

# Unaccompanied and Migrant Children Myths vs. Facts

## **MYTH: Border crossings are on the rise.**

**FACT:** Border crossings are actually down from where they were in the 1990s, when more than 1.5 million people would come to the United States annually. U.S. border apprehensions overview:

- 2000: 1,675,438 people entering the United States
- 2008: 723,825
- 2013: 420,789

The pattern of migration has changed. In the past, people entering the United States undocumented were mostly from Mexico. Now, people are primarily arriving from Central American countries, China, Africa and Eastern Europe. There are also more families with young children – and children without families – than before.

U.S. citizens have a long and honorable history of welcoming the refugee and the immigrant. Just one port of entry, Ellis Island in New York, welcomed millions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During those years, churches and community groups acted on the gospel call to welcome the migrant. This is an important part of our American identity and history.

## **MYTH: The unaccompanied children are all leaving their homes in Mexico.**

**FACT:** Most of the children are coming from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. While they travel through Mexico to arrive in the United States, the vast majority of the unaccompanied children are coming from Central America.

## **MYTH: These kids are here illegally.**

**FACT:** Most of these kids are seeking out and surrendering themselves to U.S. Border Patrol; they are not running. When a child comes into contact with U.S. Border Patrol, Border Patrol has 72 hours to process him or her. If possible, the child is repatriated. If not, the child is given a “Notice to Appear” (NTA), which references his or her court date. Because of this processing, the child is neither here undocumented nor illegally.

The ELCA, along with other humanitarian organizations, is responding by serving and caring for those who are awaiting review of appeals for asylum or protection and for those who have been released from detention to join family or sponsors.

## **MYTH: These kids are carrying drugs and are just here to cause trouble.**

**FACT:** According to a U.S. Border Patrol representative, drug-related violence and exploitation is a primary reason these children flee. Drugs are being run by drug cartels, not by children from Central America who are seeking asylum.



Children and families are seeking out and surrendering to the U.S. Border Patrol by the thousands in order to escape criminal exploitation and worse. When asked why they left their homes, children say they were hungry or their parents sent them to try to protect them from being recruited into the gang violence and trafficking in their home communities. They are not troublemakers; they are trying to avoid trouble.

The danger for these children -- regardless of where they end up -- is that they will be “easy pickings.” Therefore, it is crucial that the communities that shelter these children have systems in place to ensure their safety and success while they await deportation or placement.

### **MYTH: These kids have diseases that they will spread to us and our kids in school.**

**FACT:** Lutheran Social Services of the South has cared for approximately 6,000 unaccompanied children in the past year, and they report fewer than a dozen children who have needed more than routine medical care. The primary health issues these children receive care for include dehydration, the common cold and dental needs.

### **MYTH: When migrants are released, taxpayers end up paying for them to join their families.**

**FACT:** When migrants are released from detention while their cases are reviewed and resolved, they are released to a sponsor or family member. They may not leave the detention center until their transportation is paid for either by themselves or by their sponsor. Often, family members send money and a bus voucher is given to be redeemed for a ticket at the bus station.

### **MYTH: This is only happening in Texas.**

**FACT:** While their cases are being reviewed, families with young children and unaccompanied children are either being reunited with relatives or paired with sponsors across the United States. Families, agencies and ministries across the country will have the opportunity to offer hospitality and service to these children and those who care for them.

### **MYTH: This kind of migration of people is unparalleled in the world today.**

**FACT:** Millions of people are on the move in the world today, fleeing conflict and violence in their countries to seek safety across their borders. From Syria to South Sudan, from Western Africa to Central America and to the borders of the United States, this is the reality. People are pushed from their homes and pulled across borders. Neighboring countries are often called upon to provide for their most basic needs including water, food, shelter and safety.

Our worldwide communion – The Lutheran World Federation – remembers the displacement of many Lutherans in Europe after World War II. The communion has developed expertise in serving refugees, asylum seekers and others who have been displaced from their homes and communities. The ELCA is a member church of the communion.

### **MYTH: This is the largest non-conflict-related migration of people in history.**

**FACT:** The stories we have heard, both from people desperate to enter the United States and from our companions in several Central American nations, make it crystal clear that people are fleeing their homes and communities to escape severe conflict and extreme violence. Like millions worldwide, they are refugees who are running from violence, trafficking and other risks.