

MEXICO

Migrant Caravan

Since 13 October, several thousand migrants have left Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala to form two large caravans and multiple smaller groups travelling by foot towards the United States border. At least 9,000 people have entered Mexican territory since 19 October. Protection concerns as well as urgent food, water, health and shelter needs have been reported. In the lead-up to the US mid-term congressional elections the caravan has become a highly politicised issue, which put pressure on the Mexican state to prevent migrants entering the US and to create incentives for migrants to apply for asylum in Mexico.

IMPACT



NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



Possible routes of the caravans

Source: MSF, accessed 30/10/2018

Anticipated scope and scale

In addition to the 9,000 people in Mexico, **up to 15,000 people** have left Central American countries to follow the caravan's path. **More tensions** at entry points along Mexico's southern border and an **increase of needs** along the route are to be expected. Uncertainty of the route makes preparations harder and increases the likelihood of shortages. **Pressure from the US** is likely to increase the number of people applying for asylum in Mexico and disperse the caravan. Further delays and blockages are likely to increase migrant's exposure to protection risks near the northern border.

Key priorities



+9,000
migrants in Mexico



Basic Needs
incl. shelter, food, health services



+2,300 children
in need of protection

Humanitarian constraints



Access to the areas affected is largely unrestrained currently. Humanitarian actors are most likely to face bureaucratic issues as the caravan has become politically significant and access may become impeded.

Limitations

Estimates of the number of migrants in each caravan vary widely, and few have been verified. Although the caravans have received significant media attention, it is very difficult to determine to which caravan section each report refers.

Crisis impact

Since 13 October, caravans of migrants from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala are heading towards Mexico on their way to the US (for further information on the caravan's passage through Guatemala, please see ACAPS briefing note of 29 October).

As of 30 October, at least 9,000 migrants had entered Mexico with the goal to apply for asylum in the US. Some 1,700 have applied for asylum while several hundred have accepted repatriation. (La Vanguardia 30/10/2018; The Guardian 27/10/2018; The Guardian 24/10/2018) Urgent food, water, health and shelter needs are reported. (WOLA 24/10/2018; ABC News 27/10/2018)

The first caravan that left San Pedro Sula in Honduras reached Ciudad Hidalgo in the southern state of Chiapas on 19 October. Clashes between migrants and Mexican security forces were reported as migrants tried to cross the bridge across the Suchiate River dividing Guatemala and Mexico. (El Comercio 20/10/2018; BBC 20/10/2018; CBS News 20/10/2018) Migrants faced long delays to enter the country and receive transit permits. However, hundreds of people crossed the river, while most of the caravan spent the night on the bridge without proper shelter, food or protection. Several people were wounded. (AI, 20/10/2018; BBC 29/10/2018)

On 22 October, the caravan continued the journey inside Mexico from Tapachula towards Oaxaca state. On 27 October, Federal Police (PF) and the National Migration Institute (Instituto Nacional de Migracion - INM) temporarily stopped the caravan between Arriaga, Chiapas and Tapanatepec, Oaxaca, after thousands of people rejected offers by the Mexican government to register in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca and receive temporary work permits and assistance. (El Universal 26/10/2018; El Universal 27/10/2018; CNDH 27/10/2018) After the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) facilitated a meeting between members of the caravan, PF and INM the caravan was able to continue the journey north. (ABC News 27/10/2018)

As of 28 October, the size of the first caravan was estimated to have reached between 7,000 and 8,000 persons and was located in Tapantepec in Oaxaca state. (UNHCR 24/10/2018; ECHO 26/10/2018; Reuters 28/10/2018) An estimated 2,300 children are travelling in the first caravan. (UNICEF 26/10/2018; Plan International 26/10/2018) By 30 October, the first caravan had arrived in Juchitan de Zaragoza Oaxaca and was expected to arrive in Mexico City around 2 or 3 November. (Excelsior 28/10/2018; La Vanguardia 30/10/2018; La Prensa 30/10/2018) However, the latest reports indicate that the size of the caravan is decreasing as migrants disperse, with reported number varying from 4,000 to more than 6,000 people. (Milenio 31/10/2018; Jornada 30/10/2018; Al Jazeera 31/10/2018)

On 28 October, a second caravan of about 2,000 US-bound migrants predominantly from El Salvador and Honduras clashed with Mexican and Guatemalan security forces as they tried to enter at the same crossing point between Tecun Uman in Guatemala and Ciudad Hidalgo in Mexico. (Reuters 28/10/2018; Animal Politico 29/10/2018; Proceso 28/10/2018) In the violent clashes several migrants were hurt and one person of Honduran nationality was killed by rubber bullets allegedly fired by Mexican security forces. (El Universal 28/10/2018; BBC 29/10/2018; El Financiero 28/10/2018; Aristegui Noticias 28/10/2018) By 30 October, the second caravan reached Tapachula in Chiapas. (La Prensa 30/10/2018)

