



Report on Homeland Security for Children

Fiscal Year 2023 Report to Congress

September 2023



Homeland Security

Message from the Under Secretary

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) respectfully submits the *Report on Homeland Security for Children, Fiscal Year 2023* pursuant to the *Homeland Security for Children Act* (P.L. 117-130).

The report provides a description of DHS's efforts to review and incorporate feedback from organizations representing the needs of children, including children within underserved communities, into Department policies, planning, and mission execution. It addresses the designation of individuals and offices responsible for carrying out the Act's provisions; the results of a formal review of Department (including Operational Component) policies, programs, and activities with respect to children conducted in 2022; changes in Department policies, programs, and activities to ensure they are appropriate for children; and coordination with organizations and experts outside the Department that informed reviews, changes, modifications, and/or promulgation of policies, programs, and activities.



Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable Mark E. Green
Chairman, House Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member, House Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Chairman, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

The Honorable Rand Paul
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

I am pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact the DHS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 447-5890.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Silvers', written in a cursive style.

Robert Silvers

Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans



Report on Homeland Security for Children

Fiscal Year 2023 Report to Congress

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Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) is using the full breadth of its authorities and resources to take important steps to protect children. Implementation of the *Homeland Security for Children Act* (HSCA) provides an opportunity to take stock of Department and Component programs affecting children and identify areas for enhancement.

The Department interacts with children daily, often when they are at their most vulnerable, such as during natural disasters, in immigration processing settings, and when protecting them from or educating them on the dangers of exploitation and abuse. Protecting and serving children, including those in underserved communities, is of such paramount importance that it is a cornerstone of the Department's new, sixth mission—Combat Crimes of Exploitation and Protect Victims—announced in *The Third Quadrennial Homeland Security Review* (Third QHSR) released in April 2023.

In 2022, at the direction of the Secretary, the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans conducted a formal review across all DHS Agencies and Offices to assess how each considered children's needs, including in underserved communities, in their mission planning and execution; what policies, programs, and activities specific to serving the needs of children were in place or being considered; and how each engaged with external stakeholders. Four broad categories were identified: Policy Revisions; Direct Case Assistance and Mission Execution; External Engagement; and Internal DHS Activities. The review not only served to identify the Department's status in support of the HSCA's requirements, but also established a baseline to help track impacts and identify potential improvements.

DHS is fundamentally a department of partnerships, and our success depends on their strength. We pursue mutually beneficial partnerships across many sectors: foreign governments; international organizations; federal agencies; state, local, tribal, territorial, and campus law enforcement organizations; private industry; academia; civic organizations; and non-governmental organizations and the communities they represent, including faith-based organizations. DHS interfaces with these entities regularly, receiving their counsel and expertise, communicating Departmental priorities and initiatives in real time, and accessing new technologies and ideas.

While not all Components and Offices in DHS have, or require, designated individuals responsible for coordinating the integration of children's needs, the majority (14 of 22) are involved directly in issues impacting children and have some formal means of engaging with external stakeholders and interest groups.

DHS is committed to improving its work with and on behalf of children while enforcing our laws and protecting the nation.

I. Legislative Language

This report responds to the reporting requirements set forth in the *Homeland Security for Children Act* (P.L. 117-130), which states:

SEC. 4. REPORT.

Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act and annually thereafter for five years, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall submit to the Committee on Homeland Security and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate a report describing the efforts the Department has undertaken to review and incorporate feedback from organizations representing the needs of children, including children within under-served communities, into Department policy in accordance with subsection (h) of section 102 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (as amended by section 2 of this Act), including information on the following:

- 1) The designation of any individual responsible for carrying out such subsection (h).
- 2) Any review, formal or informal, of Department policies, programs, or activities to assess the suitability of such policies, programs, or activities for children and where feedback from organizations representing the needs of children should be reviewed and incorporated.
- 3) Any review, change, modification, or promulgation of Department policies, programs, or activities to ensure that such policies, programs, or activities are appropriate for children.
- 4) Coordination with organizations or experts outside the Department pursuant to such subsection (h) conducted to inform any such review, change, modification, or promulgation of such policies, programs, or activities.

