



UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN IN MEXICO

Honoring God's call to love our neighbor.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The arrival of almost 70,000 unaccompanied children in 2014 – most from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala – sparked U.S. government response that included a major focus on supporting Mexico's efforts to increase immigration enforcement. Though this enforcement in Mexico decreased the number of families arriving in the U.S. temporarily in fiscal year 2015, the number of unaccompanied children arriving in the U.S. has increased again in fiscal year 2016. This shows that **enforcement is ineffective as a long-term solution**, and that **the U.S. government should instead concentrate on protecting families and investing in the vulnerable communities they are forced out of.**

A delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church

in America (ELCA) traveled to Mexico after partners in Central America who work with young migrants expressed concern about an overwhelming lack of protection of children and families detained in Mexico, despite their known vulnerability to trafficking and sexual assault. The ELCA found that, although Mexico has some of the most holistic protection laws in the world, these laws are not effective. Those who express fear of returning to their countries of origin are actively discouraged from applying for protection by Mexican migration agents and most asylum seekers are kept in detention centers for many months.

Despite knowing that Mexican agents are victimizing children and violating international law, Congress has increased financial aid for Mexico's government and the Obama administration continues its support for beefing up Mexico's enforcement. **As a church, we know that all the children of God deserve safety and to be treated with respect. The U.S. can be a champion for vulnerable migrant children today by holding the Mexican government accountable for the protection of asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants; especially women and children.**

WE URGE OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO...

- » Maintain and/or strengthen human rights conditions on U.S. security assistance to Mexico and Central American countries;
- » Require transparency from all agencies that give financial or program support to the Mexican government;
- » Provide funding for programs that strengthen the protection of children and families fleeing their communities; and
- » Invest in programs that address the root causes of the forced displacement at a community level.

OUR LUTHERAN VOICE

Our church has a long history of hospitality for refugees. After World War II, nearly 1 in 6 Lutherans was displaced. This history reminds us to be gracious hosts as well as humble guests. **"Immigration, refugee, and asylum policies express who we are as a nation, influence the nation's future character, and affect the lives of millions of people,"** says the ELCA ["Message on Immigration"](#)

Jesus professed love for our neighbors as a fundamental reflection of our baptismal identity. The ELCA is a church with migrant roots that recognizes we are all made in God's image and have the right to dignity and respect. In our [social message on immigration](#), the ELCA declares that, **"The presence of newcomers in our church and society ... deepens our belief that 'all people are God's creatures, sinners for whom Christ died,' and call for respect of the human dignity of all."**

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CONGRESS CAN BE A CHAMPION FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS BY...

Strengthening human-rights conditions on U.S. security assistance to Mexico and Central American countries.

Congress has effectively used human rights conditions in U.S. security sector assistance as a tool to advance the rule of law in countries in the region. As the U.S. works closely with Central American and Mexican governments, it is critical that the U.S. continues to support strong human rights and the rule of law.

Requiring transparency from all agencies that provide financial or program support to the Mexican government.

The U.S. government's lack of transparency regarding its support of the Mexican government diminishes the insight and input of groups working with children and families. This lack of input results in both the U.S. and Mexico supporting policies that violate international and national laws.

Providing funding for programs that strengthen the protection of children and families fleeing their communities.

While the Mexican government has increased border security, it has failed to address institutional weaknesses that prevent compliance with its laws. The U.S. should lead efforts to ensure that regional governments have strong human rights records.

Investing in long-term programs that address the root causes of forced displacement at a community level.

Children and families from Central America continue to be displaced from their communities with little access to protection. Investing in community programs that address safety, poverty, lack of opportunities and hold governments accountable for protecting human rights is the only responsible and compassionate way to address the displacement of children and families arriving in the U.S.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- » ["Increased Enforcement at Mexico's Southern Border"](#) - Washington Office on Latin America, wola.org
- » ["The Cost of Stemming the Tide"](#) - How Immigration Enforcement Practices in Southern Mexico Limit Migrant Children's Access to International Protection," Georgetown Law - law.georgetown.edu/news/press-releases/the-cost-of-stemming-the-tide.cfm
- » [ELCA social message on "Immigration"](#) - elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Immigration

The following resources are located at www.elca.org/Resources/Advocacy

- » ["Our Communities in Crisis"](#) - A faithful look at the root causes of Central American forced displacement and the repatriation of children and families after the summer of 2014.
- » ["Central American Advocacy: Children and Families"](#) - A factsheet about ELCA efforts and priorities in Central America



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