Monitoring the Detention and Return of Central American Unaccompanied Minors

A Research Study to Reduce the Risk Of Child Trafficking

Presented by
Mary DeLorey
Catholic Relief Services
Background

- Local/National Migration Partners Alarm at growing levels of UAMs, and accounts of children going missing.

- Documented disappearance of Guatemalan children in Mexican custody

- Absence of girls in some detention/shelter sites (in contrast to % in migration flows.)
Step 1- Laying the groundwork

- Identified limitations (or lack) of available data, monitoring and tracking of UAMs

- Data available (UNICEF-DIF, USG) cited very high rates of UAMs from Mexico in the U.S.

- Need for research/info and improved response greatest for Central American UAMs detained in Mexico
Profile of Unaccompanied Migrants Interviewed

- Central American unaccompanied minors ages 12-17,
- Intercepted by the Mexican authorities and transported to detention centers and/or shelters in Mexico
- deported to specific reception sites in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras during the course of the study.
- 745 UAM - interviewed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Interview location</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Migration Detention Mexico City</td>
<td>Sin Fronteras</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Migration Detention Tapachula</td>
<td>Sin Fronteras</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Shelter for migrant minors Tapachula</td>
<td>Casa de Migrante - Tecum Uman</td>
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<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Government Shelter Quetsaltenango</td>
<td>Casa de Migrante  Tecum Uman</td>
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<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Border crossing La Hachadura</td>
<td>CARECEN</td>
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<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Government Shelter - Santa Ana</td>
<td>CARECEN</td>
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<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Border Crossing - Agua Caliente</td>
<td>Casa de Migrante Ocotepeque</td>
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<td>Migrant Shelter - Ocotepeque</td>
<td>Casa de Migrante Ocotepeque</td>
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Conference on Protection of Unaccompanied & Separated Children
Areas of Priority:

- **Interception:** by immigration authorities whose job is to regulate and to detect irregular migration, including by minors, and take them into custody.

- **Detention:** Children and adolescents are held in custody while legal proceedings for repatriation are in process.

- **Deportation/repatriation:** The process of transporting children and adolescents to their country of origin, in accordance with multilateral, bilateral and consular agreements.

- **Reception:** The legal process for by which designated migration or child welfare authorities from the country of reception transfer children and adolescents to competent authorities of their country of origin.

- **Reintegration:** Return of children and adolescents to their parents, substitute guardians or government institutions, who are responsible for the protection, well-being and development of the child or adolescent.
Research findings: Profile

• Majority not in school prior to migrating, high % of boys working

• 2/3 came from single parent or no parent households.

• 16 % spoke indigenous language

• 60 % listed desire for employment as reason for migration

• 21% family reunification as primary reason for migration (repeat migration = 27% for this reason)
Research findings: Abuse

• 27% - victim of robbery (highest during migration)
• 18% - extortion
• 17% - intimidation
• 12% of physical and verbal abuse (highest during interception/detention)
• 5 cases of probable trafficking

• Although the majority did not claim abuse- Highest rates of abuse by any actors = migration authorities/police.
Protection Gaps

- Children held in detention centers, with adults, in substandard conditions.
- Intentional denial of access to UAM protection.
- Bilateral agreements not consistently followed.
- Overland return frequently not monitored to final reception.
- Children returned to persons not verified as competent authority or family member.
- Indigenous children noting higher rates of abuse.
Recommendations

• **Consular services:** Develop clear agreements on standards and procedures for Consular services to unaccompanied minors in the region. Such standards should outline frequency of contacts, access to, and responsibilities for minors in detention.

• **Dedicated Resources:** Child welfare agencies throughout the region are lacking adequate funding to fulfill their obligations, and the viability of establishing alternatives to detention is undermined by lack of budgetary prioritization.

• **Ensure that UAMs are identified and provided with access to legally designated services and protections and in general are not housed with adults during interception or detention phases, and.**
Recommendations

• Increase access to psychosocial evaluation & services, to determine the best interests of the child; and whether a child is able to be safely repatriated or if further intervention is needed in their case.

• Establish clear, well documented and disseminated procedures for repatriation and reintegration of UAMs and responsibilities of authorities returning/receiving minors at border crossings.

• Strengthen Bilateral Agreements between Mexico/ Honduras; and Guatemala/Honduras to ensure that Honduran UAMs are received in an orderly and safe manner by appropriate Honduran immigration authorities.
Thank you