

MEXICO

Venezuelan people stranded in Mexico

KEY FINDINGS

50%

OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF EXTORTION, SEXUAL ABUSE OR ROBBERIES

DISPLACED PEOPLE ARE SLEEPING ON THE STREETS BECAUSE OF LACK OF MONEY TO PAY FOR ACCOMODATION

187,000

VENEZUELAN CITIZENS HAVE RETURNED TO MEXICO BETWEEN OCTOBER 2021 AND SEPTEMBER 2022

CRISIS OVERVIEW

- On 12 October, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced joint actions with Mexico to create a more orderly and safe immigration system for Venezuelans. This system included a new programme allowing up to 24,000 Venezuelans to enter US territory by air as long as they have a supporter in the US to provide them financial and other types of support. The programme is not open to Venezuelans who have been “ordered removed” from the US in the previous five years or have irregularly entered Mexico or Panama after 12 October (DHS 12/10/2022).
- These new measures aim to reduce the number of people arriving at the southwestern US border (DHS 12/10/2022). That said, the programme has stranded a horde of Venezuelans on the move in Mexico who do not qualify for the new US migration policy but also do not have the financial capacity to return to Venezuela (BBC 21/10/2022; NYT 24/10/2022; La Silla Vacía 14/10/2022).
- From October 2021 to September 2022 there were 187,000 encounters with Venezuelans in the US-Mexico border, which is 74% higher in comparison to the 49,000 encounters in 2021 (Migration Policy 27/10/2022, CBS News 22/10/2022). Between January–September 2022, more than 8,600 Venezuelan citizens applied for asylum in Mexico, an increase of 167% from the 3,200 asylum applications during the same period in 2020 (COMAR 03/10/2022; La Razón 03/10/2022). Over 82,000 Venezuelans were in Mexico as of September 2022 (R4V 12/10/2022).
- The number of stranded people unlikely to reach their destination is increasing, and the response capacity is overwhelmed. Several people have reported having no money left after spending all their savings to reach the northern border of Mexico (BBC 21/10/2022; El Diario 17/10/2022).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- The new US DHS policy seeks to issue 24,000 visas for Venezuelans, but around 33,000 Venezuelans already arrived at Mexico’s northern border with the US in September alone. It can take several weeks for those who want to apply to meet the requirements of the new programme (BBC 21/10/2022). As a result, more people are likely planning to stay longer in Mexico before either returning to Venezuela or attempting to reach the US by air through the new legal channels.
- Many Venezuelans may choose to remain in Mexico without applying for asylum, as one of the conditions for entering the new programme is to have not been recognised as a refugee in another country. Not applying for asylum would decrease their access to Mexico’s protection and other governmental services (El Tiempo Latino 24/10/2022).
- Venezuelans in transit are stranded at the northern border without savings and are unable to afford temporary accommodation. They will need shelter, food, protection, and health assistance until they can return to their country or until conditions for entering the US change.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Studies show that the participation of local governments and host communities in the response speeds up the implementation of projects such as increasing shelter capacity or delivering humanitarian assistance (Sayara International 03/2021). In the face of a crisis that can grow rapidly, coordinating with local authorities is likely to make the response more effective.
- The International Rescue Committee published a study showing that xenophobia among the host community can limit the access of people on the move to formal or informal jobs (IRC 01/05/2022). Improving livelihood access for people on the move has proven useful in migration contexts to help them afford accommodation (ILO 19/06/2019).



HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- People on the move are often reluctant to contact authorities or humanitarian organisations for fear of expulsion from the country they are staying in (Population Council 11/2021).
- The Government of Mexico only offers 15- or 20-day stay permits for Venezuelan migrants who have not applied for asylum, which may cause people on the move with expired permits to become cautious about seeking humanitarian assistance (BBC 21/10/2022; TWP 20/10/2022).
- Some people on the move are unaware of which authorities they can contact for help in medical emergencies or if they become victims of violence (El País 18/10/2022; Population Council 11/2021; IOM 31/08/2022).

IMPACT

Shelter and NFIs

Before the recent changes in the US migration policy, Venezuelan nationals could enter and wait for the resolution of their asylum application, which could take several months, in the US. This system led many to use up their savings to reach the northern border of Mexico and, from there, cross into the US (LA Times 12/10/2022; The Guardian 20/10/2022). The changes in this provision, effective immediately on 12 October, have left several Venezuelan nationals stranded at Mexico's northern border without savings and unable to pay for temporary accommodation (BBC 21/10/2022). During the week of 27 October, the US forcibly returned 7,000 Venezuelans to the northern Mexico border cities of Ciudad Juárez and Reynosa. Because of these returns, 8,000–13,000 people in the town of Reynosa alone are estimated to require humanitarian assistance, and 2,000 people are living on the streets (ECHO 27/10/2022).

There are already records of Venezuelans sleeping on the streets or in makeshift camps in northern host cities (NYT 24/10/2022; PBS 22/10/2022). Other Venezuelans are in shelters in different cities in Mexico (PBS 22/10/2022; Border Report 25/10/2022). Existing shelters have been overcrowded since the beginning of the year because of increased migration at Mexico's southern and northern borders (ACAPS 21/10/2022; Inewssource 21/06/2022).

