

Executive Summary



Childhood Cut Short: Sexual and Gender-based Violence Against Central American Migrant and Refugee Children

Kids in Need of Defense & Human Rights Center Fray Matías de Córdoba
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Since 2011, the number of unaccompanied Central American children arriving in the United States and Mexico has increased dramatically. The number of unaccompanied children apprehended in the United States increased 272 percent from 2011 to 2016, and the number of unaccompanied children deported from Mexico increased 446 percent during the same period.

This trend has been accompanied by a significant increase in the number of girls migrating alone. The percentage of unaccompanied girls in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody rose from 23 percent in 2012 to 34 percent of all unaccompanied children in 2014, and has remained at around 33 percent through the 2016 fiscal year. The percentage of Central American migrant girls deported from Mexico rose from 17 percent to 25 percent during the same period. Girls make up a significantly higher percentage of younger Central American unaccompanied migrant and refugee children—since 2013 over 40 percent of unaccompanied children ages 0-11 deported from Mexico have been girls.

A growing body of research indicates that many of these children are forced from their homes due to violence. However, less is known about the specific role of sexual and gender-based violence in driving child migration from Central America. With funding from the Oak Foundation, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), in partnership with the Human Rights Center Fray Matías de Córdoba (CDH Fray Matías) undertook a study of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and migration of unaccompanied Central American children. To better understand the relationship between violence and child migration from this region, this study documents the occurrence and forms of sexual and gender-based violence that children face in their countries of origin and during migration, as well as access to justice and protection for child survivors of SGBV in these countries.

This study draws on the cases of 96 Central American migrant children, including those gathered through interviews conducted by KIND and CDH Fray Matías, and analysis of key documentation from KIND client case files, as well as 78 interviews with government and civil society representatives in the region. Analysis of children's cases provides insight into the forms of violence that children

face, as well as the ways in which these experiences of violence shape their decision to migrate. Interviews with government and civil society experts and analysis of secondary sources provide information on violence in Central America and Mexico, access to justice and protection, and child migration trends in the region.

Key Study Findings

Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Lack of Access to Protection in Countries of Origin

1. Sexual and gender-based violence forces Central American children to migrate.

Study participants who experienced SGBV in their countries of origin reported that this violence, combined with a lack of options for seeking protection, led them to leave their countries in search of safety. For many other children, including study participants, fear of SGBV, especially by gang members, propels them to leave their countries before they are victimized. Of the 30 study participants who experienced SGBV in their country of origin, 21 reported that they migrated to flee SGBV.

2. Children in Central America, especially girls and LGBTI children, suffer multiple forms of SGBV in their homes and communities.

SGBV against children in Central America takes on a range of forms, including sexual violence by gangs and other organized criminal groups, forced or coerced intimate relationships, sexual violence in the workplace, human trafficking, and sexual abuse by family members. All children are vulnerable to violence, but girls and LGBTI children and youth are the most frequent victims.

3. Gang-based SGBV, including sexual harassment, rape, and forced sexual relationships, is widespread in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by gangs and other organized criminal groups is increasingly common and extremely brutal, and was the form of SGBV most commonly disclosed by participants in this study. Several study participants were raped by gang members, and one was kidnapped by gang members and subject to ongoing sexual abuse for a period of months.

Multiple study participants were targeted to become the “girlfriends” of gang members, which generally implies a forced sexual relationship with the gang member. Most faced threats of harm to themselves and families if they did not comply and some were raped or otherwise victimized when they resisted.

4. The threat of sexual violence by gang members forces children to stop attending school.

Schools are principal sites of gang recruitment and violence in communities; children often experience threats of violence by gangs at schools or on their way to or from school. Girls who participated in this study who live in gang-dominated areas or had to cross through gang controlled areas to get to school reported living in constant fear of violence. In some cases girls who faced harassment or threats from gang members dropped out of school and limited their movements and activities to avoid continued threats and violence.

5. Sexual violence by family members is extremely widespread. Children are often very young when violence begins and experience ongoing abuse over an extended period of time.

Interviews with experts in the region confirm that in a large number of cases of SGBV against children, the perpetrator is a member of the child’s family. Nine girls who participated in this study experienced sexual abuse or rape by family members, including step-fathers, grandfathers, and uncles. The average age of these children when they first experienced abuse was nine years old, and two children were raped by a family member when they were six years old. In some cases sexual abuse continued over the course of months or years.

