

AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

Briefing Points

WHAT IS AMMPARO?

AMMPARO stands for Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities. It is a commitment by the ELCA, as a church in the world, to accompany vulnerable children today and in the future.

HOW AMMPARO STARTED

Although children began coming in increasingly large numbers much earlier, in 2014, as media coverage of the plight of unaccompanied children arriving from Central America began to garner attention, ELCA leaders traveled to the U.S.–Mexico border to see first-hand what children faced. In government shelters, they saw the faces of children who were seeking protection in the U.S.

In early 2015, an ELCA delegation visited El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to listen to, pray with the Lutheran churches the ELCA accompanies, and further understand why people are fleeing their communities. Through these visits to Central America, it became apparent that the ELCA has valuable and unique connections in the region that allow the church to view the migration of children and families in a holistic way.

AMMPARO is an answer to the discovery of the church's valuable and unique perspective.

With the expertise and perspective of companion churches and connections to other ministries in the region, together with our connections in the U.S., we can spiritually walk together with unaccompanied children. Through AMMPARO, we will work to change the root causes that force children to flee their homes and communities. If they must leave their home country, however, the church will be there in their journey and welcome them as our own in the U.S.

WHAT IS OUR STRATEGY?

The strategy was drafted with input from Lutheran and ecumenical companions and partners, the ELCA bishops in October 2015, and others.

AMMPARO seeks to provide a whole church response that will:

- Uphold and guarantee basic human rights and safety of migrant children and their families;
- Address the root causes of migration in countries from Central America's Northern Triangle and Mexico and the treatment of migrants in transit;
- Work toward just and humane policies affecting migrants in and outside the U.S.; and
- Engage as a church body with all of its companions, affiliates and partners to respond to the migration situation as a whole context and to advocate for migrant children and their families.

The guiding principles of accompaniment, awareness building and advocacy will orient our work, which will include action around protection, advocacy, representation and opportunities.

In order to fulfill these commitments, the ELCA will work purposefully with companions and partners, through strategies for ministry with:

- Those in the countries of origin: Sinodo Luterano Salvadoreño (Salvadoran Lutheran Synod) in El Salvador; Iglesia Cristiana Luterana en Honduras (Lutheran Christian Church in Honduras) Comisión de Acción Social Menonita (Mennonite Social Action Committee) and Lutheran World Federation/World Service (LWF/WS) in Honduras; and Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala (Lutheran Augustinian Church in Guatemala) and LWF/WS in Guatemala
- Those in countries of transit: Iglesia Luterana Mexicana (Mexican Lutheran Church), AMEXTRA
- Those in the U.S.: through synods and congregations, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), Lutheran Social Services organizations, Church World Service (CWS)

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Approximately, 70,000 children and another 70,000 women with their children, most from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, arrived in the U.S. in fiscal year (FY) 2014. Although this number decreased by 42 percent in FY 2015, numbers began increasing again in August 2015.

The reasons why these vulnerable populations must flee are complex and interrelated. They include violence, insecurity, lack of opportunity and environmental displacement.

Violence, insecurity and the inability of governments to protect their citizens play a significant role in the displacement of children and families. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found that approximately 58 percent of children have a potential need for international protection. This includes asylum or other forms of protection outside of their country. In addition, UNHCR also recently recorded the abuse that women asylum seekers face and the incredible impunity that leads to their forced displacement.

- Other sources that cite violence and insecurity as principal in the migration: The American Immigration Council, which interviewed Salvadoran children, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office, which interviewed government staff with knowledge of what is happening in the region.

The conditions that lead to children and families being displaced has not changed. In 2015, violence in El Salvador reached levels not seen since its civil war, with murder rates increasing approximately 70 percent from the year before. In addition, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have some of the highest rates of female homicides globally. However, in these three countries, the conviction rate for crimes committed is 5 percent or less.

Children, then, are victimized before leaving a community and continue to face violence during their journey to safety. In Mexico, they face traffickers, corrupt officials, drug cartels and criminal actors.

Human trafficking in Latin America is the third-largest illicit industry, with women and children being especially vulnerable. Nevertheless, Mexican officials do not properly screen children and actively deter them from applying for protection. In the U.S., political efforts to address the number of children that arrived in the country center on changing a trafficking bill that improved the screening of Central American children.

Instead of thinking of ways to prevent children from seeking safety or weakening screenings that could make a difference for a child in need of safety, the only humane and effective way to deal with this humanitarian crisis is by addressing the roots causes that force people to flee in the first place.