

1. In focusing on the placement or detention of displaced children in Texas, what are the most critical issues you see regarding differential treatment of different categories of children?

	Accompanied	Unaccompanied
Refugees	Placed in community with family	Placed in URM foster care
Asylees	Placed in detention with accompanying parent	Processed and released to family or foster care
Immigrant/economic migrants	Rapid deportation with parent	Placed in ORR custody (then typically released to family), and removal proceedings initiated

There are three major issues presented by this differential treatment:

- Family detention, housing children who have broken no laws, in prison-like detention facilities with limited access to health care, attorneys, education or resources for re-settlement, simply because they arrived at the border with their mothers.
- Disruption of family units, as fathers arriving with children are almost immediately released, as there are no facilities available to detain fathers and children, while mothers with children are placed in detention facilities.
- Post-release access to services. Unaccompanied children and children arriving in the US with refugee status are provided a wide range of services to help them settle into new lives in the United States. Accompanied children, however, are released with only their parents and extended families to navigate a complex network of safety net providers.

2. What are the most critical issues you see in terms of current practice or policy responses to the holistic needs of displaced children in Texas?

There are no concerted or organized efforts to support displaced children once they are released from detention. The children and families who are fleeing war-torn or gang-infested countries have experienced endemic violence and significant trauma. The cumulative effect of these traumas impacts mental and physical health in ways large and small. Education in these failed states is often limited. Displaced children may lag far behind their native-born peers, even when taught in their first language. If we cannot rehabilitate these children, addressing their trauma, providing access to services, teaching them (and their mothers) English, the futures of these children are likely to be limited.

3. What different understandings of ‘best interests’ do you see in your work? Is there a gap between intention and practice in terms of prioritizing the best interests of children in placement or detention settings?

The problem is that large areas in which I work do not even consider the best interests of the children in practice or intention. Detaining children in a prison facility violates international law, and is certainly inconsistent with the best interests of the children. On the other hand, when using the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status process to obtain status for unaccompanied children, the state court proceedings typically do address the best interests of the child, specifically making a finding as to whether it is in the child's best interests to be returned to his or her country of origin.

4. What are the opportunities and barriers for the voices of children to be heard in placement or detention decisions that affect them?

Opportunities	Barriers
Immigration hearings	Political pressures
State court proceedings for SIJS children	Lack of trained personnel to interview and record stories
Volunteers around the country recording stories	Volume of children
Researchers collecting data	Access to children in detention
	Limited access post-release due to no centralized database

5. Using a children's rights framework, what are the primary recommendations you would make to strengthen policy, practice, or research to improve the lives of children who have been displaced across borders and are experiencing placement or detention in Texas?

Policy: Abolish family detention and eliminate private prisons.

Research: Multidisciplinary collaboration to access existing databases

Practice: Wrap-around services to address trauma, language acquisition, and adjustment