II. Review of Department Policies, Programs, and Activities

In response to the HSCA, a formal review across all DHS Agencies and Offices was conducted by the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans in August and September 2022. Components and Offices were asked about current engagements with organizations representing the needs of children, policies, programs, and activities specific to serving children's needs, and anticipated future efforts to ensure children's needs are accounted for.

Of the Department's 22 Components and Offices, 14 stated their mission execution or planning directly involved children's issues, with 12 reporting engaging with children's stakeholder groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGO). Of those 12, seven indicated they have offices, organizations, or individuals dedicated to ensuring children's issues are addressed in mission execution or planning. The remainder responded that their work did not directly involve children.

Components provided details of their activities, which fell into four categories: Policy Revision; Direct Case Assistance and Mission Execution; External Engagement; and Internal DHS Activities. Particularly noteworthy activities included the following:

Policy Revisions

DHS continues to establish and revise policies related to the needs of children. For example, in the last two years, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) engaged with NGOs to update or develop seven policies related to children. These new, child-focused policies include:

- *Processing of Children Born in the United States in U.S. Customs and Border Protection Custody and/or at a CBP Facility* (Directive, implemented August 31, 2022).
- *CBP Approach to Trauma-Informed Care for Person in Custody* (Directive, implemented April 29, 2022).
- *Reminder – Identification and Processing of Unaccompanied Children* (Memorandum/Muster, implemented August 8, 2022).
- *Processing of Pregnant and Postpartum Noncitizens and Infants* (Memorandum, implemented January 28, 2022).
- *Required Actions Regarding Pregnant, Postpartum, Nursing Individuals, and Infants in Custody* (Policy Memorandum, implemented November 23, 2021).
- *Reminder Regarding CBP's 2009 Interim Guidance Implementing the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 with Respect to UC*

(Unaccompanied Children) from Contiguous Countries (Memorandum/Muster, implemented December 6, 2021).

- *Pregnancy and Childbirth Guidance* (Memorandum, implemented August 18, 2021).

Prior to these new policies, CBP had only two relevant policies, one from 2015 (CBP Standards on Transport, Escort, Detention, and Search (TEDS)) and one from 2009 (Implementation of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008), both of which were updated.

Direct Case Assistance and Mission Execution

Across the Department, many Components that interact with children incorporate policies and programs that serve children’s needs into their mission planning and execution.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations’ (HSI) Victim Assistance Program (VAP) supports victims of a wide range of federal crimes, many of whom are children. HSI also collects evidence and tracks activities of those who sexually exploit children through their Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU), housed within the HSI Cyber Crimes Center (C3). Since its establishment in 2011, the CEIU Victim Identification Program (VIP) has identified and/or rescued more than 11,000 child victims of sexual exploitation.



Petty Officer 3rd Class Ryan Hicks, Coast Guard Maritime Safety and Security Team New Orleans, rescues a child in support of Hurricane Harvey relief efforts in Port Arthur, Texas.
Source: USCG

Family Reunification Task Force

On February 2, 2021, President Biden ordered the formation of the President’s Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families and appointed Secretary Mayorkas as the Chair. The Task Force is identifying and implementing comprehensive strategies to bring families back together and ensure support for the children and parents who were intentionally separated in 2017-2018. To date, Task Force efforts have resulted in 600 children being reunited with their parents in the United States. While more remains to be done, the Department is working diligently to reunite families separated by past policies.

The Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman (CIS Ombudsman) provided individual case assistance to approximately 300 children in fiscal year (FY) 2021. The CIS Ombudsman also provides support for those in need of the protection of a juvenile court due to abuse, abandonment, or neglect by a parent through Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) classification, under which lawful permanent residency may be granted.

The U.S. Secret Service (USSS), Forensic Services Division conducts examinations of digital and analog video and audio recordings for criminal investigation in support of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). These recordings include CCTV, recorded suspect and witness interviews, undercover audio recordings, 911 calls, radio transmissions, consensual telephone conversations, and voicemail messages. In addition, USSS examiners use speaker recognition software to determine speaker identity.

