



AUGUST RECESS TOOLKIT 2014

Unaccompanied Children at the U.S.-Mexico Border

HIAS is the global Jewish nonprofit that protects people whose lives are in danger for being who they are. We protect the most vulnerable refugees, helping them build new lives and reuniting them with their families in safety and freedom. We also advocate for the protection of refugees and assure that displaced people are treated with the dignity they deserve. Join the movement at www.hias.org.



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OVERVIEW

During the month of August, Members of Congress are on recess in their home states and districts. In many cases they will be meeting with constituents, hosting Town Hall events, and attending local gatherings before returning to Washington, DC after Labor Day. This presents a great opportunity for advocates—like you—to reach out to elected officials and communicate issues that are important to constituents in their states and districts.

One of the timeliest issues during this particular August recess is the growing number of unaccompanied children arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. Nearly 60,000 children have arrived and more are coming. The journeys these children take are extremely dangerous, making them vulnerable to violence, rape, and exploitation. In most cases, the children have fled relentless violence and hopelessness in search of a safe place and a better life. The Jewish community has come together to send a strong message to Congress that the safety and well-being of these children must be at the heart of every policy decision made in response to this situation.

Before leaving for recess, the House and Senate both considered emergency funding proposals to help meet the needs of unaccompanied children. The Senate legislation, [S. 2648](#), introduced by Senator Mikulski (D-MD), would provide \$2.7 billion to government agencies. This is a particularly strong proposal because it includes \$1.2 billion to address the dire shortfall in funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the government agency responsible for serving unaccompanied children as well as refugees, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable populations. However, this legislation failed to proceed on a procedural vote. The House legislation, [H.R. 5230](#), introduced by Rep. Harold Rogers (R-KY), would only provide a fraction of the necessary funding while removing due process protections in current law. This legislation passed the House by a vote of 223-189, but Senate leadership and President Obama have already promised that they will not allow this bill to become law. The House also voted on legislation introduced by Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), [H.R. 5272](#), which aims to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program for future and current DREAMers.

When legislators are home during August, please take the time to call them, write letters, attend Town Hall events, schedule meetings, and invite them to local events so that you can have an opportunity to speak with them about this important issue. This toolkit includes resources for communicating with your elected officials, crafting your messages, and equipping yourself with facts about this complex issue. Please also take the time to fill out the “Report-Back Form” we have included at the end of this toolkit so that we can keep track of where each legislator stands on the issues. Feel free to contact advocacy@hias.org with any questions.

COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS

When elected officials hear from their constituents, they act accordingly. Establishing and nurturing relationships with your Senators and Representatives is crucial to enacting legislation that reflect our Jewish and American values of ensuring human rights, protecting children, and fulfilling our tradition of “welcoming the stranger.” Here are some ways you can communicate with your Members of Congress during the August recess:

Meet with Congressional Offices: One of the most effective ways to influence legislators is to meet with them in person or to meet with staff at their state and district offices. For these meetings, it is best to convene a powerful group of advocates such as faith and community leaders, social service providers, local business owners, and immigrants and refugees themselves. If possible, you should try to integrate a personal story into your talking points. For instance, one of the participants could share a personal story about the local impact of reprogrammed funding for refugee services.

Call and/or Write to Your Legislators: When calling or writing to your elected officials, keep your points clear and concise. Include some background information about why you care about this issue and the specific action(s) you want the legislators to take. Make sure to reach out to the offices of your two Senators as well as your Representative. When you call or write to each office, specify that you are a constituent, as well as your name and your role in the community (i.e. faith leader, organizer, student leader, congregant, etc.).

Participate in Town Halls: Many legislators will hold local Town Hall events during August recess. Open to the public, these meetings are intended for Members of Congress to hear directly from their constituents about key issues. These events also present opportunities for community leaders and advocates—like you—to ask questions about where legislators stand regarding the U.S. government’s response to unaccompanied children fleeing Central America.

Utilize Social Media: Engaging on social media can allow you to amplify your voice, send a strong message to legislators, and educate others about complex issues. Here are some sample posts for you to directly urge your elected officials to show leadership in responding to the surge in unaccompanied children while maintaining our country’s commitment to helping asylum seekers and refugees. Make sure to look up your legislators’ accounts so that you can tag them directly:

- @[legislator] Please increase FY 14 funding for ORR by \$1.2 billion so we can meet the needs of #UACs & #refugees. #ChildrenOnTheRun
- @[legislator] As your constituent, I urge you to increase funding for ORR by \$1.2 billion ASAP & maintain important protections for kids
- @[legislator] When you return to DC, Congress must pass a clean supplemental bill & maintain due process 4 #unaccompaniedchildren



JEWISH TALKING POINTS ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

An estimated 80-90,000 unaccompanied alien children (UACs) are expected to cross the southern border of the U.S. by the end of the current fiscal year and as many as 140,000 may come next year. The journeys these children take are extremely dangerous, making them vulnerable to violence, rape, and exploitation. In most cases, the children have fled relentless violence and hopelessness in search of a safe place and a better life. Their safety and well-being must be at the heart of every policy decision made in response to this humanitarian crisis.

