



Public Funding for Migrant Children in Mexico: Subsidies for Local DIF Systems

Since 2021, the Mexican government has annually allocated public resources to the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (National DIF System) for children on the move who arrive in Mexico unaccompanied or with their families, or adult caregivers. These resources are intended to provide dignified, safe, and appropriate care and reception spaces, where their well-being and best interests are the primary consideration.

Public investment for the benefit of this population stems partly from state government budgets and, largely, from National DIF System subsidies. Subsequently, this entity sets out these funds to state and municipal DIF systems through calls for proposals, project selection, and coordination agreements. This framework strengthens local capacities to respond to the needs of migrant, asylum-seeking, and refugee children and adolescents.

KIND monitors these public resources and analyzes available information regarding the subsidies that the National DIF System distributes to state and municipal systems for this population. By doing this, we intend to identify progress, challenges, and opportunities to improve public policies aimed at guaranteeing the rights of children on the move within Mexico.

¿What budget does the DIF allocate to the protection and social assistance of children?

The DIF System, at the federal, state, and municipal levels, plays a vital role in the comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents on the move. This responsibility rests primarily with the Offices of the Attorney for the Protection of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents (PPNNA), the Social Assistance Centers (CAS), and the Enabled Assistance Establishments (EAH), which are collectively responsible for ensuring care, protection, safe housing, and specialized guidance for migrant, asylum-seeking, or refugee children.

At the federal level, the budgetary program corresponding to these institutional activities is E034: Comprehensive Protection and Social Assistance Services. For 2026, this program has been granted a budget of 4.244 billion pesos, of which 2.295 billion pesos are designated as subsidies for local DIF systems. That is to say, 54 percent of the National DIF's protection and social assistance budget is set aside for state and municipal DIF systems to strengthen the operational capacity of the PPNNAs and the reception spaces (CAS and EAH) in charge of providing essential services and management for vulnerable youth, including migrant children.

The importance of public funding for local CAS in the case of Tapachula, Chiapas

To understand the value and the crucial importance of public funding in the states and municipalities, it is worth looking at specific locations such as Tapachula, Chiapas, a medium-sized city near the border with Guatemala, where a large part of the population on the move enters seeking protection in Mexico due to situations of violence or other human rights violations in their countries of origin. Here, authorities, international agencies, and organizations such as KIND, through a team specialized in legal and psychosocial care, work to counteract the adverse effects of irregular migration and support access to rights and well-being for unaccompanied children, or those separated from their parents but accompanied by other relatives or adult caregivers who habitually look after them.

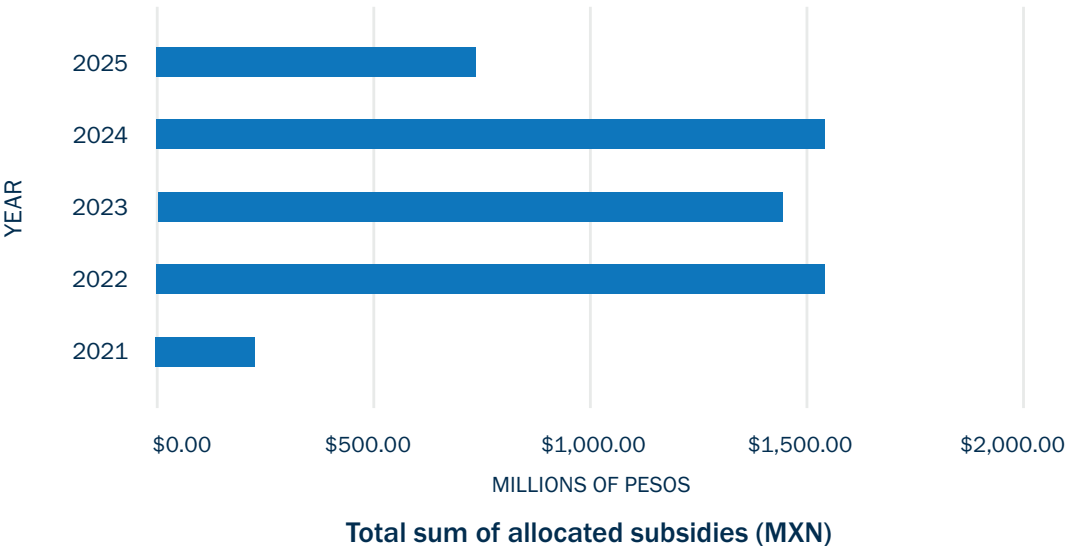
In Tapachula, there are three shelters that are operated by the state and municipal DIF. The shelters are essential because they serve as a safe and temporary residential reception site, providing care, attention, and community activities for migrant children, while their best interest is determined on a case-by-case basis and progress is made in the comprehensive restitution of their rights. The operation of these centers depends largely on federal subsidies from the National DIF. Each year, state and municipal DIF systems, such as those in Chiapas, submit projects that require financing. The subsidies allow them to have specialized personnel and multidisciplinary teams, as well as the material conditions and supplies necessary to maintain their operation.

