

Humanitarian situation of people on the move

The growing number of people on the move in Mexico has overwhelmed southern and northern border areas, and humanitarian needs are escalating. By September, 86,200 asylum applications in Mexico had already been received for 2022, which is the second highest on record, after 2021 when 130,000 applications were received (CBP accessed 05/10/2022; CBS News 20/09/2022, El Heraldo de Tabasco 04/10/2022; La Razón 03/10/2022). The city of Tapachula at the southern border received nearly 66% of all applications so far in 2022 (La Razón 03/10/2022). The profile of nationalities has also widened to include more arrivals from Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Russia, Ukraine, and Venezuela, adding to those from El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua (WOLA 23/09/2022, 09/09/2022, and 19/08/2022; Reuters 25/07/2022; El Economista 12/06/2022). Some intend to stay in Mexico, while others are in transit to the US, their final destination. In September, encounter events (apprehensions and expulsions) at the US border surpassed two million for the first time.

A lack of legal documentation obstructs access to formal employment and essential services, including healthcare and education. The congestion of regular migration channels in Mexico, the country's lack of response capacity, and restrictive US policies have led many people on the move, including those entitled to refugee status, waiting months, or even years, for their situation to regularise.

Migrants and asylum seekers face recurrent abuses and violence across the country, especially in northern states. Protection risks are of particular concern for women and children, especially those in transit, as they are at risk of sexual abuse and human trafficking during their journey. Between January–August 2022, the US Customs and Border Protection registered more than 100,000 encounter events involving unaccompanied minors at the US southern border with Mexico (CBP accessed 05/10/2022). Unaccompanied minors at the northern border or Mexico are exposed to human trafficking or recruitment into gangs and cartels. Although homicides have decreased in 2022 across Mexico, they have been increasing in northern cities, such as Ciudad Juárez (El Diario 26/08/2022; Animal Politico 19/08/2022 and 01/09/2022). Criminal groups have also kidnapped migrants for ransom (Milenio 04/08/2022; Imagen de Veracruz 04/08/2022).

Economic instability and harsh environmental conditions aggravate people's needs. People in transit must usually walk long distances carrying their belongings. In certain cases, they pass through deserts with high temperatures and few water sources. About 34% of the reasons of deaths among migrants on the US-Mexico route between 2014–2021 were harsh environmental conditions (Missing Migrants accessed 18/08/2022). At the same time, Mexico is

facing an increase in inflation rates, making access to goods and services even more difficult for people on the move and host communities (El País 03/08/2022; El Economista 20/07/2022).

Mexico: migration routes



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About this report

Aim: this report aims to give an overview of the situation of migrants and asylum seekers in the northern and southern border areas of Mexico, as well as those in transit across the country. It includes the most immediate humanitarian needs, access constraints, and information gaps.

Methodology: this analysis is based on secondary data review.

Limitations: the difficulties in tracking people on the move and the lack of updated and reliable figures make it difficult to precisely know the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and the extent of health and protection needs. Violence, abuses, and cases of sexual and gender-based violence are under-reported.

MAP KEY TERMS

Caravans

The term 'caravans' usually denotes the mobilisation of large groups of people on foot through Mexican territory to other Mexican states or the US. People in caravans generally face protection risks associated with the use of force and arbitrary detention by Mexican authorities.

Interception/migrants intercepted

'Interception' refers to the act of preventing migrants from continuing their journey (IOM accessed 30/09/2022). 'Migrants intercepted' refers to irregular migrants who do not present themselves to but are intercepted by migration authorities, usually before reaching their destination.

Irregular migration movement

This type of movement generally identifies people "moving outside regular migration channels. The fact that they use irregular migration pathways does not imply that States are not, in some circumstances, obliged to provide them with some forms of protection under international law, including access to international protection for asylum seekers fleeing

persecution, conflicts or generalized violence." Irregular migration movement takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit, and receiving country. Categories of people who may not have any other choice but to use irregular migration channels include asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, and unaccompanied children (IOM accessed 30/09/2022).

People on the move

Migration flows in Mexico are mixed. They include people escaping conflict or persecution and fearing for their lives (asylum seekers and refugees), and those moving by choice to escape poverty (migrant with regular or irregular status). Some intend to stay in Mexico, and others are in transit to the US, their final destination. As it is difficult to distinguish the varying nature of the movements and groups, ACAPS uses the term 'people on the move' when referring globally to people who have moved away from their usual place of residence. The congestion of regular migration channels in Mexico and restrictive US policies have led many people on the move, including those entitled to international protection and refugee status, waiting months, sometimes years, for their situation to regularise. People on the move need humanitarian assistance and protection, no matter their initial motivation to move.

