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Childhood and Migration in Central and North America

New Multi-Country Study Maps Crisis and Calls for Regional Response Rooted in Human Rights

San Francisco, February 12, 2015 – A comprehensive regional [study](#) released today concludes that conditions, laws, policies, and practices throughout the Northern Central America-Mexico-United States corridor systematically violate the human rights of migrant children and children whose parents are migrants. The authors—civil society organizations and academics with expertise in children, migration, and human rights—call on Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States to reform laws and policies and to develop a regional response to guarantee children’s rights in countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Unprecedented in scope, [Childhood and Migration in Central and North America: Causes, Policies, Practices and Challenges](#) is the result of a two-year regional investigation into the treatment of Honduran, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Mexican, and United States citizen and permanent resident children affected by migration. Directed by the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies at the University of California Hastings College of the Law ([CGRS](#)) and the Migration and Asylum Program, Center for Justice and Human Rights at the National University of Lanús, Argentina ([CDHUNLa](#)) in partnership with civil society organizations throughout the region (listed below), the study finds major gaps in the protection of these children. While Northern Triangle countries (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) and Mexico continue to suffer from high levels of violence, social exclusion, and extreme poverty—to which women and children are particularly vulnerable—Mexico and the United States continue to expand harmful immigration enforcement measures, such as systematic detention and deportation of high numbers of migrant children and families.

[*Childhood, Migration, and Human Rights*](#) examines the root causes of the forced migration of children and families in the region; the policies, practices, and underlying conditions of countries of origin, transit, and destination; and inadequate national and regional responses that violate rights. Individual chapters examine children in the context of migration in each of the five countries in the Central America-Mexico-United States corridor, and the final chapter evaluates relevant regional and bilateral accords. The study overall finds four major shortcomings that deny the basic rights of children and adolescents in the context of migration: (1) lack of attention to the root causes of migration including social exclusion, marginalization and poverty, violence, and the need to reunify with family, (2) policies that prioritize immigration enforcement—such as detention and deportation—over the rights and best interests of children and adolescents, (3) an absence of adequate reintegration programs for repatriated children, and (4) the lack of comprehensive regional accords and policies informed by human rights, human development, humanitarian law, and international refugee law.

CGRS Associate Director and Managing Attorney Lisa Frydman, a specialist in immigrant children’s rights and asylum law, explains, “Rather than focus on increasing immigration enforcement in Mexico and the United States, the countries of the region should concentrate on addressing violence and other drivers of migration, ensuring full and fair access to asylum and other forms of relief, and upholding human rights.”

“There is a crisis in children’s rights throughout the region. Countries of origin, transit, and destination regularly violate or ignore nearly all internationally-recognized rights for persons under the age of 18,” says Pablo Ceriani Cernadas, Member of the U.N. Committee on Migrant Workers, Coordinator of CDHUNLa’s Migration and Asylum Program, and Professor of Human Rights. “These rights must be respected, protected, and guaranteed in all cases and without discrimination.”

[*Childhood, Migration, and Human Rights*](#) concludes that the countries of the region must act immediately and jointly to promote and guarantee comprehensive human rights, including children’s rights to life, safety, family, development, due process, and international protection, and to have their best interests considered as a primary factor in all decisions affecting them.

[*Childhood and Migration in Central and North America: Causes, Policies, Practices and Challenges*](#) was produced with major support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, supplemented by support from the Ford Foundation. Partner organizations include: [Casa Alianza](#) (Honduras); the [University Centroamericana](#) “José Simeón Cañas” (El Salvador); Pastoral de la Movilidad Humana ([PMH](#)) and Asociación [Pop No’j](#) (Guatemala); Centro de Derechos Humanos [Fray Matías](#) de Córdova and the Programa de Defensa e Incidencia Binacional ([PDIB](#)) (Mexico); and Kids in Need of Defense ([KIND](#)) and the Women’s Refugee Commission ([WRC](#)) (USA). The Washington, D.C. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also contributed a chapter based on its [2014 report](#) on child migration in the region.

Individual .pdf files of each of the book’s chapters and of its executive summary and recommendations are [available for download](#).

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The Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS) at the University of California Hastings College of the Law carries out a broad range of research and policy advocacy initiatives focused on refugee protection, as well as documentation of the root causes that underlie forced migration. CGRS uses

domestic, regional, and international human rights mechanisms to advance refugee law and policy, and to address the violations of rights that cause forced migration. CGRS is recognized for its deep expertise on these issues, and provides legal consultation, training, and resources to attorneys representing asylum seekers – in particular, women, children, and LGBT individuals. <http://cgrs.uchastings.edu/>

The Migration and Asylum Program of the Center for Justice and Human Rights at the National University of Lanús, Argentina (**CDHUNLa**), engages in research and advocacy initiatives on human rights in the context of migration, with particular emphasis on the migration of children and adolescents. CDHUNLa’s initiatives are implemented at the national, regional, and global levels. <http://www.unla.edu.ar/index.php/centro-de-derechos-humanos>

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