Although this has been widely recognized as a regional humanitarian crisis only recently, migration from the “Northern Triangle” of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—has risen steadily as violence has increased and transnational organized crime has gained a foothold in the region. It is important to note that asylum claims are increasing all over the region: Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize have shown a 435 percent increase in the number of asylum applications they have received from individuals from Northern Triangle countries. This shows that “push factors” are causing people to flee and that the influx of asylum seekers is not unique to the U.S.

Key Talking Points:

- Congress must move quickly to approve Senator Mikulski’s (D-MD) proposal for emergency funding for unaccompanied children, which includes \$1.2 billion to allow the Office of Refugee Resettlement to adequately fund refugee services and the surge in unaccompanied children. The current humanitarian situation must not curb our **ability to resettle refugees** fleeing Iraq, Syria, Burma, Sudan, and elsewhere who have been generously offered protection by the U.S.
- The U.S. government must ensure that everyone in danger of persecution—particularly unaccompanied children—is given a **meaningful opportunity to seek asylum** under U.S. law.
- The **right to family unity** has long been a cornerstone of U.S. refugee policy—the U.S. should consider offering humanitarian parole or other relief to these children, which would open family unity and refugee processing channels south of our border while undercutting smugglers.
- As a **global humanitarian leader**, the U.S. must maintain practices in accordance with international refugee law and American principles of due process—the rest of the world is watching and we must set a good example.

Learn more about refugee issues

HIAS, the international Jewish organization that protects refugees hias.org

Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of refugee protection agencies rcusa.org

United Nations’ Refugee Agency (UNHCR) unhcr.org

U.S. Department of State Refugee Admissions Program state.gov/j/prm/ra

U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr



JEWISH STATEMENT ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

As organizations deeply rooted in Jewish values, we support policies that promote human rights, ensure the protection of children, and fulfill the Torah's mandate to 'welcome the stranger.' As such, we are very concerned about the urgent humanitarian crisis on the U.S.-Mexico border. Migration of vulnerable children and others from the "Northern Triangle" of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—has risen steadily as violence has increased and transnational organized crime has gained a foothold in the region. The safety and well-being of these migrants—and particularly the unaccompanied children—must be at the heart of every policy decision made in response to this humanitarian crisis.

The only long term solution to this crisis is a holistic approach that prioritizes safety and opportunity for children in the countries of the Northern Triangle. Increased border enforcement must be accompanied by more meaningful measures to ensure that all migrants in danger of persecution have access to a meaningful opportunity to seek asylum. Children in particular must have the legal and social assistance they need to determine whether or not they have a refugee claim or other forms of legal relief available to them and, above all, to ensure that their lives are protected.

It is crucial that we deal with this urgent humanitarian situation while maintaining our country's commitment to asylum seekers and refugees. As organizations based on Jewish values, we oppose any plans to "reprogram" funds that had been budgeted to pay for refugee resettlement services. Such cuts to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program would have devastating consequences for recently arrived refugees as they begin their lives anew in our communities. The Administration and Congress should not be pitting the interests of resettled refugees directly against those of migrant children. Based on the Jewish values to which we adhere and our proud history as a community and nation established by immigrants and refugees, we urge the U.S. government to protect both children and refugees in a humane manner.



"BORDER PROBLEM, BELTWAY CRISIS," BY MARK HETFIELD, HUFFINGTON POST (AUGUST 7, 2014)

There is a problem at the border, but it is not a problem caused by children, and it is not a problem caused by giving fleeing children due process to claim asylum.

In less than a year, nearly 60,000 unaccompanied children have been apprehended or, in most cases, turned themselves in to the Border Patrol. The children at the border, however, are only a symptom of a crisis of extreme violence in Central America and a crisis inside the Beltway caused by a dysfunctional Congress that misses opportunity after opportunity to fix our broken immigration laws.

This is a life and death issue. Partisan politics within the Beltway have resulted in pointing fingers at kids and at due process. Nothing illustrates this more vividly and more sadly than the House Supplemental Appropriations bill (H.R. 5230). H.R. 5230 would ultimately shift resources away from law enforcement priorities; i.e. away from the removal of criminals, and toward a fast track deportation process for children -- essentially creating a kangaroo court for kids.

Honduras has the highest murder rate of any country in the world, with nearly 100 murders for every 100,000 people. Central America as a whole is home to less than one percent of the world's population but accounts for four percent of murders worldwide. There are more than 275,000 Hondurans and El Salvadorans living in the United States with "temporary protected status (TPS)." Absent comprehensive immigration reform, immigrants with this status cannot legally reunite with their children who are trying to escape the violence, so they resort to relying on smugglers. If Congress finally enacted comprehensive immigration reform, families would have confidence in using designated channels to flee danger and reunite children with their parents and relatives in America.

There must be a long-term and sustained approach to the issue -- through a foreign policy which pays more attention to supporting efforts by our neighbors to the South in promoting the rule of law and economic development, and through comprehensive immigration reform.

