

"...to bring good news to the poor... proclaim release to the captives... let the oppressed go free..."  
(Luke 4:18-19)

# CRISIS AT THE BORDER

2014-2015 MISSION FOCUS  
AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

## A Note on the News

You may have heard on the news that the pressure has been lifted off of Congress to address the crisis at the border due to a sharp decrease in the number of children arriving at the border in the months of July and August. The reality is that, while the numbers have indeed decreased, July and August tend to be months with lower arrival numbers because of the high summer temperatures and other factors. Additionally, "the current numbers are still higher than the number of apprehensions for children and adults with children during past years," as stated by Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson in a statement as reported in the Washington Post ("[Number of unaccompanied children crossing Texas border dropped sharply in July, Obama administration says.](#)" by David Nakamura, August 7, 2014.) So, while the numbers may indeed be down, that's no signal that the crisis is over. It is felt that the delay in executive action on immigration is due to midterm elections in November, so further legislative action is currently on hold. It is clear: There is still a deep need to address the issue of unaccompanied children on all fronts as an issue of peace and justice.

## September 2014: "Push" Factors

### **What is causing the unprecedented number of children arriving at the border?**

- This four minute video is an excellent overview of what's happening in the Northern Triangle that is causing children to flee.



Central American refugees flee violence

*"There are problems in my country. The biggest problem is the gangs. They go into the school and take girls out and kill them.... Sometimes girls are involved in gangs and other gangs kill them. Or sometimes girls are dating boys who are in the gangs and members from other gangs kill them. Or sometimes gangs hate a girls' family and they kill her because of that. I used to see reports on the TV every day about girls being buried in their uniforms with their backpacks and notebooks. I had to go very far to go to school and I had to walk by myself. There was nowhere else I could go where it would've been safer. I lived in a village and it was even worse in cities."* (14-year-old girl from El Salvador, as reported in ["Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection,"](#) by United Nations High Commission of Refugees, March 12, 2014, p. 32.)

- Download and read the document entitled ["Myths and Facts on Central American Migration Surge,"](#) which gives critical information in understanding what is sending children from their homes. This report includes statistics and causes.
- "Children from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador cited the growing influence of youth gangs and drug cartels as their primary reason for leaving. Not only are they subject to violent attacks by the gangs, they explained, they are also targeted by police, who assume out of hand that all children are gang-affiliated. Girls also face gender-based violence, as rape becomes increasingly a tool of control." (["Forced from Home: The Lost Boys and Girls of Central America,"](#) by the Women's Refugee Commission, October 2012, p. 1.)
- In several successive studies (interviews) of children arriving at the border, done by Women's Refugee Commission, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee, the children predominantly reported being pushed from their homes due to increasing violence and insecurity. "The children we spoke with told us they felt like they would die if they stayed in their home country, and although they might die during the journey, they at least would have a chance." (["Border Surge of Unaccompanied Children: Why They're Coming & What the Government Should Do,"](#) Women's Refugee Commission, June 26, 2014.)
- Children from Mexico fall under different policies related to immigrants from contiguous countries (Canada and Mexico) and are able to be immediately deported back to their home countries. Although screening for the possibility of the child being a victim of trafficking is supposed to occur, there are significant failures in the system. Mexican cartels are increasingly coercing children to become traffickers themselves because the cartels know the children will simply be returned to them.
  - ["Mexican migrant kids swiftly sent back: Treatment contrasts with that of Central American minors"](#) (by Sandra Dibble, U-T San Diego, July 12, 2014) includes a video report on a Tijuana YMCA home for migrant youth.
  - An explanation of the differences in process for a child from Mexico compared to that of a child from Central America is outlined in this article, ["Sealed UNHCR Report Warns of Poor Protections for Unaccompanied Mexican Children,"](#) (by Walter Ewing, on American Immigration Council Immigration Impact, July 28, 2014).
- It is notable that 69% of Americans polled said that the children should be treated as

refugees and "should be allowed to stay 'if authorities determine it is not safe for them to return to their home country.'" (*"Most in Poll Say Children at Border Merit Relief,"* by Julia Preston, *New York Times*, July 29, 2014.) For the actual poll and a more full statistical summary, [click here](#).

## Reflections

### Questions for reflection or discussion:

- Use [www.govtrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us) to find what legislation is currently before the House or Senate related to immigration and "unaccompanied alien children" (the official term). If you create an account, you can set up trackers to be notified of changes in the legislation status. Download and read ["Talking Points on Proposals to Roll Back TVPRA Protections for Unaccompanied Children."](#) (It is the second document in the bullet point list on the page.) Compare the information you read on the page and in the downloaded document with the legislation you find on govtrack.us. Use the links available on govtrack.us to voice your own opinion to your legislators (the site lists your legislators for you).
- **Consider the children in your own family.** Can you imagine situations in which you would pay extraordinary amounts of money to strangers in hope that your children (grandchildren, nieces/nephews) would find safe passage away from the dangers of your own community? Can you imagine situations in which the risk of a journey alone would seem preferable to the risks faced in day-to-day life on the streets of your neighborhood? Spend some time with your journal putting yourself in the shoes of the mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunt/uncles of the children. What would it feel like?
- **Read Exodus 2:1-10.** How does Moses' childhood story relate to this situation? Look beyond the facts of the story and into the hearts and minds of all involved. What happens in the future, as a result of Moses having been saved from danger?

## Resources

### UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

UNHCR Washington has an entire section of their website devoted to this topic. Visit [www.unhcrwashington.org/children](http://www.unhcrwashington.org/children) for resources, materials, media, and stories.

### Next Issue: Needs

*What are the short-term and long-term needs of the children?*



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