

Crisis at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Save the Children Aiding Migrant Children and Families, Addressing Migration's Root Causes in Central America July 30, 2018

“We are taking urgent action to assist children and families who are in the middle of this heart-wrenching crisis. This is a man-made disaster, but together, we can help these vulnerable children.”
--Carolyn Miles, President & CEO of Save the Children

The Emergency

Over the past 18 months, the U.S. government has placed increasing restrictions on immigration, with children bearing a significant burden of the policy changes. In April 2018, the administration announced a new “zero tolerance” policy toward border crossings that instituted criminal proceedings for every adult caught crossing the border illegally. Under this policy, more than 2,300 children were forcibly separated from their parents or relatives. Additionally, there are many thousands of children who enter the U.S. unaccompanied, at grave risk of exploitation and harm.

While recent policy changes have worsened the impact of this crisis on children and families, life-threatening violence and poverty have for years driven children and families from Central America to seek safety and asylum in the U.S. For many families, the treacherous journey is a desperate attempt to keep their children safe.

The violence from which people are fleeing is pervasive. Honduras and El Salvador are among the top-10 countries worldwide for child homicides. It's estimated that with every hour, three more children die from a violent act in the Latin America and Caribbean region. In many communities, families live in constant fear for their lives.



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

The Impact of the Crisis on Children

Save the Children is gravely concerned for the safety and well-being of children and families that have been traumatically separated at the U.S.-Mexico border. Very young children and adolescents have been held alone without their parents in prison-like detention cells for extended periods, with little attention paid to their emotional and physical well-being.

Additionally, many families are being placed in indefinite detention. From our work in the U.S. and around the world, we understand the trauma and psychological impact that separation and indefinite detention has on children and families. With no clear process for parents who have been detained or deported to follow to track their children or find out how they will be reunited, their desperation is magnified.

Save the Children's Response

Save the Children has decades of experience supporting children in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico with protection, health and education programs, with a particular focus on providing services for returning child migrants. Our work also has supported the development of government protocols and standards at every point of the reunification process, including identification at transit points, supporting children in transit centers, accompanying children as they reunite with families, identifying alternative care arrangements for children and ensuring that children and families are linked to support services.

Our response to the current family separation includes the following critical work:

Raising our Voice to Protect Children

We are mobilizing our supporters and advocates to speak out against policies that harm children. To date, the Save the Children Action Network (SCAN) has generated nearly 100,000 messages to Congress and nearly 450 media pieces have been placed. Our advocacy team continues to press Congress and the administration on these and other actions:

- End family separation and take immediate steps to reunite families.
- Instead of indefinite family detention, opt for the use of proven alternatives to detention.
- Defend the right to due process for migrant children and families and uphold procedural protections.
- Ensure that migrant children receive treatment and care at the border that meets international standards by providing them with adequate protection, safe and humane care and sanitary conditions and essentials such as food, water, blankets, clothing and shelter; providing basic health and mental health support; and providing access to education and play materials.

Supporting Trusted Partners

We are providing direct assistance to migrant children and families at the U.S. border through financial and communications support to trusted partners assisting families with legal representation, case management and reunification. Partners include KIND, which provides legal representation to unaccompanied and separated children; the American Immigration Council, which provides legal representation for families locked in detention; and Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, which operates a humanitarian respite center in Texas.

Expanding Programming in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico

Save the Children is expanding current programs that address root causes of the crisis and support the reunification and reintegration of separated children and their families in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Our programs include life skills training for youth, efforts to strengthen government systems to improve child protection policies, conflict mitigation and peace building initiatives, psychosocial support programs, and positive parenting initiatives that strengthen the household while addressing gender and power dynamics that can lead to violence.

Reuniting Separated Children

We seek to ensure that children are reunited with their families as quickly and safely as possible through reunification programming in Central America and through partnerships with U.S. experts providing legal services.

Specifically, our technical expertise will be used to support the reunification of children with parents who have already been returned to their counties of origin.