The shelters also usually do not have enough food, sanitary kits, beds, or sanitary facilities (MSF 13/07/2022; IOM 21/07/2022; El Heraldo 28/05/2022). Access to water, especially at the northern border, is limited and constrained as a result of water shortages earlier in 2022. Some shelters had limited or no access to water in July 2022 because of drought conditions, which are likely to continue because of climate change (Telemundo 20 21/07/2022; Reuters

20/06/2022). Shelter capacities may not be sufficient to accommodate the increase of stranded Venezuelans trying to transit through Mexico.

Livelihoods

Many Venezuelan citizens have travelled to Mexico through up to ten countries (PBS 22/10/2022). The journey is costly in some areas, such as the Darien jungle between Colombia and Panama. By the time they reach Mexico, they have either spent their savings or stopped at several points to work in order to continue onwards (DW 06/07/2022). The Mexican and Venezuelan Governments offer return flights costing more than USD 200, which people on the move often do not have (La Tercera 26/10/2022; El Diario 17/10/2022).

Some Venezuelans may decide not to apply for asylum in Mexico to avoid losing the opportunity to enter the US, meaning they would remain in Mexico without regularising their migratory status. This setup would limit their access to formal employment opportunities (PBS 22/10/2022).

Protection

People on the move in Mexico often face various protection risks. In southern Mexico, they have reported being victims of xenophobia, with some community members accusing them of increasing violence levels or reducing job opportunities (WOLA 02/06/2022; La Jornada 22/06/2022). In transit zones, people on the move face risks of human trafficking, robbery, sexual abuse, and enforced disappearance (Forbes 13/12/2021; El País 18/11/2018). One in ten kidnappings in Mexico involves a migrant or asylum seeker. Unaccompanied children are often at risk of sexual abuse and kidnapping by armed gangs (InSight Crime 17/01/2022; INEGI 09/2021). Cases of human trafficking are concentrated at Mexico's northern border, with armed gangs sometimes forcibly recruiting migrants and asylum seekers (InSight Crime 05/08/2022; SSPC 20/07/2022).

Armed gangs often coerce people on the move with disrupted livelihoods and unable to regularise their status to engage in illegal activities in exchange for food or shelter (Infobae 30/06/2022 and 11/08/2022). Between 2015–2022, over half of migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico reported muggings, extortions, robberies involving physical violence, and, occasionally, sexual assault or sexual abuse (NYT 25/07/2022; MSF 02/2020). A new wave of Venezuelans without sufficient money and unable to return to their country or regularise their status in Mexico would face the same risk of protection issues, such as forced recruitment into armed gangs.



AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Rainy and hurricane season

The rainy season in Mexico starts yearly in May–June and lasts until November (Mexperience accessed 28/10/2022). In 2022, the overflowing of Huixtla River severely affected more than 19 municipalities in Chiapas, one of the states receiving large numbers of people on the move (Diario del Sur 20/09/2022; El Heraldo de Chiapas 19/09/2022). Continued rainfall is expected in November would mean that people sleeping on the streets or in parks will likely face low temperatures in some cities, putting them at higher risk of contracting illnesses like respiratory infections (Infobae 09/10/2022; Murray et al. 04/03/2011).

Hurricanes and tropical storms have reached Mexico during the past months, affecting people, damaging infrastructure and crops, and constraining access to rural areas (La República 23/10/2022; Telemundo 51 10/10/2022). The potential for new tropical storms or hurricanes in the country remains with the hurricane season extending to November (SMN accessed 27/10/2022). Flooding from hurricanes can disproportionately affect unsheltered people.

Organised crime and gang violence

Gang violence remains high in Mexico. The Ministry of Security and Citizen Protection recorded 93 homicides on 14 October, 107 on 15 October, and 83 on 16 October, surpassing the daily average of 70–75 homicides per day for the previous two years (AA 18/10/2022; Animal Político 17/10/2022). Armed gangs in Mexico have started to see smuggling as a profitable activity. Clashes have broken out among them over the control of some areas for smuggling (NYT 25/07/2022; MSF 02/2020). Oaxaca, one of the states with a large number of people on the move, is among the states with the highest levels of violence, especially against politicians and government officials. During the week of 29 September, there was a 115% increase in violent events in Oaxaca relative to the weekly average for the preceding month (ACLED 29/09/2022). Organised crime groups often forcibly recruit people on the move, perpetrate sexual violence against women and children, and kidnap people for ransom. An increase in organised crime violence may put them at risk.

Economic instability

Inflation in Mexico during October was 8.53% (France 24 25/10/2022). In 2022, inflation in Mexico has reached the highest levels in 20 years (El País 19/10/2022; Forbes 08/09/2022). Inflation hits people on the move the hardest, as some of them live on remittances from families abroad. In an economy with high inflation levels, the value of these remittances decreases every month. Migrant families also tend to have less surplus to send to their relatives abroad with inflation also rising in other Latin American countries. Certain coping mechanisms against rising prices, such as cutting back on food or avoiding protein, can put the food security of people on the move at risk (El Financiero 24/10/2022; El Economista 25/10/2022).

MAP: MIGRATION ROUTES IN MEXICO



The boundaries, names and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ACAPS.

Sources: ACAPS 21/10/2022, EfrainMaps accessed 20/10/2022,