External Engagement

DHS leverages partnerships with external organizations to enhance the Department's ability to serve the needs of children. Section III of this report details external engagement.

Internal DHS Activities

The Department has prioritized incorporating a victim-centered approach into all of our work. This is not only the right thing to do to help survivors begin to repair their lives; it also enables law enforcement to better detect, investigate, and prosecute perpetrators. Last year, eleven DHS offices and agencies that interact with victims, including child victims, developed plans to incorporate a victim-centered focus into all relevant policies and programs. This year, we are building on this work by measuring progress in the implementation of these plans, developing a

Angel Watch Center

Initially created in 2007 as "Operation Angel Watch" and formally established in 2016 through International Megan's Law, the Angel Watch Center (AWC) is managed by the HSI CEIU as a joint effort with CBP and the U.S. Marshals Service. The AWC plays a crucial role in the global fight against transnational child sexual abuse by identifying individuals convicted of certain sexual crimes against a child and who may pose a potential new threat from traveling overseas for the purpose of sexually abusing or exploiting minors. Using flight data, along with the National Sex Offender Registry and publicly available state sex offender websites, the CEIU and CBP identify and alert foreign law enforcement, through HSI Attaché offices or CBP joint partnerships, to offenders pending arrival to their countries. Since 2016, the AWC has made more than 10,000 notifications to foreign countries and notified the Department of State (DOS) of more than 3,500 passports requiring a convicted sex offender endorsement.

Department-wide policy on gender-based violence and trauma-informed care, and working with interagency partners to establish victim-centered screening protocols.

The Department offers several programs to train DHS employees and provide additional Component resources to enhance their ability to serve children’s needs. For example, the Office of Health Security (OHS) is currently implementing the DHS Child Well-Being Program, which provides trained child welfare professionals to support CBP and ICE and strengthen the care and protection of children in DHS custody between the time of encounter and their transfer to a long-term care facility. The program augments existing resources and current services by providing structured programmatic support, clinical services, and technical guidance focused on the wellbeing of children in DHS custody. Additionally, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ (USCIS) asylum and refugee officers receive training to build rapport with, elicit testimony from, and evaluate the credibility of children during asylum and refugee interviews. Officers are provided background information on general considerations for child development and factors that may influence their development, including trauma.

OHS also conducts work-life and organizational wellness activities for the DHS workforce and their families. Examples include employee assistance programs, emergency back-up care programs, and engagement programs for children



A Coast Guard Cutter Escanaba crew member carries two children rescued off an overloaded sailing vessel off Rodriguez Key, Florida, Nov. 21, 2022. Twenty-two people were rescued after a good Sam reported the sailing vessel to Sector Key West watchstanders.

Source: USCG

III. External Engagement

On April 13 and 17, 2023, the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans held two virtual listening sessions with child advocacy groups to discuss implementation of the HSCA. Listening sessions provide a forum for dialogue surrounding DHS's efforts to address the needs of children and solicit advice and feedback to improve the Department's policies, mission planning, and execution.

Fourteen NGOs participated in the sessions, which resulted in concrete recommendations that are under evaluation, including issues such as process improvements to enhance customer service during disaster response; training for field and Headquarters personnel; staffing changes to reflect child-centered advocacy; and data transparency, with specific recommendations as to what data is gathered, how it might be disaggregated and published to provide Department metrics and support NGOs working to understand and support children. Assessment of the recommendations will include considerations of jurisdiction, authority, and resources.

In addition to HSCA-focused Headquarters engagements, DHS Agencies and Offices also routinely engage with stakeholder organizations.

While not solely dedicated to children, CBP has an office dedicated to bidirectional stakeholder (including NGO) communications. In the last two years, CBP engaged with NGOs to update and develop policies related to children.

Within CBP, the U.S. Border Patrol Sectors routinely engage the public at events such as Career Days, Red Ribbon Days, stakeholder liaison duties, holiday parades, national and station-level law enforcement nights out, school presentations with interactive resources, food bank volunteering, Toys for Tots, and others. These result in an average of 432 events annually across all Sectors.

