



Unaccompanied Children Frequently Asked Questions

ACF's Office of Refugee Resettlement in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services operates shelters throughout the United States for children who enter the country without their parent. These shelters are consistently quiet and good neighbors in the communities where they are located.

Below are some of the questions that community members and media have frequently asked.

Q: Are there still temporary shelters on military bases open?

A: No. In May and early June, HHS opened three temporary shelters on military bases to handle the large increase in unaccompanied children being apprehended by immigration authorities. The temporary shelters at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Fort Sill Army Base, and Naval Base Ventura County-Port Hueneme played a critical role in the humanitarian response, providing care to more than 7,700 children. The Department of Defense has been an exemplary partner in this humanitarian response.

To prudently manage its resources, HHS has suspended all three of these temporary shelters. All unaccompanied children who were cared for at the temporary shelters have either been transferred to standard shelters or released to sponsors while they await immigration proceedings. We were able to take this step because we have proactively expanded capacity to care for children in standard shelters, which are significantly less costly facilities. At the same time, we have seen a decrease in the number of children crossing the Southwest border.

We greatly appreciate the support of the Department of Defense in this humanitarian response.

Q: How do ORR shelters affect our community?

A: The impact on the local community is minimal. Shelters are operated by non-profit organizations, generally as group homes. Most shelters care for fewer than 50 unaccompanied children. These shelters are consistently quiet and good neighbors in the communities where they are located.

ORR pays for and provides all services for the children while they are in care at a shelter. This includes providing food, clothing, education, medical screening, and any needed medical care to the children. Children spend fewer than 35 days on average at the shelters and do not integrate into the local community. They remain under staff supervision at all times.

Q: Do these children pose a health risk?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) believes that the children arriving at U.S. borders pose little risk of spreading infectious diseases to the general public.

Countries in Central America, where most of the unaccompanied children are from (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras), have childhood vaccination programs, and most children have received some or all of their recommended childhood vaccines. However, they may not have received a few vaccines, such as chickenpox, influenza, and pneumococcal vaccines. As a precaution, ORR is providing vaccinations to all children who do not have documentation of previous valid doses of vaccine.

Children receive an initial screening for visible and obvious health issues (for example, lice, rashes, diarrhea, and cough) when they first arrive at CBP facilities. Onsite medical staff are available at CBP facilities to provide support, and referrals are made to a local emergency room for additional care, if needed. Children must be considered “fit to travel” before they are moved from the border patrol station to an ORR shelter.

Children receive additional, more thorough medical screening and vaccinations at ORR shelter facilities. If children are found to have certain communicable diseases, they are separated from other children and treated as needed. The cost of medical care for the children while they are in ORR custody is fully paid by the federal government.

Q: Are communities safe with these kids in it? There are rumors that some kids are gang members.

A: Many of these children are fleeing violent situations in their home country and choose to leave rather than join a gang. They endure a long and dangerous journey to reach the border. When they are placed in a standard shelter, they are, as a rule, relieved to be in a safe and caring environment where they can wait for a sponsor to arrive to take custody.

Children served by the Office of Refugee Resettlement program do not integrate into the local community. They are not permitted to visit the local town or area attractions unless supervised by approved staff. Each staff member is required to maintain visibility on children at all times and know the exact location of each child.

Q: How can individuals or communities help?

A: In response to this humanitarian effort, members of the public have expressed interest in donating or volunteering to help unaccompanied children. The Federal agencies supporting these facilities are unable to accept donations or volunteers to assist the unaccompanied children program. However, there are several voluntary, community, faith-based, or international organizations assisting unaccompanied children. Additional information and updates are available online at the resources

listed below.

- English – <http://www.dhs.gov/information-donations> (<http://www.dhs.gov/information-donations>)
- Spanish – <http://www.dhs.gov/informacion-sobre-donaciones> (<http://www.dhs.gov/informacion-sobre-donaciones>)
- Volunteering and Donating Responsibly – <http://www.fema.gov/donate> (<http://www.fema.gov/donate>)

Several refugee resettlement non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the U.S. are accepting monetary donations and, in some cases, experienced volunteers to assist incoming refugee families, although not specifically unaccompanied children, in support of the effort of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program at the State Department. Information, by state, for refugee resettlement NGOs can be found at the **State Department's Refugee Processing Center (RPC) webpage** (<http://www.dhs.gov/redirect?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wrapsnet.org%2FHome%2FRPAgencyContacts>) or the **HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) webpage** (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/state-programs-annual-overview>).

Q: How much does it cost to take care of the unaccompanied children?

A: The FY14 appropriation for this program is \$868 million.

Q: Can I foster or adopt one or more of the unaccompanied children?

A: We have grantees in various parts of the United States who care for a small number unaccompanied children in foster home settings, and many providers are looking to expand their number of foster parents, particularly ones who are bilingual. ORR requires that all foster care parents be fully licensed by their state. If you are not already licensed, you could begin by contacting one of the foster care providers who care for unaccompanied children, such as United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services who have provided foster care to unaccompanied refugee and immigrant children for many years:

- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)
 - Website: <http://lirs.org/fostercare/> (<http://lirs.org/fostercare/>)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
 - Website: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/children/f...> (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/children/foster-care.cfm>)

Q: Are children who arrived as unaccompanied children ever enrolled in local schools?

A: While students are in HHS custody at HHS shelters, they will not be enrolled in the local school systems. When students are released to an appropriate sponsor, while awaiting immigration

proceedings, they have a right – just like other children living in their community – to enroll in local schools regardless of their or their sponsors’ actual or perceived immigration or citizenship status. State laws also require children to attend school up to a certain age. A small number of children in HHS custody are placed in long-term foster care instead of being released to a sponsor. These children do enroll in public school in the community where their foster care is located. Children in all other care settings receive education at an HHS facility. For more information about local educational agencies and unaccompanied children, please visit: **www.ed.gov/unaccompaniedchildren** (<http://www.ed.gov/unaccompaniedchildren>)

ORR/ Division of Children Services/Unaccompanied Alien Children (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/ucs/about>) *program provides unaccompanied alien children (UAC) with a safe and appropriate environment as well as client-focused highest quality of care to maximize the UAC’s opportunities for success both while in care, and upon discharge from the program to sponsors in the U.S. or return to home country.*

BACK TO TOP