

# THE IMMIGRANT CHILD CRISIS

## AT OUR BORDER

### FACT SHEET

JANUARY 2023



The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reported that in fiscal year 2022, which ended on September 30, 2022, a record number of nearly 130,000 children crossed the southern border and entered its shelter system.

The surge is part the largest migrant influx ever recorded -- 2 million people according to the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP).

Young people from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador fleeing violence, poverty, and exploitation account for approximately two-thirds of these children, while the remainder come from Mexico, which is experiencing record homicide rates.

It is estimated that 75–80% of newly arriving unaccompanied children are victims of human trafficking by being forced into labor or prostitution.

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According to government estimates, approximately 80% of unaccompanied children from Central America who enter federal custody have relatives in the U.S. who can sponsor them. The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) does not disqualify proposed relative sponsors based on their immigration status.

**Under U.S. law, ORR must house unaccompanied children who lack a legal immigration status until they turn 18 or can be released to a sponsor, who is typically a parent or another close relative living in the U.S.**

The numbers of children crossing the border may be spiking, but the problems they face are not new. For the last decade, Administrations from both political parties have struggled to process arriving unaccompanied children, despite several laws and a court settlement in place to protect their rights.

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Under the terms of the landmark Flores Settlement Agreement of 1997, children taken into custody by CBP must have access to lawyers and child advocates, and CBP must actively search for sponsors who are willing to care for them.



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In 2021, HHS issued a statement that CBP facilities are overcrowded and the 72-hour timeframe for the transfer of children is not always met. The agency said it was working to set up new shelters and add beds at 220 CBP locations

One of these, a temporary tent facility in Donna, Texas, is emblematic of the dire humanitarian crisis in immigration facilities across the US. Dozens of makeshift emergency shelters at military sites, convention centers, and work camps housing children are delivering substandard services, prolonging stays, and prompting mental health concerns.

After separating from their families, escaping violence, and being exposed to further trauma—all while risking their lives to get to the U.S. border—many children are at risk for re-traumatization by processes enacted by the U.S.



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