the latter coinciding with the US Border Patrol sectors with the highest numbers of migrant apprehensions.

Despite being aware of their existence, neither the US nor the Mexican authorities have shown significant commitment in addressing the risks faced by CBGAs. It is however important to acknowledge that there have been attempts to create a legal framework that can be adjusted to the specific needs of the children and adolescents involved in border crossing facilitation.

### **The legal framework**

One of the actions seeking to serve and protect young people and children in Mexico was the creation of the General Law on the Rights of Boys, Girls and Adolescents (LGDNNA). Article first of the

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detention pursuant to the JRP. According to US CBP officials the program was discontinued in 2015, however court data indicate that some minors were still in custody as late as 2016. Boys, girls and teenagers reported being held at facilities across the United States with limited or no ability to communicate with their family members in Mexico, being constantly interviewed by federal authorities regarding their knowledge of drug trafficking and human smuggling operations. The [Washington Post](#) reported on the case of a male teenager who apprehension under JRP might have led his employers to believe he had become an

informant to US authorities. Two of the teenager's relatives were murdered, and fearing for his life he opted to go into hiding following his repatriation.

<sup>7</sup> See WOLA, 2015. [Forgotten on 'La Frontera': Mexican Children Fleeing violence are rarely heard](#), Women's Refugee Commission, 2015 [Detention and Treatment of Unaccompanied Migrant Children at the US Mexico Border](#), and the [legal complaint](#) filed by American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 2015.

<sup>8</sup> This observation was also made by Appleseed in their report "[Children at the Border](#)" in 2011.



law states: [the law's mission is to] "Guarantee the full exercise, respect, protection and promotion of the human rights of unaccompanied boys and girls in line with Mexico's constitution, and that of the international treaties Mexico is part of." Likewise, article 89 establishes that "the authorities must adopt special measures to guarantee the rights of migrant boys, girls and adolescents, being unaccompanied, accompanied, separated, Mexican or foreign, and repatriated in the context of human mobility."

While the law constitutes an important step in acknowledging the rights of migrant youth and children as boys, girls and teenagers in transit, neither article will guarantee the protection of migrant children or youth as long as there are no ad-hoc programs in place that can lead to the full restitution of their rights. It is likewise fundamental to highlight that the socio-economic and geopolitical contexts along the US Mexico border make the experience of CBGAs unique, what demands the development and implementation of a multidisciplinary intervention that addresses their needs from a human rights perspective. For example, there is a protocol in place for the attention of migrant and unaccompanied or separated boys, girls and adolescents staying at shelters (the *Protocolo de atención de niños, niñas y adolescentes migrantes no acompañados o separados que se encuentran albergados*) developed by Mexico's welfare agency (Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, DIF) and its state offices. However, the document does not make reference to CBGAs, and therefore does not establish a mechanism that may tend to their specific vulnerabilities and/or risks.

The specific contexts of CBGAs must be kept in mind as procedures and protocols that may assist them are developed. These must also include the participation of other authorities like those involved in

the administration of justice, education and drug abuse prevention, among others.

### **NNAC and the academic discourse**

Only sporadically have academics paid attention to the dynamics of the children and adolescents who perform tasks in smuggling facilitation on the US Mexico border. Moreno Mena and Avendano Millan described in [a 2015 article](#) the processes protection agencies conducted on behalf of CBGAs. More recently, [Hernandez](#) documented the case of children involved in the local markets of smuggling and drug trafficking in Tamaulipas. However, work on smuggling facilitation in general continues to be scant and to over-emphasize a criminological dimension.

The visibility of organized crime in the Mexican context –generated in large part within a state-sponsored narrative that seeks to justify the militarization of border communities and the criminalization of its most marginalized residents – has generated much interest among academics who have vested significant amounts of time on documenting organized crime and violence. This has led to the emergence of a vast corpus of scholarship on organized crime that has remained uncritical of dominant discourses and has often sensationalized human smuggling and drug trafficking practices, all along reifying its participants as inherently criminal, and often replicating state-centric control and security perspectives. It is also common to find that this work vastly excludes the perspectives of the actors, construing them as irrational and inherently violent people on the one hand or as hopeless victims of transnational organized crime on the other. In this context our work seeks to challenge traditional, state-centric and criminological perspectives, and evidence the need for research that not merely documents what to outsiders may be perceived as phenomena afflict marginalized communities. Our goal is to

instead support the crafting, development and dissemination of research by communities themselves that informs government, policy makers, academics and other communities.