The CIS Ombudsman Engagement, Casework, and Policy divisions engage with organizations representing the needs of children to help individuals and their families resolve issues they have with USCIS, identify issues in the immigration system, and make recommendations to USCIS on



CBP employees and their families arrive for CBP Family Outreach Event in Blaine, Washington.

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

how to address these problems.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Infrastructure Security Division's School Safety Task Force engages with a broad range of organizations representing the Kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) community on topics of school safety and security.

The Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties has a Community Engagement Section that engages with community-based organizations representing the needs of children, particularly in the immigration context.

The HSI VAP was established in 2008 to address the need for full-time, designated professionals to assist with victims identified in investigations. NGOs, Child Advocacy Centers, and child welfare organizations, among others, are consulted at the earliest stages of investigations.

ICE/Enforcement and Removal Operations' Juvenile and Family Management Division engages with various federal Departments and agencies, as well as external organizations representing the needs of children during planning or mission execution.

Located within the DHS Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT), the Blue Campaign is a national public awareness initiative designed to educate the public, law enforcement, and private industry partners to recognize indicators of human trafficking, and how to appropriately respond to possible cases. The Campaign directly engages with a variety of subject matter experts, including those with NGOs, who work with children when creating applicable human trafficking awareness products, such as an animated video series on human trafficking for youth.

The USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate, along with other USCIS program offices and directorates (including the Office of Public Engagement, the Office of Policy and Strategy, the Field Operations Directorate, and the Office of the Chief Counsel), engages with individuals and organizations on intercountry adoption. The USCIS adoption working group closely collaborates with DOS (the U.S. Central Authority on intercountry adoption), and may engage with other federal agencies, foreign adoption authorities, and organizations such as the Hague Permanent Bureau, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). USCIS and DOS also regularly engage with adoption stakeholders, including adoption service providers, child welfare professionals, state court judges, adoption attorneys, adoptive parents, and adult adoptees.

Additionally, the USCIS Office of Policy and Strategy and Field Operations Directorate engage with CBP, ICE, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Justice, the Executive Office for Immigration Review, and domestic state court judges about USCIS' administration of the SIJ program and SIJ deferred action policy to provide juveniles with a path to citizenship, and deferred action and employment authorization throughout the process.

The Council on Combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a DHS body that identifies best practices for preventing and addressing GBV and facilitates implementation of those practices across the Department. Engaging community members to provide input to and feedback on DHS's work in this area is an important part of this process. Part of these efforts include engaging with organizations committed to protecting girls from female genital mutilation/cutting and learning how the Department can bring a better public health approach to our awareness efforts. The Council has partnered with the DHS Office of Health Security to share gender-based violence materials with health care providers who care for children and at-risk communities.

Ransomware and Schools

K-12 school districts are among the most victimized organizations when it comes to ransomware. According to data from the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC), the percentage of reported ransomware incidents against K-12 schools increased at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year. In August and September 2020, 57 percent of ransomware incidents reported to the MS-ISAC involved K-12 schools, compared to 28 percent of all reported ransomware incidents from January through July 2020.¹

DHS surged cybersecurity resources to help fund school districts to combat K-12 ransomware attacks, produced a wide range of educational and supporting material, and established partnerships that bring together government and industry leaders through such initiatives as the Cyber Safety Review Board established in 2022, and the Joint Cyber Defense Collaborative.

¹ <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/cybersecurity-advisories/aa20-345a>.

Outreach and Education: Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) has exploded in recent years. It encompasses a broad range of criminal acts that involve victimization of children for sexual gratification or some other personal or financial gain. The NCMEC, the nation's clearinghouse for child sexual abuse material (CSAM), received over 32 million cyber tips in 2022, corresponding to more than 88 million images and videos of child sexual abuse—a roughly 75 percent increase over the previous five years. And worse, these numbers represent only CSAM on the open web; they do not include the massive amount of CSAM produced and shared on the dark web and through livestream platforms.² The NCMEC and law enforcement agencies are also seeing an explosion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) images showing child sexual exploitation, which threatens to overwhelm officials who work to identify victimized children and who have to determine whether the images are real or fake.

