



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Central American Minors (CAM) Program: In-Country Refugee/Parole Processing for Minors in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras

#### What is the stated purpose of the Central American Minors (CAM) Program?

In FY2014 57,498 unaccompanied children fled from their homes in Central America and crossed the U.S. Southern border.<sup>1</sup> Often referred to as the “surge” of arrivals, many of these children were fleeing violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The journey to the United States is incredibly long and dangerous, placing young children at high risk of being trafficked, brutally mistreated or even death. With a stated purpose of providing “a safe, legal and orderly alternative to the dangerous journey” for those seeking to reunite with parents in the United States, the U.S. Government introduced the Central American Minors (CAM) Program under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) in December 2014.<sup>2</sup>

Read the Department of State’s [factsheet](#) for an overview of the U.S. Government’s program plan.

#### Who is eligible to apply?

Designed as a reunification program, only parents living in the United States with lawful immigration presence can apply for their children under the age of 21. The program applies to children living in the countries in the Northern Triangle of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. To receive refugee status, children must demonstrate fear of persecution or other serious harm on account of one of five grounds: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

#### What is the process of reuniting children with their parents?

Qualifying parents in the U.S. can file an application for family reunification (called an Affidavit of Relationship) with a refugee resettlement agency in the U.S. Once approved, the Resettlement Support Center (RSC) in Latin America, funded and managed by the U.S. Department of State, prepares the case for presentation to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

In their home country, children will go through an interview process and DNA testing to determine whether or not they qualify for refugee status. During in-country processing, it is important to note that children may not receive protection, often prolonging their exposure to harmful conditions.

Read the U.S. Refugee CAM Admissions [Flowchart](#) for a detailed breakdown of the process.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Newsroom, Stats and Summaries, Unaccompanied Alien Children. Retrieved on 7/15/15 from <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children>

<sup>2</sup> The official name of the program is “*In-Country Refugee/Parole Program from Minors in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras with Parents Lawfully Present in the United States*” See Department of State/PRM factsheet at: <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2014/234067.htm>.

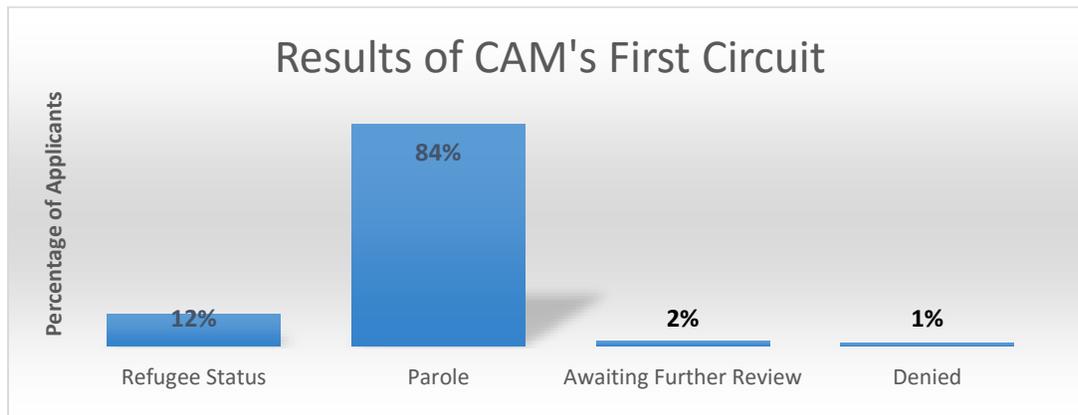
## What is Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's (LIRS) role in the CAM program?

As one of nine refugee resettlement agencies who partner with the U.S. government, LIRS and our network of local resettlement offices assist qualifying parents in the U.S. to file applications for their children. For those who are accepted as refugees, LIRS and other resettlement agencies help with integration upon arrival to the U.S.

For a complete list of resettlement offices approved for CAM process, follow this [link](#) to the directory.

