

PROTECTING MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN IN EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, HONDURAS AND



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Two migrant families from Central America in front of the Rio Grande on the border between Mexico and the United States. They fled their place of origin due to extortion and violence. They await their asylum process in Mexico in the hope of going to the United States.

Page 1: © UNICEF/UN0217841/Bindra

The bus carrying children deported from Mexico arrives at the governmental reception shelter "Nuestras Raices" ("Our Roots", in English) in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala on May 3, 2018. All minors deported from Mexico are sent to this center by bus.

Page 3: © UNICEF/UN0271799/Kelly

Families from a migrant caravan making its way from Central America to the United States prepare to leave a tent city outside the stadium for Deportivo 'Benito Juarez' to 'El Barretal', a shuttered nightclub turned into another temporary shelter, Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico, 10 December 2019.

Page 4: © UNICEF/UN018755/Zehbrauskas

In mid-April 2016 in El Salvador, two boys supervised by a volunteer worker play with toys at the Centro de Atención al Migrante (Migrant Care Centre) in San Salvador, the capital, following their arrival by bus with other migrants deported from Mexico.

Page 5: © UNICEF/UN0278799/Bindra

Migrant families wait for fast-track humanitarian visas at the Mexico-Guatemala border in Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico, on January 31, 2019. The one-year visa allows migrants to stay in Mexico, work and access social services.

Page 6: © UNICEF/UN0294143/Bindra

Children participate in recreational activities funded by UNICEF-supported local municipalities and the Red Cross, that seek to educate children about the realities of migration in Villanueva, Honduras on March 12, 2019.

Page 7: © UNICEF/UNI285120/Amador

On 29 January 2019, scene from an encampment in Matamoros in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas.

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Regional Overview

In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico gangrelated violence, extortion and forced recruitment are daily realities which affect the lives of girls, boys and adolescents in their schools, their homes and their communities. These are amongst the countries with the highest levels of violence in the world. For many children this pervasive violence is compounded by poverty and limited access to quality education, social services and livelihood options, as well as the effects of climate change. These factors, along with a desire for family reunification, all influence the decision of children and their families to embark on dangerous journeys in search of safety and opportunity.

Migrant and refugee children are caught in a cycle which is tearing apart the social fabric of communities, and the number of migrant children and their families shows no signs of slowing any time soon.

The continuous and increasing flow of irregular migration and displacement of children and families from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico is generating immediate protection needs for thousands of boys, girls and adolescents, including approximately 76,000 unaccompanied children, and 473,000 family units, who were apprehended at the Southwest Border of the United States during Fiscal Year 2019¹. These children, those accompanied and unaccompanied, can become targets for trafficking, abuse and exploitation. Children returned to their countries of origin (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) often face community stigmatization, social exclusion, violence, internal displacement and extreme poverty.

At the same time, migrant children from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico are facing significantly reduced access to safety and international protection. This

1. United States Customs and Border Protection. Data from Fiscal Year 2019.

 UNICEF, 'Uprooted in Central America and Mexico: Migrant and refugee children face a vicious cycle of hardship and danger', Child Alert Series, New York Average Automatication of the series of the se is due in large part to the recent spate of agreements and policy changes adopted by governments in the region. Recent asylum cooperation agreements obligate many children moving through the region to seek protection in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and await asylum decisions in Mexico. As noted previously, organized crime and violence in many areas make parts of these countries unsafe for their own children, let alone for those arriving from other places.

In Mexico, the Migrant Protection Protocols have led to an increase in the number of migrant children stranded in border areas, such as Matamoros, Tijuana, Reynosa, and Ciudad Juarez, while they wait for their asylum cases to move through the U.S. court system – a process which can take months. In many of these areas, migrant children and their families face exploitation, violence and abuse and lack access to essential services.



Note: This map is stylized and it is not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.