DHS recognizes that providing children, teens, parents, and teachers with information about potential dangers of online environments, and how to stay safe online, can help prevent many instances of child exploitation. Therefore, DHS law enforcement officers visit schools and community groups to help teach children the skills they need to protect themselves online through iGuardian and Childhood Smart Programs. These interactions help equip children with tools to avoid dangerous situations. They also boost the morale of law enforcement personnel that provide direct engagement with the children they work so diligently to protect. This outreach also enhances relationships between DHS law enforcement personnel and local communities, which facilitates a level of trust that has proven to help victims and support related investigations.

Project iGuardian is focused on keeping children and teens safe from online predators through robust education and awareness. This outreach effort shares information about the dangers of online environments, how to stay safe online, and how to report abuse and suspicious activity. Project iGuardian helps kids, teens and parents get smart about online safety and stay safe from online predators. In FY 2021, Project iGuardian provided tips and resources to nearly 60,000 children and adults.

Begun in 2016, the USSS's Childhood Smart Program (CSP) program educates parents and children (K - 12) about real-world safety issues and increases awareness of internet safety. This educational program works in partnership with the NCMEC to provide educational and interactive sessions on topics such as child sexual abuse material, online enticement, child sexual exploitation, child abduction, and child sex trafficking. USSS employees volunteer nationwide, bringing the CSP to schools and communities in their districts. In FY 2022, the

² https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-04/23_0420_plcy_2023-qhsr.pdf.

USSS more than doubled the ranks of its CSP Ambassadors and educated more than 23,000 parents, teachers, and children in about how to prevent online sexual exploitation, child abduction and child sex trafficking.

The technology industry also plays a key role in outreach and education to the threat of online CSEA. Released in 2020, the Five Country Ministerial (FCM: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States) launched the *Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*,³ in consultation with six technology companies, and the WeProtect Global Alliance. Since then the Group of Seven (G-7: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union) Interior Ministers have added their support and a total of nineteen companies have endorsed the Principles. The goal of the Principles is “the prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse.” In the last three years, the 19 companies who have endorsed the Voluntary Principles are at varying stages of implementation and public transparency reporting (supported by launch of the Tech Coalitions’ Trust: *Voluntary Framework for Transparency*⁴ in mid-2022). The FCM countries are continuing to monitor at the officer-level to inform ongoing strategic engagement and calling on wider efforts by other tech companies to help move forward this important narrative, and to be more proactively involved across the five countries from the moment a company expresses an interest in signing up, to making sure we have specific information from the company as to how their company currently meets, or how they will work to satisfy the expectations of the Voluntary Principles, including publication of transparency reports and related measures, before the company becomes an official signatory.

³ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1256061/download>.

⁴ <https://www.technologycoalition.org/knowledge-hub/trust-voluntary-framework-for-industry-transparency>.

IV: Designation of Responsible Individuals

In compliance with requirements in the HSCA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) appointed a technical expert, the FEMA National Advisor on Children and Disasters, who continues ongoing efforts of coordinating, integrating, and implementing resources created to support the needs of children, youth, and their families into activities to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against the risk of disasters. The Advisor works closely with both internal and external subject matter experts.

V. Current and Anticipated Future Efforts

Quadrennial Homeland Security Review

On April 20, 2023, DHS released the Third QHSR, a comprehensive strategic approach to the Department’s efforts to secure the nation. In this QHSR, the Department reaffirmed the five enduring missions set forth in the first and second QHSRs, while adding a new—and sixth—homeland security mission with significant implications for protecting children.⁵ This new homeland security mission is to Combat Crimes of Exploitation and Protect Victims.

Crimes of exploitation—human trafficking, labor exploitation, and child exploitation—occur at alarmingly high rates, both in the United States and abroad. Reflecting the overriding importance of supporting victims and stopping perpetrators, the Department redoubled efforts to combat these heinous crimes and is committed to further enhancing its work in this space through the new mission announced in the Third QHSR.

The Third QHSR was conducted in consultation with a broad range of partners and stakeholders throughout the federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial representatives, along with private sector, academic, faith-based, and other NGO partners.