Refugee

According to The Refugee Convention of 1951, a refugee is "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR 1951). In Latin America, the Cartagena Declaration proposed a regional definition of refugees that, aside from containing the elements of the 1951 Convention, would include people whose "lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order" (OAS 1984). In Mexico, the Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection, and Political Asylum adopted in January 2011 includes the Cartagena Declaration definition of a refugee (Gov't of Mexico 27/01/2011). The US is a party to the 1951 Convention and, through the Refugee Act of 1980, has adopted this definition of refugee into its legal system (US Congress 03/17/1980).

Transit

In this report, the term 'transit' does not distinguish between the means of transport, the most frequent being trucks and on foot. This term also means temporariness, since people in transit are on a journey towards a different destination; in the case of this report, the usual destination is the US (UNHCR accessed 30/09/2022).

REFUGEE SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

Mexico's system

Asylum application

People seeking asylum must apply within one month of entering the country to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR). Asylum seekers must wait out their cases in the state where they apply for asylum, forcing many to remain at the southern border after crossing from Guatemala. If their case is rejected, they are supposed to return to their original place of residence and have the right to appeal the decision (WOLA 02/06/2022; UNHCR accessed 12/09/2022). The Mexican migration authorities' refusal to set up more accessible and less complex legal routes to formalise migration status compounds the issues hounding the high number of people in need of international protection. The situation results in a large number of migrants being channelled into Mexico's asylum system, ignoring other avenues to secure a documented status in the country and creating a more acute situation (WOLA 02/06/2022).

Constancia

Once COMAR receives an application for asylum, it issues a document called 'constancia' that serves as proof of an open asylum case. Asylum seekers cannot be returned to their country of origin during the processing of their case.

Visitor Card for Humanitarian Reasons

With their constancia, asylum seekers can apply with the National Institute for Migration (Instituto Nacional de Migración or INM) to receive a humanitarian visa known as a Visitor Card for Humanitarian Reasons (TVRH by its Spanish acronym). The TVRH confers legal permission for people to live and work in Mexico for a year (WOLA 02/06/2022). It is also essential to avoid interception or deportation and access essential services, such as health and education (CN 10/08/2022).

Permit to work

To access formal employment, asylum seekers in Mexico need the constancia or TVRH. They must also have several Mexican tax documents and a valid passport from their country of origin. All these documents can take several months to obtain, and many migrants and asylum seekers have not been able to renew their passports. Bureaucratic barriers restrict their access to formal employment, leading them to join the informal sector under poor working conditions (Swissinfo 05/07/2022; El Economista 02/08/2022).

US policies

Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP)

The US Government enacted MPP, also known as the Remain in Mexico policy, in January 2019. MPP allowed individuals and families to make an asylum claim in the US but forced them to wait out their immigration proceedings in Mexico (DHS accessed 28/09/2022; Save the Children accessed 29/09/2022). This policy severely affected asylum seekers as it forced them to wait for many months, even years at a time, in dangerous and overcrowded border camps in Mexican cities while awaiting US court hearings instead of allowing them to cross the border and apply from within the US (ACLU 02/03/2022; America's Voice 28/02/2019). The Supreme Court and the Biden Administration decided in June–August 2022 to progressively strike down MPP, Individuals are no longer being newly enrolled into the policy, and individuals currently enrolled in MPP in Mexico will be disenrolled when they return for their next scheduled court date. Individuals disenrolled from MPP will continue their removal proceedings in the US (DHS 08/08/2022).

Title 42

The Public Health Services Act, 42 U.S.C. section 265 (referred to as Title 42), authorises the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to implement appropriate regulations limiting immigration to combat the spread of serious communicable diseases. The Trump Administration enacted it in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Title 42 closed the US border and allowed the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to turn away all asylum seekers (Save the Children 01/04/2022, WOLA 31/03/2022, AIC 15/10/2021). Under this policy, migrants were immediately expelled to their home country or their last country of transit (CBP accessed 26/09/2022; Pew Research Center 13/08/2021; USA facts 04/06/2019). The Biden Administration has exempted unaccompanied children and tried to terminate Title 42 but was blocked by courts on procedure grounds (CNN 20/05/2022).

Border detention

Refers to detaining those who may be guilty of illegally entering a country. In the US, it mostly takes place on or near the southern border with Mexico (UHV accessed 23/09/2022). Non-US citizens deemed to have entered illegally are placed in detention facilities and lack judicial protection (ICE accessed 23/09/2022). For example, immigrants can be detained indefinitely; there is no federal right to legal representation for detainees; and most immigrants are not entitled to government-appointed lawyers (Saadi et al. 06/2020).

Encounters

In the US immigration policy, 'encounters' refers to events of apprehensions, detentions, and rejections from both border and irregular crossings. Afterwards, migrants are taken into custody in the US to await adjudication, are deemed inadmissible, or face expulsion by the Border Patrol (application of Title 42) from the US. Most encounters in recent months have resulted in expulsion, not apprehension, under the public health order Title 42 (CBS News 16/08/2022).

