



Lutheran Immigration  
and Refugee Service

# CAMINO A CASA



 **LIRS**  
Guatemala

## Statement of Need

In Guatemala, poverty, instability, violence, and the desire for family reunification drive high rates of migration each year. Among the migrant population, youth and young adults are uniquely vulnerable, with unaccompanied children (UC) from Guatemala representing nearly 50 percent of minors referred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the United States. While migration to the U.S. has increased in recent years, so too have deportations. According to the Instituto Guatemalteco de Migración, there was a nearly 50 percent increase in UC returned to Guatemala by air from 2021 to 2022, and a 173 percent increase for adults. Although the U.S. has lifted Title 42, the pandemic-era public health measure used to prevent migrants from crossing the border, pathways for migration and asylum remain limited by restrictive policy measures. The Department of Homeland Security has warned that those apprehended under Title 8, a code that outlines processes of deportation, may face expedited removal. In this context, it is likely that the number of repatriations will only increase.

Upon returning to Guatemala, youth face several challenges for effective reintegration. For youth who left the country to find work, it can be difficult to re-enter the school system. Youth feel the pressure of returning to the U.S. or finding a job in-country to support their families, rather than going back to school. Youth and their families also often incur considerable debts to finance their journey to the U.S. that needed to be paid off. In addition, many returned youth have unmet mental health needs due to physically dangerous in-country situations, family dynamics, discrimination, and the traumatic journey to and from the U.S.



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## Our Mission in Guatemala

Increase success of community reintegration for youth recently repatriated from the U.S. or Mexico by supporting mental and emotional health and wellbeing, educational and vocational advancements, and stability through financial assistance and economic empowerment.

### Scope of Project

Operating in nine different departments throughout Guatemala, LIRS's Camino a Casa is a specialized program designed specifically to care for youth repatriated from the United States or Mexico who are between the ages of 14 and 24. LIRS provides in-home case management and clinical services to youth for up to twelve months to ensure successful reintegration.

Psychoeducation, mental health services, and psychosocial support is provided to identify each youth's strengths, supports, and protective factors as well as to develop positive coping strategies. Family counseling is offered to assist with family dynamics and the process of reintegration. Clinicians provide trauma-informed, client-centered therapy with modalities like Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and Solutions-Focused Therapy.

Case management services includes assessments and an individualized service plan to focus on specific, client-driven goals with the objective of supporting educational advancements and vocational training, connecting youth and families to resources, and addressing and overcoming barriers. A financial stipend is also a component of the program so clients can contribute to household needs, covering expenses associated with education, health and transportation, among others, while increasing opportunities for future financial stability.

### Outcomes

The goal of Camino a Casa is to ensure youth have increased success with community reintegration and family reunification upon return to Guatemala. To meet the needs of each youth and obtain sustainable outcomes, the program focuses on improved health and safety, increased coping mechanisms, and stability through financial assistance. In its first year the program will serve 50