Both of these, however, comprise the long-term strategy. In the meantime, immediate action is required to reverse the tide of kids putting their lives in harm's way via the hands of smugglers.

The United States should establish in-country refugee processing, built on four major principles: (1) accessibility, meaning it would be easier for the children to get access to the program than to get access to the border; (2) efficiency, meaning the process would take weeks or months, not years; (3) a central focus on family reunification, as 90 percent of the kids are joining a relative and 50 percent are joining a parent; and (4) a clear eligibility standard so that a child can articulate a claim without needing an attorney to navigate our asylum system.

Congress' full cooperation to set up this system as a refugee processing program would be helpful, as it did in the past in clarifying the legal standard for Soviet Jews, Iranian religious minorities, and boat people from Indochina via the Lautenberg Amendment. If, however,

Congress will not cooperate, the Administration can achieve a similar result through humanitarian parole, as it did for Kurds evacuated from northern Iraq to Guam in 1996, where they were given humanitarian parole and then applied for asylum after arriving in the United States.

The issue with the latter approach is that it would be more costly and complicated in terms of both time and money, and with less certain results. Through the refugee program, the child would enter with a clear legal status. Under humanitarian parole, however, the child would enter insecurely, uncertain about whether or not he or she could legally remain in the country. The refugee approach, with Congress' cooperation, would be better.

In the most immediate term, it is critical for Congress to enact the supplemental bill (S. 2648) which is advancing in the Senate, to provide resources to ensure that providing safe housing and access to hearings for the children who have entered this country does not come at the cost of diverting resources from immigration enforcement priorities or the refugee program.

Let's hope House leadership can stop blaming kids for our problems and instead protect both the integrity of our borders and the welfare of children.

Mark Hetfield is President & CEO of HIAS, the U.S. Jewish community's global refugee agency.



“A JEWISH CALL TO FAIR TREATMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN,” BY RABBI JENNIE ROSENN, *WASHINGTON JEWISH WEEK* (JULY 30, 2014)

Like many Jewish parents, I send my son off to camp each morning with plenty of water, an extra bathing suit and a reminder to put on sunscreen throughout the day. “Ask for help from your counselors to make sure you’re covered,” I say as he gets on the bus.

This daily routine is what went through my head the first time I saw a photograph of a boy my son’s age having just made the long and dangerous journey through Central America to the United States. I struggled to comprehend a 7-year-old on this perilous journey by himself (or worse, with unscrupulous adults). I imagined the dire circumstances that would lead a parent (or grandparent or aunt) to put his or her child at risk of violence, trafficking and rape.

The painful truth is that these parents are desperate to get their children to a safer place, and the dangerous journey is the better option than staying where violence and crime pervade everyday life. Through my work at a refugee organization, every day, I am struck by the realities encountered by these families. Violence and persecution around the world cause people from Congo, Sudan, Syria and many other countries to leave their homelands—often with nothing more than the clothes on their backs and little idea of what their future holds—and flee to safer countries. It’s a terrible choice that no one should have to make, and yet hundreds of thousands make it every year.

And now, for the first time in history, there is a large influx of unaccompanied children arriving at a U.S. border, requiring an immediate and effective humanitarian response.

There is no question that the long-term solution is to increase safety and opportunity for children in Central America. But, in the meantime, their basic needs for safety, shelter and food must be met.

Just as important, their well-being must be at the heart of every policy decision U.S. officials make. Under both international and domestic law, children who have asylum claims cannot be returned to harm. Furthermore, they should not be expected to represent themselves in court to make their asylum claims. We do not allow children to face complex legal procedures alone under any other circumstances. Why allow it in these cases?

Adding to the challenge, we must find a way to care for these children without undermining our country’s commitment to the refugees and asylum seekers who have already been promised safe harbor in the United States. Funds designated to help resettle the 70,000 refugees the U.S. has committed to welcoming this year should not be “reprogrammed.”

Earlier this month, 20 national Jewish organizations—including the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Council on Public Affairs, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Conservative Movement’s Rabbinical Assembly—joined HIAS’ call and urged the administration and Congress “not to pit the interests of resettled refugees directly against those of migrant children.”



To ensure that both the arriving children from Central America and resettled refugees receive the critical services they need, we support President Obama's request for an additional \$3.7 billion in emergency funding. We urge Congress to approve this request quickly and not to eliminate children's access to due process and legal counsel.

Our Jewish values call us to protect life and to love the stranger. It is one of the rare instances in which we are given the reason; we are told throughout the Torah, love the stranger because you were slaves in Egypt. It is not only our values, but also our history. We know from too many generations of experience what it means to be persecuted and to flee to a new land to rebuild our lives in safety.

The Jewish community should speak out on this issue and call on the U.S. government to meet the needs of these children while maintaining our country's commitment to refugees.

We must ensure that anyone who reaches our border is afforded safety and dealt with fairly. At a minimum, as their claims for refuge are sorted out, their basic human needs should be met with care. We would want nothing less for our own children.

Rabbi Jennie Rosenn is the vice president of community engagement at HIAS, the international Jewish organization that protects refugees.



