



Interim Progress Report

Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families

March 31, 2022



Homeland
Security



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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Executive Order Language	3
III.	Recent Progress and Ongoing Efforts.....	4
IV.	Update on Task Force Data.....	8
V.	Update on Parole Requests	9
VI.	Appendix.....	10

I. Introduction

The Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families (Task Force) submits this interim report on recent progress made on the implementation of Executive Order 14011 (E.O. 14011), *Establishment of Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families*.¹ As of March 17, 2022, the Task Force has facilitated the reunification of 147 children with their separated parents in the United States and provided these families with access to behavioral health services. During the last 60 days, the Task Force made noteworthy progress in the following areas:

- Registered 308 potentially eligible families with the Task Force since the launch of *Together.gov* and *Juntos.gov*, bringing the total to 1,075 families. This includes families without confirmed reunifications who are outside of the United States, as well as families who were previously reunified and are in the United States. Of those families, approximately 467 separated children have been referred to receive assistance in obtaining reunification support services.
- Reached 129 families outside of the United States and registered 102 of them in this period through the Department of State's (DoS) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration's (PRM) project with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Kids in Need of Defense (KIND). This project has reached 551 families and registered 428 families since its start in September 2021.
- Designed and implemented a plan to re-assess approximately 1,800 families previously determined to be ineligible for reunification services from the Task Force. To date, the Task Force completed a preliminary review of 900 of the 1,800 cases.
- Developed and launched a robust outreach and education campaign to contact separated families, both in the United States and abroad. This campaign includes Task Force coordination with U.S. government (USG) members, and non-governmental and international organization partners. PRM's partner UNHCR also launched targeted information campaigns in support of the Task Force's outreach and reunification goals. DoS public affairs teams are also coordinating with PRM and UNHCR to further amplify information and counter misinformation about family reunification to relevant demographics in Mexico and Northern Central America.
- From March 14-18, 2022, Task Force Executive Director Michelle Brané and members of the Task Force traveled to Guatemala and met with Guatemalan government officials and non-government organizations (NGOs) working under the PRM-funded project to locate separated families. This included meeting with separated families to hear their stories and learn from their experiences to improve the work and the effectiveness of the Task Force. Guatemalan press coverage of the trip further broadcasted information about USG family reunification efforts to Guatemalan audiences, especially highlighting *Juntos.gov* and relevant phone numbers for families to seek guidance and register

¹ 86 Fed. Reg. 8273 (February 5, 2021).

potential cases of separation, validating this program for individuals who may be skeptical of available benefits.

- Analyzed nearly 20,000 comments from individuals and NGOs submitted in response to the Task Force’s *Federal Register* request for public input on “ways to minimize the separation of migrant parents and legal guardians and children entering the United States, consistent with the law.”² Ninety percent of the comments supported reunification efforts.
- Continued working with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to develop a clear recommendation on future behavioral health services for reunited families. The existing contract was extended until May 10, 2022, to avoid a lapse in services.
- Continued to engage with Class Counsel in settlement negotiations in the *Ms. L.* litigation.³

² 86 Fed. Reg. 70512 (December 10, 2021).

³ *Ms. L. v. ICE*, No. 18-cv-0428-DMS (MDD) (S.D. Cal. Mar. 8, 2019).

II. Executive Order Language

On February 2, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 14011 (E.O. 14011), *Establishment of Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families*. The Executive Order requires regular reports to the President, including:

- (i) an initial progress report no later than 120 days after the date of this order;
- (ii) interim progress reports every 60 days thereafter;
- (iii) a report containing recommendations to ensure that the Federal Government will not repeat the policies and practices leading to the separation of families at the border, no later than 1 year after the date of this order; and,
- (iv) a final report when the Task Force has completed its mission.

III. Recent Progress and Ongoing Efforts

The Task Force continues to improve the pace of family reunifications. Since the last interim progress report, the Task Force developed a robust, collaborative outreach and education campaign to contact eligible separated families and inform them of available reunification services. Additionally, the Task Force analyzed the comments submitted in response to its announcement in the *Federal Register* requesting public input on how to minimize the separation of migrant parents and legal guardians from children entering the United States in the future, consistent with the law. The Task Force continued working with HHS to improve the availability of mental and behavioral health services to reunited families. The Task Force continues to receive registrations from separated families and, as of March 17, 2022, 373 children are now on a path to receive reunification support services for their families, in addition to the 147 children that have been reunified by the Task Force.