CHIAPAS AND TABASCO, SOUTHERN BORDER

Overview

Increasing migration flows at the southern border have led to a backlog in the processing of asylum applications in Chiapas and Tabasco states, the main entry points for Central and South American people arriving through Guatemala. As people on the move are unable to leave the state where they apply for asylum, they must stay in Chiapas and Tabasco. Permit delays – sometimes of up to six months – and the socioeconomic context in these states have left people without access to essential services or formal employment (TNH 21/09/2022). As a result, humanitarian needs are high, especially food security, livelihood, and shelter, particularly for those in Tapachula (Chiapas) and Tenosique (Tabasco). Health services, protection, and education are also lacking.

From January–June 2022, close to 49,000 people (compared with almost 29,900 in 2021) in Chiapas and 14,000 (compared with almost 10,950 in 2021) in Tabasco were intercepted and presented to migration authorities for entering through unofficial entry points or lacking immigration documents (SEGOB 10/2022). The increase in migration flow is mainly resulting from the deterioration of crises in other countries in the region, directly affecting the number of people seeking to remain in Mexico or transiting to the US (IRC 19/01/2022; Tricontinental 24/05/2022; UN 27/05/2022). Tapachula remains the city with the highest migration flow and number of asylum applications as it has a greater capacity than other ports of entry (Lizárraga Ramos 08/2022; Gobierno de México 09/2022; TRT 31/08/2022). In 2021, the COMAR received at least 90,000 asylum applications in Tapachula (La Jornada 22/06/2022; WOLA 02/06/2022; SEGOB 10/2022). In March 2022, 30,000 people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Tapachula (UNICEF 19/03/2022). In a Danish Refugee Council and Jesuit Refugee Service Mexico assessment, at least 10% of the migrant population reported being homeless in Tapachula, and more than half of the population interviewed reported eating less than three meals per day (DRC/JRS 30/09/2022).

Humanitarian needs

Protection

People on the move in southern Mexico face xenophobia and stigmatisation from the local and host communities, who accuse them of being violent, increasing work competition, worsening insecurity or criminality, and having unhygienic practices that enhance the spread of COVID-19 (WOLA 02/06/2022; La Jornada 22/06/2022; Gaspar Robles 2022). Because of high mixed migration flows, Mexican military forces have taken on the role of intercepting people crossing through irregular channels at its southern border. There have been reports of abuse of force, violence, torture, cruel and inhumane treatment, and arbitrary detention (HRW 06/06/2022; El País 15/12/2021; WOLA 02/06/2022; Manek et al. 08/08/2022; CNDH 24/11/2021; HRW 14/04/2020). Cases of family separation have occurred in different detention centres. The lack of agreement between the US and Mexico affects the immigration status of unaccompanied children seeking to reach the US to reunite with their families. Poor coordination between the two Governments has led some unaccompanied children to travel clandestinely to the southern Mexican border, facing protection risks, such as human trafficking, robbery, and gender-based violence, along the route (WOLA 02/06/2022).

Livelihoods

Access to employment is limited. Waiting times for permits and legalisation of migration status by COMAR have hindered access to formal jobs and diminished livelihood opportunities for migrants and asylum seekers (DRC/JRS 21/06/2022; IOM 21/07/2022; Diario de Chiapas 18/07/2022; El Universo 05/07/2022). Chiapas has one of the highest rates of informal work (76%) in the country (El Economista 02/08/2022; Latinus 18/08/2022). Those whose status is yet to be regular resort to informal or irregular work. In some cases, they do not receive the agreed financial compensation (DRC 21/07/2022). They often receive lower wages than agreed in jobs where working conditions are not guaranteed. A lack of income has reduced access to food, sanitation, shelter, and basic goods and services (DRC/JRS 21/06/2022; IOM 21/07/2022). These restrictions often result in the adoption of negative coping mechanisms, such as begging and the restriction of food consumption (HRW 06/06/2022; WOLA 02/06/2022; IOM 21/07/2022; Canal13 14/07/2022; Aquí Noticias 17/02/2022). The lack of access to employment has led to an increased number of caravans, putting pressure on the Mexican State to give them legal status and allow them better job conditions (LATimes 11/06/2022).

Health

Medical centres and other health providers require people on the move to present legal documentation to prove their identity. Delays in regularisation processes restrict access to health services, including for pregnant women. About 166 (44%) pregnant migrant and

asylum-seeking women reported not having access to maternal and child healthcare for this reason (IOM 04/05/2022). People on the move face traumatic situations during their journey, raising the need for psychological care as well (WOLA 02/06/2022; El Comentario 06/09/2021). As at March 2022, 502 migrants (44% of those surveyed by IOM in Tapachula and Tenosique) indicated having no access to health services. The main reasons mentioned are financial obstacles and a lack of information (IOM 04/05/2022).

