



A family from Guatemala is picked up at a Greyhound bus station by the IRC staff in Arizona and shuttled to a day center for asylum seeking families at a local high-school. Photo by A. Oberstadt/IRC

## SEEKING SAFETY: CRISIS & RESPONSE AT THE US BORDER

**Political turmoil, extreme poverty and rampant violence in Central America continue to fuel a humanitarian crisis, spurring thousands of people to undertake a dangerous journey in search of safety.**

As migrants encounter increasing difficulties at the border, here's what you need to know:

**People fleeing violence have the right to request asylum.** Central Americans escaping gang violence and persecution in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador are protected under U.S. and international law with the right to seek a country of refuge without being criminalized, turned back or separated from their children.

**The IRC is delivering life-saving support to those in need.** Our response in the U.S., Mexico and El Salvador is focused on providing food and other vital services such as healthcare and protection for women and children.

## CRISIS CONTEXTS

### EL SALVADOR

For more than a decade, El Salvador has been categorized as one of the world's most violent countries outside of an active war zone:

**Gangs operate with impunity.** Kidnapping, extortion and homicide are widespread.

In 2017, **one woman was murdered every 18 hours.**

In 2018, there were **more than 9 homicides per day**—that's nearly double the rate of the U.S.

With a population of about 5 million people, 300,000 of whom are internally displaced, 60% of the country is controlled or contested by gangs. Open warfare in the streets is rampant. Salvadorans must pay gangs protection fees to continue living where they are. Gangs often ramp up prices to force people out, leaving families with the decision to pay, flee or be killed.

### MEXICO

**On average, 2,200 people are crossing the border from Mexico into the United States daily.** In March alone, U.S. Customs and Border officials apprehended:

- 53,000 people traveling as families
- 30,000 single adults
- 8,900 children traveling alone

This surge in migration, recent changes in U.S. policies and the lack of available resources and services at the border are putting thousands of people - especially women and children - at increased risk of violence and exploitation.



**IMMEDIATE  
FUNDING NEED:  
\$ 3 MILLION**

We must raise \$3 million in new funding to continue delivering life-saving support to the most vulnerable families and populations at risk.

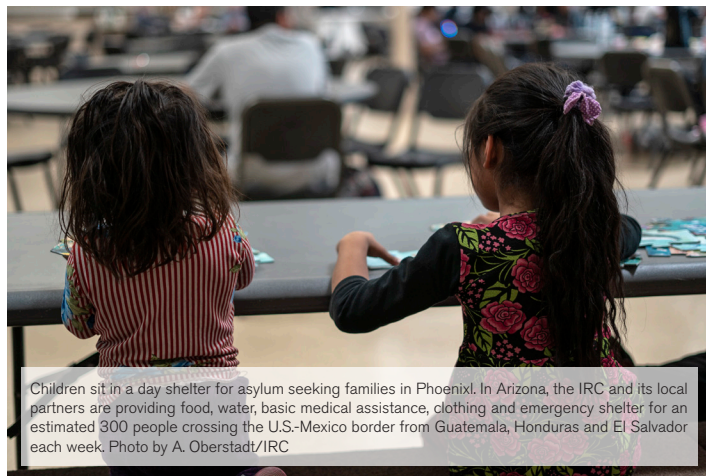


# WHAT HAPPENS TO ASYLUM SEEKERS AT THE BORDER?

Imagine this: You're forced to flee your home and everything you know. You've made the decision to take your children on what you know will be a dangerous journey and you may have to spend your life savings to do so. When you arrive at the U.S. border, you may have to wait in Mexico for months before you're able to present yourself to U.S. authorities. Once you do, you'll be held in the infamous 'icebox' detention centers.

Most families are then released and allowed to continue their asylum proceedings while living in the community. But they're often left at bus stations, even in the middle of the night, without information or guidance on what to do next. Now asylum seekers are on their own in a system that's so complex it feels like it's set up for them to fail. Because of backlogs in the immigration courts, it now takes an average of three years for an asylum case to be decided.

When someone is charged with a crime in the U.S., they're provided a lawyer - but asylum seekers are not. They must pay for their own immigration lawyer. And if they can't afford one, they're left to argue their case on their own. Keep in mind, seeking asylum is completely legal.



Children sit in a day shelter for asylum seeking families in Phoenix. In Arizona, the IRC and its local partners are providing food, water, basic medical assistance, clothing and emergency shelter for an estimated 300 people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador each week. Photo by A. Oberstadt/IRC

“ We often talk about children on the move ‘slipping through the cracks’ of the system. But for families seeking asylum in the U.S., there’s nothing to crack. There’s no foundation whatsoever and they’re falling into an abyss.”

- Olga Byrne,  
IRC’s Director of Immigration  
U.S. Programs



Central American migrants face high levels of violence: in both their country of origin and along migration routes, exploitation, abduction for ransom, human trafficking and worse are common. Many hope to cross the southern US border for safety from violence and organized crime.

**MEXICO RESPONSE:** We are setting up programs in Northern Mexico to aid asylum seekers stuck in border towns. Programs are focused on improved assistance to survivors of gender-based violence, including access to urgent medical care and psychosocial assistance.

**U.S. RESPONSE:** We have launched a response in U.S. communities along the Mexico border via a unique combination of crisis response tools and social work expertise.

**EL SALVADOR RESPONSE:** We are providing crisis case management, cash assistance and technical expertise for women and children’s protection services in El Salvador.

## IRC RESPONSE AT THE SOUTHERN US BORDER:



The IRC is working with partners along the border to provide support to asylum seekers. It often starts by going to the bus station to pick up families who have been dropped off there by immigration agents.



We'll bring them to a shelter and make sure they've had a chance to eat and tend to urgent medical needs.



We then help them connect with their relatives who live in the U.S.



Legal orientation is also provided in a language asylum seekers can understand to be sure they comprehend the complicated process they will follow in gaining asylum.