6. Children are often caught in cycles of vulnerability that expose them to multiple forms of violence.

Many children face multiple forms of violence including sexual abuse in the home, intimate partner violence, gang-based SGBV, and human trafficking. In some of these cases children flee one form of violence and then find themselves in an equally dangerous situation. For example, girls subject to violence in the home may move in with older partners to escape that abuse. Girls in relationships with older partners are vulnerable to domestic and/or sexual violence, and those who fled abusive families have no family to whom they can return. LGBTI children are especially vulnerable to cycles of violence and exploitation,

due to discrimination and lack of support within families and state institutions. Poverty often contributes to cycles of vulnerability, as children are forced into situations of violence and exploitation to meet their basic needs.

7. Victim-blaming is widespread and prevents many children from disclosing sexual abuse to their family or other adults and from receiving support or protection from adults.

The cases of study participants as well as interviews with experts in the region indicate that many Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan child survivors of sexual abuse do not tell anyone about the abuse, in some cases for many years, because of fear and shame or because of direct threats of harm from the abuser. When children do disclose violence to a family member or other adult, they are frequently blamed for what happened to them, discouraged from reporting abuse to the authorities, and forced to continue to live with or have contact with the abuser. Child survivors of SGBV rarely report violence to the authorities due to lack of trust in them and fear of retaliation by the abuser. In cases of gang-related violence, reporting puts victims and witnesses at great risk, as gangs commonly punish those who report their activities with violence or death.

8. Ineffective judicial systems in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala lead to high rates of impunity and lack of protection for survivors of SGBV.

Victims who report SGBV face a number of obstacles in accessing justice, from slow and burdensome judicial processes to discrimination and re-victimization by officials who lack appropriate training and sensitivity. Combined with ineffective investigation and prosecution, these factors contribute to the extremely small percentage of cases that reach legal resolution. Even when a sentence is reached, victims rarely have access to the protection and assistance that they need to rebuild their lives.

9. Child protection systems in the region fail to adequately protect children who are victims of SGBV or provide them appropriate services. This failure is especially apparent in cases of gang-related SGBV against children.

Child protection systems in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala are severely underfunded, and lack capacity to provide necessary services to child survivors of SGBV, including protection from ongoing violence as well as adequate shelter, psychological support, and social and

economic assistance. Child protection systems generally lack the capacity to provide protection in cases in which children are targeted by gang members, and in some cases officials cannot enter gang-dominated areas to respond to cases of child abuse or neglect, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a gang member. When girls refuse to become the “girlfriends” of gang members, often their entire families are threatened with violence, yet families under threat of gang violence have nowhere to turn for shelter or security due to a complete dearth of programs or services to assist this population.

Sexual and Gender-based Violence during Migration and Lack of Access to Protection

10. Unaccompanied children, especially girls and LGBTI children, often endure multiple forms of sexual violence during migration.

When children migrate alone, often fleeing violence in their countries of origin, they are frequently subjected to SGBV during their journeys through Central America and Mexico. This study documents multiple forms of violence against children in transit, including sexual harassment, rape, human trafficking, and coerced survival sex. Perpetrators of violence include organized criminal groups, smugglers and traffickers, immigration officials and other authorities, and other migrants.

11. Migrant and refugee children in Mexico, including SGBV survivors, risk deportation to danger.

Extended periods of detention as well as lack of information and legal representation deter children fleeing violence, including SGBV survivors, from applying for refugee status in Mexico. Those children who do seek refugee status in Mexico confront a system that, while improving, does not yet have the capacity to adequately adjudicate their cases. Without meaningful access to international protection, children are deported back to their countries of origin and risk being harmed or forced to flee yet again.

12. Children who flee SGBV or experience SGBV during migration have limited access to justice and assistance in Mexico.

Migrant and refugee children who are victims of SGBV in Mexico rarely report these crimes to authorities because they fear detention or deportation and do not trust authorities. This fear or mistrust stems in part from the

fact that in some cases, authorities have extorted migrants or have been involved or complicit in acts of violence against migrants. Many children are also isolated during the migration journey and rarely access government, civil society, or private shelter services. This isolation creates another barrier to reporting violence and often results in survivors not receiving the medical or psychological attention they need.

Sexual and Gender-based Violence After Repatriation and Lack of Access to Protection

13. Most often girls, and some boys, face discrimination and stigma within their families and communities following repatriation to countries of origin.

Some returning girls suffer discrimination within their families and communities based on the assumption that they were raped or engaged in sexual relations with men during their journeys, or in the United States. Some returning boys and girls are accused of having picked up “malas costumbres” (bad habits). Peers and other community members sometimes ostracize or reject returning migrant children as a result of these judgments and assumptions.