Migration Crisis in Figures:



386,480 asylum-seekers and refugees worldwide from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.³



86% increase in asylum claims worldwide between Jan-Jul 2019 compared to 2018 figures.⁴



74 of the migrant population crossing into Mexico are migrants traveling with at least one child.⁵



Approximately **76,000 unaccompanied children**, and 473,000 family units, apprehended at the Southwest Border of the United States during Fiscal Year 2019.⁶



28% increase in the number of returnees to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras in 2019 compared to 2018 figures.⁷

3. Source: UNHCR North of Central America Update December 2019.

4. Ibid.

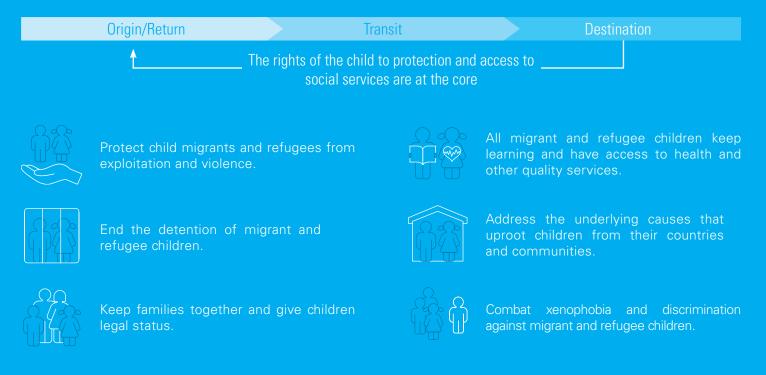
5. Source: Gov. of Mexico Migration Policy Unit, 2019.

6. Source: US Customs and Border Protection Authority, 2019.

7. Source: IOM NTMI Report Jan.-Dec. 2019.

Six Actions to Protect All Migrant and Refugee Children

In 2017, UNICEF adopted a Global Programme Framework on Children on the Move, on the Move, building on related international human rights standards, as well as existing UNICEF programming with the goal to: "Protect all migrant and refugee children". In this regard, UNICEF calls for six priority actions:



UNICEF in Action

UNICEF works through a multi-sectoral approach to contribute to the protection of migrant and refugee children and to help ensure that they have access to quality and specialized services adapted to their specific circumstances.

In countries of origin (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), UNICEF works with municipal governments and schools to reduce violence through the creation of safe spaces and alternative educational and vocational opportunities. UNICEF programmes provide targeted support to strengthen national and local child protection systems to prevent, detect and protect children affected by different forms of violence and to ensure that all children are engaged in learning. This includes supporting case management, providing psychosocial support, providing information to protect children who may migrate (such as locations of shelters, hotline numbers, etc.) and supporting programmes to raise awareness and engage communities around the risks of irregular migration and its impact on families, communities and children. In addition, UNICEF provides returned migrant children with specialized services and psychological support to address trauma and stigma; support their social and school reintegration, development of life plans; and ensure their protection as well as build their resilience through strengthening ties to their communities.

In countries of transit and destination, UNICEF programmes seek to provide alternative care models for migrant children;

ensure their access to services as well as their protection. This involves, for example, strengthening best interest determination procedures, consular protection protocols as well as the training of frontline child protection, migration and consular staff. To increase the accessibility and availability of effective alternatives to immigration detention for children and families, UNICEF has developed models of care (opendoor shelters, foster care and independent living). UNICEF is also working closely with migrant shelters and mental health providers to provide immediate humanitarian aid, psychosocial support to migrant and refugee children and to support national institutions and services providers to expand access to social programmes such as education and health for migrant and refugee children. This involves working with national education systems, developing pedagogical materials and providing training and awareness raising to address discrimination and stigma experienced by migrant and refugee children.

UNICEF is also on the ground addressing the humanitarian needs of migrant and refugee children in moments of acute need such as when large groups are moving together or when people are forced to remain in border areas for long periods of time without adequate access to services. In these contexts, UNICEF is installing sanitation facilities, providing hygiene kits and setting up child friendly spaces in which to provide psychosocial support to children and families as well as nonformal education. UNICEF is present to advocate for the best interest of children to be the foremost consideration in all decisions which affect them and to ensure their appropriate care and non-detention.





