

Caring for Unaccompanied Children

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

IS THERE REALLY A CRISIS AT THE UNITED STATES—MEXICO BORDER?

Between October 2018 and March 2019, a total of 361,087 people had been apprehended at the United States—Mexico border. Of those, 189,584 are families who have been apprehended together, while 35,898 are children who were traveling without parents or caregivers—commonly known as unaccompanied children.

Prior to FY 2011, more than 90 percent of people who came to the border were single adult males. This demographic has since shifted to families and unaccompanied children, primarily from the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. In just the first six months of FY 2019, more than 60 percent of those apprehended at the southern border were unaccompanied children and families.

WHY ARE FAMILIES FROM CENTRAL AMERICA COMING TO THE UNITED STATES?

People in these countries are facing unparalleled levels of violence, with El Salvador and Honduras among the top five most violent countries in the world.¹ Families and children throughout the Northern Triangle are threatened by gangs and other armed criminal groups. Children are especially vulnerable to these threats as local gangs try to forcibly recruit and extort them and their families. As of February 2018, 202,032 children in Honduras were orphans, 40 percent of which were orphans due to violence.² The local violence also exacerbates the lack of economic and educational opportunities for children. In addition to the violence and danger families and children face in their country of origin, many encounter more violence, sexual abuse, and further extortion en route to seek asylum in the United States.

WHY IS BETHANY INVOLVED IN THE CARE OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN?

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2008 (TVPRA) established legal processes that were designed to protect unaccompanied children who are vulnerable to trafficking coming to or within the United States. Under the TVPRA, an unaccompanied child from countries beside Canada and Mexico is screened by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and then transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within 72 hours. ORR places children with an agency, like Bethany Christian Services, to provide care for the children instead of deporting the children or holding them in a detention facility. Oftentimes, it is not safe to quickly return unaccompanied children to their home countries.



Bethany provides small-group care and transitional foster care for children who are seeking refuge in the United States without their families. The goal of these programs is to ensure that children who have fled for their lives are cared for, kept safe, and quickly and safely reunified with their families. Essential services are provided to the children in our care, such as a safe, temporary foster home, education, medical care, case management, mental health services, legal screening, and post-release services.