



FAQs: Central American Minor Refugee and Parole Program

September 2023

What is the Central American Minors refugee and parole program?

U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of State (DOS) established the Central American Minors (CAM) refugee and parole program in December 2014 to allow a safe and legal basis for certain unaccompanied minors from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to join qualifying parents in the United States.¹ Under this program, the child is screened first for refugee status. If found eligible for refugee status, the child will be admitted to the United States as a refugee under section 207 of the INA. If the child is found ineligible for refugee status, the child will be considered for parole and may enter the United States pursuant to a grant of section 212(d)(5) parole.

A “qualifying parent or legal guardian” who lives in the United States may initiate a process to allow qualifying children to legally enter the United States as either refugees or parolees. Until granted refugee status or parole, CAM-eligible children must wait outside of the United States.

Who is a “qualifying parent” or “qualifying legal guardian” for CAM?

Under the initial version of the CAM program, the qualifying parent must have been at least 18 years old and have one of the following types of immigration status:

- Permanent resident status;
- Temporary Protected Status;
- Parole, assuming it is valid for at least one year;
- Deferred action, assuming it is valid for a period of at least one year;
- Deferred Enforced Departure; or
- Withholding of removal.

On June 15, 2021, the Secretary of State and Secretary of Homeland Security issued a joint statement expanding access to the CAM program, expanding the eligibility to legal guardians (not

¹ The most up-to-date information on the CAM program can be found at the State Department website at state.gov/refugee-admissions/central-american-minors-cam-program/. USCIS also maintains a website on CAM, uscis.gov/CAM.

just parents) with lawful status.² In addition, this plus a subsequent expansion on April 11, 2023, have expanded eligibility to certain U.S.-based parents or legal guardians who have pending asylum applications, U visa petitions or T visa petitions filed before April 11, 2023.³

Who are the qualifying family members eligible to receive parole under CAM?

The “qualifying child” must be:

- The child (genetic, step, or legally adopted) of the qualifying parent or under legal guardianship of the qualifying legal guardian;
- Unmarried;
- Under the age of 21 (at the time of filing);
- A national of El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras; and
- Physically present in El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras.

Under the initial version of the program, the in-country parent of the qualifying child could also qualify for parole if that parent was married to the “qualifying parent” in the United States and would be joining the CAM child in the United States. The unmarried children of “qualifying children” could also qualify if under the age of 21.

In 2016, the CAM program was expanded to include additional eligible family members for parole *when accompanying a qualifying child*:

- A qualifying parent’s son and/or daughter who is married and/or aged 21 years or older.
- The in-country biological parent of the qualifying child, even if not married to the qualifying parent.
 - Unmarried children under 21 of the in-country biological parent may be listed as derivatives on that parent’s parole case.
 - The legal spouse of a biological parent not married to the qualifying parent may be listed as a derivative on the biological parent’s case.
- The caregiver of a qualifying child who is either related to the U.S.-based qualifying parent or qualifying child (for example, the qualifying parent’s sister or qualifying child’s cousin).
- Unmarried children of the qualifying child who are located in-country and under 21.

Additional requirements apply to the above categories; practitioners should consult the USCIS page on CAM.⁴

² Joint Statement by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Homeland Security on the Expansion of Access to the Central American Minors Program, state.gov/joint-statement-by-the-u-s-department-of-state-and-u-s-department-of-homeland-security-on-the-expansion-of-access-to-the-central-american-minors-program/ (June 15, 2021).

³ Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration; Central American Minors Program, USCIS/DOS, 88 FR 21694, [federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/11/2023-07592/bureau-of-population-refugees-and-migration-central-american-minors-program](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/11/2023-07592/bureau-of-population-refugees-and-migration-central-american-minors-program) (April 11, 2023).

⁴ “Central American Minors Program,” USCIS, uscis.gov/CAM (last updated June 23, 2023).

Although this FAQ is on CAM parole, it is worth noting that those qualifying family members and their possible derivatives listed above are also eligible for refugee status, either based on their own claims or possibly as derivatives on the qualifying child's case, should the child be granted refugee status.

What is the application process?

In order to begin the process, the qualifying parent or legal guardian physically present in the United States with lawful status submits an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) on Form DS-7699 to the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Refugee Processing Center through a resettlement agency in the United States for the qualifying child.⁵ Next, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Resettlement Support Center in Latin America conducts a pre-screening and prepares the file for USCIS. USCIS considers those individuals it determines ineligible for refugee status for the possibility of entry to the United States under parole.

What resettlement agencies can help to submit the Affidavit of Relationship (AOR)?