“WELCOME THE STRANGER,” BY HEATHER NORRIS, *BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES* (JULY 24, 2014)

Many in the Jewish community along the Mexican border take a humanitarian stand in the contentious immigration crisis.

In the past nine months, more than 50,000 children have entered the United States illegally, many of them fleeing violence and gangs in Central American countries. While Congress and the White House have argued over how to deal with the flood of undocumented immigrants, many in the Jewish community have taken action.

In Tucson, Ariz., Anne Lowe makes regular trips into the desert to fill tanks of water for those traveling through the desert to use.

“I realize it’s an illegal thing to cross the border without proper documentation,” said Lowe. “On the other hand, should they have a death sentence for this?”

Once a week, groups of two to four volunteers from Humane Borders, a faith-based humanitarian organization, travel into the desert at the break of dawn in trucks carrying dozens of gallons of water. They follow a designated route, filling the tanks at the stations located close to known trails migrants follow through the desert and checking for vandalism (in the past, there have been incidents of tanks being riddled with bullet holes and contaminated with chemicals) in addition to measuring water levels—proof, Lowe said, that what they’re doing is really helping.

“I firmly believe what the Torah teaches us, what the Talmud teaches us: that to save one life is to save the world,” said Lowe. “I’m hoping that somewhere along the line the things we’re doing are making a difference and helping to save somebody’s life.”

Lowe describes her involvement with the organization—and the organization itself—as “purely humanitarian.” Regardless of a person’s stance on immigration law or the need for reform, she said, no one wants these people to perish in the Southern Arizona desert heat.

Like many Jewish activists along the border—Humane Borders has about four or five Jewish volunteers in all—Lowe said she was inspired to get involved through her own Jewish heritage.

“No one helped the Jews during the Holocaust; very, very few nations helped the Jews. Our own America didn’t,” she said. “I don’t think, as Jews, we can turn our backs on people who are looking for a better life or trying to escape violence in their home countries.”

“We have to remember history,” she added.

As director of Northwest Outreach at the Tucson Jewish Federation, Lowe has also volunteered with other federation staff to assist people at the bus stations, once even volunteering alongside a Native American man from a nearby reservation to help women and children purchase bus tickets. Water deliveries, though, have become her calling in the current immigration crisis.



“There has been a beautiful community response,” said Bryan Davis, JCRC director and Holocaust education coordinator at the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona. Davis and the JCRC in Tucson have joined forces with the local Catholic service organization to offer assistance to the women and children who were released to family members in the U.S. after meeting with Border Patrol.

While the Tucson Jewish community is split on how to proceed with the sudden influx of immigrants from Central America, the JCRC sees its mission clearly, said Davis.

After hearing about unaccompanied minors and women traveling with children being left at bus stations near Tucson at a June interfaith meeting organized by the local Catholic diocese, Davis and other faith leaders determined that they had to do something and were in a good position to respond to the needs of the newcomers.

In the 1980s, churches, synagogues and other houses of worship were central in the immigration crisis plaguing the border at that time. Then, the people crossing the border were fleeing their Central American home countries to escape civil war and political turmoil. The immigrants at the heart of today’s debates originate from many of the same Central American countries, but instead of warfare, they are fleeing high crime rates and gang problems. In the 1980s, Congress eventually passed legislation allowing certain groups temporary protected status, but today the crisis is far murkier.

A 2008 law signed by then-President George W. Bush forbids the immediate deportation of unaccompanied minors arriving from Central American countries, instead allowing them to stay in the U.S. legally until they are given a court hearing to determine whether they are permitted to stay or are deported.

Data collected by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security shows that the majority of unaccompanied minors entering the country illegally from January through mid-May came from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Those coming from Guatemala, DHS research shows, hail largely from rural areas, leading experts to believe many of the Guatemalan children are coming to the U.S. in pursuit of economic opportunity. Conversely, research shows many of the children arriving from El Salvador and Honduras come from regions plagued by violence, such as San Pedro Sula, the Honduran city deemed the murder capital of the world, where an average of four murders—many gang-related—take place every day.

While Maryland is some 1,700 miles north of the nearest U.S.-Mexico border crossing, the problem has ripple effects in almost every state. Most recently, news has spread of a rift between Gov. Martin O’Malley and the administration of longtime ally President Barack Obama over where to house some of the children while they await their hearing.

O’Malley has spoken out against mass deportations, describing such actions as sending the children “back to certain death,” but opposed a rumored plan to house some of the unaccompanied minors at a site in Carroll County, where anti-immigration graffiti appeared earlier in July.



Arthur Abramson, president of the Baltimore Jewish Council, sympathizes with O'Malley about the danger in sending the children back to their home countries.

"In my view these children are victims," said Abramson. He pointed to immigration laws passed in the U.S. before and during World War II that made it difficult for Jews in Europe to seek safety in America as effectively sentencing them to death in concentration camps and insisted officials look at the current situation in the context of history.

