Session 3B: Comparative Practices in the Western Hemisphere

Speakers:
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- Strong migratory flows are a given in the Western Hemisphere, children make up a substantial portion of those migrating, and unaccompanied minors are a large share of the children who cross borders.
- Unaccompanied children may migrate to (re)join their parents or to seek employment/betterment for themselves.
- Perspectives of the protection and assistance of unaccompanied and separated children:
  - National
    - Institutions for the protection of children
    - Governmental agencies
    - Social service agencies
    - Laws and procedures
    - Interagency coordinating bodies
    - Communication and information systems, public affairs
  - Bilateral
    - Memoranda and agreements to facilitate and coordinate the protection and movement of minors
    - Coordination across borders, especially during return or repatriation of minors
    - Visits, meetings, role of embassies and consulates
  - Regional and International
    - Membership in organizations and signatory to international agreements which deal with the protection of children, e.g.,
    - UNHCR, IOM, Regional Conference on Migration

- Perspectives differ, however, according to a country’s role (in each particular case) as a source, destination, or transit country. One country, e.g., Mexico, may be a source, transit (especially for Central Americans), and destination country.

- The human dimension is paramount: the protection, safety, and welfare of the child and deserves case-by-case attention.
  - There needs to be special measures for the protection of extremely vulnerable, victims of trafficking, detainees, those with criminal records.
  - Reunification with parents (or siblings) is generally the goal.
  - There must be concern not only for unaccompanied or separated children, but also for those who may be at risk even if in the company of parents/guardians.
  - No accidents, no gaps, in responsibility for the child, especially in movements across borders
- Protection and welfare of the child is needed before immediate repatriation
- Timing is critical.