



# AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

*Brief summary*

## INTRODUCTION

In 2014, media put a spotlight on the humanitarian crisis in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala that led almost 70,000 unaccompanied children and another 70,000 individuals in family units to flee to the United States.<sup>1</sup> In fiscal year 2015, after varied government responses, the number of children arriving in the U.S. decreased by approximately 42 percent.<sup>2</sup> However, deportations of Central Americans in Mexico increased sharply.<sup>3</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is keenly aware of the forced displacement of these families and children due to its historical and personal connections with churches in the region.

Following visits from ELCA leaders and staff to the U.S.-Mexico border, Central America and Mexico, it became evident that children and mothers must flee their communities today due to **violence, poverty and lack of opportunities**. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees confirmed in a study that most children have a need for international protection. A child might need this protection due to fleeing domestic, gang or other types of violence, being a victim of trafficking, or being targeted in other ways.

As vulnerable children make the treacherous journey, ELCA connections in the region and in the U.S. give the ELCA a unique and critical perspective to help uphold and guarantee the protection of children. Working as church together and with companions and partners, the ELCA will focus on three interdependent guiding principles: **ACCOMPANIMENT, AWARENESS BUILDING AND ADVOCACY**.

## THE CALL TO THE CHURCH FOR ENGAGEMENT

The ELCA's 1995 social statement, "For Peace in God's World," states:

Care for the Uprooted. Tens of millions are refugees in foreign lands. At least as many are internally displaced. In unprecedented numbers people have had to flee their homes because of persecution or general violence. We support compassionate survival assistance for refugees and vigorous international protection for them. The world community has a responsibility to aid nations that receive refugees and to help change the situations from which they have fled. In our own country, we support a generous policy of welcome for refugees and immigrants. We pledge to continue our church's historic leadership in caring for refugees and immigrants.

1 [http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FINAL\\_Draft\\_CBP\\_FY14\\_Report\\_20141218.pdf](http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FINAL_Draft_CBP_FY14_Report_20141218.pdf).

2 U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children Statistics FY 2015." <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2015>.

3 Washington Office on Latin America. [http://www.wola.org/news/mexico\\_now\\_detains\\_more\\_central\\_american\\_migrants\\_than\\_the\\_united\\_states](http://www.wola.org/news/mexico_now_detains_more_central_american_migrants_than_the_united_states)[http://www.wola.org/news/mexico\\_now\\_detains\\_more\\_central\\_american\\_migrants\\_than\\_the\\_united\\_states](http://www.wola.org/news/mexico_now_detains_more_central_american_migrants_than_the_united_states).

Because we understand each person to be made in God's image – without distinction based on race, ethnicity, gender, economic class or country of origin – and have heard God's call to serve the needs of our neighbor wherever they may be, we recognize ourselves to be in mission and ministry together for the benefit of all God's people. (See also "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture," 1993).

## BACKGROUND

Forcibly displaced children are highly vulnerable in their communities, as they journey to safety, and in the U.S. Despite these vulnerabilities, governments – the U.S., Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – have focused on border enforcement without taking sufficient steps to protect them.

Currently, the ELCA has programs to accompany these children in Honduras and Guatemala through our global ministry and in the U.S. through the church's domestic ministry, synods and its partners, such as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. The AMMPARO strategy will support and expand the ELCA's work, while improving coordination and advocating to improve systems that protect children.

## STRATEGY

This strategy accompanies children in the countries of origin, in transit, and in the U.S.

Some examples of **ACCOMPANIMENT** include:

- enhancing the capacity of companions to develop strategic alliances with organizations in the countries of origin and with outside organizations that are working on the issues of migration, detention, deportation, repatriation and reinsertion and to develop plans of action; and
- encouraging congregations to develop service centers that focus on needed social services, including "wrap-around services" (e.g. education, life-skills training, legal assistance, etc.).

Some examples of **AWARENESS-BUILDING** include:

- enhancing ELCA members' awareness of the situation through new resources (including the creation of a webpage), documents and other materials; and
- conducting immersion programs and tours for ELCA members, colleges, universities, seminaries and others in collaboration with companions in Central America and Mexico with a capacity to receive such visits.

Some examples of **ADVOCACY** include:

- addressing the root causes of migration, including outlining needed U.S. policy changes;
- bringing together ELCA synods, ethnic-specific ministries, partners, the Immigration Ready Bench, synods on the Mexico border and other communities serving migrants to advocate for fair and compassionate migration policies; and
- encouraging local advocacy by companions as well as solidarity advocacy by international companions (e.g. ELCA) in a coordinated and collaborative way.