While Mexican children are deported immediately, there is a strong push among some advocates and organizations to declare some people from these Central American countries refugees. In the spring, the U.N. Refugee Agency suggested that many of the children traveling north from these troubled countries could and should be seen as and treated as refugees and offered asylum. Earlier this month, Pope Francis insisted that the children fleeing Central American countries on their own "be welcomed and protected," while Jewish organizations such as the National Council of Jewish Women, HIAS and the Jewish Federations of North America issued a joint statement urging President Barack Obama to pursue "measures to ensure that all migrants in danger of persecution have access to a meaningful opportunity to seek asylum," citing the Torah's instruction to "welcome the stranger."

For Rabbi Larry Karol of Temple Beth-El in Las Cruces, N.M., the idea of welcoming the stranger resonates particularly strongly.

"We were strangers in Egypt," said Karol of his Jewish heritage.

Comparing some of the stories in the Torah to the stories of these immigrants, he added, "It really brings the text to life."

Hearing about the problems these immigrants face at home and the challenges they face trying to make a better life in America has led Karol to think about his own family's immigration story. Like some of the teens fleeing from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, Karol's grandfather fled Russia to avoid being forced into the Russian army. After living in South Africa for a decade, he eventually moved to the United States, something Karol doubts would have been possible in the current immigration climate.

Using a website called EntryDenied.org, a project by Bend the Arc, a Jewish group with a mission to promote social justice, Karol determined that his family would likely be denied if they were trying to enter the U.S. today. The website asks users to answer a series of questions about any one of their ancestors and then uses those answers to compare with current immigration laws to ultimately give the user a notice of either denial or acceptance into America.

"There were Jews who left Europe—Eastern Europe, especially—for some of the same reasons that these families are leaving the Central American countries, because of the threat of violence," said Karol, who disclosed that there are a mix of opinions on the topic within even his own congregation. "I think that there is, in many cases, a similarity between the Jewish immigration story [and that of the Central American immigrants]."

“There are other people who don’t apply it that way, and that’s up to them, but for me, personally, verses like that really resonate on this issue, whether it’s the general immigration reform issue or whether it’s this particular case, where you have people who really could be accepted for seeking asylum because of the situation in their home country,” he said, “or just basic persecution as many of the Jews [faced] in the 1800s and 1900s and therefore came to the United States or went to other places to escape persecution and have a better life.”

While the much larger Catholic diocese is leading most of the effort to aid the newcomers, Karol knows of multiple members of his congregation who have gotten involved in groups providing help to the Central American immigrants and has even helped deliver water to the center where many of the people are being detained while they wait for processing and release to join relatives.

In Yuma, Ariz., a small city situated in the southwestern corner of the state, less than 10 miles from the Mexican border, Burton Schapiro has seen the crisis firsthand.

A member of Congregation Beth HaMidbar, Schapiro is an active member of the Yuma County Interfaith Sponsoring Committee. For months, the situation along the border had been a topic of conversation among committee members and they debated how to get involved. In early July the group found its answer.

For months, the local bus terminal had been a launching point for immigrants processed by the Border Patrol and permitted to travel to family members inside the country with whom they could stay. One day, a pastor on the committee got a call from a manager of a nearby Wal-Mart looking for help for a group of people who had been dropped at the store. The group included two pregnant women and a 3-year-old. One of the women was from El Salvador and the other from Honduras, and they had befriended each other on the journey through Mexico. Between the pair they had the equivalent of just \$28 in American money and needed to get to family in Atlanta.

“The story that we’re hearing on their journey from Central America is just scary,” said Schapiro. “When they get up here, they’re tired, they’re dirty, they’re hungry and they’re scared.”

The interfaith committee fundraised to purchase the tickets the women and child needed to make their trip, passing around collection plates at local services at one of the Yuma churches, and the women were able to make it to Atlanta, said Schapiro. Since then, the group has helped two more groups in the past couple weeks, offering people showers, food, clothes and help deciphering the bus system.

In an effort to not alienate some members of their congregations or become entangled in a web of political controversy, the group tries to stay as below-the-radar as possible, Schapiro said. But he doesn’t shy from speaking up when he feels a line has been crossed, once standing up at a conference he was attending where the keynote speaker was one of the architects of Arizona’s controversial law requiring police officers to stop and question anyone they suspect of being in the country illegally. He compared the practice to Nazis stopping Jews on the streets of



Germany. He received some boos from the crowd, but it didn't bother him. For him and his fellow congregants, helping immigrants is a form of tzedakah, he said.

"We just want to help people finally get on their way and wish them the best," said Schapiro.

"The thing that gets me is that they're really just children," he added.

Proposed Maryland Shelters Raise Concern

As discussion has shifted to where to house the thousands of unaccompanied minors, states hundreds of miles from the border have been pulled to the forefront of the debate on the children's fate.

In Maryland, more than five sites have been discussed for temporary housing. As of publication, four locations had fallen through, including a site in Carroll County Gov. Martin O'Malley reportedly sparred with the White House over after anti-immigration graffiti appeared on the walls of the building in question early last week.

As of late last week officials had confirmed that there was an effort being made to find a location to temporarily house some of the immigrants in Maryland, but a rumored Catholic Charities proposal to use one of its Timonium buildings was being met with opposition by members of the Baltimore County Council who expressed concern over the organization taking in the children rather than assisting the local community.

