



**COVID-19,**  
ANOTHER WALL  
**FOR**  
CENTRAL AMERICANS



**BETWEEN  
2014 AND 2019**

THE U.S. DETAINED  
2,960,500 MIGRANTS  
AT THE SOUTHERN BORDER



*@COVID-19, another wall for  
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**Care**

Argus. International Observatory  
of Migration and Human Rights

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Our views seek to investigate the social, economic, political and cultural phenomena surrounding human migration in different areas of the world, with the aim of defending the universality of human rights.

We observe the migratory processes by looking at their structural causes, the vulnerable populations, the various actors involved and the possible strategies of alarm, denunciation, follow-up and resolution of cases.

We focus on the specialized production of reports, maps and pedagogical contents, which serve as tools for research and action, and which can be useful to social, academic, civil and multilateral organizations.

The evocation of the ARGOS myth -the one with multiple eyes- inspires us to observe, with a plurality of perspectives, the migratory phenomena and the possible recommendations that guarantee free human mobility in conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

Migration to the United States is caused primarily by unequal opportunities and lack of economic prospects in the migrants' countries of origin. Every year, thousands of people depart from Mexico and Central America fleeing economic conditions, systemic violence, as well as climate change and its devastating effects. Since March 2020, the health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has been added to the already difficult situations that cause migration in the sub-region.

Migrants already move in precarious, vulnerable and uncertain conditions, and travel for long periods of time in the open, without the minimum conditions of food and shelter, in addition to being exposed to extremely high levels of stress due to the insecurity of the journey. The bodies of those who migrate suffer from exhaustion, wear and tear and disease, in addition to the high exposure to COVID-19.

The pandemic deepened the common scourges for people in situations of forced migration. Xenophobia, discrimination and criminalization have worsened towards migrants, who are often seen as “carriers of the virus”, which has triggered situations of physical and symbolic violence in both transit and destination countries.

Paradoxically, the most critical focus of COVID-19 in the world is currently in the United States of America (USA), since it is the country with the highest number of cases of infection and deaths. Large communities of Central Americans live in the most densely populated cities in the United States, and in recent decades they have formed multi-generational families and consolidated their roots. Many of the migrants from the Northern Triangle countries (Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala) and Mexico migrate with the conviction of reuniting with family members, so the COVID-19 pandemic has not been a deterrent.

For its part, the Trump administration's extreme anti-migrant policies led Mexico to become a border-nation, with most undocumented migrants stranded on Aztec soil. Between 2014 and 2019, the U.S. detained 2,960,500 migrants at the southern border, while in 2019 the U.S. held 977,509 people and Mexico held 298,211.<sup>1</sup> During the month of October 2020, 11,336 refugee applications were received in Mexico from Hondurans and 3,103 from El Salvador, equivalent to 46% of the total.

In the context of the pandemic, the migrant population in transit remains largely exposed because not only is it not attended in the already overcrowded health centers of the countries of the migratory corridor, but it is not included in the national vaccination plans. While some countries are opening their borders to vaccinated tourists, even more doors are closed to migrants. Both in Mexico and in Central American countries, migrants without documents are simply not contemplated to access vaccination plans, as they do not have documents in order. This situation not only deepens the vulnerability of the migrant population, but also accentuates the discrimination to which they may be subjected for supposedly being constant transmitters of the virus.<sup>2</sup> In Mexico, the vaccination plan is restricted to those who obtain the Unique Population Registry Code (CURP), a code that can only be obtained by Mexican citizens, permanent and temporary residents.

Although the borders remain closed, the need to migrate is a growing reality, which has generated an increase in organized crime that offers clandestine routes and means of transportation to move migrants without following any type

1 <https://www.anahuac.mx/mexico/noticias/Migracion-y-COVID-19>

2 <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2021/02/mexico-registro-vacunacion-excluye-importantes-sectores-poblacion/>

of sanitary protocol, exposing them to all kinds of dangers. Likewise, scams have become increasingly frequent for migrants held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers who are extorted or deceived through supposed bail payment plans.

For those who have been detained, the situation is aggravated by the legal uncertainty in which they find themselves because, although the Biden Administration announced reforms in immigration policies, these have not yet materialized. The review of asylum requests can take months, during which time the people awaiting the process are returned to Mexican territory where they are exposed to situations of vulnerability and discrimination. The expulsions of migrants from the border continue to occur despite the pandemic, even in cases of people sick with Covid-19 who are expelled without making the corresponding official notifications or following the appropriate protocols.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, the U.S. southern border remains closed and, in fact, the current U.S. administration reopened one of the detention centers for minors at the Texas border. The U.S. government claims that this will be a temporary measure due to the more than 6,000 unaccompanied minors who have arrived at the border so far this year.<sup>4</sup> In a recent interview<sup>5</sup>, Roberta Jacobson, special assistant to President Joe Biden and coordinator for the border with Mexico, stated that in order to take adequate precautions against the pandemic “it is very important that people who do not have an appointment stay where they are and do not try to cross the border until they

3 <https://sinfronteras.org.mx/osc-presentan-informe-sobre-las-graves-afectaciones-del-covid-19-en-poblacion-migrante-y-refugiada-en-mexico/>

4 <https://www.voanoticias.com/estadosunidos/eeuu-abre-centro-menores-no-acompanados-llegan-frontera>

5 <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-56093388>

get the call”, He also asserted that even if the immigration policies of the previous administration are relaxed, especially the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) or “Stay in Mexico” program, most asylum seekers “are not going to qualify” for legal entry.

On February 22, the website of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Mexico published a communiqué from the Security Attaché, Edgar Ramirez, where the official is explicit about the protocol for people with open cases of the Stay in Mexico Program, saying: “Let it be clear: do not come to the border right now”, and urges migrants to wait for a call to make an appointment.<sup>6</sup>

All indications are that Mexico will continue to be the border nation or “wall” for migration from the Northern Triangle and other South American countries, and even transcontinental (especially from Africa), which use the migration corridor as access to the US. After the repression and dispersal of the migrant caravan in Guatemala, the so-called “ant migration” has proliferated, small groups of migrants seeking to circumvent surveillance and repression by police forces, which does not exempt them from dealing with organized crime around human trafficking, extortion and swindling, as well as exposure and lack of attention in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://mx.usembassy.gov/es/si-eres-migrante-y-tienes-caso-pendiente-bajo-el-protocolo-mpp-no-vengas-ahora-a-la-frontera/>

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