More smaller groups of migrants are reported to be forming on an ad hoc basis and are organising via social media in Central American countries, one of which is expected to arrive at the Mexican border on 31 October. (Proceso 28/10/2018; Proceso 28/10/2018) The number of more people on their way to Mexico is unconfirmed but may have reached 15,000. (ECHO 26/10/2018; Voice of America 28/10/2018)

Shelter and NFIs: Migrant shelters exist along the route but are not equipped to host thousands of migrants. Adequate shelter for those in transit as well as those seeking asylum in Mexico is urgently needed. (El Universal 22/10/2018; CNDH 28/10/2018) In Mexico City, migrant shelters and churches are preparing for the arrival of the caravan, although the exact route thereafter remains unclear, shortages in northern states can be expected. (Excelsior 28/10/2018; El Manana 29/10/2018) Given the high number of female migrants and young children, protection measures in shelters should be put in place. (CNDH 28/10/2018; UNICEF 26/10/2018;)

Food and Nutrition: Food and drinking water assistance is needed as migrants lack cash for food and dehydration is reported. (Radio hrn 25/10/2018; El Universal 27/10/2018; Prensa Libre 27/10/2018) However, civil society groups are providing food, water, and NFIs in the villages and towns along the route of the caravan. (El nuevo Herald 25/10/2018; El Periodico 28/10/2018; WOLA 24/10/2018; CCINM, 24/10/2018) As members on the caravan mostly rely on the food handed to them along the way, malnutrition, especially among the 2,300 children, is another concern. (UNICEF 26/10/2018; Reuters 28/10/2018) Potential pre-existing malnutrition in the countries of origin of the migrants add to these needs, as Guatemala has the fourth-highest chronic malnutrition rate in the world. (USAID 30/09/2018)

Health: Migrants traveling long distances on foot are exposed to the elements and up to 40-degree heat. Many have suffered from dehydration, exhaustion and are in need of basic health services. (Washington post 29/10/2018; Proceso 25/10/2018; Reuters 28/10/2018; Radio hrn 25/10/2018; El Universal 22/10/2018)

WASH: Considering the long, mostly rural distances covered by the caravan and lack of adequate shelter, open defecation is common and access to sanitation and hygiene items limited.

Protection: Several reports point to a high number of young children and unaccompanied youth in the caravan, which are among the most vulnerable. (UN News 24/10/2018; UNICEF 26/10/2018; UNHCR 24/10/2018)

Migrants on the Guatemalan side of the border with Mexico have been crossing the river in rafts or at night in an effort to circumvent attempts by Mexican authorities to stem the flow of people across the border bridge. Crossing the border at night poses risks of SGBV, violence and theft for vulnerable migrants. Those crossing the river also risk drowning (The Guardian 21/10/2018).

According to a survey by Amnesty International, 75% of migrants detained by Mexican migration authorities were not informed of their rights, which is another protection concern for vulnerable migrants currently in transit. (AI 23/01/2018)

Vulnerable groups affected

Migrants in Mexico are in a particularly vulnerable position and often fall prey to organised crime and corrupt security officials. (UN HRC 26/10/2018; AI accessed 29/10/2018) Women, pregnant women, children and elderly people among the caravan members are in need of special protection in transit and in shelters. (Reuters 28/10/2018; Plan International 26/10/2018) Women migrants in particular suffer frequent gender-based violence, approximately 70% to 80% of women migrants are victims of sexual violence. (Sin Embargo 19/11/2017; The Guardian 05/10/2017; Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal 2013) Some people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ community are also reported to be among the caravan members. (CBC 25/10/2018; Noticias Ya 25/10/2018)

Aggravating factors

Insecurity and organized crime

Mexico is currently experiencing a new peak in violence with an average of 80 homicides per day in 2017. (Infobae 22/01/2018) 2018 is close to becoming the most violent year of the past two decades. (El Pais 21/08/2018) Transit through Mexico is known to be a very dangerous migration route and yet every year 500,000 people cross into Mexico. (MSF 05/2018) Vulnerable migrants face theft, extortion, abduction, rape and murder at the hands of criminal groups. (MSF 05/2018; MSF 20/06/2018) As migrants often fear deportation and do not trust security officials, many incidents go unreported. (UN HRC 26/10/2018)

Pressure to apply for asylum and impending deportations

US president Donald Trump has threatened to close the US-Mexico border and cut aid to Central American governments to put pressure on the Mexican government to restrain

migrants in transit from travelling north. (AI 26/10/2018; The Guardian 26/10/2018; The Guardian 26/10/2018) On 29 October the US announced the deployment of 5,200 troops to the US-Mexican border. (BBC 29/10/2018) The Mexican president's response to US pressure has been to announce a special scheme for migrants travelling in the caravan, offering benefits to those that register as refugees in Chiapas or Oaxaca. (El Universal 26/10/2018; The Guardian 27/10/2018) Those who continue their journey face obstacles like road blocks and limited access to public transport. (ABC News 27/10/2018; 14ymedio 22/10/2018) As of 27 October, the government said that more than 1,700 people of the caravan had registered for asylum. (The Guardian 27/10/2018)