14. Returning children who are SGBV survivors rarely receive the support necessary to reintegrate into their families and communities, and in many cases do not receive adequate protection and assistance.

Most child SGBV survivors repatriated to their countries of origin from the United States or Mexico do not receive the support services they need to reintegrate into their communities in a safe and sustainable way. There is an almost total lack of specialized medical and psychological services for this population, especially for those returning to rural and marginal urban areas, where government services are extremely limited. Additionally, weak child protection systems in the region often fail to identify and provide adequate protection for repatriated children who migrated to escape SGBV, leaving them vulnerable to the same violence they fled.



Benita is an indigenous girl from Guatemala who speaks Mam as her primary language. She never went to school in Guatemala and worked alongside her parents on the fincas (farms). When she was about 14 years old, her father disappeared, and her destitute mother began a relationship with a man who promised to support the children and send them to school. Instead, this man forced Benita and her brother to work in the fields and kept their money. He beat them to force them to work faster and make more money for him. When Benita was about 15, the man attempted to rape her. Benita's mother and the children fled from their home and went into hiding elsewhere in Guatemala. One day when Benita and her brother were gathering firewood, they were both kidnapped. Benita was taken to Mexico where a man kept her locked in a room with no windows. He gave her short skirts and tops and made her watch videos of women wearing little clothing dancing in a sexy way and told her to learn how they danced. He told her that she would make him a lot of money. This man drugged and sexually assaulted her. One day he forgot to lock the door and she escaped. She made her way to the United States and is awaiting the results of her claim for asylum.

Recommendations

Governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala

Justice Sector Reforms

1. Increase by 50 percent the federal budget for investigation and prosecution of SGBV-related crimes; increase financial resources and personnel dedicated to SGBV-related crimes within police, public prosecutor's offices, and courts to shorten the amount of time it takes to process a case and therefore reduce both impunity and the burden on the victim; expand capacity for collection of forensic evidence and ensure that this evidence is handled according to existing protocols.

2. Increase resources and personnel dedicated to specialized units for assistance to victims focused on gender-based violence within police, prosecutors, and courts, and ensure the accessibility of those institutions in urban and rural areas throughout the three countries.

3. Expand and institutionalize training on SGBV for all police, prosecutors, judges, and child protection officials to ensure awareness of all binding laws related to SGBV and the application of proper procedures in cases of SGBV. Training should be ongoing and mandatory, and should build capacity for assisting SGBV survivors, including children and LGBTI persons as well as survivors of SGBV perpetrated by gangs or organized crime.

4. Create and implement protocols within government institutions including police, public prosecutor's offices, and courts for specialized attention to victims of SGBV, including children, adolescents, and LGBTI persons. Implement and/or strengthen institutional mechanisms to oversee the application of protocols for SGBV cases, including the monitoring and enforcement of protective orders. Sanction public officials who fail to comply with protocols for investigation and prosecution of SGBV-related crimes and protection of victims.

5. Dedicate resources to ensure that indigenous people who are victims of SGBV have access to linguistically and culturally appropriate services, including the assistance of an interpreter for reporting crimes and throughout all phases of the judicial process, as well as information available in indigenous languages about the judicial process.

6. Devote resources to the monitoring and enforcement of legal protection mechanisms (such as restraining orders) for women and girls who are victims of domestic violence and other gender-based crimes. Create a specialized unit within the public prosecutor's office for the monitoring and enforcement of protective orders and ensure coordination between judges issuing orders and local police.

7. Strengthen victim and witness protection programs by expanding them to protect family members, and offering victims protection beyond the sentencing phase if there is a continued threat. Create witness protection programs and shelters that have capacity to provide security to victims and families in cases where there is gang involvement, including mechanisms to provide protection outside of the country if necessary.

8. Establish and strengthen internal government entities charged with investigating and prosecuting local level corruption and police involvement with gangs and organized crime. Create and expand current international monitoring entities, such as CICIG in Guatemala and MACCIH in Honduras, to ensure accountability for corruption at all levels. Prosecute government authorities found guilty of colluding with gangs or organized crime.

9. In consultation with civil society, develop and implement realistic and effective public policies to increase the credibility of government institutions and public confidence in those institutions, so that people will be willing to report SGBV-related crimes and seek assistance from government institutions.