## How many children have been reunited with their parents through CAM?

Despite the narrow scope of eligibility for the program, some 6,900 applications had been filed as of January 28, 2016.<sup>3</sup> A stark majority—86% of applicants—are El Salvadoran. Only 90 applications were reviewed in the first circuit ride, which began in July. **No children were approved under the CAM program and reunited with their parents in the U.S. until November 2015, though the program was enacted in December 2014.** The approval rates in the first circuit ride were only at 12% for refugee status.<sup>4</sup> Though they have increased to 43% approval rates, this is comparatively low given the number of vulnerable children seeking protection.<sup>5</sup> As of April 2016, only 300 children and parents have been approved to enter the U.S. as refugees.<sup>6</sup>



Data obtained from U.S. Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman Fifth Annual Conference. “Humanitarian Hot Topics—Year in Review.” Attended on Nov. 11, 2015.

While the U.S. Government has yet to publish an official report on the program’s first circuit ride, many frustrations with the program are expressed in this *New York Times* [article](#).

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<sup>3</sup> Molly Hennessy-Fiske. “Frustrated by new U.S. program to take in migrants, Central American parents turn to smugglers,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 2016. <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-central-american-migrants-20160420-story.html>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman Fifth Annual Conference. “Humanitarian Hot Topics—Year in Review.” Attended on Nov. 11, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> *RSC Quarterly Report: Q1 FY2016*. Report Resettlement Support Center.

<sup>6</sup> Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “U.S. Struggles With Goal of Admitting 10,000 Syrians,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/31/us/politics/as-us-admits-migrants-in-a-trickle-critics-urge-obama-to-pick-up-the-pace.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/31/us/politics/as-us-admits-migrants-in-a-trickle-critics-urge-obama-to-pick-up-the-pace.html?_r=0)

## What does it mean to be granted parole as opposed to refugee status?

Children who apply for CAM and are not granted refugee status might still be eligible for reunification with their parent in the United States through temporary humanitarian parole. However, parolees are not eligible for refugee assistance or community-based integration services—for example, support in coping with trauma and medical services. Parolees must also cover their own travel arrangements and costs and are not eligible for a travel loan. Parole status is not permanent and can be easily revoked by the U.S. Government.

## Why are the approval rates so low?

One possible explanation for low approval rates are the extremely limited eligibility parameters of the CAM program, restricting critical protection to only a very small number of children who desperately need it.

## What are LIRS' main concerns about the program?

LIRS holds deep concern for the safety of children in Central America, and as such, we support the stated purpose and robust implementation of the CAM program. However, given the limited scope and disappointing success rate of the program, CAM should not be offered as “the solution” to the arrival of unaccompanied children at the southern border. Access to protection must be safeguarded for children who cannot wait or do not qualify for in-country processing. Of the beneficiaries that have been interviewed as of December 2015, 71 individuals had previously been deported (3 from the United States and 68 from Mexico) and returned to their home country after fleeing in search of protection.<sup>7</sup> Under no circumstances should children seeking protection be turned away at the U.S. border, or at other borders along the migration route, and denied access to entry and protection. Furthermore, children who are in high-risk situations often cannot wait months for their case to be processed. In the absence of adequate shelter and protection mechanisms, children can be exposed to new threats in their journey to processing centers or be exposed to prolonged suffering in unstable homes. LIRS and other resettlement agencies have received reports of children in imminent peril abandoning the CAM process to seek safety. Tragically, in January 2016 LIRS learned **one child was killed in their country of origin while waiting for their CAM AOR application to process.**

## What are LIRS' recommendations to improve the CAM program?

- The CAM program is available only to children determined to be in danger of persecution who have parents with lawful presence in the U.S. This scope restricts protection to a very small segment of the children who desperately need it. Consideration should be given to expanding eligibility to vulnerable populations such as at-risk children lacking parents with lawful presence in the United States.
- We are concerned that children applying for the CAM program face danger in their home country during the application process, before they can complete the requirements. We

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<sup>7</sup> Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions Workshop. Attended Dec 4, 2015.

recommend establishing mechanisms to ensure child applicants and their families are safe while their cases make their way through the in-country process.

- Transportation and safe shelter should be provided for eligible children who do not live in the capital cities where processing takes place. If these opportunities are not available, many children who would otherwise benefit from the program will be excluded due to logistical obstacles that could easily be addressed.
- The U.S. government should expand the same critical follow-up services available to other refugees to children and families paroled into the United States through the CAM program.

For a complete statement from LIRS on the CAM program, please read this [statement](#) submitted to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary on April 22, 2015.

**For more information, please contact:**

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