HIAS STATEMENT TO THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE (JULY 10, 2014)

The surge of unaccompanied children at the U.S.-Mexico Border is a humanitarian crisis. The U.S. government must ensure that the safety and well-being of migrants—particularly children—are at the heart of every policy decision made in response.

HIAS supports President Obama's \$3.7 billion Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Request for Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14). The \$1.83 billion increase for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) must be approved if we are to provide migrant children with appropriate care and ensure that the U.S. maintains our country's commitments and obligations to asylum seekers and refugees.

More than 52,000 unaccompanied children have crossed the southern border of the U.S. in the last nine months, and it is expected that 80,000-90,000 will arrive by the end of the current fiscal year. U.S. law requires that the children from Central America have their cases heard by an immigration judge before they can be deported. The system was designed to serve the 6,000 to 8,000 kids who used to come to the U.S. every year—it cannot handle 80,000. This is indeed an emergency, and it should be funded as such. Congress must act swiftly to provide additional funding to ORR and other agencies that are responsible for serving these children.

Increased funding must not be attached to the repeal of laws intended to protect the safety and welfare of unaccompanied children. The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPA) of 2008 includes important protections for vulnerable children such as ensuring access to legal and social assistance. This legislation must remain intact as child safety is a recognized national priority and humanitarian imperative.

Although only recently brought to the attention of the public, migration from the "Northern Triangle" of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—has risen steadily as violence has increased and transnational organized crime has gained a foothold in the region. Honduras has the highest homicide rate in the world, and as the murder rate has risen, so has migration. In these countries, gangs forcibly recruit children as young as five. Kids who refuse are tortured and killed by the gangs. They are also targeted by vigilante groups who indiscriminately kill young people in neighborhoods known for gang activity. There are few employment opportunities; about a third of young people in the urban areas of these countries are not employed or in school. A recent report from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) found that more than half of the children they interviewed cited violence, sexual abuse, forced gang recruitment, and other forms of exploitation as the main reason they fled. The police do not protect them and the weak governments in the region do not control the violence.

The journeys these migrants take are extremely dangerous, making them vulnerable to sexual assault, trafficking, and exploitation. In most cases, the unaccompanied children have fled relentless violence and hopelessness in search of a safe place and a better life.



With governments unable to ensure the safety of their citizens, children and families are fleeing to the U.S., as well as other countries in the region including Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize. In fact, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) reports a 712 percent increase in asylum applicants from the Northern Triangle in these countries, an indication that people are fleeing in all directions and that the influx of asylum seekers is not unique to the U.S.

It is absolutely crucial for Congress to ensure that everyone in danger of persecution is given a meaningful opportunity to seek asylum under U.S. law. In 2005, a congressionally-authorized U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal found that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was not following its own rules to ensure the protection of migrants with a fear of return. The study found that in 15 percent of observed cases where an arriving non-citizen expressed a fear of return, CBP summarily deported the individual without referring him or her to an asylum officer.

Since the study was released nine years ago, CBP has not demonstrated that any measures have been taken to address the protection deficiencies faced by asylum seekers who cross the border. The Administration and Congress must not further expand expedited removal of migrants—particularly unaccompanied minors—until CBP has taken steps to address these deficiencies.

The right to family unity has long been a cornerstone of U.S. refugee policy. Many of the children coming to the U.S. are seeking to reunite with their families in a place of refuge; many are the children of the 269,000 Salvadorans and Hondurans legally authorized to live and work in the U.S. under Temporary Protected Status. Because of the failure of the House of Representatives to follow the Senate's lead and pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform, these children have been separated from their parents for years with no hope of being able to legally reunite with their parents.

Given the lack of hope for family reunification and the extreme violence in their home countries, the U.S. should offer humanitarian parole or other relief to these children. This would open family unity and refugee processing channels south of our border while undercutting smugglers.

This crisis requires a holistic approach that prioritizes safety and opportunity for children in the countries of the Northern Triangle. The U.S. Border Patrol and other government officials that come into contact with migrant children once they arrive at our border should be trained to deal appropriately with them. Children should be screened in a non-adversarial setting by officials trained to interview children who can assess whether the child has a credible fear of return. Children who flee the violence who have asylum claims must be able to make them.

Furthermore, systems and funding should be in place to ensure that these children have competent legal representation and are not left alone to represent themselves in court. Congress should allocate funds to the immigration courts to process cases quickly and should fund programs to help ensure the safe return and integration of children who are sent back to their home countries.

As a global humanitarian leader, the United States must respond to this crisis in a thoughtful and calculated manner thoroughly consistent with international refugee law and American principles of due process. The entire world is watching our response—other nations around the world are receiving increased numbers of vulnerable migrants from Northern Triangle countries and other trouble-spots. We must set a good example for them to follow.

Congress must immediately increase funding to ORR for FY14 so that the influx of children at the border is not paid for by the refugees from Iraq, Syria, Eritrea, Sudan, and Ukraine and elsewhere who have been generously offered protection by the U.S. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a key component of our government's foreign policy and we should not be pitting the interests of resettled refugees directly against those of migrant children.