Supporting Separated Families when They Come Forward

In this reporting period, 308 potentially eligible parents or legal guardians have registered with the Task Force website, *Together.gov/Juntos.gov* bringing the total to 1,075. For the registrants who appeared to be living outside of the United States, the Task Force referred them to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to complete the parole request process and, if granted parole, schedule travel to the United States. The referred families represent 467 separated children. Of those parents or legal guardians, 147 have been granted humanitarian parole, on a case-by-case basis, and reunified with their children. 373 are receiving assistance in obtaining reunification support services.

On December 15, 2021, USCIS began accepting parole-in-place (PIP) requests for separated children, parents, and certain additional family members. As of March 17, 2022, USCIS, has received approximately 40 PIP requests. The Task Force is modifying its existing contract with IOM to extend reunification services to families located in the United States, including helping families complete and submit PIP requests and employment authorization applications. The Executive Director of the Task Force, under its delegated gift authority from the Secretary of Homeland Security, has also requested additional private funding to extend its Help Desk to support separated families in the United States who need information on how to register and request parole. With this support, the Task Force hopes to eliminate certain identified challenges, such as communicating with separated families and submitting parole requests with USCIS.

Locating Families and Explaining Reunification Options

In this reporting period, the DoS/PRM project with UNHCR and KIND reached 129 separated families and provided them with information on the reunification process wherever possible, and registered 102 families on *Together.gov/Juntos.gov*, which presents information in several languages for ease of use. Since the start of the project on September 15, 2021 through March 6, 2022, 551 families were reached through direct contact and 428 were registered. KIND continues to estimate that it takes approximately 20 hours per family to make contact and register them on the website. KIND attempted at least initial contact with all 713 separated parents for

which the *Ms. L. Steering Committee* has contact information by February 15, 2022, with the exception of a small number of parents on the lists who independently registered before KIND could reach out to them.

For families with known contact information who remain unreached, UNHCR is working with KIND on targeted outreach with Justice in Motion (JiM), using on-the-ground searches for families who JiM is best positioned to reach, or that KIND was unable to reach by phone. Since September 2021, JiM has conducted 187 searches and located 108 parents.

Implementation of a Review Process for Out-of-Scope Families

In this reporting period, the Task Force designed and implemented a review process to re-assess the 1,800 family separation cases that were previously identified as out-of-scope to determine potential eligibility for reunification services from the Task Force. Separated families that are currently out-of-scope of the *Ms. L.* class cannot receive USG-funded support services, such as IOM support and USG-funded travel to the United States. While final determinations of inclusion in the *Ms. L.* class depends on the *Ms. L.* final settlement agreement, the Task Force can proactively review these cases to determine whether any of these families are now eligible to request reunification, even without finalization of the *Ms. L.* litigation. To complete this assessment, the Task Force developed its own criteria based on agreement reached thus far in the *Ms. L.* settlement, so that it will allow for an expedited determination once a final settlement agreement is in place. To date, the Task Force has reviewed 900 out of the 1,800 family separation cases.

Increasing Outreach Efforts to Improve Public Awareness

On March 4, 2022, the Task Force submitted communications strategy report to the Domestic Policy Council outlining how it will amplify the reunification message and bring more families forward. Following this submission, the Task Force launched a new and robust outreach and education campaign to reach families that remain separated and encourage them to start the reunification process. The Task Force information campaign includes an all-of-government approach – utilizing spokespeople across agencies and the private sector to amplify and effectively communicate the messaging on reunification in multiple languages and access options. The outreach plan includes new efforts to expand communications both directly and in general through electronic and traditional communication methods, partnering with NGOs for families for which we do not have contact information. These all-out efforts are expected to increase the rate of separated families coming forward and registering for reunification services.

Action has already started with the UNHCR launch of its “Communicating with Communities” (CwC) campaign across Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The CwC campaign is focused on three main objectives: to raise awareness about the family reunification process; promote KIND’s Help Desk as a resource for families with questions or needing assistance with registration; and to prevent fraud/exploitation (e.g., to counter misinformation used to exploit families) related to the reunification process. This campaign includes social media across a range of channels, printed materials and other tools to help disseminate information in communities in which separated families live, and radio spots to spread the message in multiple

languages and access options. The CwC campaign is taking a phased approach with key messages rolled out to accomplish the main objectives. The initial focus is on basic eligibility criteria and promoting the KIND Help Desk, and messages in the coming weeks will increase to counter misinformation. UNHCR will be continually monitoring channels and seeking feedback from partners to adjust messaging as needed across the campaign. DoS Embassy officials in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are coordinating with PRM and UNHCR to further amplify information about family reunification via Embassy social media and in public engagements with relevant demographics to raise awareness of and trust in the family reunification process and counter misinformation.