Ten national resettlement agencies with over 300 local affiliates located throughout the United States are currently qualified to help submit the AOR.⁶

In general, the family will meet with the resettlement agency to complete the AOR. The resettlement agency then files the AOR with the DOS, which begins the process of the agency's verifying the parent or legal guardian's eligibility for the program. This also triggers the process of the Resettlement Support Center becoming involved. The Resettlement Support Center should provide information to the family on the process and status of the application as it becomes available.

In addition, while Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) is not a resettlement agency, they assist in filing AORs through partnerships with resettlement agencies. More information can be found at KIND's website, "KIND's Central American Minors (CAM) Application Program."⁷

Is an I-134, Declaration of Financial Support, required for the CAM Parole Program as it is for humanitarian parole generally?

No, as part of the Federal Rule from April 11, 2023, the administration removed the requirement of an I-134 for the initial CAM Parole Program. In its place, the administration is now allowing a sworn

⁵ The April 11, 2023 Federal Rule also indicated that in certain limited cases where a stepparent filed an AOR and is not the child's adoptive parent or legal guardian, USCIS will, if needed, evaluate whether the child has a biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian in the United States and confirm that individual's intentions to remain "available in the United States to provide for the child's care and physical custody" were the child paroled into the United States.

⁶ Resettlement & Placement Agency Contacts, Refugee Processing Center, wrapsnet.org/rp-agency-contacts/ (last visited June 12, 2023).

⁷ supportkind.org/what-we-do/international/kind-central-american-minors-program-cam-applications/ (last visited Sept. 28, 2023).

statement from the qualifying parent or legal guardian as an alternative to the I-134. The I-134 is required, however, for any future re-parole request.

If immigration practitioners encounter a person with family who may be eligible for refugee status or parole under CAM, what assistance can they provide?

They should refer the family member to the appropriate resettlement agency for assistance. Only these resettlement agencies are authorized to complete the necessary AOR forms to start the CAM process.

While only resettlement agencies can file the AOR, attorneys in the United States can provide legal assistance or representation to the child and other family members in connection with their refugee interview. As of now, attorneys cannot represent the child in the refugee interview itself, but they can gather and file evidence, prepare the child for the interview, file legal arguments, and provide the child and other family members with information to help them understand the CAM process.

Can a child present in the United States seek parole under CAM?

No, the program is limited to individuals outside of the United States in El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras.

If immigration practitioners encounter a person granted parole under CAM, what assistance can they provide?

Individuals who entered the United States on CAM parole should be screened for eligibility for other permanent forms of relief and protection under the immigration laws. For example, an individual who entered the United States on parole may be eligible to apply for asylum. The person may qualify for adjustment of status if a family member is able to file an I-130 petition on his or her behalf. Children may also qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

Consider the following example:

- Sonia was granted withholding of removal by the immigration court. She was unable to apply for asylum because she was placed in “withholding only” proceedings upon entering the United States. She has a 16-year-old daughter, Raquel, who has recently entered the United States pursuant to a CAM program two-year grant of parole. Raquel’s biological father abandoned her and has never provided her any emotional or financial support. Sonia seeks custody of Raquel together with a predicate order in support of Special Immigrant Juvenile status (SIJS). Raquel is able to file for SIJS and, ultimately, permanent residency in the United States.

Can a CAM parolee request a renewal from within the United States?

Yes, it is possible to request re-parole from within the United States for those granted CAM parole. A person granted parole initially by USCIS should file a new Form I-131 and write “CAM re-parole” across the top of the application. The form must include the fee or Form I-912 request for a fee waiver, and should include materials and evidence to support the request for re-parole and an explanation of why the applicant needs to remain in the United States. In contrast to the initial CAM Parole request, the re-parole application needs to be accompanied by an I-134, Declaration of Financial Support. The re-parole request should include arguments about the urgent humanitarian reasons for approving their re-parole and/or arguments on why doing so is in the public interest. The request should be filed at least 90 days in advance of the expiration of the authorized parole period. As with an initial request for parole to USCIS, this request is submitted to the Dallas Lockbox.

USCIS also notes on its website that individuals who failed to apply for re-parole due to the CAM parole program termination may apply now. These individuals should include an explanation for why they did not apply for re-parole previously.

What has happened with previously denied CAM applications?

The Trump administration ended the parole portion of the CAM program in 2017. The Biden administration announced in March 2021 that it was restarting the program, proceeding through phases to first adjudicate cases which were denied upon termination of the program before accepting new applications. In September 2021, the CAM program began accepting new applications. As part of its Federal Rule from April 11, 2023, DHS announced that some CAM minors who were denied refugee status in 2018 and did not proceed to the parole program would now have their parole cases adjudicated.