

Safeguarding the Rights and Welfare of Child Refugees Along the U.S.–Mexico Border

GA2

Issue description:

Thousands of children travel to the U.S.–Mexico border every year, many without their parents. They leave their home countries because of gang violence, poverty, political instability, or abuse. Most come from Central America, especially Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. These children hope to find safety in the United States, but the journey is extremely dangerous. Many face kidnapping, trafficking, hunger, or sickness on the way.

Once they reach the border, they often enter crowded shelters or detention centers because there are not enough safe places for them to stay. Some children are separated from their families, while others wait months before meeting a judge or getting a legal guardian. This creates a serious humanitarian and child-protection problem. Because they are minors, they need special rights and care, including safety, education, healthcare, and legal support.

The situation remains difficult till this day. The number of unaccompanied children changes from year to year, but the border system is often overwhelmed. The U.S. government has made changes to improve conditions, such as creating child-friendly shelters and speeding up family reunification. Mexico has also expanded its asylum system, but both countries still face challenges. Many shelters are full, and legal processes take a long time. Children can become stuck in unsafe conditions or risk being returned to dangerous environments.

This issue mostly affects Mexico, the United States, and the Northern Triangle countries (Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador). These regions deal with high levels of migration and lack resources to protect all vulnerable children. Climate change, drought, and economic hardship also push more families to leave home.

Several organizations work to protect these children. UNICEF provides child-friendly spaces, mental-health support, and education. UNHCR helps children apply for asylum and stay safe. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) supports safe travel and monitoring. Many local NGOs in the U.S. and Mexico offer legal aid and emergency shelter.

Sources:

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- U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (2024). *Southwest land border encounters*. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats>
- International Organization for Migration. (2023). *Mixed migration in the Americas*. <https://www.iom.int>