Due to the current crisis, ORR—which has long been underfunded—faces an enormous funding shortfall and has “reprogrammed” funds that had been budgeted to pay for services for refugees who arrive in the U.S. from around the world. This reprogramming has already started to have devastating consequences for recently arrived refugees. Many successful programs are at risk, including those that support micro-enterprise, child care for refugee families, Cuban-Haitian entrants, elderly refugees, and school impact grants.

Throughout our history, America has been defined by our generosity toward those who seek a safe haven from violence, oppression, and persecution. We must build and maintain processes that reflect the American tradition of offering a chance at a new beginning to those who seek safety and freedom. As a global humanitarian leader, the U.S. has an obligation to fairly and objectively assess asylum applicants who arrive at our borders in a manner consistent with international refugee law and American principles of due process. The U.S. must show leadership in helping unaccompanied children while maintaining our commitment to asylum seekers and refugees.



“A DANGEROUS SUMMER FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN KIDS,” BY MARK HETFIELD, *HUFFINGTON POST* (JUNE 27, 2014)

This month, as kids across the United States wrapped up the school year and started their summer breaks, thousands of children from Central America were embarking on a different kind of transition.

Spurred by violence, poverty, broken families, and lack of hope for a safe and productive future, some 80,000-90,000 children are expected to cross our southern border without their parents this fiscal year; as many as 140,000 could come next year. U.S. Border Patrol reports that apprehensions of these children are up 92 percent from this time last year and that an increasing number are under the age of 12.

While the number of children coming from Mexico has leveled off, the number coming from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala has surged. And they're not just running to the United States. Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize have seen a 435 percent increase in asylum applications they submitted by individuals from these countries.

The journeys these children take are incredibly dangerous, putting them at risk of falling victim to dehydration, violence, rape, trafficking and exploitation throughout the journey.

They take the risk in order to escape the pervasive crime and violence in the "Northern Triangle" of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In their home countries, there are few employment opportunities; about a third of young people in these countries are neither employed nor in school. The police do not protect them, and the weak governments in the region do not control the violence.

In early June, President Obama formally designated the influx of children an "urgent humanitarian situation" requiring a coordinated federal response to be led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is legally required to take custody of children who have entered the United States (unless they are Mexican, in which case they are usually returned quickly to Mexico). ORR must then provide housing until the child can be released to a relative or placed in foster care, where he or she will wait for an immigration hearing.

This system was designed to serve the 6,000-8,000 kids who were coming to the U.S. every year. It can't handle 80,000. Right now, there is simply not enough space to house the children who are here, let alone those still coming, and the U.S. must meet the most basic needs of these children immediately.

The Obama Administration already has deported more people, spent more money on border enforcement, and employed more immigration enforcement personnel, than any administration in American history. Yet the kids keep coming, and the President and Congress have failed to provide adequate funding to ORR to house these kids. Increasing border enforcement even further will not solve the humanitarian crisis of children crossing our borders in record numbers.



Rather, it could result in child refugees being barred from accessing the urgent protection they need.

In response to the crisis, Vice President Biden stopped in Guatemala last week during his June Latin America trip, where he met with senior government officials in the region. His goal was to get the message across to parents that sending their children to the U.S. is not safe.

Central American parents already know this, but believe that their children's risk of violence along the journey to the United States outweighs their risk of violence staying at home.

The best long-term solution to this crisis is more safety and opportunity for children in the countries of the Northern Triangle. On his trip, Vice President Biden announced the United States will be spending \$255 million to assist reintegration of returnees, prosecution of criminal gang members, and expanding youth programs to prevent gang recruitment. The Administration could further alleviate the situation by providing channels for refugees to apply within Central America and Mexico for lawful entry to the United States.

In the meantime, the U.S. must ensure that children who flee the violence and have asylum claims are able to make them, and that procedures for kids in the immigration system are fair and humane. Systems and funding should be put in place to provide these kids competent legal representation. As children, they should not be expected to represent themselves in immigration court. In addition, the U.S. government should allocate adequate funding to the immigration courts so that they can process cases quickly. Few things are more harmful to effective immigration enforcement than a massive case backlog.

Finally, our leaders must remember that this is about children. While our kids are starting their summer breaks, thousands of Central American children are fleeing violence and hopelessness in search of a safe place and a better life. Their safety and well-being must be at the core of every policy decision in response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis on our southern border.

Mark Hetfield is President & CEO of HIAS, the U.S. Jewish community's global refugee agency.



HIAS STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE (JUNE 25, 2014)

An estimated 80-90,000 unaccompanied alien children (UACs) are expected to cross the southern border of the U.S. by the end of the current fiscal year and as many as 140,000 may come next year. The journeys these children take are extremely dangerous, making them vulnerable to violence, rape, and exploitation. In most cases, the children have fled relentless violence and hopelessness in search of a safe place and a better life. Their safety and well-being must be at the heart of every policy decision made in response to this humanitarian crisis.

