

# Everything You Need to Know About Unaccompanied Minors at the Border

## A Conversation with Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang

Recently we've seen reports of another "crisis" at the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly related to children, or 'unaccompanied minors.'

We continue to explore and understand what's actually happening, what *should* be happening?, and what can followers of Jesus who care about vulnerable children do?

We're continuing the conversation World Relief's President, Scott Arbeiter, started with Jenny Yang and Matthew Soerens, World Relief's in-house immigration policy experts and co-authors of [Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate](#) to help us understand what's currently happening at the border. (If you missed part 1, listen or read to it [here.](#))

### **Quick Facts:**

Immigration policy can be confusing and hard to keep track if you aren't familiar with the language. Below are a few key terms to keep in mind as you listen and/or read.

**TVPPRA:** The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. A 2008 law that, among many other elements, governs how unaccompanied children identified at the border are to be treated.

**Title 42:** A public health law that both the Trump and Biden administrations have cited as a legal justification to turn away asylum seekers because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Migrant Protection Protocols:** A Trump administration policy that required most asylum seekers who arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border to "remain in Mexico" to await their court hearings, rather than being allowed to wait safely in the U.S. for their court proceedings.

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## **PART II**

**Scott:** *Last week you both gave us a good sense of what is happening at the US-Mexico border in regards to increased apprehensions and unaccompanied minors. I'd like to switch gears a little today to talk about the actions we'd like to see take place and how we can help. So, from your perspectives, what should be happening at the border right now? What steps would you like to see our government take to remedy this situation?*

**JENNY:** Ending the use of Title 42 to expel unaccompanied children was, in our view, a very important step, as was ending the Migrant Protection Program and gradually admitting asylum

seeking families who have been required to wait in vulnerable situations in Mexico to be admitted into the U.S. to await their court dates.

Another key step would be for the Biden administration to stop using Title 42 for new asylum seeking families, which we believe unintentionally exacerbates the challenges of an increasing number of unaccompanied minors, because sufficiently desperate parents may decide that, since unaccompanied children are being protected but families are being rejected, they should make the agonizing decision to send their kids across the border alone. The government should partner with faith-based and other non-profit organizations in border communities within the U.S. to process qualifying asylum seekers in an orderly and safe fashion.

In terms of unaccompanied children, we certainly understand that the sudden increase in arrivals makes this challenging, but it's vital that the U.S. government respect our laws and transfer children from the custody of Customs and Border Protection to the Department of Health and Human Services' network of care providers within 72 hours. That will require urgently increasing the number of beds and care providers within that network, and also working as quickly (but also as carefully) as possible to move these kids on to their families or other sponsors within the U.S.

The U.S. government also should expand lawful migration options that could be accessed closer to home, so that fewer would embark upon the dangerous journey to the border to request asylum. The recent re-opening of the Central American Minors program, which allows a child with a parent residing lawfully in the U.S. to be processed in their country of origin and brought to the U.S. via airplane, is an important first step. But the U.S. should also quickly rebuild its refugee resettlement program, which would allow those with a credible fear of persecution to be classified as a refugee and vetted closer to home before being brought to the U.S. and met by organizations like World Relief.. That rebuilding process can only begin when President Biden signs the revised refugee ceiling that he has indicated he will do but has not yet signed. You can join our advocacy efforts to call on Biden to sign the new ceiling by visiting our website at [worldrelief.org/advocate](https://worldrelief.org/advocate) where we provide more information and simple tools to reach out to your elected officials.

Lastly, the U.S. can help address this situation by focusing on where the real crisis is, in Central America, by increasing U.S. assistance to non-governmental organizations confronting poverty, violence, environmental degradation and corruption.

***Scott: What can local churches and concerned Christians do to help?***

**MATT :** World Relief offices throughout the U.S. are eager to serve asylum-seeking families in any way that we can, in partnership with volunteers and churches. Those services include providing legal services and representation for some of those seeking asylum, as well as caring for newly arrived refugees and immigrants in vulnerable situations We provide an array of programming that includes education, employment, economic empowerment, youth and family services, mental health support, and anti-human trafficking. We also minister to many asylum seekers who are held in [detention](#) through our ministry at the Northwest Immigrant Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington. You can help to sustain our work in these and many other areas by joining [The Path](#),

World Relief's community of monthly givers, or by signing up to volunteer at one of our local offices. For a full list of our US locations, you can visit our website at [www.worldrelief.org/us](http://www.worldrelief.org/us).

**Scott:** *How can we be praying in the midst of this challenging situation?*

**Matt:** Great question! Please pray in particular for these children, who are uniquely vulnerable, and for their parents, who are often anguished as they wonder if they will be safe. Pray also for President Biden and his cabinet and for Members of Congress, that God would grant each of them wisdom to know how to respond to a complex challenge and the courage to do what is right. Pray also for Border Patrol agents, for the Health and Human Services staff and the staff of the organizations with whom they partner to care for unaccompanied minors and for the churches and ministries on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border actively caring for vulnerable children and families. Pray for peace, security and economic opportunity in Central America. And pray that the witness of the Church — in Central America, in Mexico, along the border and throughout the U.S. — that we would earn the reputation for reflecting God's love for vulnerable children and families and rejecting narratives rooted in fear.