

Family Separation Four Years In: Much More to Be Done

It's been four years since that horrific summer when the previous Administration wrenched thousands of children from their parents' arms and forcibly separated them under its barbaric Zero Tolerance Policy – resulting in more than 5,400 child separations that lasted weeks, months, years, and for some, to this very day.

KIND has been at the forefront of helping separated families since then – **reuniting more than 460 separated individuals and their family members** – and **serving more than 2,500 people** whose lives have been affected by family separation in the United States and in Central America.

KIND has been integral in assisting the Biden Administration's Family Reunification Task Force since its launch in February 2021. In partnership with UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, and with support from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, KIND **has served over 1,200 individuals** both through targeted outreach to eligible families and giving them information about reunification, and by fielding calls and providing assistance through our telephonic Help Desk. With our partner Justice in Motion, KIND **has registered over 630 separated families** on the Task Force's website [Together.gov](https://www.together.gov). We are working to reunite hundreds more.

But too many refugee children – [over 1,300 as of May 31, 2022](#) – are still waiting to be reunited with their families. And all families impacted by separation need support to help heal from the trauma inflicted upon them and to access lasting safety and stability. There is much still to be done.

In addition to these efforts, KIND has:



Represented **805** individuals seeking return to the U.S. through humanitarian parole applications.



Helped reunify **103** families (**468** individuals) in the U.S.



Provided ongoing legal representation to over **440** individuals impacted by family separation at the border, representing them in applications for immigration relief and before immigration courts.



Provided legal assistance and orientation to over **200** individuals facing potential separation or seeking reunification at the U.S.-Mexico border.



Helped more than **300** families seek justice for harms suffered.

Family separation continues

The previous Administration's Zero Tolerance Policy was an abhorrent and exceptionally cruel formalization of a practice that the U.S. government has used for many years under successive administrations. To this day, families are separated based on various rationales and without appropriate safeguards to protect the rights of children, parents, and caregivers and to limit separations to rare cases in which it is necessary for the child's safety and best interests.

KIND is committed to a vision in which no child ever experiences such horrors again.

KIND has used its in-depth expertise from the last four years to address continued family separation. At the U.S.-Mexico border, we work directly with children and families every day to prevent the separation of children from their parents and caregivers.

It felt like ... the beginning of a new life. A new stage. It's time that we'll never get back, but now we're here and the only thing to do is to move forward." - KIND client, 20, interviewed by CNN after she and her three sisters, ages 11, 16, and 18 were reunified with their mother after more than three years.

For example, when thousands of Ukrainian families sought entry through the U.S.-Mexico border in late winter 2022, some children were separated from their caregivers because of a lack of paperwork to establish the caretakers' relationship to the child. KIND provides legal information on U.S. processes to these families and many others who arrive at the border from around the world in search of safety to help prevent family separation.

During the fall of Afghanistan in August 2021 when thousands of children were separated from their families amid the chaos at Kabul airport, KIND provided guidance to the U.S. government and the

"I have been shocked to hear and know the pain separated parents feel. When I talk to them, it feels like it happened yesterday, not three years ago, and the trauma of the situation is still taking a toll on them. But also, the gratitude and happiness of the parents who are in the process of being reunited has impacted me." - Melissa, KIND family reunification team member

"We have contacted a lot of separated families, we have heard their stories, we have learned to relate to them, to build trust, to identify how their stories impact us, we have seen the fear they face, the trauma and the deep need to aspire to a better life. We know that for some families this represents a great opportunity, but we also know that at the same time there are other families that continue to be separated and continue to suffer the consequences." - Daniela, family reunification team member

European Union on processes and child safeguarding procedures to facilitate family reunification and child protection. KIND partners in Europe are assisting Afghan children with family reunification and protection claims. KIND also helped reunify children with caretakers in the United States and continues to represent Afghan children in the U.S. who remain without their legal guardians.

KIND will always implement best practices to prevent and mitigate family separation. If family separation occurs, KIND will provide child-centered assistance, counseling, and tracking, and facilitate rapid reunification, ensuring that safeguards for children are part of the process.

KIND will not rest until all separated families are reunited and provided with the legal assistance, social services, and counseling support needed to help rebuild their lives following the devastating Zero Tolerance Policy. These objectives, which the Administration has committed to and numerous members of Congress have echoed, cannot be achieved without proper funding and resources.

Toward this end, KIND urges:

- 1.** Congress to authorize and provide the funding needed to reunify separated families that remain apart and ensure that all separated families can access necessary social and legal support.
- 2.** The Biden Administration to maximize existing resources to provide this critical support to as many separated families as possible.

To help prevent unnecessary separations in the future, the Biden Administration should:

- 1.** Create clear and rigorous guidelines that prioritize keeping families together, except in specific cases where a child welfare expert determines a child may be in danger.
- 2.** Ensure that qualified child welfare professionals are present at the border and are involved in all processing of children and families.
- 3.** Establish accessible and transparent procedures for challenging family separation decisions that allow for rapid resolution of contested cases.
- 4.** Carefully document any instances of family separation and enhance record keeping to ensure that children and their families can be quickly reunified and that separated children are not lost in the system.



Young KIND client reunited with her father in Los Angeles with the help of our Family Separation Team.

If you were separated from a child at the border between January 2017 and January 2021, or know someone who was, and the separated parent or child is outside the United States please contact the **Help Desk** at:

| KIND Help Desk | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Interpreters are available.</i> | |
| In Brazil, call: | +55-21-3500-8817 |
| In El Salvador, call: | +503-2136-1163 |
| In Guatemala, call: | +502-2302-5773 |
| In Honduras, call: | +504-2217-0379 |
| In Mexico, call: | +52-55-8897-5395 |
| In Nicaragua, call: | +505-7517-8143 |
| In the United States, call: | +1-213-454-0527 |

To learn more about the Family Reunification Task Force, and to register to start the reunification process, go to the family reunification website at:

<https://www.together.gov>

KIND can help you register your case.

Additional Resources

- [Timeline: Family Separation and Reunification Efforts](#)
- [KIND Family Separation Resources](#)
- [KIND's analysis of the Biden Administration's unaccompanied child policies in its first year](#)
- [KIND comments on identifying recommendations for the Family Reunification Task Force](#)

For information about whether and how KIND can help in other family separation cases, please email info@supportkind.org