While the National DIF subsidies are not solely for children on the move, for most of the country’s states and municipalities with the presence of migrant children, the federal funds are indispensable for the survival of shelters and the essential social assistance services provided to these children, whether alone or accompanied by their families.

What do we know from the agreements and approved projects?

In 2021, with the publication of the “Agreement authorizing the habilitation of housing spaces for alternative care and/or residential reception of girls, boys, and adolescents in the context of migration,” the detention of migrant children in the immigration detention centers of the National Institute of Migration was brought to an end. Since then, KIND’s monitoring of agreements celebrated between the National DIF System and local DIF systems, published in the Official Gazette of the Federation, shows that between 2021 and 2025, nearly 5.5 billion pesos were transferred for the care and shelter of children on the move. It is worth mentioning that, last year, other groups of the “population subject to social assistance” served by the DIF system, such as older persons or persons with disabilities, have also been included.

Subsidies allocated through DIF agreements



The subsidy amounts budgeted in the Federal Expenditure Budget (PEF) do not always coincide with the total subsidies granted, as projects must first be submitted and approved. In total, between 2021 and 2025, 354 agreements were published, accumulating 5.492 billion pesos, with an average amount granted per project of 15 million pesos. There is a notable and considerable decrease in the total amount granted in 2025 compared to the three previous years. Regarding the average amount per project in 2025, it was lower, at 9.7 million pesos.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Subsidy amounts budgeted in the PEF		\$1,400,027,695	\$1,478,379,671	\$2,152,385,045	\$2,235,251,869
Total sum of allocated subsidies according to the published agreements	\$251,278,802	\$1,532,840,806	\$1,439,652,710	\$1,548,105,440.90	\$720,016,509.98
Number of entered agreements	19	71	94	96	74

How can we keep making progress for children and adolescents on the move?

Undoubtedly, it has been of vital importance that local DIF systems receive subsidies from the National DIF System to bolster care in dignified reception spaces for migrant children and to facilitate the proper management of their cases by the PPNNAs offices.

Nonetheless, it is fundamental to maintain the progress achieved and to assertively prepare a long-term strategy that can guarantee that this system of care and protection does not deteriorate, disappear, or is not abandoned due to political changes or circumstances that may make it seem unnecessary while there are migrant children who need the system to ensure their well-being, care, and the protection of their rights.

It is also necessary to recognize the current lack of transparency regarding the proper expenditure on the granted subsidies. Examples of this include the lack of publicly available information on the operating rules of the subsidies, as well as the calls for proposals, which are not made public, making it difficult to evaluate the design and effectiveness of the underlying policy and generating uncertainty and instability regarding the long-term sustainability of these spaces.

Therefore, it will be extremely important to access the details of each of the previous, current, and future projects via the agreements to assess the efficiency of the spending and the impact in terms of protection (the intended result of the public policy). It is important to mention that a center such as Casa Patos in San Raymundo Jalpan, Oaxaca, where at the end of February two Haitian girls passed away under circumstances that remain unclear, may also have been among the beneficiaries of subsidies, and the lack of information, not only regarding the events but also the general conditions of the shelter, is disconcerting.

Conclusion

KIND has made recommendations for the institutional strengthening of public policy on the care and protection of children on the move in Mexico, with three key components: 1) sufficient budgetary allocation, 2) a timely and public information system, and 3) evaluation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. The current context of decreasing migratory flows, at least temporarily as a consequence of restrictive United States policies, has resulted in a lower demand for residential shelter spaces and care for migrant children. This provides the Mexican government with a unique opportunity to review its models and implement the necessary improvements to move forward in this regard.

Reference materials

- [Priorities for children and adolescents on the move in Mexico: 2025-2030](#) / Published in 2025.
- [Analysis of the implications of the 2026 Federal Expenditure Budget proposal on the human rights of people on the move](#) / Published in 2025 by the Migration Policy Working Group, Institute for Women in Migration, and KIND.
- [Statement calling for solidarity with the Haitian family and community regarding events at Casa Patos in Oaxaca](#) / Published February 27, 2026.