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STRANDED

The Impact of US Policies on Asylum Seekers





INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused havoc around the world, creating a health emergency, disrupting lives, and exacerbating existing humanitarian emergencies. In response to the crisis, approximately 167 countries have fully or partially closed their borders to contain the spread of the virus, many making no exceptions for asylum seekers, including the United States.¹ Sending asylum seekers back to dangerous conditions constitutes “refoulement” and is forbidden by US and international refugee law.

On March 20, the US implemented travel and asylum restrictions along the US border with Mexico and Canada. All migrants arriving at the border without proper documentation — including asylum seekers and unaccompanied children — are being turned back. Since the order was issued, more than 20,000 migrants have been expelled without the opportunity to file for asylum or other protections.²

Photo: The border fence that separates the city of Tijuana from San Diego. On the other side you can see an American soldier.

It is estimated that hundreds, if not thousands, of those forced to return have been kidnapped, raped, or targeted by cartels and organized crime groups.

While no one is currently able to apply for asylum in the US, this is the latest in a series of efforts by the US Government to limit these long-held protections. In January 2019, the US government announced a policy called the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as “Remain in Mexico,” which forces asylum seekers arriving at ports of entry on the US-Mexico border to return to Mexico to wait while their claim is processed. New MPP cases are no longer being accepted while the border is closed, but those impacted by “Remain in Mexico” over the past year continue to live in limbo.

Since it was launched, MPP has returned more than 64,000 people to Mexico as they petition for safety in the US. Upon their return, they are often targeted by gangs and criminal activity, stranded without resources, with only six percent able to secure legal representation.³ It is estimated that hundreds, if not thousands, of those forced to return have been kidnapped, raped, or targeted by cartels and organized crime groups.⁴

Protections for individuals fleeing violence and arriving at our borders have been written into domestic law and included in treaties signed by the US government. For decades, people seeking protection from violence in their home countries have been able to enter the US and petition for asylum. The vast majority of these asylum seekers do not abuse the system, with 89-98 percent attending their court hearings or complying with immigration court obligations

when they have access to legal representation.⁵

Despite this, MPP has denied asylum seekers their right to protection as they face even greater challenges in accessing the US asylum system. Asylum seekers returned to Mexico are stranded, living in dangerous and uncertain circumstances. They continue to wait for court dates that need to be rescheduled due to the pandemic. Many are abandoning their efforts to petition for asylum in the US rather than face prolonged homelessness as well as further dangers in Mexico, including kidnapping, extortion, sexual assault, and violent crimes.

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Mexico has been witness to the impact of this harmful policy as asylum seekers and migrants in Mexico rely on assistance from nonprofit organizations to meet their basic needs and assist in their search for safety and security. Yet, not everyone can be assisted by organizations like JRS; many are left alone and vulnerable.



JRS MEXICO

JRS first began operating in Mexico in the 1990s to meet the needs of Guatemalan refugees who were fleeing conflict within their country. After phasing out of that work, JRS returned to Mexico in 2017 at the invitation of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

The majority of JRS Mexico's programming takes place in Tapachula, a town 35 miles from the Guatemala border, where many migrants and asylum seekers first arrive. The majority of new arrivals are from the Northern Triangle of Central America – Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala – but also include individuals and families from other parts of Latin America – including Venezuela – and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia.

In 2019, JRS Mexico served over 14,000 people, an increase over the 9,000 people served in 2018. Nearly even numbers of men and women are served by JRS Mexico, with five percent being members of the LGBTI population. JRS responds to a variety of basic needs by providing emergency cash assistance, food, clothing, and help finding housing. JRS Mexico's two largest programs are offering legal assistance and psychosocial support to migrants, including those petitioning for asylum in Mexico.

JRS Mexico lawyers assist the most vulnerable in the legal processing of their asylum claims to the Mexican government. A team of licensed

psychologists also support the mental health needs of the asylum seekers, many of whom have experienced severe physical or emotional trauma. Activities include leading weekly support groups for men and women, staffing and equipping a safe space for children while their parents meet with JRS staff, and organizing community gatherings and celebrations.

In response to the global pandemic, JRS has adapted its programming but continues to serve those in need. Collaborating closely with local pharmacies and taxi services, JRS Mexico makes sure that vulnerable families receive the help they need including food, medicine, and rental assistance. The legal team continues to prepare asylum applications and psychologists meet with their clients via phone.

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I no longer believe them when they say I'm worthless. Now I know it's a lie. We tell each other that we are strong; we are important.

MEMBER, JRS-RUN
WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP,
TAPACHULA

MIGRATION THROUGH MEXICO

Historically, the majority of migration at the US southern border was composed of single adult males from Mexico seeking better work opportunities or reunification with family members. By 2007, this migration flow had declined, and a majority of those seeking entry to the US at the southern border are now from Central America. This increase in migration from Central America was primarily due to rising gang violence and the inability of governments in the region to keep their citizens safe.

In 2014, the number of unaccompanied Central American minors seeking entry into the US surged, and the US found itself unprepared to provide an adequate response. The US government took several measures to try to stem the number of arrivals, including launching a media campaign in Central America describing the risks related to migration, increasing detention of children and women while they waited for asylum hearings, and funding more enforcement measures.⁶

These policies continued into late 2018 and early 2019, when an estimated 300,000 migrants and asylum seekers crossed into Mexico. Caravans, in particular, have drawn international attention, including one composed of approximately 7,000 people which arrived at the Mexico/Guatemala border in October 2018.



