

# SPOTLIGHT ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN



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[www.eastbaysanctuary.org](http://www.eastbaysanctuary.org)

**S**ince 2014, EBSC has provided legal assistance to more than 600 unaccompanied children fleeing gang violence, human trafficking, and domestic abuse in their home countries.

With our help, these youth are often able to obtain asylum, reunify with their family members, and finally feel safe.



There are currently not enough low-fee attorneys to meet the needs of the growing numbers of unaccompanied children seeking legal services.

## Why do children flee to the United States for safety?

“Cosme” and “Vicente” are brothers from Guatemala, ages 16 and 18. They experienced brutal beatings from their grandmother. When Cosme was 12, he was kidnapped and beaten by a well-known gang. With the help of a fellow kidnap victim, Cosme escaped. Over the next few years, the boys experienced daily threats and beatings from gang members. At one point, the two brothers lived on their own for a month, completely defenseless, when they were 14 and 11 years old; they were deeply frightened and hardly ever left their house.

## Why are so many children hazarding this dangerous journey alone?

Cosme and Vicente decided to make the dangerous journey to the U.S. in search of their mother whom they hadn't seen in eight years. If they had stayed in Guatemala, they were certain they would be killed.

**They are not alone:** political instability, economic stagnation, and organized crime continue to plague many countries, where the cost of not cooperating with a gang is often death or harassment. Children may also suffer abuse at the hands of their caretakers, driving them to seek refuge on their own. On the long journey to the U.S., children face even greater dangers than adult refugees: trafficking, raids, rape, and assault, in addition to exhaustion and constant uncertainty.

**Targeted violence against children is the main reason that unaccompanied minors decide to migrate. A child living in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador is, on average, 10 times more likely to be murdered than a child in the United States. Kids aged 15 to 17 face the highest risk of death by homicide.<sup>2</sup>**

**In 2018, more than 50,000 unaccompanied children were stopped at the border; in January 2019, apprehensions of minors traveling alone had increased 40%.<sup>1</sup>**



REUTERS/Jose de Jesus Cortes

Unaccompanied minors ride atop the wagon of a freight train, known as La Bestia (The Beast) in Ixtepec, in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, June 18, 2014.

<sup>1</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2019/02/23/unaccompanied-minor-migrants-us-border-policy/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://theconversation.com/central-american-kids-come-to-the-us-fleeing-record-high-youth-murder-rates-at-home-99132>



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## What is the asylum process like for unaccompanied children?

Cosme and Vicente were lucky—with EBSC’s help, they were granted asylum and are now permanent residents pursuing their education and working.

Other unaccompanied children do not fare as well. For those who are apprehended at the border, about 40% are eligible for asylum or other legal status.

## How does EBSC support unaccompanied minors?

We work individually with youth to apply for asylum or other legal status that will help them to stay in the U.S. legally. We offer interpretation in the young person’s native language and accompany them throughout the legal process. EBSC also mentors pro bono attorneys to provide these services.

What stands out is the resilience of these youth, many of whom have experienced trauma in their home country, on their journey to the U.S., during detention in immigration centers, or in the process of adjusting to a new culture, all while fighting for legal status. Some have experienced multiple layers of violence, discrimination and trauma due to being LGBT, indigenous, or survivors of sexual violence.

EBSC collaborates with local mental health organizations to offer counseling, social connections and stability. We are also beginning to offer arts-based storytelling workshops for youth as a way to jumpstart their healing process and share their story in a safe way.

**“If a gang member wants to date your daughter, he will give you 24 hours to hand her over. If you say no, they will threaten to kill you and your daughter.”**

**– EBSC Client**

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**Many unaccompanied children never meet with a lawyer and have no access to legal representation during court hearings. Youth without representation are far more likely to be deported.**

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**“EBSC supports unaccompanied children by reuniting them with their parents and often assisting their parents with their own legal cases. EBSC has reunited at least one youth with his father, whom he had never met before.”**

**– Kaveena Singh, EBSC Managing Attorney**

**PLEASE JOIN US  
IN SUPPORTING UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN  
IN THE BAY AREA.**

**Donate:** <https://ebsc.nationbuilder.com>

**Volunteer:** 510-540-5296 or [volunteer@eastbaysanctuary.org](mailto:volunteer@eastbaysanctuary.org)

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