

**CAMPAIGN PRINCIPLE 6**

# Addressing the Root Causes of Child Migration

Reducing or eradicating forced migration will not be accomplished through harsh deterrence policies that deny people access to asylum and other protections. Instead, the United States and the global community should commit to reducing the root causes of migration—such as violence, persecution, poverty, the absence of rule of law, and political corruption—that prevent children from being safe and protected in their own countries.

Reducing forced migration of children requires addressing the root causes that drive children from their homes.

At the end of 2023, worldwide, 47.2 million children had been forcibly displaced because of conflict and violence.<sup>1</sup> As of 2023, more than half of all child refugees in the world were from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Venezuela. These numbers are growing each year as children flee new conflicts and other disasters around the world.

**KIND has served clients from 81 countries who journey to the United States alone in search of safety.**

<sup>1</sup> Child Displacement and Refugees - UNICEF DATA



## Why do children leave their home countries and arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border?

Over the past decade, the number of children and families arriving at the U.S. -Mexico border seeking protection has risen. The root causes of forced migration are complex, interconnected, and have worsened over time. While most children are fleeing a form of violence, abuse, or exploitation, several interconnected factors may be at play in a child's migration story:

- **Violence**, including war, gender-based violence, forced recruitment of children by gangs, and human trafficking, pushes children out of their homes, communities, and countries.
- **Political instability** caused by war, internal conflict, and natural disasters is one of the main drivers of child migration globally. This instability has led to weak national institutions and poor governance as countries struggle to recover and rebuild.
- Across the globe, **poverty** drives children and families to migrate. Over 90 percent of unaccompanied children in the United States come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, countries with some of the highest poverty rates in the Americas.
- **Injustice and impunity**. Many governments around the world are largely unable or unwilling to protect their most vulnerable citizens and crimes go unpunished. This impunity has created an environment where few feel safe and many lack trust in government.
- **Discrimination and inequality**. Gender inequality and pervasive gender-based violence, including high rates of femicide, sexual violence, violence against LGBTQ+ people, domestic violence, and child abuse, cause children to migrate. Longstanding, systemic discrimination against certain ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples resulting in persecution of these groups exacerbates existing inequalities and drives migration.
- **Food insecurity, natural disasters, and climate change**. Food insecurity and food shortages, which are increasing with climate change, are another main driver of child migration. Climate change is also increasing droughts, floods, sea rise, and other extreme weather events that are driving people out of their homes.

- Many children who journey alone **lack access to education**, either due to poverty and lack of financial resources, gender discrimination, or violence in their communities.
- Some children leave **to reunite with family members** who have already left years prior to support the family.

## How can the U.S. government address the root causes of child migration?

The United States can lead by example by engaging in international cooperation and regional agreements for child protection, which can reduce forced migration and extend protection throughout the migration journey. Such frameworks must address the risk of harm from all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation and other forms of gender-based violence and human trafficking, and should include support for local capacity building, education, and outreach to strengthen individual, family, and community efforts to keep children safe.

The U.S. government should provide substantial, long-term development assistance that addresses the issues driving children and families to migrate. This means increasing funding for programs that address gender and gang-based violence, child abuse and neglect, lack of educational and job opportunities, poverty and inequality, food insecurity, and the increasing impacts of climate change.

KIND's Keeping Kids Safe campaign advocates for practical, short- and long-term solutions to forced migration, informed by KIND's work in the United States, Mexico, Central America, and Europe.

### Why Children Leave Home: Alicia's Story

Alicia grew up in rural Guatemala with an abusive father who would hit her and her mother. Because her family's farm failed, they fell into poverty and experienced hunger. Alicia stopped attending school and started working when she was 12-years-old to help provide for her mother and siblings. Alicia did not feel safe at home or at work, where she was exploited. Alicia fled Guatemala alone in search of safety. When she finally arrived in the United States, she was connected to KIND for legal representation and won permanent protection in the United States.

**This campaign needs your support.**

For more information or to get involved, visit: [supportkind/KeepingKidsSafe.org](https://supportkind.org/KeepingKidsSafe.org)  
email: [KeepingKidsSafe@supportkind.org](mailto:KeepingKidsSafe@supportkind.org)