Child Protection System Reforms

10. Dedicate greater resources to strengthen specialized children's courts so that specialized courts, rather than general courts, hear cases involving violence against children and other child protection issues. Resources should go to decentralizing the courts, increasing the number of specialized judges, ongoing training of judges, and monitoring of judges.

11. Increase the budget dedicated to child welfare agencies and systems to strengthen their ability to respond to child protection needs. Resources should go to decentralizing systems, increasing staff at agencies and ongoing training of staff. Resources should also go to increasing the use of home based placements such as family or foster care, rather than institutionalization. State run shelters should comply

with national child welfare standards; resources should also be used to modernize shelters and develop networks of smaller shelters as opposed to shelters housing hundreds of children at a time. Child welfare agencies should regularly monitor shelters and have a zero tolerance policy for abuse or mistreatment of children in care. When private shelters provide care, the child welfare agencies of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should monitor these shelters.

Victim Services

12. Dedicate greater resources to serve survivors of SGBV. Invest in the creation and expansion of government programs and services for comprehensive support and attention for women, children, and LGBTI persons who are victims of violence, including legal, psychological, and health care as well as basic needs such as shelter. Coordinate with and provide support to civil society organizations that provide these services.

13. Ensure that municipal-level health centers have psychologists trained to provide support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and that the availability of these services is adequate to meet the needs of the local population. Create additional sites and ambulatory services to ensure that these services are accessible to women and children outside of major cities. Ensure that all children and adolescents have access to comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health services.

14. Create and implement international mechanisms and protocols between the three countries for coordination to protect victims of SGBV. Establish a regional network of shelters (including El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, as well as Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama) to provide protection to victims who cannot safely remain in their countries, including victims of violence by gangs or other criminal groups.

15. Working with civil society experts, reception centers for children in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should develop screening tools to better detect SGBV survivors and children at risk of violence upon return to the community of origin. El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should conduct follow up home visits to ensure that repatriated children are safe once back in communities of origin. El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should ensure access to medical,

mental health, and other needed services to returning SGBV survivors near communities of origin—either by developing and providing these services directly or working with civil society to provide them.

Violence Prevention

El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should each dedicate a portion of their national budget to violence prevention across all municipalities. These funds should be used to:

16. Implement public education efforts to de-normalize violence against women, girls, and LGBTI persons, including on-going education in primary and secondary schools as well as public and community-based campaigns and campaigns that are directed toward families. Ensure that these programs and initiatives are adequately funded.

17. Promote municipal-level efforts that bring together mayors, school leaders, health care workers, police, prosecutors, judges, and civil society to raise awareness of SGBV and create a plan of action for local-level interventions.

18. Create and expand local-level gender violence prevention programming for youth in cooperation with municipal governments, ministries of education, health, labor, and other government agencies, and civil society. Sexual and gender-based violence prevention programming should include education and empowerment opportunities for girls—such as scholarships and workshops for girls, as well as expanding and cultivating opportunities for young women through training, internships, and job development for work outside of domestic labor and other female dominated jobs. Programming should also include access to comprehensive health and mental health services.

19. Create and expand local-level gang violence prevention and intervention programming for youth in cooperation with municipal governments, ministries of labor, ministries of education, and civil society. Support evidence-based models that include school-based prevention, strengthening of families, community policing, and meaningful education and employment opportunities for youth, including former gang members seeking reintegration into families, communities, and the workforce. Programming should include a focus on preventing and addressing gang-based SGBV.

20. El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should create and implement a system for the collection of statistics on SGBV-related crimes to be used consistently across government agencies, in order to provide a more accurate picture of the current extent and forms of violence, to guide policy decisions, and to monitor progress. Make statistics available to the public on an annual basis.

Consular Services

21. The governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should increase funding and personnel for consular offices in Mexico, to allow consulates to provide individual assistance and follow up for migrant children from their countries. Funding should in part be dedicated to training consular officials on techniques for interviewing children and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and other trauma, identifying protection needs, children's rights and best interests, and sexual and gender-based violence.

Government of Mexico —

Justice Sector Reforms

1. Prioritize the rights, protection needs, and best interests of migrant and refugee children, as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Mexico's General Children's Rights Law, over immigration enforcement.

2. Comply with requirements under Mexico's 2014 General Children's Rights Law to end the detention of migrant and refugee children in INM facilities and transfer all migrant and refugee children from INM to DIF facilities or appropriate civil society residential programs. Promote and fund alternatives to detention, including open-doors DIF shelters and civil society shelters that provide access to health, education, and other necessary support services.

