

**US Program Emergency Response: Situation Report 01**

Date : July 20, 2018

Introduction : Unaccompanied Children at Tex/Mex border.

Country/Location : Texas, United States

Title of emergency : Unaccompanied Children along the US border 2018

Dates covered by report: : June 22 through July 20, 2018

Situation Report No : 02

**General overview**

The complex factors driving child and family migration from Central America - violence, economic insecurity and political turmoil have remained relatively unchanged since the 2014 crisis<sup>1</sup> when an unprecedented number of unaccompanied children from the region (primarily El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) crossing the southern US border.

Over the past 18 months, continued debate over US immigration “reform” has created a great deal of uncertainty within ChildFund’s target community along the Texas/Mexico border. This has heightened the fear and anxiety among families around possible deportation and separation from family members.

On May 7<sup>th</sup>, the US Attorney General announced a Zero-Tolerance policy which states that anyone who crosses the border without proper documentation will be criminally prosecuted (as a misdemeanor) for illegal entry, even if they are seeking asylum and included separating children from their parents/families while immigration procedures were underway. This is not a law, but is a change from previous policy, which treated similar cases civilly. Since the policy went into effect, an estimated 2600 children have been separated from their families. This created an overcrowding of shelters and group foster homes for the unaccompanied children, which resulted in additional US border detention centers and even “tent cities” being set up to house these additional children. While it appears that most of the facilities are clean and children are fed and participate in “activities” and some educational services, there seems to be a lack of understanding that children need more than basic sustenance, especially the need for psycho-social support, considering the trauma children have experienced in route and continue to be re-traumatized by being separated from their families.

After widespread condemnation of the policy, the President signed an executive order on June 20<sup>th</sup> meant to end separating children from their parents. A Federal Judge ordered the government to reunite the separated children, with a deadline of July 10 for the 100+ children under age 5 and July 26 for the 2500+ children ages 5-17. In some cases, parents had already been deported back to their country of origin while their children remain in the US.

**ChildFund Presence in the Area**

ChildFund has been working in the Rio Grande Valley since 1989. The ChildFund area office is located in McAllen Texas - the epicenter of the immigration crisis. We currently serve over 2700 enrolled/2100 sponsored children in the area, strengthening social emotional competencies through a literacy-based approach. All of our staff are from the Rio Grande Valley, are bi-lingual, have a solid understanding of the culture and community context.

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<sup>1</sup> In Aug, 2014, ChildFund conducted an Emergency Rapid Assessment of the Unaccompanied/Accompanied Child Migrant Crisis [https://childfundintl.sharepoint.com/:b/s/programs/Americas/UnitedStates/ES-cEm-32nBPis1EWO5IDagBSh6AcAZzv-0veGId\\_5ROsQ?e=BY5hv9](https://childfundintl.sharepoint.com/:b/s/programs/Americas/UnitedStates/ES-cEm-32nBPis1EWO5IDagBSh6AcAZzv-0veGId_5ROsQ?e=BY5hv9)

ChildFund's efforts are traditionally focused on families (primarily of Mexican descent) settled and living in RGV communities (1st, 2nd, 3rd + generation US residents). While the unaccompanied child population enters the US through Mexico, the majority of them originate from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. ChildFund's violence prevention work in these Latin American countries, focused on preventing the need to migrate for asylum, combined with our long-term presence in the Rio Grande Valley, TX give ChildFund a unique and valuable perspective on the situation.

### **Impact on ChildFund programs and operations**

The state of US immigration policy and heightened discussion around immigration has increased the fears and anxiety of children and families around possible deportation and separation from family members. Although the recent zero-tolerance policy is not directed towards the majority of our enrolled families, it has caused a major disruption within our community.

Through our interaction with our staff and our enrolled families we are hearing reports of heightened surveillance within our communities, frequent stops and questioning by Border Patrol and parents afraid to seek assistance for their US citizen children (nutrition, health care) for fear of deportation.

### **ChildFund's response**

ChildFund child protection specialists were deployed to the Texas/ Mexico border on June 25 and conducted a rapid assessment of the situation of children and families related to the current crisis on the border, meeting with potential partners, assessing the needs of enrolled families and determined how to leverage our expertise to assist children and families. A major challenge in this crisis is that we cannot reach the affected population (separated children) as the agencies and institutions in charge are extremely reluctant to allow access.

Based on our assessment, a crisis response specialist is being deployed to Texas to manage operations, including coordination, design, and facilitation of the following interventions and partnerships.

- Support migrant families who have been released from U.S. Customs & Border Patrol, as they travel to join extended family elsewhere in the US. We are partnering with the Catholic Charities Respite Center, providing in-kind and social-emotional support to assist children and families as they prepare to take the next step in the journey ahead.
- Bolster support for children and families in our existing Texas programs who may be affected by the current crisis due to tighter scrutiny and are subject to greater risk of deportation and family separation, resulting in fear, mistrust, deterioration of wellbeing. We will fortify our existing community and school-based social emotional learning program, incorporating targeted psychosocial supports and facilitating contingency planning for families at risk of separation.
- Pursue partnerships with organizations that provide legal services for unaccompanied children and families in U.S. detention. We are well positioned to provide rights-based, psychosocial training to legal professionals who are new to child and adolescent protection and representation. This training could also be expanded to law enforcement agencies, such as border patrol, and social service agencies who are increasingly put into the position of caring for children and youth without proper training on child protection and psychosocial care.

ChildFund will continue to advocate for the protection and rights of children. We signed onto a joint letter to Congress based on the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's recommendations for the reunification of separated children with their families. We are also convening other child-focused partner organizations (American Academy of Pediatrics, Bethany Christian Center, Futures Without Violence, Plan International, Save the Children, US Fund for UNICEF, World Vision and the Young Center) to leverage our combined experience and resources, and to identify gaps and opportunities in both programmatic and advocacy work on behalf of children in this crisis.

We will also continue to strengthen our programs in Central America that address the root causes of forced migration: endemic violence, deep poverty and lack of opportunity, among others. We're working with children, youth and families to help them create the lives they want and need where they are.

We're also involved in supporting migrant families who have been deported back to these countries, helping them reacclimate and recover from trauma.

**SECTIONS BELOW ARE FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY**

1. Security & logistics  
No special information. .
2. Partnership and coordination
3. Program (that are being done by ChildFund)

Sector	Actions

**4. Staffing**

Major HR issues: Not yet reported.  
 Visits: Not yet done  
 Departures: As usual  
 Arrivals: As usual

**Staff on the Ground:**

1. Person1
2. Person 2

**5. Donors**

Proposals and concept note submitted:

Donor	Program	Amount

Confirmed funding:

Donor	Program	Amount (USD)

**6. Finance**

**7. Media/Communications**

Aross@childfund.org

Resources	What's available	URL
Photos		
Case studies		
Press releases		
Blogs		
Press coverage		
Videos		

**8. Next steps**

**Attachments**

- Proposed Budget