Shelter

There is a lack of shelter to accommodate all the people entering through the southern border (WOLA 02/06/2022; IOM 21/07/2022). In Tapachula (Chiapas) and Tenosique (Tabasco), the lack of shelters has resulted in people living in overcrowded conditions in the few available collective shelters or in makeshift shelters on the street and in parks. Free shelters often lack food, sanitary kits, and NFIs (IOM 21/07/2022; El Heraldito 28/05/2022). The high number of people on the move who have arrived in 2022 has led to a rise in rental costs in Tapachula city, making it even more difficult for them to rent accommodation (IOM 21/07/2022; WOLA 02/06/2022).

Education

About 93.6% of children surveyed in Tapachula and Ciudad Juárez responded that they were not receiving formal education. People on the move from Africa, Haiti, and other non-Spanish-speaking regions face language barriers in Mexico, impeding their access to education (DRC/JRS 21/06/2022).

Access constraints

The number of people arriving daily in Chiapas and Tabasco exceeds the response capacity, limiting their access to services and assistance. Current policies in place prevent migrants and asylum seekers from leaving the states. In general, migrants stay in Tapachula and Tenosique cities owing to their proximity to the INM, which is in charge of migration permits (WOLA 02/06/2022; IOM 21/07/2022; Estados Unidos Mexicanos 21/02/2012).

PEOPLE IN TRANSIT

Overview

The lack of access to services and employment and the extended time for processing applications in southern border states discourage people from staying put. Instead, they start transiting to other states or towards the US. It is difficult to determine the number of people in transit, which creates challenges in providing adequate humanitarian response.

Caravans to the US or other Mexican states offering faster processing of permits to transit through Mexico are increasing (IOM 21/07/2022; El País 09/06/2022). Data on the number of caravans is scarce as these are informal movements. Travelling in large groups, despite increasing the vigilance of authorities and potentially reducing chances of crossing the border, can significantly reduce travel costs and the risk of falling victim to human smugglers and trafficking networks (Correa-Cabrera/Koizumi 15/11/2021; El País 12/10/2019). There is also an increasing number of 'ant caravans' – the movement of smaller groups to avoid attracting media or institutional attention (La Razón 03/09/2022; Milenio 07/12/2021).

The routes taken, whether in caravans or small groups, constantly change depending on the entry point, destination, and risk of attracting the attention of authorities. In southern Mexico, there are about 11 international legal and at least 370 informal entry points (Gobierno de México 29/12/2015). Most of the time, migrants entering Mexico from Guatemala arrive in Ciudad Hidalgo, south of Chiapas state, before arriving in Tapachula. Upon leaving Tapachula, migrants head towards Mexico City, making a stop at Juchitán de Zaragoza in Oaxaca state.

From Mexico City, people usually take three different routes:

- northward to Laredo, a border city with San Antonio (Texas)
- northwest to the states of Durango and Chihuahua, where the border with El Paso (Texas) is located
- to the Mexican Pacific Coast, one of the most dangerous routes as it crosses Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, and Sinaloa – areas with a lot of violence derived from drug trafficking – and the Sonoran Desert. This route seeks to reach San Diego (California).

Depending on the route, people on the move could walk between 3,000–6,000km to reach the Mexico Northern border (LR21 22/10/2018). The Government of Mexico has not updated the information on migrants' routes since 2014 (El Economista 23/05/2022). Information about routes comes mostly from the media and news articles.

Caravans form in southern Mexico or Central American countries. Between January–July 2022, at least seven caravans left Chiapas (IOM 21/07/2022). These caravans comprised

2,000–7,000 migrants (La Razón de México 01/07/2022; The San Diego Union-Tribune 11/06/2022). Some reports suggest that caravans of various sizes are formed almost daily in Chiapas. The Mexican Government has issued temporal permits for people in caravans to stay in the country for weeks or months (FMM by its acronym in Spanish which translates multiple migration form). People on the move have denounced the act in other states. Authorities have sent them back to Tapachula or Tenosique, arguing that FMM are only valid in the state in which they were issued (La Jornada 01/10/2022). In August 2022, another eight caravans containing hundreds of migrants departed from southern Mexico towards Oaxaca city (capital of Oaxaca state), where they expect faster processing of their asylum petition (France 24 01/09/2022).

Other caravans have formed in countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The ease of travelling in groups has led migrants to walk in caravans to Mexico's southern border and continue towards the US from there (UNHCR 15/11/2018; Oxfam 14/05/2019). In the caravans, there are not only Latin American migrants but also people from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Eritrea, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Senegal (BBC 24/04/2019).

Humanitarian needs

Protection

People in transit face risks of human smuggling and trafficking, robbery, violence related to xenophobia, gender-based violence, and enforced disappearance (Forbes 13/12/2021; Swissinfo 23/08/2022; El País 19/11/2018). Those who join caravans and other people in transit face mistreatment, abuse, arbitrary detention, and abuse by law enforcement (NCHS 23/02/2022; La Jornada 04/04/2022; Política Expansión 08/06/2022; CNDH 05/2022).

