

International Detention Coalition

Human rights for detained refugees,
asylum seekers and migrants

Exploring solutions for migrant children

With the growth in migration of unaccompanied children globally an expert roundtable looks at possible alternative care models for Mexico.

PRESS RELEASE

4 December 2013

Contacts: Grant Mitchell (+ 61) 0403194665 americas@idcoalition.org

MEXICO CITY: More than 7000 children migrants were detained in Mexico in the year to September.

Of these, seven out of ten traveled alone.

Mexican immigration law requires that unaccompanied migrant children are referred to the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF), but the institutional mechanisms, protocols and budgetary allocations to make this a reality remain to be developed.

In addition, most of these children - 80% - are over 12 years old, but the system does not currently accept them. This means these adolescents - aged between 12 to 18 years - remain in detention centers until the deportation process is concluded.

Today an expert panel plans to discuss solutions.

Convened by El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and the International Detention Coalition (IDC), the expert roundtable aims to progress law, policy and practice. It includes experts from USA, Sweden, Guatemala and Mexico, all with experience in managing migration and children on the move.

The International Detention Coalition (IDC) is a civil society network with 300 member groups in 65 countries and its Director, Grant Mitchell, will be speaking at the expert roundtable. *"Mexico is certainly not alone in the difficult challenge of trying to manage large numbers of undocumented children on the move. What we know from international research however is that immigration detention is damaging to children and not the solution in preventing, addressing or managing undocumented migrant children."*

Instead, the IDC has found a number of effective community-based alternatives to detention, including in transit migration contexts similar to Mexico. States are using these models effectively to manage and protect children and their families in the community without the need for detention, including in Indonesia, Tanzania and Turkey.

These community models varied, from transferred guardianship to family and welfare departments and specialized NGOs, shelter and group housing programs, through to case management and supported return and reintegration programs. IDC research has found these practices are on average 80% cheaper than custodial immigration detention while still ensuring compliance with immigration requirements. "It's successful alternatives like those in our research that we will be discussing at the roundtable" said Mr. Mitchell.

Worldwide, states are increasingly recognizing the negative impacts that even short periods of detention can have on those under the age of 18. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has made a recommendation to states to "expeditiously and completely cease the detention of children on the basis of their migration status".

Rene Zenteno, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte said, *'We are hoping that today's event and the exploration of international good practices will be an important starting point to finding a sustainable solution and means of protection for child migrants in Mexico and the region.'*

More information: www.idcoalition.org.ccap