



**FROM CENTRAL AMERICA  
TO THE NORTH:  
THE LONG RALLY UNDER  
THE SPOTLIGHT**



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SOUTHERN BORDER OF  
THE UNITED STATES



*©From Central America to the North:  
the long rally under the spotlight*

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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.

According to the World Migration Report published in 2020 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mexico constitutes “the main country-to-country migration corridor in the world”.<sup>1</sup> Mexican territory has become the main transit area for migrants from Central American countries -among others-, especially from the so-called Northern Triangle: El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Likewise, according to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Central America and Mexico constitute the largest migratory corridor on the planet: “fifteen million people have followed this path, stimulated by the enormous productivity and salary gaps existing between the countries”<sup>2</sup>.

Undocumented migrants suffer all kinds of human rights violations both in transit to a better destination - if they manage to get there - or on the return journey for deportation. The situation of “clandestinity” makes them prey to police abuses ranging from harassment, persecution and violence, to the separation of family members (even children from their families) and deprivation of liberty in immigration detention centers at the border of the United States of America (USA): the so-called “hieleras (freezers)”, cells with very low temperatures, or the “perreras (doghouses)”, overcrowded cages. In 2019, there was a 456 % increase in the number of families detained at the southern border of the United States<sup>3</sup>.

In recent years, the phenomenon of migration from Central America to the North has been characterized by the modality of mass mobilization through “caravans” of migrants that occur by land in large groups and are usually convened through social networks. In January 2021, more than 7500 people mobilized

1 [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2020.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf)

2 <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/44649-desarrollo-migracion-desafios-oportunidades-paises-norte-centroamerica>

3 <https://nuso.org/articulo/las-politicas-migratorias-de-donald-trump>

in a caravan, mostly from Honduras, who were repressed by Guatemalan police forces. The violent dispersal of the caravan resulted in the return of more than 3,000 migrants, mainly to Honduras, while another group of migrants arrived in the border area between Guatemala and Mexico. The caravan included children, 80% of whom, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), were unaccompanied<sup>4</sup>.

The construction of a negative image of the migrant is part of the process of securitization of both internal and external US policies, which have deployed an engineering of control over the borders by means of a narrative that legitimizes the use of greater police force, the construction of walls, the installation of cameras, deportation, etc. This perspective on migration was not brought to the fore by Donald Trump; it has been part of a systematic policy of militarization and consensus-building by the various White House administrations, which place issues such as organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking and migration on the same level, in an exercise of criminalization of migrants.

The U.S. government's pressure on the countries of the sub-region has materialized in treaties, pacts and agreements that oblige the countries to reinforce security and repression mechanisms without bilaterally addressing the structural problems that generate forced migration. By stating the agreements as part of the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, the U.S. has created security financing programs with Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries, which have resulted in more deaths, detentions and fiscal spending that could have been invested in other areas such as education or health. Such is the case of the Merida Initiative and the Central American Initiative for Regional Security.

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4 <https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/01/1486952>

The Southern Border Plan, implemented by the Mexican government in 2014 at the behest of the U.S. administration (presided by Barack Obama), and as a continuation of the Merida Initiative, meant the militarization of the Mexican border as far as Guatemala, in addition to the criminalization of undocumented migration. The Plan contemplated the hiring of private security teams, surveillance by drones and cameras installed in trains and geolocation systems. Under this system, migrants suffered increased persecution, detention and deportation. Between 2014 and 2015, deportations increased from 47.36 % to 96.61 %.

After the Trump administration's strident pressure mode and the intensification of anti-immigrant measures, newly elected President Joe Biden inaugurated his administration with a clear move to distance himself from his predecessor, declaring the suspension of some of Trump's most extreme measures, such as the Asylum Cooperation Agreements ("ACAs"), which allowed the deportation of those requesting asylum from the Northern Triangle, or the construction of a cinematic wall between Mexico and the U.S. Biden is familiar with the issue, as during the Obama administration he was in charge of the Plan Alliance for Prosperity initiative, whose objective was to organize, together with the governments of the Northern Triangle, a response to the immigration crisis in 2014, with a strong increase in security and defense mechanisms, without achieving major goals despite a multi-million dollar investment through the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)<sup>5</sup>.

The migration of Central Americans responds to a set of historical conditions marked by colonization and domination, which has generated a permanent situation of asymmetries that cross the entire social and economic system of the sub-region.

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5 <http://rdd.undav.edu.ar/pdfs/pr74/pr74.pdf>

The absence of public policies that could offer development and stability conditions to families has been the breeding ground for migration, together with the idea of the “American dream” and the hope of achieving better living conditions in the face of a panorama of inequalities, unemployment and generalized precariousness.

Violence has become one of the most pressing problems, as the proliferation of weapons and gangs has not stopped, but rather has been growing in the context of the pandemic. The health emergency has in turn led to a deepening of poverty and precariousness, confinement has hindered informal work in countries where most of the labor force works in this way, along with the decline in the receipt of remittances and their consequent impact on the economy of these countries. Another cause of migration in Central America is climate change. At the end of 2020, hundreds of families lost their homes, land and crops as a result of hurricanes Eta and Iota.

In short, lack of economic prospects, food and health insecurity, systemic violence and natural disasters are the main motivations for those who are forced to migrate to the North. The treaties, pacts and programs historically promoted by the U.S. have mostly benefited the elites of the sub-region, without leveraging structural transformations in the social sphere, which deepens poverty and the lack of alternatives for the majorities.

The great challenge remains in overcoming the logic of securitization that prevails over development and solidarity strategies. The tendency to respond to migratory crises with more restrictive and repressive measures should be reoriented to a structural understanding of the causes of forced migration, as well as to the assumption of migration in general as a human right that also brings cultural and social wealth to the destination countries.

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