



Photo: GFC

# AMERICAS REGIONAL STRATEGY

## 2022–2024

### I. What do the Americas mean to us?

*Land of colors, fabrics, flavors. Of idyllic beaches, mysterious deserts, and majestic volcanoes. Where the smell of coffee and wet soil awakens the senses every morning. Land of living memory inspired by the struggles of our ancestors.*

The American continent is a vast, rich, and diverse territory. According to [Casa de América](#), the region currently has more than 55 million Indigenous people and more than 37 million Afro-descent young people, and upwards of 420 different languages are spoken there. As reported by the [United Nations Environment Program](#) (UNEP), about 60% of the world's terrestrial life and various marine species can be found in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Despite this enormous wealth, the region is full of disparities, many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. While acknowledging significant progress, Latin America is still considered the most unequal region on the planet. According to [ECLAC](#), more than a third of Latin Americans are poor, and one in four children grows up in extreme poverty. The pandemic left more than 114 million children and adolescents without access to education ([UNICEF, 2022](#)). In addition, [14 of the 25 countries with the highest number of femicides in the world](#) are in the Americas.

*The Latin America and the Caribbean region is at once a scar and a wound that does not heal. This hurts and angers us.*

The expansion of organized crime and corruption; the rise of new extreme right-wing movements; the criminalization of social protest; forced displacement; and sexual and gender-based violence are just some of the problems that the region faces. All of these have particularly detrimental effects on children and youth, who encounter numerous obstacles in accessing basic education and health services and are continually blocked from participation in decision-making spaces. Very often, youth organizations and movements are forced to navigate systems made for adults that hinder their ability to access the international support and funding that could amplify the impact of their work.

And yet, hope persists. At GFC, we are enthusiastic witnesses to the power of social movements, primarily led by young people. Using art, play, and creativity, these young leaders fight every day against marginalization and for racial and gender justice, youth leadership, care as a political compass, access to quality education, and the defense of migrant communities.

Thanks to the efforts of many people and grassroots organizations, the region continues to defend its right to resist joyfully.

*With dances, with joy, with courage and emotion, our partners defend every day their right to dream. To imagine other possible worlds. To build worthy communities of support, care, and love.*

At GFC, we reaffirm our commitment to continue learning from this region and from the incredible work of our partners. We are willing to listen and learn, to walk together. We will continue to strive to build sustainable trust-based relationships based on the promotion of community wellbeing and shared responsibility. Our primary objective is to place children, youth, and communities at the heart of everything we do, harnessing their power and wisdom to change the world.

*This is our dream.*

## 2. Our Approach

In addition to honoring GFC's core values of trust, creativity, honoring local knowledge, and responsible flexibility, the regional strategy for the Americas is based on four fundamental pillars:

- **The right to play and have fun.** GFC never sees play as an activity reserved solely for children. Play is never a waste of time. Play lets us test, experiment, rebel, and transform; create new worlds; try other possibilities; and find new ways to be together and take care of each other.

At GFC, we defend everyone's right to happiness, and we value the importance of working together to build new collective knowledge. We will continue to enable spaces to play and think collectively. Using tools from the pedagogy of play and popular education, we are committed to building wellbeing spaces that allow partners to look inward, critically reflect on their work, and think of ways to improve their impact.

- **Care at the center.** For GFC, care is a political statement. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us to understand care as a series of practices aimed at protection and safety and, at the same time, as an essential component of an organizational culture that proactively promotes the wellbeing and dignity of all people.

Care is holistic. Caring begins in our bodies. Care is both personal and collective. It is a healing practice that allows us to recognize ourselves in others. It is an exercise that recovers and rebuilds emotions that drive social change.



Photo: GFC / Alejandro de Leon

At GFC, we will continue working to translate care into an everyday practice that questions and transforms harmful power dynamics that seriously affect the people, communities, and organizations we support.

- **Youth participation and co-creation.** GFC recognizes the profound and significant contributions of youth-led organizations and movements in the region, as well as the many difficulties they face in finding support and sustaining their work. We believe that the mere presence of youth leaders or youth-led organizations is not enough. Furthermore, we know that youth movements are often used to legitimize extremely harmful adult-centered, hierarchical practices.

Youth are the future, yes, but they are also a creative force today. They have the right to define the narrative: to call out, intervene, and rewrite their own stories. The young people of the Americas are protagonists of change, and their voices deserve to be heard by everyone, from their homes to their communities and the public square. Their lives and contributions matter, and they deserve to be named.

At GFC, we will continue to support the creation of intergenerational spaces where youth can share experiences and

propose strategies as equal co-creators and co-leaders. Spaces where we all learn, and we all teach. At the same time, we will continue to provide technical and financial support aimed at strengthening the advocacy, mobilization, interconnection, and self-management capacities of youth-led organizations.

**- Weaving diverse networks to support communities.** Our approach is eminently intersectional. We seek not only to recognize diversity but to revel in it. We want to hear the voices of rural, marginalized, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, LGBTQ+, and migrant youth, movements, and organizations. We seek to listen for, encourage, and amplify the stories and collective memory that have been continuously silenced, and to weave bridges of understanding and new collaborative narratives. We want to promote diverse networks of support and care and to co-create organic and horizontal spaces where all share their knowledge, words, emotions, thoughts, and actions. Where all can feel seen, heard, and valued. Our initiatives seek to contribute to a wellbeing that lifts up all facets of our individual and collective identities. We know that together, with diversity, we can do more.