Cyber Crimes Center

HSI personnel around the world work tirelessly to protect children from exploitation by predators involved in production, distribution, and possession of CSAM and who travel internationally to engage in illicit sexual conduct with minors. HSI employs the latest technology to collect evidence and track the activities of individuals and organized groups who sexually exploit children using the dark web, chat rooms, peer-to-peer trading, and other Internet-



An ICE Cyber Crimes specialist works in a room that is setup to help identify child abusers and their victims..
Source: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

⁵ The five enduring missions are: 1) Counter Terrorism and Prevent Threats; 2) Secure and Manage Our Borders; 3) Administer the Nation’s Immigration System; 4) Secure Cyberspace and Critical Infrastructure; and 5) Build a Resilient Nation and Respond to Incidents.

based platforms. This critical public safety mission is supported by the CEIU. The CEIU aids HSI field offices; coordinates major investigations; conducts operations throughout the world to identify and rescue child victims and to identify and apprehend offenders; and delivers training to HSI personnel as well as state, local, federal and international law enforcement partners. CEIU's VIP utilizes state-of-the-art technologies combined with traditional investigative techniques to identify and rescue child victims of sexual exploitation throughout the world.

Center for Countering Human Trafficking

Recent estimates indicate that are 3.3 million children in forced labor worldwide.⁶ DHS is prioritizing the fight against human trafficking by establishing and growing the CCHT, highlighting efforts to combat these crimes among the Department's core 2022 and 2023 priorities, and recognizing this work as a homeland security mission for the first time in the Third QHSR. The codification of the CCHT in the *Countering Human Trafficking Act of 2021*,⁷ in particular, has enabled the consolidation of numerous efforts across the Department into one place. The CCHT is a DHS-wide center with 16 Agencies and Offices that coordinate efforts to combat human trafficking and the importation of goods produced with forced labor. Consistent with this focus, DHS is undertaking a wide range of actions to enhance prevention through public education and training; identify, protect, and support victims; and detect, apprehend, and disrupt perpetrators of exploitation.

Identifying and Protecting Unaccompanied Children

DHS is addressing the needs of children who arrive at our Southern Border without a parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody. In 2021, DHS saw a significant influx of unaccompanied children, which led to overcrowding of CBP facilities. FEMA worked with the HHS and other interagency partners to increase HHS's capability to receive and shelter the children, and USCIS personnel served as caseworkers to support HHS efforts to release the children to vetted sponsors, including verified relatives in the United States.

On March 29, 2021, more than 5,700 children were in U.S. Border Patrol facilities, 4,078 of whom were in such facilities for longer than the 72 hour limits mandated by statute, and the average length of time an unaccompanied child spent in a Border Patrol facility was 133 hours. By May 11, 2021, only 455 children were in Border Patrol facilities, none for more than 72 hours, and the average length of time a child spent in a Border Patrol station was 22 hours. This average was further reduced to 19 hours in February 2023.

⁶ *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage* (International Labour Organization; September 2022); see https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854795.pdf.

⁷ P.L. 117-322; signed into law by President Biden on December 27, 2022.

Public Awareness

To best equip operators with the skills and information they need to protect children, the DHS Blue Campaign trained more than 150,000 federal, NGO, law enforcement, and public participants in FY 2022 to recognize indicators of human trafficking. Additionally, DHS's Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers trained more than 3,300 law enforcement officers representing over 120 federal law enforcement agencies to recognize and respond to potential trafficking cases. The Blue Campaign and the DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships also provide educational counter-trafficking materials in numerous languages, and the CCHT and USCIS offer public webinars on immigration protections for victims of human trafficking.

In 2023, DHS will launch a first-of-its-kind national public awareness campaign to counter the rapidly escalating crisis of CSEA. The campaign seeks to educate children, caregivers, policymakers, and the broader public about growing threats of online CSEA and how to keep children safe online. It will reside in the HSI C3 as a permanent Department function.

