Overlooking the Vulnerable: Limited Resources for Unaccompanied Migrants

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Overlooking the Vulnerable: Limited Resources for Unaccompanied Migrant Youth

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Introduction:
In recent years, violence by heavily-armed, transnational gangs in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (the Northern Triangle of Central America or NTCA) has increased, causing migration in order to survive. In 2016 there were 164,000 total refugees and asylum-seekers from the NTCA, an almost tenfold increase over the previous five years. In October of 2015, the Mexican government estimated that at least 27,000 unaccompanied and separated youth had entered Mexico from the NTCA. As many as half are fleeing threats to their lives and safety.

Once in Mexico, without protection from the government, unaccompanied youth are exposed to threats to join local gangs, threats of sexual violence or exploitation, held for ransom, subjected to extortion, charged extra for public transit, and are subjected to bribes from law enforcement. Less than 1% of youth who are apprehended by Mexican immigration authorities are recognized as refugees or receive formal protection in Mexico.

• 35,000 migrant youth were detained in 2015.
• Youth are often unaware that they are eligible for asylum. If they are, they often struggle with the process having no knowledgeable representation.

Current Strategies
Collaboration between the Mexican and United States Governments
• The U.S. government has given an extra $78 million in addition to normal aid in order to “securitize the border.”
• In the San Jose Action Statement, Mexico stated it was “committed to building refugee protection capacity” while the United States stated it would “work with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to expand its refugee admissions programs in order to help vulnerable people fleeing the northern triangle countries.”

Government Resource
• Commission for Refugee Aid (COMAR)
  • Apply for asylum status.
  • Three locations in Mexico (see map below).

Non-Government/International Responses
• Civil-society shelters
  • Access to temporary shelter and sometimes food.
  • Standard stay: 72 hours due to overcrowding.
  • Located on main migrant routes.
• Four UNHCR offices in Mexico (see map below)
  • Enhances systems including raising awareness about the protection that is needed for refugees and asylum-seekers.
  • Develops safe spaces and solutions including integration.
  • Collaborates with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Innovation
Program proposal
• This advocacy program would be mobile. Advocates who are familiar with the process of applying for asylum would:
  • Work from already established shelters along the most traveled migrant routes (see map below).
  • Assist thousands of displaced youth.
  • Serve all migrants eligible for asylum but would give priority to unaccompanied youth.
  • Connect those eligible for refugee recognition to admissions programs through UNHCR and COMAR.

Goal
• By assisting migrants through the paperwork process of applying for asylum, more people would gain protection from the government. This would increase accessibility to the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, and a safe space to live.

Innovation Model
Guide through the paperwork process
Inform/raise awareness about application and eligibility
Teach this process so information can be shared

Conclusion
Forced Migration has major impacts on home and identity, with displacement and dispossession having profound and long-term implications on those who are separated from their homes and homelands. The double displacement of asylum seekers constitutes a major interruption with fundamental human needs.

• According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, those fleeing for their lives have the right to receive refugee recognition and government protection.
• The collaboration between the United States government and the Mexican government to enhance security and increase deportations exploits the right to protection for those fleeing for their lives.
• This proposed program would increase accessibility to the process of gaining asylum status.

References
3. Jana Sládková. (2014). "The guys told us crying that they saw how they were killing her and they could not do anything". Psychosocial explorations of migrant journeys to the U.S. Psychosocial intervention, 23 (1), 1-9. doi:10.5093/j2013i9pp

Key
COMAR offices:  
UNHCR offices:  
Main Migrant Routes