

## **Mamadou Seck**

### Memo: Causes of South American Children's immigration to the North

Poverty hits almost all South American countries. The number of people living in highest poverty in Latin America has drastically shot up in the latest year. Poverty is closely linked to inequality, and Guatemala has one of the highest levels of inequality and poverty in the world. 54% of the population live in conditions of poverty, and 13% in conditions of extreme poverty. The decline in social and economic inequality is registered in many Latin American countries. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) stated that « the proportion of people in extreme poverty, which is characterized by lack of access to basic human necessities like food and shelter, rose to 10.2 percent of the population in 2017, or 62 million of people, from 9.9 percent in 2016 » . This is due to the failure of the economic and employability policies of most of Latin American countries.

Most of young immigrants who attempt to reach North America are abandoned by their parents because they can't ensure their education and their feeding. The absence or failure of social policies aimed at guaranteeing social rights, such as employment opportunities, deepen root causes of migration of both children and families, as well as parents who migrate and leave their children behind. According to the World Bank the revenue per day of a middle class family of Latin Americans live on \$10, the upper class \$50 per day and the majority poor class less than \$2 per day. The economic deterioration spreads over in Latin America this previous year. In the context of widespread of economic difficulties in Latin American countries, Thirty percent of the Salvadoran population live in conditions of poverty. According to data provided by the ECLAC, by the end of 2007, 184 million people were living in poverty, out of which 67 million lived in indigence. Even when the poverty rates in the region show a sustained decline since 2003, the absolute number of citizens under the poverty line is still higher than 1980 and the percentage rates show a poor improvement, going from 40.5% in 1980 reduced to 34.6% in 2007 (eclac, 2008).

Education is among the biggest challenge in Latin America. Most of the countries in South America are facing of a problem of education. In Honduras six thousand children and adolescents live on the streets without any access to services; many of them have taken to the streets to escape violence at home. Whether homeless or not, lack of access to education, food, health care, job opportunities, and protection from discrimination, compels many Honduran children and adolescents to migrate in order to survive. Like most countries in the third world, there is not a sustainable educational system and a remarkable inequality in education in South America.

The higher level of violence in South American countries is among the factors that push Latin American children attempting to migrate to the North. In most Latin American countries the level of violence is far higher than in Europe, the United States, and Canada. Over the last several years the 'Northern Triangle' countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have suffered high levels of violence associated with organized criminals. Violent crime perpetrated by *mara* street gangs, Central American drug transporters, and Mexican drug cartels has been linked to a wave of forced displacement in this region (CANTOR 2014). During the same period the United States has apprehended a wave of unaccompanied children emigrating from the same countries without authorization. This wave has been very large; for example, the number of apprehensions of 17 year-old from the Northern Triangle during

2011–2016 is 8% of the total number of 17 year-olds who were initially living in those countries.

Efforts to manage those children's arrival in the United States, and to prevent future unaccompanied children migration, depend critically on understanding the links between violence in their origin countries and the decision to migrate. But little quantitative evidence exists, for these Central American children or for any other international migrants that could empirically measure and causally identify the connection between origin-country violence and migration.

As a matter of facts, Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico are facing the same issues of violence. Sixty-five percent of the 200 Honduran children and adolescents interviewed for the study of UNESCO in Latin America in 2014 indicated that violence was the main reason they decided to migrate. Honduran children and adolescents suffer multiple forms of violence perpetrated by numerous different actors in society. They frequently witness violence and murder. Honduras had the world's highest murder rate for a non-war zone in 2013 with 79 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. In 2013, murder claimed the lives of 187 out of every 100,000 residents in San Pedro Sula, the murder capital of the world. Children and adolescents primarily flee two types of violence: violence perpetrated by organized criminal syndicates and violence experienced in the home. Gangs and other organized criminal syndicates threaten, stalk, beat, rape, dismember, and murder Honduran children and adolescents with impunity and threaten to harm their families. Rampant interfamilial violence, including child abuse and incest, as well as widespread gender-based violence, drive many Honduran children and adolescents to run for their lives, and help explain the increase in the number of girls migrating alone. Between 2005 and 2012 there was a massive (246%) increase in the number of femicides or feminicide (both terms are used to define gender motivated killings of women) of Honduran women and girls, many of whose bodies showed signs of sexual abuse or mutilation. In addition, 9,881 Hondurans under the age of 23 have been murdered since 1998; 767 of them were killed between January 28 and October 31, 2014 alone. This violence occurs in a context in which extrajudicial killings of children and adolescents have become commonplace and children's lives have little value.