DHS's Strengthened Infrastructure to Protect Children

DHS released the *DHS Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor, and Child Sexual Exploitation* in January 2020. In the spring of 2022, Secretary Mayorkas released his FY 2022 priorities, which included enhancing efforts to prevent and detect child sexual exploitation. Although the 2020 strategy addressed child sexual exploitation, much of it is in the context of human trafficking and does not address the totality of CSEA crimes. Therefore,

End of Family Detention

DHS ended family detention in 2021 and is currently evaluating alternatives. A core principle of the Department is we are a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. Separating children from their families to deter other individuals from coming to the United States and asserting an asylum claim is in clear opposition to our nation's values.

ICE shifted resources to increase efficiencies in the alternatives to detention programs for family units. As of FY 2022, all ICE Family Staging Centers were repurposed to focus on single adults.

Recently, Secretary Mayorkas tasked the Homeland Security Advisory Council to look at alternatives to detention programs, including the family case management program implemented in 2016 that shuttered after only a year and a half. The data showed this humane program was more cost effective than detention, and it had a stellar compliance rate of more than 99 percent appearance rates at check-ins and court hearings. However, DHS will evaluate all options in seeking a system of border management that is orderly, effective, safe, and humane.

the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans is developing a department-wide framework to combat online CSEA with lines of effort that are unified and synchronized. Moreover, DHS is leveraging its full breadth of authorities and resources to bolster initiatives like the CEIU, a global leader in CSEA law enforcement operations—including offender arrests, victim identification and rescue, and information sharing—to elevate and enhance the Department’s capabilities.

HSI Victim Assistance Program

DHS takes a victim-centered approach to the policies, programs, and activities that govern our interactions with victims of crime, including those who are children.

HSI’s VAP, which consists of Victim Assistance Specialists (VASs) and Forensic Interview Specialists, integrate victim assistance throughout the lifecycle of the investigative process. VASs are introduced to potential victims early in the investigation to help inform them of their rights, answer questions, assess their needs, and provide access to resources. The needs of CSEA victims and their families are multi-faceted, and the burden of their pain and loss is immeasurable. Knowing this, HSI works in collaboration with various NGOs, which play a critical role in providing social services and emotional support to victims and their families as these victims seek to rebuild their sense of safety and begin to heal from their trauma.

In 2022, the Department expanded the HSI VAP, increasing personnel by 40 percent. As a result, the program helped over 1,100 victims of child exploitation in FY 2022. An additional 60 percent increase in personnel is planned for 2023.



Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan White from Air Station Miami carries a sick child off of a helicopter from Air Station Borinquen, Puerto Rico.

Source: USCG

VI. Conclusion

In almost every aspect of planning for and executing its missions, DHS's work touches upon children's lives. Whether it takes the form of the world's finest criminal investigative teams finding and prosecuting exploiters and abusers, responding to disasters, or providing humane immigration assistance, the Department has a responsibility to care for vulnerable children.

In recognition of the important role of stakeholder groups, the Department will expand and enhance its partnerships in the coming years. Such engagement and consideration provide DHS with insights into how it is doing and how it can improve. The Department already does much, but there is more to be done.

The importance of protecting and serving children, including those in underserved communities, has been elevated to prominence through the new sixth mission identified in the Third QHSR. The QHSR is the Department's capstone strategy document. It identifies the most critical threats and challenges facing the homeland and the approaches to address them. Guided by the QHSR, the Department will safeguard the American people, including children, with honor and integrity.

Appendix A: List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AWC	Angel Watch Center
C3	Cyber Crimes Center
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
CEIU	Child Exploitation Investigations Unit
CIS Ombudsman	Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Service Ombudsman
CSEA	Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
CSP	USSS Childhood Smart Program
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DOS	U.S. Department of State
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HSCA	The Homeland Security for Children Act, P.L. 117-130.
HSI	Homeland Security Investigations
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OHS	Office of Health Security
QHRS	Quadrennial Homeland Security Review
SIJ	Special Immigrant Juvenile
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
USSS	United States Secret Service
VAP	Victim Assistance Program
VAS	Victim Assistance Specialist
VIP	Victim Identification Program



Homeland
Security