### **The DHIA-UTEP Partnership**

During the 2013-2016 term the government of Ciudad Juárez developed several practices aimed at improving the attention received by migrant boys, girls and adolescents. For the first time, the municipal development initiatives included a budget for the development and design and development of a program to serve CBGAs. The program had a systemic, structural approach that involved a community-based initiative that included families and friends of CBGAs. A version of this model had already been implemented with homeless children, and was readapted and contextualized to the dynamics of CBGAs of the border. The strategy was mobilized through the “Follow-up and Monitoring Unit for Circuit Boys, Girls and Adolescents” located at the shelter that welcomed CBGAs. In 2017, the arrival of the new administration led to personnel changes. Today, despite the fact that the shelter is still operating, it is unknown if it continues to abide by the original strategy and there are in fact questions concerning the program’s implementation by the new staff emerging from claims of negligence and lack of safety measures.

In late 2016, DHIA (Derechos Humanos Integrales en Acción, A.C.) and the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) began to hold conversations on the development of a research proposal that grounded on a human rights perspective, could address the specific dynamics of CBGAs. From January to June 2017, two senior college students from the Department of Social Work at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez completed an internship through DHIA that involved establishing focus groups with CBGAs. An invitation was made at

that time to the former coordinators of the Follow-Up and Monitoring Unit to join the team’s efforts. Together the team developed two proposals to conduct a preliminary study on the data pertaining to the facilitation of smuggling along the El Paso-Juárez corridor, and which primarily focused on the experiences of CBGAs.

The financial awards allowed the team to begin data collection activities starting in April of 2017. Our team has been collecting data on CBGAs in support of funding applications that might allow for the implementation of a larger initiative for a community-based and informed strategy to address the challenges faced by border youth, specifically those involved in the facilitation of human smuggling and drug trafficking. Our long time goal is to develop and implement a project to promote new dynamics to the inside of the CBGAs’ families and which may eventually reduce their incidence in activities where their health, safety and future are constantly comprised.

### **What are CBGAs’ challenges?**

- The lack of recognition of the phenomenon by municipal, state and federal authorities.
- The reluctance of academics to carry out empirical, community grounded work among groups considered “high risk.”
- The scant protection mechanisms for CBGAs and their families.
- The unavailability of human-rights based social policy for border population and for border children and youth in particular.
- The lack of a specialized attention protocol addressing intervention, protection and administration of justice for migrant boys, girls and adolescents, including CBGAs.

## **Limitations**

- Lack of knowledge and interest from the parties responsible to this issue, namely authorities, educational institutions, NGOs and civil society.
- The lack of interest in attending the specific needs of CBGAs by institutions and organizations.
- The stigma surrounding children and youth involved in criminal activity.
- Lack of funding.

## **Policy Recommendations:**

- The immediate development and inclusion of protocols for the attention of CBGAs given the specific risk levels they face as victims of structural violence.
- The full restoration of rights as an a-priori route to efficiently attend the needs of CBGAs in Juárez, along the US Mexico border and those who may still be in US custody or facing protection and/or repatriation processes.
- Create awareness of the dynamics of CBGAs in academic circles so that empirically-based scholarship that can inform public policy can be created.
- That criminal investigations into the recruitment and overall treatment of circuit population by adult smuggling facilitators and drug traffickers are conducted in a fashion that provides protection to the children, youth and their families.

### **About the Authors:**

*Derechos Humanos Integrales en Acción, A.C. (DHIA) is a Juárez-based, civil society organization that promotes and defends the human rights of migrants and LGBT+ community under the principle of equality and non-discrimination. DHIA is part of multiple networks at the local, regional and national level, including the Network for the Rights of Childhood in Ciudad Juárez, the Binational Protection and Incidence Program and the Working Group on Migration Policy, where it supports a Project on migrant youth and children.*



### **Contacts:**

*Blanca Navarrete, M.A. is DHIA's director. [b.navarrete@pdib.org](mailto:b.navarrete@pdib.org)*

*Fernando Loera, M.A.. DHIA's consultant and former director of the Shelter for Migrant and Repatriated youth "Mexico mi Hogar" in Ciudad Juárez. [fdoloera@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:fdoloera@yahoo.com.mx)*

*Carlos Zavala, M.A. DHIA's consultant and former coordinator of the Follow-up and Monitoring Unit. [zavala-carlos@outlook.com](mailto:zavala-carlos@outlook.com)*

*Gabriella E. Sanchez: Fellow, European University Institute. Former Assistant Professor at the University of Texas, El Paso. [gabriella.sanchez@eui.eu](mailto:gabriella.sanchez@eui.eu)*

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