

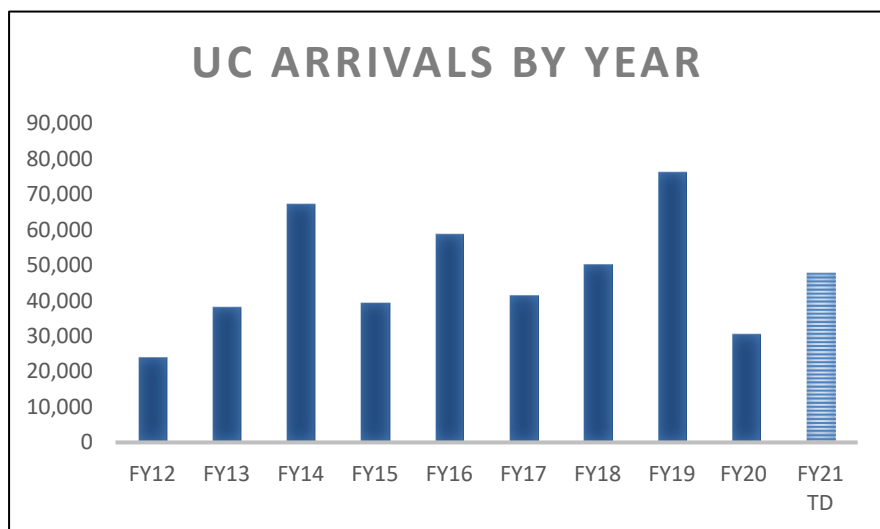
Arriving Unaccompanied Children, April 2021

Who are Unaccompanied Children?

Unaccompanied children (UCs) are minors who arrive in the United States without a parent or legal guardian and who do not hold legal immigration status. Typically, arriving UCs are placed into a network of shelters that are run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Shelter care providers offer temporary homes and services, including educational, medical, and mental health services and case management to reunite children with their families. In times of system stress, ORR may operate other facilities, including influx facilities and, more recently, emergency intake sites. The care and legal custody for UCs is governed by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008, the Homeland Security Act of 2002, and the *Flores* Settlement Agreement.

Arrivals of Unaccompanied Children

Since the federal fiscal year (FY21) began in October 2020, approximately 37,000 UCs have arrived in the United States for processing. FY21 arrivals-to-date have exceeded all years since 2017.¹ Most observers expect that FY21 will approximate or exceed other recent years of high arrivals: 2014, 2016, and 2019. Many UCs entering the United States were expelled under the prior Administration’s use of Title 42 to deny access to protection, in place from March to November 2020. Many other UCs would have come in FY20 but delayed their journeys because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Because of these two factors, experts are uncertain whether 2021 arrivals represent a true “surge” year, or whether 2021 arrivals are in line with recent averages, best approximated by averaging FY20 and FY21 arrivals.



¹ Most likely, FY21 arrivals-to-date are all-time highs. Definitive statements are difficult because of differences in gathering and reporting data from years prior to FY18.

WHO WE ARE

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is a nongovernmental, not-for-profit international organization that responds to the needs and advocates for the rights of refugees and immigrants worldwide.

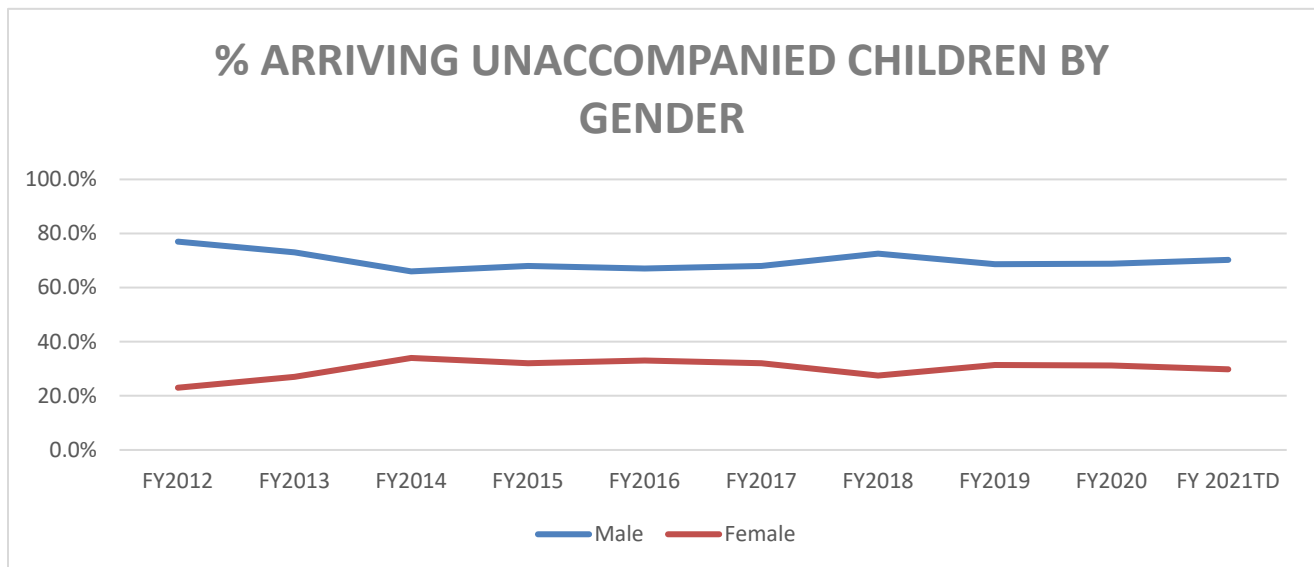
Arriving UCs Look Like Years Past – With More of All Groups

While arrivals of UCs have increased in FY21, the population composition is largely unchanged. In other words, more of all children are arriving, rather than any specific sub-group.

