The Vulnerability of Unaccompanied Minors

Why Are They Coming?

Initially, the majority of children making the dangerous journey to the United States were boys. However, an increase in gender-based violence in Central America has forced a growing number of girls to travel north.

The growth in children on the move...is a result of “push factors” forcing them from their communities. These children have endured such extreme violence in their cities, neighborhoods, and homes that they have no choice but to flee.

Voices of Unaccompanied Minors

Carlos:
In El Salvador, there is a wrong—it’s being young. You’re stalked by gangs, authorities beat and follow kids because they don’t trust them; they think they’re gang members. There are no jobs for young people because employers don’t trust the kids either...It is better to be old.

Maritza:
I am here because the gang threatened me. One of them “liked” me. Another gang member told my uncle that he should get me out of there because the guy who liked me was going to do me harm. In El Salvador they take young girls, rape them and throw them in plastic bags. My uncle told me it wasn’t safe for me to stay there.

Alfonso:
The problem was that where I studied there were lots of gang members. They had killed the two police officers who protected our school. They waited for me outside the school. The gang told me that if I returned to school, I wouldn’t make it home alive. I knew someone whom the gangs threatened this way... They killed him in the park. He was wearing his school uniform.

Number of Unaccompanied Minors Arriving at the Southern US Border

The number of unaccompanied minors arriving at the southern U.S. border remained steady for several years but has taken a dramatic leap in 2014.

-Adapted from Women’s Refugee Commission

-Adapted from Forced from Home: The Lost Boys and Girls of Central America/Women’s Refugee Commission

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SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF ORANGE
Vulnerability of Unaccompanied Minors

What happens when they are here?

- Child is apprehended by Customs and Border Patrol
- Immigration processing begun
- Meals provided
- Initial Health screening conducted
- Child may be transferred to short term multi-federal agency center
- Full medical check conducted by HHS; Immunizations given
- Emergency Shelter assignment
- ICE/Coast Guard transfer child to Emergency Shelter (Ideally within 72 hours)
- Child is provided adequate supervision, continued medical care, counseling services, and family reunification services
- Family reunification is either in the US or country of origin
- Child can be sponsored to remain in the US pending outcome of immigration process

- Adapted from Catholic Charities USA

Opportunities to Help

Protect children through legislation

Unaccompanied children fleeing violence should not be returned to unsafe situations, but must be protected and cared for humanely.

- Tell Congress to protect unaccompanied children: http://bit.ly/1I14sGF
- Urge Congress to reject rollbacks to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Call 1-866-940-2439 to be connected with the offices of your legislators

Take Action


Donate

Annunciation House
815 Myrtle Ave, El Paso TX 79901

Supplies needed: Monetary donations

Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona
140 W. Speedway Blvd Suite 230, Tucson AZ 85705

Supplies needed: travel blankets, toiletries, hand wipes, and blue jeans, sweatpants, and sweaters for children & women.


For more information visit:

Myths and Facts on Central American Migration Surge: http://bit.ly/1IS6WGV

Facts on Unsafe Deportations: http://bit.ly/1rOPFq5


Unaccompanied Children – Advocacy Resources: http://bit.ly/1qI88CP

LCWR Statement on Unaccompanied Children: http://bit.ly/1sVnAv4

America’s child migrant crisis (2 minute video): http://bit.ly/1zGDi1B

Catholic Social Teaching and the Issue of Unaccompanied Minors

The Catholic Church’s work in assisting unaccompanied migrant children stems from the belief that every person is created in God’s image. In the New Testament, the image of the migrant is grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In his own life and work, Jesus identified himself with newcomers and with other marginalized persons in a special way: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Mt. 25:35). Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher without a home of his own, and was a child migrant fleeing to Egypt to avoid violence, persecution, and death. (Mt. 2:15)

- Adapted from Bishop Mark Seitz’s, Bishop of the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, Statement before Congressional Committee on immigration of unaccompanied children, June 25, 2014