Contextual information

Drivers of migration

El Salvador and Honduras experience high levels of violence, human rights violations, and corruption. (WOLA 18/10/2018; WOLA 22/10/2018; The Guardian 26/10/2018; Proceso 28/10/2018) Climate change related phenomena like drought and floods has been another driver of migration in the countries of origin. Honduras suffered intense flooding over the past year. (WOLA 22/10/2018) Several years of drought in southern Guatemala has exacerbated food security for poorer households by reducing agricultural production and livelihood opportunities. Guatemalans living in the dry corridor already face IPC Phase 2 (stressed) and are projected to face IPC Phase 3 (crisis) by February 2019. (FEWS NET September 2018) Guatemala has also experienced floods and landslides in 2018.

Past displacement

In April this year, a smaller migrant caravan set off on the same route but only some 200 reached the United States via the border town of Tijuana in Baja, California state. (The Guardian 26/10/2018; ABC News 27/10/2018; WOLA 04/04/2018) Caravans of migrants are often formed to increase the security of individual migrants but generally do not receive much media attention. Whereas the number of migrants entering the US is at an historic low, the number of asylum requests in Mexico due to violence and crisis in Honduras, El Salvador and Venezuela has increased over the last five years. (WOLA 26/10/2018) The number of asylum applications registered in Mexico has increased drastically over the past years from less than 1,300 in 2013 to 14,500 in 2017. (COMAR 2018; UNHCR 24/04/2018; AP 23/01/2018) In contrast and whereas the number of undocumented migrants apprehended at the US border is at historic low, the number of asylum applications from Central Americans in the US is rising since 2010. (IRIN 29/10/2018; MPI September 2018; WOLA 01/02/2018) In June, the US announced that asylum claims related to domestic or gang violence will no longer qualify for asylum, a decision that put the life of thousands of Central Americans fleeing violence at risk. (MSF 20/06/2018) Human rights

organisations and journalists have documented illegal pushbacks and denial of rights of the US to Central American migrants. (AI 2018)

Key characteristics

- **Demographic profile:** 129.2 million inhabitants, 79% live in urban areas.
- **Poverty and inequality.** 43.6% living in poverty. GINI index score of 48 (2012)
- **Food security and nutrition.** Whereas malnutrition rates have been decreasing (2% of children under 5 acutely malnourished in 2012), the prevalence of overweight (9% of children under 5 in 2012) and diet-related health risks has been increasing. In 2018, 5.6% of the population of Mexico City is affected by food scarcity.
- **Life expectancy:** 77.1 **Infant mortality rate:** 15 per 1000 births
- **WASH statistics:**
Basic sanitation services: 85%.
Limited sanitation services: 10%. Piped water: 92%
- **Security:** Homicide rate rose by 16% (15,973 homicides in the first six months of 2018), Global Impunity Index Score of 69.21.

Sources: World Bank, OECD; FAO: INEGI; IFPRI; UNICEF; Amnesty International; IGI 2017, The Guardian; SNSP

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The National Migration Institute, the National Human Rights Commission and Federal Police as well as other government agencies are the main government agencies involved with the migrant caravan. (INM 19/10/2018) Privately run migrant shelters, national organisations and civil society groups are providing assistance including food, shelter, NFIs, water and health assistance to those in the caravan. (Proceso 25/10/2018) In some states along the anticipated route, like Mexico City, Veracruz, Chihuahua and Tamaulipas, government institutions and religious and civil society groups are preparing to assist the caravan members. (AGN 23/10/2018; Proceso 28/10/2018) As of 27 October, shelter, food and sanitation assistance from the government focused on those who decide to register as refugees or apply for asylum. (ABC News 27/10/2018)

International response capacity

Organisations that were already present in Mexico's south and along the migration routes are assisting migrants. UN agencies including UNHCR and UNICEF are responding to the needs of the caravan, as are several international IOs and NGOs providing services including shelter and food assistance and analysing needs and vulnerabilities. (Reuters 28/10/2018; UNHCR 24/10/2018; UNHCR 23/10/2018; UNICEF 21/10/201)

Information gaps and needs

The fluidity of the situation and the constant movement of the various waves of the caravan make it very challenging to track who is displaced, where and with what specific needs. Though the caravan has attracted significant media attention, it is not always clear to which wave the various reports are referring. Additionally, it is difficult to verify the number of migrants on the move, as anecdotal reporting suggests that new migrants continue to attempt to join existing caravans, while others drop out along the way and return to their countries of origin.

Anticipating routes and needs is also hard. The route via the northern states of Tamaulipas is shortest but poses elevated risks of organised crime and a severe climate.