

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-163T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2012 there has been a rapid increase in the number of apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexican border of UAC from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Current data indicate the rate of UAC migration from Central America in 2015 is lower than the record levels of 2014, though apprehensions increased in August 2015. Children from these three countries face a host of challenges, such as extreme violence and persistent poverty.

This testimony summarizes the findings from GAO's July 2015 report, which reviewed (1) U.S. assistance in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras addressing agency-identified causes of UAC migration; (2) how agencies have determined where to locate these assistance efforts; and (3) the extent to which agencies have developed processes to assess the effectiveness of programs seeking to address UAC migration. This testimony also provides updated information on several topics covered in the report. GAO reviewed agency documents and interviewed officials in Washington, D.C., and in Central America for the report.

What GAO Recommends

GAO's July 2015 report included recommendations that DHS and State integrate evaluations into their information campaigns intended to deter migration, and that DHS establish performance targets for its investigative units. DHS concurred with both recommendations, and said that it plans to evaluate its most recent campaign. State also concurred with the recommendation directed to it.

View [GAO-16-163T](#). For more information, contact Kimberly Gianopoulos at (202)-512-8612 or GianopoulosK@gao.gov

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UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILDREN

Improved Evaluation Efforts Could Enhance Agency Programs to Reduce Migration from Central America

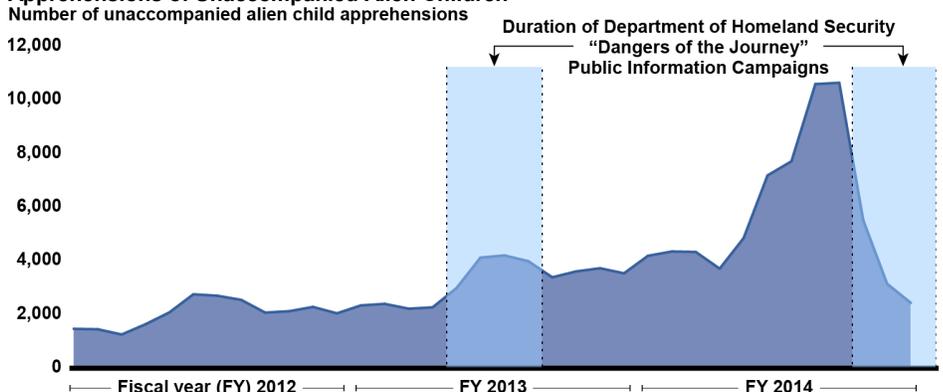
What GAO Found

GAO reported in July 2015 that U.S. agencies had sought to address causes of unaccompanied alien child (UAC) migration through recent programs, such as information campaigns to deter migration, developed in response to the migration increase and other long-standing efforts. The increase in migration since 2012 was likely triggered, according to U.S. officials, by several factors such as the increased presence and sophistication of child smugglers (known as coyotes) and confusion over U.S. immigration policy. Officials also noted that certain persistent conditions such as violence and poverty have worsened in certain countries. In addition to long-standing efforts, such as U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) antipoverty programs, agencies had taken new actions. For example, Department of Homeland Security (DHS)-led investigative units had increasingly sought to disrupt human smuggling operations.

GAO found that U.S. agencies located programs based on various factors, including long-term priorities such as targeting high-poverty and -crime areas, but adjusted to locate more programs in high-migration communities. For example, Department of State (State) officials in Guatemala said they moved programs enhancing police anticrime capabilities into such communities, and USAID officials in El Salvador said they expanded to UAC migration-affected locations.

GAO found that most agencies had developed processes to assess the effectiveness of programs seeking to address UAC migration, but weaknesses existed in these processes for some antismuggling programs. For example, DHS had established performance measures, such as arrests, for units combating UAC smuggling, but had not established numeric or other types of targets for these measures, which would enable DHS to measure the units' progress. In addition, DHS and State had not always evaluated information campaigns intended to combat coyote misinformation. DHS launched its 2013 campaign in April, but launched its 2014 campaign in late June after migration levels peaked. Neither agency evaluated its 2014 campaign. DHS has reported that it plans to evaluate its ongoing campaign before the end of this year.

Timing of Department of Homeland Security Public Information Campaigns and Monthly Apprehensions of Unaccompanied Alien Children



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security data. | GAO-16-163T