Although this has been widely recognized as a regional humanitarian crisis only recently, migration from the “Northern Triangle” of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—has risen steadily as violence has increased and transnational organized crime has gained a foothold in the region. It is important to note that asylum claims are increasing all over the region: Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize have shown a 435 percent increase in the number of asylum applications they have received from individuals from Northern Triangle countries. This shows that “push factors” are causing people to flee and that the influx of asylum seekers is not unique to the U.S.

The governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are unable to ensure citizen safety. Honduras has the highest homicide rate in the world, and as the murder rate has risen, so has migration. In these countries, gangs forcibly recruit children as young as five. Kids who refuse are tortured and killed by the gangs. They are also targeted by vigilante groups who indiscriminately kill young people in neighborhoods known for gang activity. There are few employment opportunities; about a third of young people in the urban areas of these countries are not employed or in school. The police do not protect them and the weak governments in the region do not control the violence. A recent report from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) found that more than half of the children they interviewed cited violence, sexual abuse, forced gang recruitment, and other forms of exploitation as the main reason they fled.

Under the law, the U.S. is required to release these children (unless they are Mexican, in which case they are usually returned quickly to Mexico) to the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). ORR must provide housing until the child can be released to a relative or placed in foster care, where they will wait for their immigration hearing. The law requires that the children from Central America have their cases heard by an immigration judge before they can be deported. The system was designed to serve the 6,000 to 8,000 kids who used to come to the U.S. every year. It cannot handle 80,000. Right now there is simply not enough space to house the children who are here, let alone those who are still coming, and the U.S. must meet the most basic needs of these children immediately.

Vice President Biden recently made a stop in Guatemala during his Latin America trip, where he met with government officials in an effort to get the message across to parents that sending their children to the U.S. is not a safe or viable decision. But parents already understand that the journey is dangerous. Given a choice between keeping their children at home, where they are at extreme risk of violence and there is no hope for the future, and sending them to the U.S., where

they face an extreme risk of violence during the journey but have some hope of a safe future, parents are choosing hope.

More border enforcement would not in any way solve this humanitarian crisis—in fact, border resources and enforcement have been more robust than ever under the Administration, yet the migration surge continues. Considering enforcement alone in responding to this crisis could result in child refugees being barred from accessing the protection they need.

The only long term solution to this crisis is a holistic approach that prioritizes safety and opportunity for children in the countries of the Northern Triangle. This approach should also include processing refugees from these countries before they attempt to travel to the U.S. and enacting new forms of humanitarian protection for individuals fleeing the violence in the region.

In terms of immediate response, the U.S. Border Patrol and other government officials that come into contact with migrant children should be trained to deal appropriately with them. Children should be screened to determine if they would be persecuted if returned to their home countries and advised of the right to seek asylum. Children who flee the violence who have asylum claims must be able to make them, and procedures for kids in the immigration system must be fair and humane.

Furthermore, systems and funding should be in place to ensure that these children have competent legal representation and are not left alone to represent themselves in court. Congress should allocate funds to the immigration courts to process cases quickly and should fund programs to help ensure the safe return and integration of children who are sent back to their home countries.

The humanitarian situation at the southern border has caused another crisis. Because of the large shortfall in funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), ORR has informed Congress that it plans to “reprogram” funds that had been budgeted to pay for refugee resettlement services. These cuts would have devastating consequences for recently arrived refugees as they begin their lives anew in our communities. Many successful programs such as those that support micro-enterprise, provide child care for refugee families, support Cuban-Haitian entrants, elderly refugees, and school impact grants will no longer receive funding.

It is unconscionable that refugees should be made to bear the cost of the influx of children at our southern border. Congress must immediately increase funding to ORR by \$200 million for FY14 so that the burden of the influx of children at the border is not paid for by the refugees from Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere who have been generously offered protection by the U.S.

Throughout our history, America has been defined by our generosity toward those who seek a safe haven from violence, oppression, and persecution. We must build and maintain processes that reflect the American tradition of offering a chance at a new beginning to those who seek safety and freedom. As a global humanitarian leader, the U.S. has an obligation to fairly and objectively assess asylum applicants who arrive at our borders. The U.S. must show leadership in helping unaccompanied children while maintaining our commitment to asylum seekers and refugees.



REPORT-BACK FORM

Take a moment to fill out this form and return it to HIAS via email (advocacy@hias.org), fax (202.212.6001), or mail (1775 K Street NW, Suite 320, Washington, DC 20006). Please fill out one form for each congressional office that you meet with or speak to.

Name _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Organization _____

Title _____

City, State _____

Which office did you meet with or speak to?

Please provide names and contact information for each congressional staff member(s) who participated:

(OVER)



Please provide names and organizational affiliation for each of the advocates who participated:

How would you summarize the legislator's position on responding to the growing numbers of unaccompanied children at the U.S.-Mexico border?

Was there indication whether the legislator will support emergency funding for the U.S. government and/or changes to existing laws that are designed to protect children?

Is this your first time meeting with or speaking to this congressional office? If so, do you imagine you will reach out to them again on this issue or another issue?