### 3. Thematic Areas

As the GFC Americas team, we want to focus our efforts, passions, and energies on the following thematic areas, all interconnected and all contributing to dignifying the lives of children and youth in the region:

#### **- Gender Justice and Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

Violence and sexual and gender inequalities are a sad reality in the region. Latin America has the [second-highest teen pregnancy rate](#) in the world. In the last six years, more than [3,900 people have been murdered because of their sexual orientation](#). The COVID-19 pandemic [exponentially increased the rates of domestic violence and sexual abuse](#) in practically all Latin American countries.

At GFC, we have adopted a gender-transformative approach that seeks to foster critical analysis of gender inequalities, roles, and dynamics; promote change in individual and collective attitudes and behaviors; and contribute to the construction of new policies, practices, and norms that stimulate profound structural changes toward gender equity.

Understanding gender as a relational system that normalizes multiple forms of oppression, we seek to support comprehensive strategies to strengthen the leadership and wellbeing of girls and adolescents, promote healthy masculinities, open new spaces for comprehensive sexuality education, and amplify the voices of the LGBTQ+ community.

#### **- Promoting Leadership and Wellbeing of Youth-Led Movements**

We recognize that children and youth are experts in their own realities. And we know that, every day, they actively promote the wellbeing of their families and communities. Children and youth are a creative and transforming energy, a disruptive force that challenges us to be better and to build new forms of resistance and community.

They are also placed in some of the most precarious positions by the problems that plague the region. [Poverty affects almost a third of the young population, and almost 50% of rural children and youth live in conditions of](#)

[marginalization. A third of young people do not attend school.](#) And when young people speak up, youth movements are often criminalized, while the youth involved face constant risks to their lives and safety.

Through [the Spark Fund](#), and in alliance with regional actors such as the SIF CAMY Fund and the Fight Inequality Alliance, we have enabled learning and collaboration spaces in which youth activists oversee the design of proposals to strengthen youth activism, select youth-led organizations to receive support, and implement training and support strategies to protect the integrity of young people. Throughout these processes, GFC seeks to recognize youth in all their diversity, including the voices of commonly excluded groups such as Indigenous and Afro-descendant youth.

While acknowledging the challenges of supporting nascent and historically marginalized youth organizations, we will continue learning to build long-term, trust-based relationships; question our own adult-centric practices; and mainstream care and wellbeing – all while listening to young leaders at every stage of the journey.

### **- Quality Education and Early Development**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, [more than 165 million students](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean were abruptly cut off from education, first by school closures and then by the digital divide as virtual learning took hold. By the end of 2021, schools in the region had been [closed for an average of 237 days](#), more than anywhere else in the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only has forced us to recognize the need to guarantee the right of access to formal education but also has renewed our commitment to fighting for inclusive, diversified quality education that allows children and youth to reach their potential in all dimensions of human life. It is essential that children can access comprehensive, high-quality education from an increasingly early age.

At GFC, we seek to support organizations and initiatives that are committed to promoting comprehensive education strategies in which children and youth are recognized as active participants in the educational process. We seek to cultivate a sharing economy of pedagogical practices that respond to the specific challenges found in each context; that respect and build upon diverse cultures; that are linked to the care of the earth and nature; that use art and games as tools of connection and expression; and that empower children and youth to defend their rights and contribute to the construction of the world they want to live in.

### **- Children and Youth Experiencing Migration and Displacement**

According to UNICEF (2021), an estimated [3.5 million children](#) and adolescents are affected by migration and forced displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean. A large percentage suffer abuse and violations of their most basic rights, both in transit and on arrival in their destination. For adolescent migrant girls, sexual and gender-based violence is a daily risk. [Six out of 10 women, mostly young, suffer some type of sexual abuse while migrating through Mexico.](#)

## 4. Priority Countries

GFC recognizes the importance of continuing to support community and grassroots organizations in **Mexico** and **Central America**. We know that, despite the multiple economic, social, and cultural connections present in this migratory corridor, there are still numerous obstacles to mobility, access to basic services, and the exercise of rights by children and youth. While continuing to support civil society in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, GFC hopes to expand its presence into El Salvador in the coming years.

Acknowledging the cultural and territorial diversity of the Americas, as well as the economic, political, environmental, and social relevance of South America, GFC has been able to expand its presence to **Peru**, **Colombia**, and **Brazil**, thanks to the support of new allies. These three countries have a vast and politically active Indigenous and Afro-descendant population that is still exposed to racism, violence, and lack of opportunities every day. In the coming years, GFC hopes to identify new collaboration opportunities in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina, where youth organizations and the feminist movement have achieved important victories and have learned lessons that would be valuable to share with other organizations and movements in the region.

Currently, we have a vibrant, committed, and multicultural team – 75% of the team is originally from and based in American countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, and the US – that will facilitate the hands-on co-creation with our partners of new regional initiatives focused on advocacy, youth leadership, and the promotion of community wellbeing.

*Global Fund for Children (GFC) partners to build a world where all children and youth enjoy equal resources and opportunities in society and live free from violence, discrimination, and exploitation. To that end, GFC invests in innovative local organizations, helping them deepen their impact and build their capacity for social change. Together, GFC and its partners advance the rights of children and youth facing poverty and injustice and equip them with the tools and skills to reach their full potential. Since 1997, Global Fund for Children has invested \$56 million in more than 1,000 organizations, reaching more than 11 million children and youth worldwide.*

[www.globalfundforchildren.org](http://www.globalfundforchildren.org)