In 2021, 728 migrants were reported missing or deceased on the route towards the US through Mexico. As at 22 August 2022, at least 390 migrants had disappeared or died on this route in 2022 (Missing Migrants accessed 22/08/2022). The use of peripheral roads, away from central roads and urban centres, increases the risk of various threats, including extreme natural conditions, such as high temperatures, rivers, and deserts (IOM 2021; UN 28/06/2022; El País 28/06/2022). Between 2014–2021, deaths from drowning, mainly in the Rio Bravo (also known as the Rio Grande), extreme environmental conditions (a lack of water, shelter, food, or water), and vehicle accidents increased (Missing Migrants accessed 17/08/2022).

Women and girls in transit are particularly at risk of human trafficking, kidnapping, sexual abuse, and forced labour during their journey through Mexico. They often face dangerous and unsanitary conditions while trying to reach their destination (WRC 22/02/2022). Some women take contraceptives in their places of origin before starting the journey to avoid pregnancy in case of rape or sexual exploitation (RFI 08/08/2022).

According to Médecins Sans Frontières, in June 2022, 51 migrants reported the confiscation of their belongings and physical and/or sexual assault during transit in Mexico (The Postmedia 27/07/2022). Migrant women reported that during transit, they were beaten, raped, or abandoned after their smugglers discovered they were pregnant. There are also reports of women being forced into prostitution along the way or upon arrival to pay for their transport (NYT 04/03/2019).

Livelihoods

The irregular status and lack of work permits for people in transit reduce livelihood opportunities. The socioeconomic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a decrease in formal employment and the dismissal of many informal workers, which involves many migrants (ILO 30/04/2021). Many live on the savings they bring from their country or money received from relatives (UN 16/06/2022; DW 06/07/2022). That said, the impact the pandemic has had on their home countries has also reduced the money they receive (Ciudad Defensora 02/2021). Some stay for a while in Mexico to get temporary jobs before continuing their route (El País 30/10/2021). Some people in the caravans ask the Mexican Government or humanitarian organisations for water, hydrating serum, and food since they use up everything they have on the road or in the cities they reach (France 24 27/07/2022; CNDH Twitter 25/07/2022).

Health

The shortage of clean water and food increases the risk of malnutrition, dehydration, and diseases. The overcrowding of accommodations increases the risk of transmission of diseases such as COVID-19. Exposure to traumatic or stressful experiences creates serious mental health issues (CNDH 05/06/2022 and 05/2022). Women have experienced problems accessing menstrual hygiene items and medicines while travelling (Population Council et al. 11/2021).

Access constraints

The access of humanitarian organisations is complex because people in transit typically use peripheral roads in remote areas, often enter through irregular processes, and avoid official institutions (CNDH 05/06/2022; UNHCR 2022). Migrants are afraid to present themselves because of the risks of being detained or deported, preventing them from seeking assistance (HRW 06/06/2022, WOLA 06/2022).

The lack of information also constrains the access to services of people in transit. Some people report that during their transit through Mexico, they are unclear about which authorities to contact for help in case of medical emergencies or when they become victims of violence (Population Council et al. 11/2021; IOM 31/08/2022).

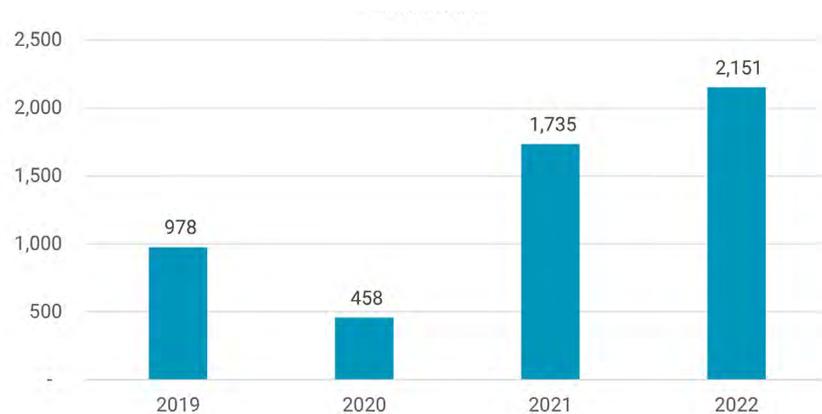
NORTHERN BORDER

Overview

Regular and irregular migration to the US from the northern Mexican border has increased consistently since 2020. As at September 2022, over two million encounter events (apprehension and expulsion) had already been recorded, a significant increase compared to previous years (see graph below) (CBP accessed 02/09/2022; ABC News 19/08/2022; TWP 16/06/2022; WOLA 26/05/2022). Protection and health are the highest needs at the northern border. People face the risk of kidnapping, human trafficking, and violence related to cartels. During the 2022 fiscal year, there were 140,186 unaccompanied children who faced specific protection risks such as forced recruitment into narcotraffic cartels and gangs (CBP accessed 02/09/2022; Animal Politico 02/09/2022; UNICEF accessed 01/09/2022).