Task Force Director Visits Guatemala

The Task Force Executive Director Michelle Brané traveled, along with a team of Task Force members from DHS and DoS to Guatemala on March 14-18, 2022. The trip's focus was to spread the word about reunifications, as well as strengthen trust and visibility of the Task Force and USG commitment to the families. The Task Force met with Guatemalan government officials, local community networks, media, NGOs conducting direct outreach, and families. Engaging families in their home country helped build trust within the communities and amplify the message of a safe and swift reunification process.

Importantly, during this official trip, Task Force members heard directly from families who shared their experience with the reunification process, stressing that once they were reached, they did not initially believe that the benefits were real, with a first impression that it was too good to be true. With this feedback, the Task Force is refining communication material to increase effectiveness and delivery to ease concerns using clear language that available benefits are a reality and do not require any payment by families.

The Task Force remains committed to communicating that free reunification is currently available for all eligible separated families via [Together.gov](https://www.together.gov) and [Juntos.gov](https://www.juntos.gov), and that the reunification process is safe and swift.

Publishing in the Federal Register for Public Input

During this reporting period, the public comment period in the *Federal Register* closed for submissions on how to minimize the separation of migrant parents and legal guardians and children entering the United States, consistent with law.⁴ The Task Force received and analyzed approximately 20,000 comments from individuals and NGOs. Out of this total, approximately 90 percent were in support of reunification efforts. The Task Force is using these recommendations, along with Task Force member recommendations, to draft a report to President Biden.

⁴ Identifying Recommendations to Support the Work of the Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families, 86 Fed. Reg. 70512 (Dec. 10, 2021); Identifying Recommendations to Support the Work of the Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families; Extension of Comment Period, 86 Fed. Reg. 73311 (December 17, 2021).

Improving the Availability of Behavioral Health Services

The existing behavioral health services contract was extended to May 10, 2022. This extension will allow the Task Force to continue to work with SAMHSA to develop a clear recommendation on future behavioral health services for reunited families. In addition, the Task Force is working with HHS to support its recommendations regarding the provision of additional behavioral health services and support to the families, including trauma-informed, culturally, and linguistically appropriate behavioral health case management and clinical services; parenting support and psychoeducation; and pre-reunification counseling.

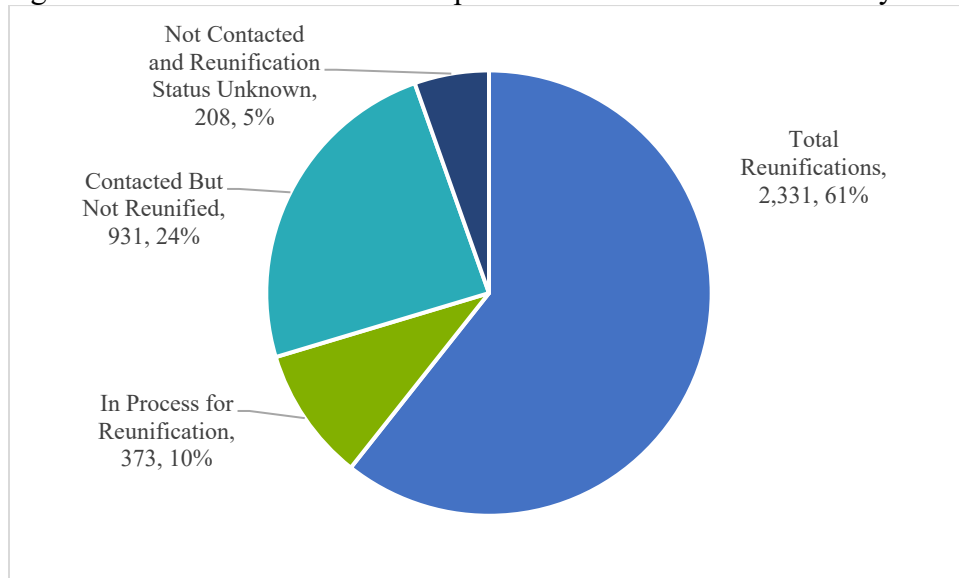
Impact of Settlement Negotiations

The Task Force continues to consult with the Department of Justice, which remains engaged in settlement negotiations of the *Ms. L.* litigation. These settlement negotiations are confidential. The Task Force will continue to promote the directives of E.O. 14011.

