

Child Migrants Who Brave Border-Crossings Alone: *Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC's) and Repatriated Mexican Children*

Who are these children? Every year tens of thousands of children attempt the arduous trip to cross the Mexican border into the United States. These children, no matter their age or gender, brave the trip alone without a parent or a guardian.

Why do they risk their lives in crossing the border? There are numerous reasons why children make the difficult journey to cross the border. Migrant children may be trying to escape: gang violence, being forced into drug trafficking, sexual violence, child abuse and neglect, and poverty. Many are attempting to reunify with family members already in the U.S.

How do they enter? Many of these children cross the border by coyotes. They risk falling prey not only to gangs but drug and sex traffickers as well. Many travel through Mexico on the outsides of trains, putting them at grave risk for injury or even death. More and more are at risk of being kidnapped en route to the U.S. and ransomed for large amounts of money.

What happens to them when they are apprehended? These children are detained upon arrival by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). Last year in 2010, Customs and Border Patrol detained a total of 30,000 minors (half of which were UAC's). According to the TVPRA, all unaccompanied non-Mexican children must be transferred from the Department of Homeland Security's Custody to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in the Office of Refugee Resettlement's Division of Unaccompanied Children's Services (ORR/DUCS). Children in ORR/DUCS custody have the opportunity to reunify with family members and fight their immigration removal case in the immigration court. They have access to post-release social services that help them adapt to life in the U.S., or respond to special needs or risk factors that may have been discovered at the time of the child's apprehension. Children are not immune to Border Patrol abuse; in 2009, a national organization working with UAC's met with Border Patrol to express concerns over the lack of a third party to ensure reporting and appropriate interviewing and handling of allegations of Border Patrol abuse. If the migrant child is Mexican the child is usually repatriated to Mexico. Mexican migrants do not get the same screening and assessment that other non-Mexican children receive. They can be returned to the country almost immediately by CBP. They often do not have family to meet them, they may be returned to locations where traffickers and gang members frequent, the Mexican authorities may have no prior knowledge of the repatriation, and the children may be returned after nightfall.

Demographics: The largest group of child migrants originates from Mexico. The vast majority of them are promptly repatriated to Mexico without adequate child protection assessments and monitoring. The majority of unaccompanied child migrants come from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

Mexican children:

- Roughly 90% age 13-17, 4.5% age 6-12, 3.7% over 18. 82% are male and 18% female.
- CBP apprehended approximately 15,500 unaccompanied Mexican children, nearly all were repatriated to Mexico.
- Last year only about 10% of Mexican children apprehended were transferred to ORR/DUCs custody and become entitled to UAC services and screening through DHHS.

Non-Mexican children:

- In contrast, the number of unaccompanied non-Mexican children apprehended by CBP was approximately 2,000.

Links for further information

"Halfway Home" – Women's Refugee Commission
http://womensrefugeecommission.org/docs/halfway_home.pdf

"Children at the Border" – Appleseed
http://www.appleseednetwork.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=DJ6O_s tNNfc%3d&tabid=157

"A Child Alone and Without Papers" – Center for Public Policy
<http://www.cppp.org/repatriation/A%20Child%20Alone%20and%20Without%20Papers.pdf>