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EDUCATION - Jesuit Refugee Service/USA (JRS/USA) and 13 U.S. Jesuit law schools have released a call for policy change on the legal challenges facing Central American asylum seekers and migrants in the U.S.

[“A Fair Chance for Due Process: Challenges in Legal Protection for Central American Asylum Seekers and Other Vulnerable Migrants,”](#) a new report released just prior to World Refugee Day on June 20, captures the efforts by Jesuit law schools to assist asylum seekers, as well as the challenges they face in delivering these services.

Jesuit law schools such as Boston College, Georgetown University and Santa Clara University, among others, have been working with Central American refugees for years. But when the schools joined with JRS/USA, they took their involvement to the next level. Calling it a “ground-breaking effort,” JRS/USA National Director Armando Borja expressed his belief that the partnership would allow them to “identify and call for significant changes in U.S. policies and practices toward migrants.”

Their months of research have revealed the plights of many refugees. One young woman, Beatrice, fled with her son after violent gang threats; another young man, Arturo, was forced to flee after witnessing the murders of his cousin and brother at the hands of a local gang. Many are underage, qualifying as unaccompanied minors, but over half of these minors don’t receive legal aid in their request for refugee status.

JRS/USA and law students are working to change this. In 2014, Jesuit law schools represented 291 asylum seekers and migrants from Central America and anticipate serving more than 300 in 2015.

The report calls for specific policy changes: requiring legal counsel for all unaccompanied minors; recognizing gang-based asylum claims; providing access to trauma counseling for victims and trauma training for judges; and a reform of the U.S. detention system.

Jesuit law students and JRS/USA will continue their work with the immigrant communities, offering an increase in their pro bono services, immigrant rights workshops and other events. In the report's conclusion, the Jesuit schools assert their desire to "ensure that anyone who comes to our borders seeking safety is provided a fair and equitable process to articulate their claims for protection and that their dignity and well-being is respected throughout the entire legal process."

Source: Jesuit Refugee Service, June 19, 2015