3. Increase regulation of and oversight for migration enforcement activities to prevent human rights abuses, and increase investigation and sanction of officials who violate the rights of migrants and refugees, including sexual harassment, abuse, and violence.

4. Provide clear mandates to municipal, state and national-level DIF offices in relation to their responsibilities for the protection of migrant and refugee children, along with the financial resources to carry out those mandates. Funding for the protection of migrant and refugee children should be allocated to municipal and state DIF offices in accordance with the numbers migrant and refugee children in a particular area. Ensure necessary coordination between the levels of DIF.

Access to International Protection

5. Increase training for INM, national, state, and municipal DIF officials, and all other Mexican officials who interact with migrant and refugee children, regarding their obligation to inform children of their right to seek refugee status during first contact with the agency, and about how to do so in a child appropriate manner. Provide INM and DIF officials with the training and supervision necessary to apply the Protocol of Initial Evaluation for the Identification of Indices of International Protection Needs in Unaccompanied and Separated Children and Adolescents developed by COMAR, UNHCR, and UNICEF.

6. Provide greater funding to COMAR to increase personnel, training and specialization, and geographical coverage. Train COMAR personnel in skills for interviewing children and trauma survivors, and international protection needs of SGBV survivors, and ensure COMAR personnel receive regularly updated information on country conditions and dynamics, including gang violence (and gang-related gender-based violence) in Central America.

7. Increase federal funding to COMAR and other government agencies responsible for providing support to people seeking refugee status, including unaccompanied children. Provide comprehensive assistance to people seeking refugee status, including support with housing, employment, education, health care, and basic needs, from the time that they submit their application through the process of integration into their local communities.

Legal Assistance to Children and Best Interests Determinations

8. Increase financial resources and personnel of the federal, state, and municipal-level Child Protection Authorities to represent SGBV survivors and other migrant and refugee children on a broad range of legal needs, assess the best interests of each child, issue protection orders based on that assessment, and coordinate and follow up on all protection mechanisms ordered for migrant children (for example, in relation to education or health care) in compliance with Mexico's General Children's Rights Law and Migration Law. Attorneys of the Child Protection Authorities—charged with representing children—should receive regular training on standards with regard to representing children, such as identifying and taking into consideration children's stated interests in all proceedings.

9. Permit access of human rights and other civil society organizations to detained migrant and refugee children so that they are able to provide legal and psychological support and other services to SGBV survivors and other migrant and refugee children; ensure that children who seek refugee status in Mexico have access to legal assistance from civil society organizations from the beginning through the completion of the refugee status process, in collaboration with the Child Protection Authorities.

10. In compliance with Mexico's Migration Law and implementing Regulations and General Children's Rights Law, best interest determinations (BIDs) should be conducted for all migrant and refugee children prior to potential repatriation. BIDs should be coordinated by federal, state, or municipal level Child Protection Authorities and carried out by interdisciplinary teams of child protection experts that are housed within the Authorities, in compliance with Mexico's General Children's Rights Law. Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Mexico's Regulations implementing its Migration Law, children must have the right to express their opinion and have their opinion taken into account in the BID process.

Child Migrant and Refugee Victims of Crime

1. Ensure that state, municipal, and federal-level Child Protection Authorities have the resources, personnel, and training to represent migrant and refugee children who are victims of crimes and to ensure that all orders for the protection and restitution of rights (for example, rights to education, health care, mental health care) of child victims of crime are carried out.

2. Provide specialized training in gender issues, SGBV, children's rights, and LGBTI rights to all justice system officials who come into contact with migrant and refugee children who are victims of crime or other rights violations, including prosecutors and judges. Training should build specialized capacity for interviewing children and survivors of SGBV and other forms of violence. Training should include information on all relevant laws related to children's rights, migrant's rights, and SGBV.

3. The Mexican government should increase funding for specialized prosecutors for crimes against migrants. State governments should dedicate funding to train personnel in specialized investigation techniques for crimes against migrants, including SGBV-related crimes. State governments should increase monitoring and oversight of investigations. The federal government should require increased coordination between special prosecutor's offices in different states, and provide funding and training to support that coordination.

4. The Mexican government should grant unaccompanied migrant children humanitarian residency permits based on their vulnerability as unaccompanied children, consistent with Article 52 of Mexico's Migration Code.

5. State-level Special Prosecutors for Crimes Against Migrants (FEDCCI) and the Unit for the Investigation of Crimes Against Migrants within the Federal Prosecutor's Office (PGR) should establish mechanisms to detect cases of human trafficking and labor exploitation of migrant and refugee children, investigate such cases and prosecute those responsible, and provide humanitarian residency permits and access to protection and support services to victims.