The northern Mexican border with the US is around 2,000mi long. The Mexican states bordering the US are Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sonora, and Tamaulipas, and there are both legal and illegal crossings for people on the move through all of them. Nuevo Laredo (Tamaulipas), Río Grande and Mexicali (Baja California), and Río Grande (which connects Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas with Texas) are the most common illegal crossing points (El Tiempo Latino 04/09/2022; El Tiempo 09/05/2022; BBC 27/06/2019). The main humanitarian needs in these states are access to water, protection, and access to shelter for migrants (NYT 03/08/2022; The Conversation 04/08/2022; MSF 13/07/2022).

Southwest land border encounters (US-Mexico), 2019–2022



Source: CBP (accessed 01/09/2022)

Note: 'Encounters' refers to events, not people, meaning people on the move can be encountered more than once. As a result, the overall number of encounters reported in a given month may overstate the number of distinct individuals involved (CBP 08/12/2021).

People on the move face safety and security risks in the northern states and while trying to irregularly cross the northern border. In 2022 alone, there were 748 fatalities registered related to drowning in Río Grande or the harsh conditions of the desert (CNN 07/09/2022; Forbes 07/09/2022). On the border with Tijuana, the violence and militarisation of the city resulting from narcotraffic pose greater protection risks for people (El Imparcial 16/05/2022; WOLA 18/05/2022).

In June 2022, the CBP reported 207,416 encounters at the US-Mexico border. This figure is the highest number for that month in the last 21 years since public reporting in 2000 (WOLA 22/07/2022; TWP 16/06/2022). As at September 2022, the CBP had reported more apprehensions of single adults (1,360,366) than in the 2021 fiscal year (1,105,925), followed by the apprehension of family units (a group of two or more aliens comprising a minor or minors and their adult parent/s or legal guardian), with 506,569 in 2022 versus 479,728 in 2021 (CBP accessed 02/09/2022, CBP 10/06/2021)

The number of apprehensions of unaccompanied children has decreased since 2021, with 52,040 in July 2022 versus almost 83,500 in the same month in 2021 (CBP accessed DD/MM/2022). This decrease is likely the result of the lifting of certain migration policies, such as Title 42, encouraging families to travel together.

The number of unaccompanied children remains significant. US policies expelling or returning families, including the Remain in Mexico policy, have led parents arriving with children at the border to send their children to the US alone while they remain on the Mexican side of the border because it is likely the best chance the child has at finding protection (Law 360 03/01/2022). In some cases, their parents disappear in Mexico, leaving children unaccompanied when they arrive in the US (KIND 24/02/2020).

Humanitarian needs

Protection

One of ten kidnappings in Mexico involves a migrant or asylum seeker. Between July 2019 and November 2021, there were around 1,720 kidnappings in the country. The number could be higher since only 93% of crimes in Mexico are reported (InSight Crime 17/01/2022; INEGI 09/2021). In Veracruz, criminal groups have kidnapped several people for ransom. They release those who could pay and violently mark their faces with heated metal shapes to sow fear in the communities, while those who could not often disappear (Milenio 04/08/2022; Imagen de Veracruz 04/08/2022). Children, including unaccompanied children, have experienced sexual abuse, extortion, and abduction for ransom. Children and adolescents are at risk of forced recruitment by narcotrafficking groups and gangs (UNICEF 04/05/2022; HRW 04/02/2022). In 2021, almost 9,000 reports of kidnapping, sexual abuse, and violence against migrants and asylum seekers were reported in areas near the Mexico-US border (LA Times 17/01/2022).

Others have also reported extortion and psychological abuse from both the authorities and criminal gangs (HRW 05/03/2021).

The US-Mexico border is a human trafficking hotspot. The Mexican states connected with the US border, Baja California, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León, accounted for one-quarter (122) of all human trafficking victims identified in Mexico in the first six months of 2022 (InSight Crime 05/08/2022; Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección de México 20/07/2022). According to Border Patrol declarations, more than 800 migrants have died border-wide in the fiscal year 2022. This number is significantly higher considering the 557 deaths reported in fiscal year 2021 (NPR 29/09/2022; Forbes 07/09/2022). According to US Border Patrol statistics, the average number of fatalities from fiscal years 1998–2021 is 359 (The Conversation 04/08/2022; IOM 01/07/2022).

In 2022, several incidents have been reported, including the discovery of 53 deceased people, mostly Mexican citizens, in a truck on the outskirts of San Antonio, Texas, on 28 June (NYT 28/06/2022; Reuters 29/06/2022). Fatalities in the northern border, especially in the desert areas, are expected to be under-reported because reports only include bodies that are found. The arduous condition of the terrain tends to decompose bodies faster, leading to the overlooking of casualties on the Mexican border side (NNIRR accessed 18/08/2022). As at August 2022, most of the causes of deaths of migrants and asylum seekers were harsh environmental conditions, including a lack of adequate shelter, food, and water (141 deaths), drowning (113), vehicle accidents (76), violence (45), and a lack of access to healthcare (9). These figures exclude 'mixed or unknown cause deaths' and 'accidental deaths', for which data is not available (Missing Migrants accessed 17/08/2022).

