

What is Happening to Children from Mexico & Central America

U.S. law has special protections to keep children traveling alone safe, and to protect them from human trafficking and return to danger. **Since March 20th**, the U.S. has been using COVID-19 as a pretext to ignore its obligations to children and this law entirely, in order to quickly send them back to the circumstances they fled. This graphic shows how U.S. policies are harming unaccompanied children arriving at our border seeking protection.



Children at the U.S.-Mexico Border

- Mexican immigration officials illegally block children from approaching the border on their own.
- U.S. immigration officials expel children who manage to reach the U.S. border on their own. They are also expelling children traveling with adults- without any screening to make sure the adult is safe or is even a relative.
- Some children are sent back into Mexico without any check to make sure they are safe. Other children are handed over to ICE and sent back to their countries on crowded deportation flights.
- Very few children have been allowed to speak with an attorney or ask for protection from an immigration judge as U.S. law requires.



Conditions at the border:



Violence at the border is pervasive, including human trafficking, rape, kidnapping, torture, and assault. **Over 1,000** attacks against asylum seekers have been documented in Mexico in the past year.



Homelessness is increasing as migrant shelters have closed their doors to new arrivals.



Risk of COVID-19 increases due to lack of soap and clean water and an inability to socially distance in crowded shelters and encampments.



Children Repatriated to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador

- Mexican unaccompanied children have been sent back in the middle of the night, exposing them to grave danger, and violating repatriation agreements between the U.S. and Mexico.
- Children seeking to reunite with family in the U.S. have been sent back to their home countries even when they have no family there.
- Governments are overwhelmed and are unable to receive children safely or provide necessary screenings and follow-up services.

Conditions when returned to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador:



Limited or No COVID-19 Testing: Most countries do not test returned children for COVID-19; reception centers lack space to isolate those with symptoms or to ensure social distancing.



Mandatory Quarantine: In El Salvador returned children are isolated during a mandatory 20-day quarantine. During this time children cannot see their families and have access to limited services.



Limited or No Protection Screening: Child welfare agencies are unable to meaningfully screen returning children to identify those at risk of persecution or harm.



Travel Restrictions: Restrictions on movement and disruptions to public transportation make it nearly impossible for parents to travel to the reception center to reunify with children.



Limited follow-up: Child welfare agencies are overwhelmed and unable to provide any follow up or social services to children who may be returning to the same dangerous conditions they risked their lives to flee.

Children face new dangers once back in their communities:

Extreme food shortages exacerbated by the pandemic and lack of access to clean water and soap create difficult living conditions, especially in rural areas.

Soaring rates of **gender-based violence** and child abuse pose threats at a time when access to protection is at its weakest.

Fragile health systems are getting pushed to the brink of collapse by COVID-19 cases.

Xenophobic attacks against deported migrants are rising, including threats of violence and burning of homes, due to fear that those deported will spread COVID-19.

Repressive government responses to COVID-19, such as curfews and excessive force by police and military, are restricting the safety and freedom of children.

TAKE ACTION

Policy Recommendations

1

In accordance with federal and international law, the Administration must stop expelling unaccompanied children and allow them a meaningful opportunity to present their protection claims. Immigration officials must comply with the law and ensure that children have an opportunity to ask for protection and are not in immediate danger of trafficking or persecution.

2

U.S. immigration officials must respect repatriation agreements designed to ensure returns and repatriations are done in the safest manner and only when in the best interest of the child.

3

The U.S. government must provide financial and technical assistance to Mexican and Central American governments to strengthen child welfare and health systems and address COVID-19.

How You Can Help



For ways you can take action and use your voice to make a difference, visit KIND's website. You can sign our petition, write a letter to your representative, and more!

What can I do if I identify a child who was expelled from the border?

If an unaccompanied child was sent back to Mexico or Central America after **March 20th**, it is likely that they were unlawfully expelled under Title 42. KIND works with partners in Central America and Mexico to offer return and reintegration services as well as other protection services. If you identify a child who is interested in sharing their story or would like more information about assistance that may be available to them, please contact KIND at: KINDMX@supportkind.org and KINDCA@supportkind.org.