

Crisis at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Save the Children Responding to Help Migrant Children and Families

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“Children and their families are fleeing unspeakable violence in their home countries and face a long and dangerous journey to the U.S. border, with the hope of a better life. Last year, I met a 13-year-old boy in El Salvador who recounted the story of how his best friend, beaten by a gang because he refused to join, died in his arms. After sharing that heart-wrenching story, he told me his fear: ‘I don’t think I’ll ever grow to be an adult in my country.’ No child should live with this kind of fear, with so little hope for the future.”
--Carolyn Miles, President & CEO of Save the Children

The Emergency

Save the Children is bringing its decades of humanitarian expertise to help vulnerable children in the U.S. and Central America in response to recent policy changes at the U.S. border that are placing children and families at grave risk.

For years, a complex crisis of violence and poverty has forced large numbers of families and unaccompanied children to flee from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala for safety and protection in the U.S. The journey is unthinkable dangerous and violent, and for many families, it is a desperate attempt to help keep their children safe.

In recent weeks, newly arriving families have been traumatically separated. Very young children and adolescents are being held in prison-like detention for extended periods with little to no attention paid to their emotional and physical well-being. Many families are being placed in indefinite detention. Each



A 12-year-old Salvadoran boy and his father embrace. The boy’s older brother was shot and killed by a gang in February while he helped his mother with work on their farm. The family has not returned to the farm since and faces the loss of income. *Photo: Tom Pilston/Save the Children*

of these detention experiences is known to cause trauma and risk to children and their families.

We have set a goal of \$2 million in immediate support to underpin three pillars of our response. Your generous contribution will be pooled with other resources for critical assistance to support those seeking entry into the U.S., improve conditions in their violence-plagued countries and ensure their voices and needs are heard nationally through our grassroots advocacy.

Our Response

Save the Children was at the border throughout 2014 and 2015 during a surge of unaccompanied children and families from Central America. We are now taking action to assist those affected by U.S. immigration policy in recent months, and to

strengthen our work to address the root causes of the migration.

We are focusing on three priority areas:

- *Partnership:* Save the Children is partnering with trusted organizations to strengthen their ability to provide migrant families with legal services, case management for immediate support and reunification support for children separated from their families.
- *Root causes:* In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, where we have worked for years, we are strengthening our ongoing programs to address the causes of migration and to support the reunification of children on the move who have been deported from the U.S., or whose families have been deported while they remain within the U.S. detention or foster care system.
- *Advocacy:* We are mobilizing our networks and raising our voice over the recent immigration policy changes and in support of children's safety and protection.

Partnering with Immigration Rights and Social Service Agencies

We are providing support to three agencies, two of which provide legal representation for unaccompanied children and families in U.S. detention. Our third partner operates a center in McAllen, TX that serves mothers and children after their release from U.S. Customs and Border Patrol custody. They are often in urgent need of food, shelter and emotional support before they travel to places in the U.S. where they have extended families. The center serves up to 200 mothers and children in transit a day, providing meals, comfort items, a place to stay and psychological and emotional support. This is the same center where we provided migrant mothers and children with care and comfort items and ran one of our child-friendly spaces in 2014-15.

We continue to identify other potential partners with whom we can provide funding or technical program assistance for the protection of vulnerable children and their families.

Addressing the Root Causes of Migration from Central America and Supporting Reunification

We seek to sustain and strengthen our ongoing work in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, where pervasive and often ruthless violence has families living in fear for their lives and safety.

Save the Children has a strong presence and longstanding child- and youth-focused programs in the countries of origin for the majority of migrating children, adolescents and families, and in Mexico, which is both a source and transit country. We have used our presence and expertise to launch humanitarian programs to protect children, address the needs of children returning from the U.S. and reduce violence.

We seek to prevent dangerous and forced migration through activities such as awareness campaigns on the risks and rights associated with migration and programs related to youth empowerment, jobs training and family livelihoods.

We also strengthen national protection systems to care for children and adolescents in their home communities, as well as during transit and return, including family reunification, so that they can access their rights to dignity, protection and security.

Recent examples of our work include:

- Pilot projects to interrupt the cycle of gang violence in El Salvador and to create "Schools of Peace" at 70 schools in Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.
- A collaboration among Save the Children, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation, the Secretary of Social Development and the German Cooperation Development group to prevent the migration of unaccompanied children from targeted communities by enhancing their livelihoods and life skills opportunities.

- Advocating for violence reduction at the community and government levels in Honduras and Guatemala.
- Preventing trafficking and smuggling of women and youth at risk or victims of human trafficking in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.
- Improving protection systems for children who have been displaced and/or returned to El Salvador and Honduras after migration.
- Providing sexual and reproductive health services to returning adolescents in El Salvador and Guatemala.
- Working to ensure that children in border shelters in Mexico are being protected from harm and have access to psychological and emotional support activities.

Our Grassroots Advocacy Giving Migrants a Voice

Save the Children and the Save the Children Action Network (SCAN) are mobilizing our supporters and advocates to speak out against policies that harm children and in favour of policies that promote their best interests.

- To date, SCAN has generated nearly 65,000 messages to Congress, advocating for policies that protect migrant children. More than 32,500 people have signed a petition to President Trump and his administration underscoring zero tolerance for policies and legislation that do not put children's interests first.
- On June 30, Save the Children and SCAN staff and volunteers participated in 17 *Families Belong Together* rallies from places as diverse as Los Angeles, CA and Washington, D.C. to Hot Springs, AR and Manchester, NH.

While the policy of separating children from their families was changed by a recent presidential executive order, there is still much more to be done to prioritize the well-being of migrant children. We will use additional funding to:

- Urge the administration to quickly and safely reunite the more than 2,000 children separated

from their parents in the last month. Every moment that a child remains separated from his or her parent is a moment too long.

- Continue to send a clear message that indefinite family detention is not an acceptable alternative to separation. Keeping children in adult detention centers put them at risk for many adverse circumstances.
- Continue to urge Congress to uphold and strengthen procedural protections currently in place to ensure that immigration policies are not enforced in ways that are harmful to children. In addition, we will oppose any proposal to expand funding for additional detention centers designated for the indefinite detention of children – whether separated or together with their families.

Why Save the Children?

Save the Children is the national leader in child-focused disaster preparedness, response and recovery. We have over 80 years' experience serving the needs of U.S. children and have well-trained national staff ready to deploy anywhere at a moment's notice to assess needs, help protect children and provide critical relief. We are a partner of the Red Cross and a member of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters.

We are well positioned for this response, having worked directly and with partners in Texas to serve migrant children and families during the 2014-15 border crisis.

Save the Children is also one of the few organizations in Central America with longstanding programs primarily focused on children and adolescents in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico. Each year, we reach 2.8 million children in these countries with protection, health and education programs.

Ten percent of your generous gift goes to helping our emergency teams prepare for and provide critical assistance when and where children need us the most.