Health

The response is overwhelmed and lacks the capacity to address all health needs (MSF 11/07/2022; UNICEF 04/05/2022). Migrants often present signs of dehydration and malnutrition. There is also a need for mental health assistance for people dealing with anxiety, especially children (Swissinfo 22/07/2022; UNICEF 04/05/2022). In July 2022, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that 67% of medical and psychological consultations were related to some type of violence, particularly in Veracruz and Tabasco. Similarly, according to a study by the Danish Refugee Council conducted between September 2021 and February 2022, 91.8% of migrants in Ciudad Juárez confirmed experiencing anxiety, while 78.7% had depression (MSF 07/07/2022; DRC/JRS 31/03/2022). Patients were experiencing respiratory illnesses, gastrointestinal diseases, urinary infections, gynaecological and skin infections, and weakening from chronic degenerative diseases. The number of pregnant women and children under five travelling has increased. The needs and consultations for this population tripled in June–July (El Tiempo Latino 03/09/2022; CNN 01/09/2022; MSF 27/07/2022). People in Ciudad Juárez have also reported several barriers to accessing healthcare, such as the cost of medicines, significant distances between their shelters and health centres, and the insecurity they face in getting to those centres (DRC/JRS 31/03/2022).

Shelter

Shelter conditions on the northern border are precarious. Shelters are in the form of makeshift spaces that lack basic services, mattresses, food, drinking water, protection from the elements, toilets, showers, and proper waste management (MSF 13/07/2022). In Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña (Coahuila state), most shelters are closed and under construction to expand their capacities (MSF 13/07/2022; Conexión Migrante 08/04/2022). In Nuevo Laredo, shelters are at their maximum capacity, and people sleep outside on the ground but nearby to shelters, exposed to rain and high temperatures. Some shelters are in poor condition and do not provide adequate protection from floods and inclement weather conditions (El Siglo de Torreón 01/08/2022; SuperChannel 12 31/07/2022; MSF 11/07/2022). In Nuevo Laredo (Tamaulipas state), in July 2022, more than 3,000 people stayed in improvised shelters under unsanitary and unsafe conditions.

WASH

People in the states of Tijuana and Nuevo Leon have been experiencing water shortages because of the drought resulting from La Niña, a natural and cyclical climate phenomenon that has intensified in recent years. People must queue to get water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes, and there have been strikes demanding water (Reuters 30/07/2022 and 20/06/2022; El Mexicano 27/07/2022). As a result, collective shelters are rationing drinking water (Spectrum News1 18/07/2022; Border Report 08/07/2022). In the northern border areas, temperatures in the summer reach 120° F (49° C), and water is scarce for the entire population (Infobae 20/06/2022; TNH 06/11/2018).

Access constraints

The increasing number of migrants and asylum seekers overwhelms the humanitarian response capacity at the northern Mexican border. Insecurity resulting from narco trafficking groups operating in the northern states also compounds the issue. In August 2022, the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación set five cars and two civilian buses on fire in Baja California, Mexicali, and Tijuana to demonstrate their control of the area (Milenio 15/08/2022; El Comercio 14/08/2022). This illegal street blocking constrained the traffic flow and access to certain areas of Baja California, Guanajuato, Mexicali, and Tijuana (La Jornada 13/08/2022; Infobae 12/08/2022). Several journalists have been murdered. On 15 April, the national migration delegate was murdered (CNN 03/08/2022; El Sol de Mexico 17/04/2022; Infobae 16/06/2022).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Drought and high temperatures

Since 1975, Mexico's temperature has been increasing above the global average. Temperatures in the northern regions, where people in transit are mostly headed, have increased faster than in the rest of the country (UNAM 27/01/2022). The increase in temperatures comes alongside droughts affecting 90% of the northern states (Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Sonora), where the lack of water aggravates the effects of high temperatures on people's health (El País 18/07/2022; NG 12/07/2022; CNN 25/07/2022). Extreme weather conditions, such as high temperatures causing drought and water scarcity, and a rise in waterway levels along the US border have been affecting people on the move in 2022 (NYT 03/08/2022; CNN 17/06/2022). Mexico has declared a water emergency for 2022 (France 24 13/07/2022; SWI 12/07/2022).

Weather conditions disproportionately affect people on the move, as they walk long distances and carry their belongings, making them more prone to heat stress. When travelling, particularly through the deserts of Arizona, Chihuahua, and Sonora, high temperatures and the scarcity of water sources pose health risks (Missing Migrants accessed 18/08/2022).