IV. Update on Task Force Data

During this reporting period, the Task Force continues to improve its data tracking practices. These developments enhanced the Task Force’s monitoring and reporting capabilities. As of March 17, 2022, the Task Force identified 3,843 children within the scope of E.O. 14011.⁵ The Task Force has reunified, through close coordination with the NGOs and attorneys representing the separated families, 147 children with their parents. Previously, 2,184 families were reunified before the establishment of the Task Force, bringing the total number of known reunified children to 2,331. There are 373 children who are in the process of being reunified by the Task Force.⁶ There are an additional 1,139 children for whom the Task Force has not confirmed reunification with their parents and who are not currently in the process of being reunified.

Figure 1: Status of Contact with Separated and Reunified Families by Child



Source: DHS and records related to the *Ms. L.* and *Ms. J.P.* litigation.⁷

⁵ The number of in-scope separations can increase or decrease over time due to the Task Force’s continuous effort to refine and improve its data and tracking of prior family separations.

⁶ Please see Appendix A, Figure 1 for a comparison of reunification data reported in this report with the reunification data reported in the November 29, 2021 Interim Progress Report.

⁷ *J.P. v. Sessions*, No. 2:18-cv-06081 (C.D. Cal) (Nov. 5, 2019).

V. Update on Parole Requests

The Task Force is using DHS's parole authority to permit separated families, on a case-by-case basis, to enter or remain in the United States for purposes of reunification and to receive access to services. As of March 17, 2022, approximately 1,325 parole requests have been filed with USCIS by separated children, parents, and additional family members. The average processing time from registration to travel to the United States is 60 days. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) continues to support reunification efforts through funding a third-party contract to assist families with their applications, required documents and travel. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) continues to support reunifications by processing families at U.S. ports of entry.

IOM continues to support separated families with in-country processing, including completing the parole request to be filed with USCIS and, once parole is approved, obtaining required travel documents, such as passports and exit visas. As of March 17, 2022, IOM has 373 separated children in its processing queue.⁸ To date, IOM has received requests from families residing in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Brazil, the Russian Federation, and Venezuela, with the majority being from Guatemala.

In the prior progress report, the Task Force referenced its announcement of a process for separated families who are in the United States who have not been admitted to the United States to request parole-in-place. During this reporting period, USCIS has received approximately 40 PIP requests from separated parents, separated children, and additional family members.

DHS does not have authorized funding to pay for support services for families requesting PIP; however, the Task Force is modifying its existing contract with IOM to extend reunification services to families in the United States.

⁸ A portion of separated children are considered reunified with a parent prior to Task Force establishment. *See* Appendix A, Figure 1 for more detail.

VI. Appendix:

Figure 1: Updated Family Reunification Task Force Data for Separated Children

Data Tracking Separated Children and Reunifications	September 30 Report ⁹	November 29 Report ¹⁰	January 28 Report ¹¹	March 31 Report ¹²
In Scope for Task Force Support	3,948	3,951	3,842	3,843
Children Identified as Returned to Home Country	410	410	385	385
Parents Identified as Returned to Their Home Country	1,707	1,710	1,643	1,643
Total Reunifications	2,221	2,248	2,290	2,331
<i>Reunifications Prior to Task Force Establishment</i>	2,171	2,187	2,184	2,184
<i>Task Force Reunifications</i>	50	61	106	147
Remaining Children Without Confirmed Reunification¹³	1,727	1,703	1,552	1,512
<i>In Process for Reunification</i>	50	206	324	373
<i>Contact Information Available but Not Reunified</i>	1,296	1,217	962	931
<i>No Confirmed Contact Information Available and Reunification Status Unknown</i>	381	280	266	208

Source: DHS and records related to the *Ms. L.* and *Ms. J.P.* litigation.

The Task Force data is continuously changing due to various efforts that include reviewing USG datasets, contacting separated families, and learning about previously unknown family reunifications. As a result, numbers will increase and decrease from one report to the next, which should not be interpreted as a lack of progress. Learning about the status of separated families brings the Task Force closer to achieving its mandate to identify all separated children and enable and facilitate the reunification of all eligible families.

⁹ Data as of September 30, 2021.

¹⁰ Data as of November 17, 2021.

¹¹ Data as of January 17, 2022.

¹² Data as of March 17, 2022.

¹³ This number does not include cases that may have reunified on their own without the Task Force's knowledge – including those reflected in the *Ms. L.* Joint Status Report.