Voices of Central American Youth—Why They Are Fleeing Their Countries

Background on the Humanitarian Crisis in Central America:
• Since the Fall of 2011, prior to the President’s announcement of DACA, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) started apprehending significantly more unaccompanied minors from Central America. ORR promptly started to open more shelters and detention sites for these children.¹
• Updated data from the UNHCR, has shown a 712% increase in asylum requests in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize by nationals from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.²
• ORR has reported a significant increase in both younger children and girls coming.³

Maria⁴, a 12 year old girl from Central America was trafficked for labor and sex, she fled with her baby to escape slavery. Maria was 12 years old, when she was kidnapped at gunpoint and taken to a home where she was held captive. She was beaten and raped on an almost daily basis and eventually forced into prostitution. Because of this she became pregnant and gave birth to a girl while captive. Maria fled with her child, riding on top of trains so that they might escape the sexual bondage. Maria ended up qualifying for a T-visa and is currently doing well. She has now graduated high school.

Rosa, a pregnant 15 year old girl from Honduras fled to U.S. to escape threats against herself and her unborn child. In Honduras, Rosa had been attending school part of the day and working in the fields the rest of the day. One day while working, she was raped by a man in the community. The rape resulted in pregnancy. Rosa filed a police report about the incident, but then received threats against her life from the friends of her rapist to withdraw her police report and later to abort the baby.

²When UNHCR published their report Children on the Run the numbers the asylum increase was at 435%. See http://www.unhcrwashington.org/children/read-more
³http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/ucs/about#facts
⁴Names have been changed to protect the identity of the child.
The threats continued so Rosa worked with her family to flee to the U.S. to seek safety and where she can carry her pregnancy full-term. **A child like Rosa might apply for asylum.**

**Laura, an 8 year old girl from Honduras fled domestic violence and kidnapping.** Laura was living in Honduras with her aunt while mother was in the U.S. working to provide for her family. One day a man she called “step-father” who was an ex-boyfriend of her mother’s, kidnapped her from her aunt’s care. Laura’s mother in the U.S. said she could not report the kidnapping to authorities as they would do nothing. This step-father beat Laura daily with belts and pieces of wood, resulting in bruises, bleeding, and leaving visible scars on her body. On multiple occasions, he also threatened to kill her with a gun. The step-father finally threatened Laura’s mother that he would kill the Laura if her mother did not send him money. Laura’s mother was finally able to save and send a large amount of money to the step-father and Laura was able to escape to come live with her in the U.S. **A child like Laura might apply for asylum.**

**Mario is a 16 year old male from Honduras who decided to make the journey to the United States after several of the male members of his family were killed by drug traffickers.** Mario lived with his parents and siblings in Honduras and worked on a local farm in order to help support his family. He had not been able to attend school for five years due to his family’s economic situation. Mario’s his life in Honduras was fairly normal until his family was attacked. Since his father was financially successful without being involved in the drug trade others in their community became jealous of the family. He has stated that this is why his father, brother, cousin and uncle were all violently murdered one day. Mario and his family lived in fear of these individuals and the possibility that they would cause further harm to the family. Mario has a sister in the U.S. with whom he hopes to live—so he can go to school in a safe environment like a normal teenager. **A child like Mario, might seek asylum or a special immigrant juvenile status visa.**

**Jesus, is a 17 year old Guatemalan boy who came to the U.S. to escape a drug-trafficking gang who brutally murdered some of his family.** When Jesus was 7 years old, his older sister and older brother were kidnapped. The family paid money to the kidnappers but the children were not released. Authorities eventually found the mutilated bodies of his siblings. The group that murdered the siblings started making threats to the rest of his family. Jesus and his younger sister started being intimidated in the community by people they believed to be part of a drug trafficking gang. These threats caused Jesus to decide to flee to the U.S. **A child like Jesus might apply for a trafficking visa, special immigrant juvenile status visa, or asylum.**

**Juan, a 12 year old boy from Honduras and his disabled 17 year old sister Maria, fled domestic violence and trafficking.** Juan and Maria lived with their uncle, who was physically abusive to both of them. Maria was raped by her father at a young age and continued to be raped once she entered the care of her uncle. While living with his uncle, Juan was trafficked by a man to download, burn, and distribute pornography. He was threatened with a gun to continue creating this pornography or he would be shot. Upon abandonment by their uncle, the children were sent to the U.S. to live with a distant relative. **Children like Juan and Maria might apply for a trafficking visa, special immigrant juvenile status visa, or asylum.**

**Carla, a 17 year old teen, fled attempted rape by mother’s partner.** Carla’s mother’s boyfriend attempted to molest Carla. Carla immediately reported it to her mother. Her mother ended the relationship with her boyfriend. The ex-boyfriend then started threatening Carla’s life because he was outraged at the reported abuse. Carla’s mom immediately sent her to the U.S. to escape the death threat. **A child like Carla might apply for asylum.**
Carlos, a 13 year old boy from El Salvador, fled to the U.S. after witnessing his mother’s brutal murder. Four gunmen broke into Carlos’s home and shot Carlos’s mother right in front of him. The gunmen where never caught, which lead to the child and family feeling afraid in their community. The child suffered from severe trauma because of this event. Due to this, his family in El Salvador decided to send him to live with a relative in the U.S. where he would not be in danger of his life and have better care. A child like Carlos might apply for asylum.

Ana, a 12 year old girl from Honduras, fled gang abuse and abandonment by mother. Ana’s mother has a history of psychiatric care and violence against her 3 children. Ana was forced to care for her disabled younger siblings. Ana was also sexually abused as a young child. Ana finally was forced to flee because her family started to be threatened by a local gang. A child like Ana might apply for asylum or a special immigrant juvenile status visa.

David, a 17 year old boy, fled Honduras after his life was threatened. David was living with a 32 year old friend. One day, David forgot to put the farm equipment away after his work was completed. The friend and David’s caregiver threatened to shoot David. Fearing for his life, David fled to the U.S. A child like David might apply for asylum or a special immigrant juvenile status visa.

Rodrigo, 17 year old boy from Honduras, fled domestic violence. Rodrigo was physically abused often in Honduras by his father. His father would hit him with anything around the house that he could find. One day his father threatened to kill the minor with a machete. Rodrigo afraid for his life, fled to the U.S. to escape. A child like Rodrigo might apply for asylum or a special immigrant juvenile status visa.

Ruth, a 16 year old, girl fled violence in Honduras. Ruth was abandoned by her mother when she was 10 years old, her father then started to abuse her. When the violence started to escalate in her community, Ruth finally made the decision she needed to flee to the U.S. A child like Ruth might apply for asylum or a special immigrant juvenile status visa.

Tina, 16 year old, female from Guatemala fled to the U.S. because of child abuse. Tina was living with her father in Guatemala who was physically abusive. He would hit her with tree branches and cords on her back and legs. Tina has scars all over her body from the abuse. She came to the US to escape the abuse. A child like Tina might apply for asylum or a special immigrant juvenile status visa.

Dominic, 15 year old boy, fled Guatemala’s gangs. In Dominic’s neighborhood, a gang tried to recruit him and pressure him into smoking marijuana. His friend told him one day that members of the gang were waiting in a nearby park to physically assault the minor. Dominic immediately made the choice to start his journey to the U.S. A child like Dominic might apply for asylum.

Additional Information:

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http://lirs.org/our-work/people-we-serve/children/