EL SALVADOR

2020 Funding Needs: US\$ 2 million

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

El Salvador is considered one of the most violent countries in the world outside an armed conflict situation⁸ and children make up approximately one third of the population of El Salvador with over 2 million girls, boys and adolescents⁹. Gang-related violence and gender-based violence, are among the key underlying causes reported by individuals choosing to leave El Salvador. In addition, other root causes reported include a desire for family reunification, lack of opportunities, and limited access to social services. These factors are identified as the leading root causes of child migration and displacement from El Salvador. When adolescents and families are returned to their communities of origin, they receive very limited support, and they are faced with the same violence and extorsion that forced them to migrate in the first place. In 2019, approximately 6,607 children returned to El Salvador from Mexico and the USA ¹⁰.

NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

- Humanitarian assistance to returnees, and shelter for those who cannot return to their communities;
- Psychosocial and legal support for children returnees and children who have been internally displaced;
- Access to social services for victims of violence, abuse and exploitation, including on gender-based violence;
- Strengthen municipal capacity to monitor, identify, and support cases of children with protection needs; integration of children in the school system and flexible modalities of education, and support for social reintegration through the development of life plans and life skills.

- Reclaiming of public spaces through their transformation and/or revitalization to create child-friendly spaces: to develop resilience and build self-esteem through inclusive recreational and cultural activities.
- Support programmes for the reintegration of returnees, displaced children, out of school children and victims of violence in municipalities: identification of vulnerable children through social workers, psychosocial support also through creative writing and reading, legal support, school reintegration bridges, and other related strategies that support reintegration into the school system and access to innovative educational opportunities.
- Linking migration and child protection information systems: to provide timely and targeted services for returning migrant children.
- Distributing information materials for children and families on risks, procedures, services and safety related issues associated with irregular migration; and distribution of immediate support kits for returning children and families.
- Provision of support and training on consular protection for children and families.

^{8.} El Salvador ranks 113th in the Global Peace Index 2019.

^{9.} Ministry of Economics: Multipurpose Household Survey, 2018.

^{10. 2019} figures from the General Directorate of Migration.



GUATEMALA

2020 Funding Needs: US\$ 1.5 million

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Guatemala is a country of origin as well as a country of destination for migrants and refugees. In addition, it is transit territory for people, including both regional and extracontinental, who are heading to Mexico and the United States searching for better opportunities and international protection. In 2019, more than 19,000 children and adolescents were returned from the United States and Mexico to Guatemala¹¹. This demonstrates the great dimension of human mobility in transit from Guatemala and also towards the country.

NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

- Sustainable and comprehensive reintegration of children and families that includes access to schools, health systems, alternative care options, psychosocial support for returned and reintegrated children;
- Access to information and legal assistance to migrants, detainees and returnees;
- Alternative care modalities for child migrants and their families;
- Consular protection;
- Identify and provide treatment for acute malnutrition in children under 5 and pregnant and breastfeeding women;
- Protection, humanitarian aid and access to basic services, such as water, sanitation and hygiene, health and education for children and families in transit;
- Monitoring of borders to identify cases of abuse or violation of rights against migrants.

- Creating municipal child protection systems: 40% of the 340 municipalities in Guatemala have already opened a municipal protection office for children and adolescents. These offices seek to create protective environments in families, communities and at the municipal level to prevent any act of violence against children. The goal is to reach 60% of the municipalities in 3 years. UNICEF has also developed a child protection toolkit that provides families and communities with tools to address issues of violence against migrant children and encourage the creation of spaces for their social integration.
- Psychosocial support to migrant children and families in transit or who are returned: in partnership with migrant shelters and through the development of specialized materials and trainings.
- Consular protection and psychological support: for Guatemalan children in Mexico and the United States to identify special protection needs and offer psychosocial support.
- Support Education strategies for reintegration of migrant children.
- Immediate humanitarian assistance focused on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and Education: in partnership with migrant shelters and local NGOs

^{11.} Guatemalan Migration Institute 2019 Report.