Nationality is largely unchanged: Since October 2017, most UCs in ORR custody have arrived from Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras. Mexican unaccompanied children, who in general are not protected like other UCs under current interpretations of the TVPRA, have historically comprised around 25% of UCs apprehended at the border, but the vast majority never enter ORR custody and are returned quickly to Mexico. This year, all national groups appear to contribute to the increase in UC arrivals in line with proportions from recent years.

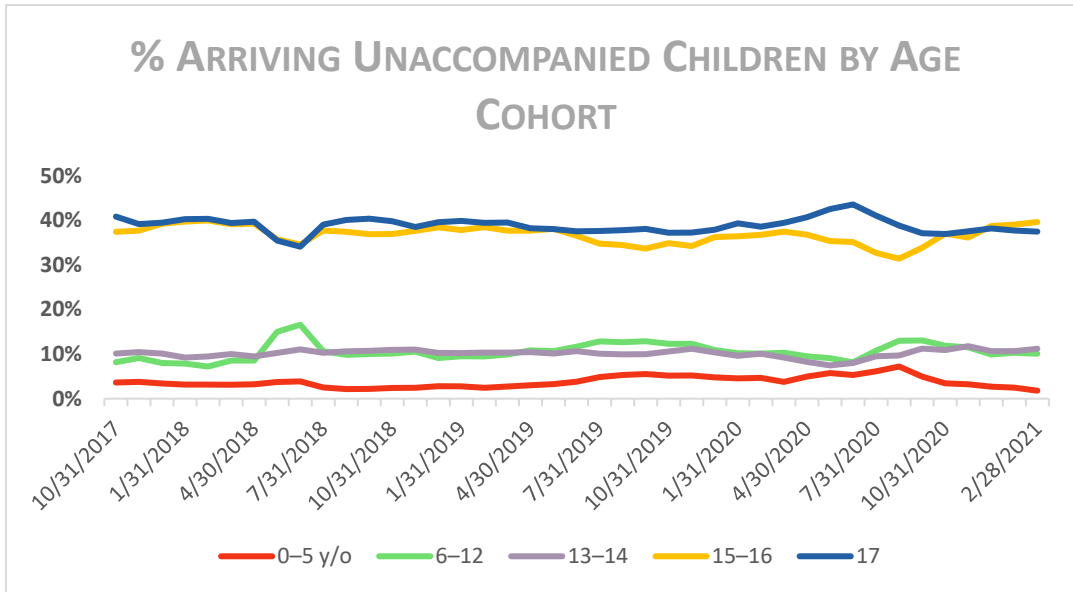
	FY18	FY19	FY20	OCT 2017– MAR 2021	FROM OCT 2020 ²
El Salvador	12.5%	18.1%	14.0%	14.5%	10.2%
Guatemala	56.2%	46.1%	50.4%	50.5%	52.6%
Honduras	27.1%	31.1%	28.2%	30.2%	32.4%
Other (non-Mexico)	4.2%	4.6%	7.4%	4.9%	4.9%

Gender of UC arrivals is unchanged: Since 2014, the proportion of arriving male and female UCs is remarkably stable. FY21 continues this trend.



² Both total UC arrivals and the arrivals of specific nationalities tend to vary seasonally, but may not be perfectly in sync. In the past three years, Guatemalan UCs have arrived in higher proportions during the first half of the fiscal year (56% vs. 45% of total entries), while Salvadorans (13% vs 18%) and Hondurans (27% vs 32%) are in slightly higher proportions in the second half.

The ages of arriving UCs are also stable: Again, the ages of arriving UCs have been more-or-less stable over the past three years, and FY21 data indicates only one potentially significant trend: a decrease in the proportion of 0–5 year-olds, who comprised 5% of UC arrivals in August 2019 but only 1.8% of arriving UCs in February 2021. The trend is only “potentially significant” because observed changes may be statistical noise or have a confounder which makes data less reliable for the group. Regardless, the data show that all other age groups are arriving in the same proportions as in other years.



The Vast Majority of UCs Have Relatives Willing to Care for Them

ORR designates UCs by Categories, which refer to the potential sponsor of the child: Category 1 is for parents or legal guardians; Categories 2A and 2B are for close relatives; Category 3 is for distant relatives and unrelated adults; Category 4 is for UCs who lack an identified sponsor. Many or most children in Category 4 are moved into Category 3 when a willing sponsor is found.

	FY18	FY19	FY20	Totals	From Oct. 2020
Category 1	41.8%	44.1%	38.5%	42.9%	46.0%
Category 2	47.2%	46.9%	45.9%	46.8%	45.6%
Category 3	10.9%	9.1%	15.6%	10.3%	8.3%

ORR Categories can be used to show how many children have relatives willing to care for them in the United States. **The data show that the vast majority of children in the ORR system have a parent or close relative who can care for them.** The family-member data, like the other data above, approximate historic averages. However, with around 20,000 UCs in U.S. government care, more than 2000 children have only a distant sponsor or no one in the country to reunite with.