Natural hazards

Climate change has made natural hazards likely to become more recurrent. In 2020, at least 1.3 million people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras left their countries because of natural hazards, including volcanic eruptions, drought and heat waves, and regular flooding resulting from tropical storms and hurricanes (France24 04/08/2022; WMO 22/07/2022; La Vanguardia 20/07/2022). In 2021, the floods in Guatemala caused displacement and migration for people in San Juan de Obispo towards the US (France24 10/07/2022; IOM 08/11/2021).

Price increases and inflation

Inflation resulting from soaring fuel prices and the war in Ukraine is affecting Latin American economies. The region is experiencing the highest inflation levels in 15 years. The rising cost of living hit low-income the hardest as the main goods affected are food and energy. The COVID-19 pandemic also increased living costs and reduced incomes. All these issues combined imply an increase in poverty and food insecurity, some of the main drivers of migration in Central America (IMF 18/04/2022; Cepal 07/06/2022; DW 06/06/2022). In Mexico, inflation reached 8.2% in early July 2022. In July 2022, the cost of food increased by 14% compared to the same period in 2021 (Reuters 22/07/2022; Focus Economics 13/10/2022; Border Report 11/07/2022; TE accessed 10/07/2022). The increase in food prices and agricultural supplies inputs is particularly affecting low-income people on the move, as inflation makes access to goods and services even more difficult (El País 03/08/2022; El Economista 20/07/2022).

Economic instability

People on the move with irregular status have low-income opportunities. In Latin America, 65% of migrating people work in the informal sector compared to 50% of the native population (IADB 06/2020). More than half of the employment in Mexico in 2022 is in the informal sector (ILO 10/2020; El País 23/05/2022). The year-on-year inflation rate was 8.7% in August, the highest since 2000 (Forbes 08/09/2022; El Economista 08/09/2022). Economic instability would increase living costs for Mexican and migrant populations. Migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico engage in riskier jobs, where they are 45% more likely to suffer a life-threatening accident or occupational disease than native-born workers (IOM 12/10/2021).

OUTLOOK

The high number of people stuck at the southern border and the resulting limited capacity of migration authorities to process them make the number of migrant caravans likely to continue increasing (HRW 06/06/2022; NCHS 23/02/2022). In late July 2022, a caravan of migrants left Tapachula. Since then, at least eight caravans have departed from the state of Chiapas because of the delays in Tapachula (France 24 01/09/2022). Migrants are trying to reach Oaxaca, where they can also apply for asylum. A high influx of migrants in this city would have similar consequences as those seen in Tapachula, including a lack of shelter, poor access to food, health, and education systems, and increased protection risks (El Tiempo Latino 31/08/2022).

Global deterioration of the humanitarian situation, especially in terms of food security, in Latin America and the Caribbean could increase migration flows to Mexico. The costs of agricultural inputs (such as fertilisers) and other foodstuffs imported on a large scale from Ukraine and Russia have increased because of the war between those countries. This increase implies that there are risks of increased food insecurity (one of the drivers of migration) in Central America (FAO 05/2022; WFP 22/06/2022; The Conversation 14/06/2022). The impact on the main economic sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean have deepened the socioeconomic crises and further limited people's access to livelihoods (CEPAL 06/06/2022). Particularly in Mexico, there are risks for the economy stemming from a possible economic recession in the US, the recipient of 80% of its exports (Forbes 11/08/2022; Infobae 26/08/2022).

People on the move will remain in dire need of protection and assistance. They are likely to keep arriving at the northern border despite restrictive policies. This situation means that dangerous crossings through smuggling in trucks and by sea are likely to continue (NYT 25/07/2022; NBC 14/07/2022). The northern border will remain as a congregation point for migrants and asylum seekers because the US promised to increase its quota of refugees from the Americas to 20,000 by 2023 and 2024, with priority for Haitians. The US will also keep needing non-agricultural workers from Central America (IFRC 02/09/2022). Violence, poverty, food insecurity, and the effects of climate change in Central and South America, Haiti, and Mexico are likely to continue and will keep triggering migration flows.

In July 2022, Mexico's migration authorities apprehended their fourth-largest monthly total of undocumented migrants (33,800) (WOLA 09/09/2022). At the same time, the participation of the Mexican armed forces in migrants' apprehensions has been recently increasing. Almost 47,000 military and national guard personnel have been deployed in counter-migration missions in the country in 2022, representing an increase of over 46% from 2021 (WOLA 09/09/2022; Animal Político 02/09/2022). Some NGOs have denounced the increased involvement of military forces in migration operations leading to human rights violations (El País 24/05/2022; El Tiempo 24/05/2022). If this trend continues, protection concerns will likely increase. At the same time, migrants may be less likely to seek aid as they may have concerns about the role of the State in assisting them.

Mexico: Migration routes



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 Source(s): ACAPS, OCHA, EfrainMaps, LaRed21, Government of Mexico, El Financiero.

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