HONDURAS

2020 Funding Needs: US\$ 2 million

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

In Honduras, many children are at risk of violence or out of school, and many have parents and other family members who have migrated abroad and with whom they would like to be reunited. These factors all influence the decision of children and their families to embark on dangerous journeys in search of safety and opportunity. Migrating and displaced children are at risk of some of the worst forms of harm. The journey is long, uncertain, and full of danger, including the risk of exploitation and violence. Children can sometimes fall victim to traffickers and other criminals who subject them to extreme forms of abuse and deprivation. Many children are intercepted during their dangerous journeys and returned to Honduras. An estimated 64,178 migrant children were repatriated to Honduras between 2014 and 2019¹².

NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

- Children need immediate care and protective services upon their return to Honduras;
- Assistance for relocation for those facing violence;
- Psychosocial support and medical care for returned and reintegrated children;
- Access to information and legal assistance;
- Monitoring of borders to identify cases of trafficking.

- Strengthening child protective services: in 37 municipalities where children are most affected by violence and forced migration, reaching tens of thousands of Honduran children and adolescents through direct service provision and communitybased actions. This includes setting up "municipal offices for children" – Child Friendly Spaces accessible to all– and training mental health professionals and social workers.
- **Casework for returned migrant children:** UNICEF has supported the presence of frontline child protection workers for returned migrant children to ensure their access to necessary services, having developed a methodological model to support this process.
- Specialized psychological support for returned migrant children: through a peer to peer support methodology at community level and through trained volunteers.

^{12.} Directorate for Children, Adolescents and Families (DINAF), September 2019.



MEXICO

2020 Funding Needs: US\$ 2.8 million

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

In 2019, more than 30,0000 migrants were sent back to Mexican border cities to wait for their appointments in immigration courts in the United States¹³. Tijuana, Reynosa, and Ciudad Juarez account for 72 percent of all asylum seekers waiting to enter the U.S. through an official port of entry¹⁴. Migration caravans have become a new mode used by Central Americans to migrate and these continued at the beginning of 2020. Travelling in caravans is considered safer, therefore many children, both in families and unaccompanied, have been a part of these large movements. In 2019, 51,999 children were identified by the Mexican Immigration authorities and 34,705 were returned to their countries of origin¹⁵.

NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

- Protection and humanitarian aid in existing temporary shelters with emphasis on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, psychosocial support and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence;
- Need for better census of migrants (especially families and children) and mapping of service providers;
- Access to information and legal assistance for migrants;
- Expansion of viable alternatives to child immigration detention that includes access to alternative care modalities;
- Need to strengthen governmental capacities to effectively respond to large migration movements and shifting flows.

- Psychosocial support: for children in transit and those awaiting assylum hearings in USA.
- Scale up alternative care programmes: for migrant children and adolescents, including alternative accommodations for families, to eliminate migration detention of children.
- Strengthen and monitor best interest procedures: and capacities for migration, child protection and asylum authorities.
- **Communications and information campaign:** to inform migrant children on risks, services and rights.
- **Strengthen cross border collaboration:** of child protection and immigration authorities to support case management, protection and service delivery for migrant children.
- Promote access to social services: including through integration in the education system and access to specialized mental health services.
- Assist in development and implementation of protocols and intersectorial coordination mechanism to improve protection and support to migrant children.
- Humanitarian assistance in migrants camps and shelters near the borders: including actions on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Education and Child Protection.

^{13.} Data obtained by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University.

^{14.} Metering Update: August 2019." Robert Strauss Centre for International Security and Law.

^{15. 2019} figures from the Migration Policy Unit, Registration and Identity of People.



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