6. Train public employees, including federal, state, and municipal-level police, prosecutors, and health care providers, in migrants' rights, human rights, gender sensitivity and attention to victims of SGBV.

7. State and municipal governments should require that all public health centers provide services to all people without discrimination on the basis of migratory status and should sanction centers that discriminate based on migration status. State and municipal governments should dedicate resources to creating mobile health care units to provide emergency health and mental health care to migrants and refugees, including victims of violence, who are far from medical facilities. Services should include psychological assistance, emergency contraceptives, and HIV prophylaxis for victims of sexual violence.

United States Government —

Funding to Central America

1. The United States should make a long-term commitment to support efforts to address the root causes of Central American migration, such as sexual and gender-based violence and gang violence. For FY 2018, the United States should commit \$750 million in foreign assistance to Central America (the level committed for FY 2016). U.S. funding to the region should address the root causes of migration and should not be contingent on migration reduction. Central American children fleeing sexual and gender-based violence need international protection, not border enforcement efforts aimed at preventing them from exercising their international rights, escaping violence, or returning them to it.

2. U.S. funding to Central America should support government efforts to address violence generated by gangs, human traffickers, and other organized criminal groups, and to meaningfully fight corruption. These efforts should include violence prevention education and programming, creating alternatives to violence for youth through education, internships and employment opportunities, as well as afterschool programming, human development, developing and strengthening community policing, and law enforcement components. Responses to violence should not focus on law enforcement alone and should not increase militarization,

as strengthening military and security forces in Central America has historically led to human rights abuses. U.S. funded programming in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to address gang violence must be developed in consultation with civil society in these three countries and must ensure transparency, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.

3. SGBV prevention and response should be a priority area for foreign assistance from all U.S. agencies to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. To maximize effectiveness, USAID and INL should coordinate SGBV programming, similar to the existing coordination between USAID and INL in communities with the highest levels of violence. SGBV prevention and response funding should require meaningful involvement by civil society organizations with expertise in gender, SGBV, gangs, and at-risk youth in designing programming and ensuring appropriate monitoring, transparency, and accountability mechanisms. Impact evaluation reporting should be done for all programming and results should be made public. Funding should support:

- (a) programming in schools, starting from a young age, for boys and girls, to teach SGBV prevention and to challenge gender norms
- (b) educational and development opportunities directed at economic empowerment of girls and women
- (c) scaling up of community based violence prevention programming
- (d) expansion of justice sector reforms focused on SGBV including, for example, victim service centers where SGBV survivors can report crime, and receive legal assistance, and support services
- (e) comprehensive services for survivors of SGBV
- (f) regular training of police, prosecutors, and judges on SGBV and working with survivors, and
- (g) efforts to build trust between communities and law enforcement, including developing community monitoring of police.

4. In consultation with civil society experts in SGBV, gangs, and at-risk youth, the United States should set benchmarks for reduction of SGBV in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, and should condition release of foreign aid on reaching these benchmarks. Benchmarks should be progressive such that expectations in reduction rise over time for future assistance.

5. U.S. funding should be dedicated in part to strengthening child welfare systems and agencies through decentralization of agencies, hiring of professional staff, ongoing training and monitoring of staff, and monitoring of child welfare agencies by an independent body. Funding should also be dedicated to ensuring access to primary and secondary education for all children.

Funding and Support to Mexico _____

1. U.S. funding to Mexico should focus on strengthening the capacity of all Mexican government agencies that come into contact with migrants to identify international protection needs (i.e., refugees, human trafficking victims), and on strengthening COMAR's capacity to adjudicate claims for refugee status and other forms of protection, consistent with international law.

2. The United States should further support Mexico's capacity to screen and adjudicate refugee claims consistent with international law by increasing funding to UNHCR in Mexico to support its work to strengthen Mexico's refugee system.

3. The United States should support Mexico's efforts to investigate and respond to SGBV and other crimes against migrants and refugees through prioritizing financial and political support for strengthening Mexico's judicial institutions and judicial reform efforts.

4. Any U.S. funding directed at supporting border/immigration enforcement in Mexico must require as a precondition that Mexico demonstrate that its immigration officials are respecting the human rights of migrants and are complying with international law regarding access to international protection, and that officials who commit human rights abuses against migrants and refugees or infringe on their right to seek protection are held accountable.



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