Photo: Migrant Caravan, January 2019

The arrival of the caravans did not end there and continues to this day as individuals and families continue to make their way to Mexico. Yet, this perceived crisis has triggered a number of local and regional responses aimed at limiting access to safe and fair asylum processes throughout the region.

REMAIN IN MEXICO

The “Remain in Mexico” policy – formally known as the Migrant Protection Protocols – has, arguably, had the most significant impact on the ability of vulnerable displaced persons to safely seek asylum in the US and the region.

Launched in January 2019, migrants who present themselves at the US southern border with an asylum claim are given a court date and sent back to Mexico to wait for their hearing. To date, more than 64,000 asylum seekers have been sent back to Mexico, and there are almost 30,000 pending “Remain in Mexico” cases in US immigration courts. Only 6 percent of MPP cases have legal representation and 517 have been granted relief.⁷

Asylum seekers presenting themselves at the US border are protected by the US Immigration and Nationality Act, the Administrative Procedure Act, and US obligations under international human rights law, including the Refugee Convention’s 1967 Protocol, which the US signed. These legal structures prohibit the return of refugees and asylum seekers to places where they face grave danger.⁸ A pending lawsuit challenges MPP on the basis that it violates these obligations.

Asylum seekers subject to MPP are sent back to dangerous and uncertain circumstances, often to towns in northern Mexico where they have experienced trauma including kidnapping or extortion. Many are living in informal tent camps

with inhumane conditions – without access to fresh water or proper sanitation or nutrition. In one camp in Matamoros, Mexico, just across the border from Brownsville, Texas, it’s reported that there are five toilets for 2,500 people.⁹

A series of logistical and legal hurdles face asylum seekers as they must find safe housing, secure transportation back for their hearings in the US, and try to access legal representation. The Mexican Government has even transported some MPP cases by bus from the US/ Mexico border back to southern Mexico on the premise that they will be safer or can find housing there. JRS Mexico has encountered a number of MPP cases who have been sent back to Tapachula, Mexico, and who have no resources to travel back for their court hearing.

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US implemented travel and asylum restrictions along the US border with Mexico. This includes no longer accepting new asylum cases (including MPP) and suspending immigration court hearings for asylum-seekers already waiting in Mexico. MPP cases with existing court dates were initially required to appear at a border crossing to retrieve their new court date as their hearings are postponed. MPP cases have now been given a one month reprieve to appear for their hearings.¹⁰

REFLECTIONS FROM EL PASO

Katie Mullins, JRS/USA mental health psychosocial specialist, reflects on the impact of MPP from a trip to El Paso, Texas in 2019. Since March 2020, the US southern border has been closed creating even greater uncertainty for those impacted by MPP.

On my trip to El Paso, I met many service providers who struggle to locate their clients who are consistently moving around the city, and sometimes across the border, as they look for a safe place to shelter while they await their trial date. Lawyers, already facing astronomical odds of success, play the role of social worker and case manager as they struggle to support their clients in an already under-resourced city with a limited network of the providers needed.

One lawyer I met was moved to tears as she recalled how one of her clients struggled to get the health care she needed and died in a shelter in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. The client's struggle continued even after her death, as the lawyer was scrambling to find resources to repatriate the body home. With MPP, asylum seekers remain in a perpetual state of limbo, which can continue on even after death.

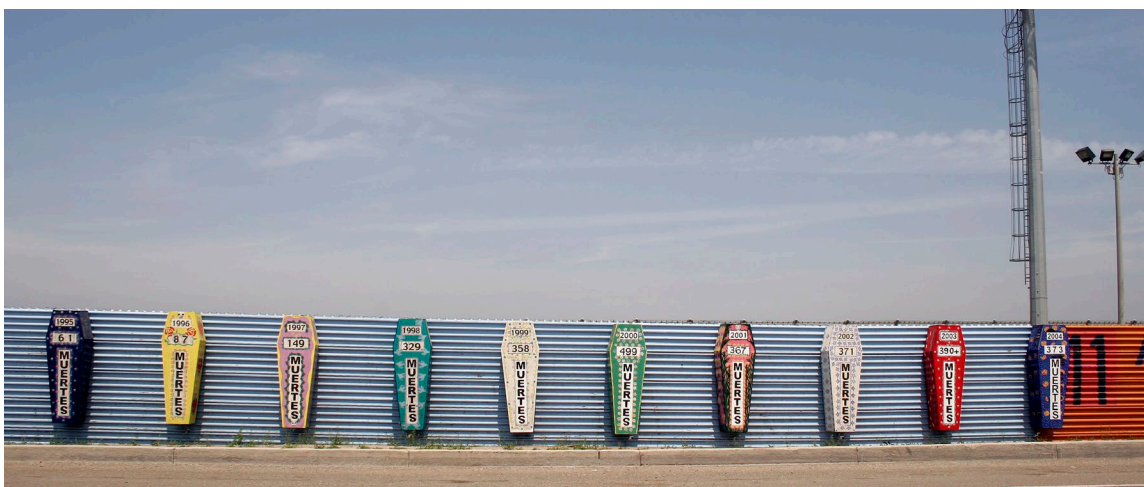


Photo: US-Mexico border deaths monument

MEXICAN RESPONSE

The Mexican government plays a critical role in implementing MPP and has been overwhelmed by the number of MPP cases sent back to Mexico. In addition, they are responding to the number of migrants and asylum seekers who continue to arrive at their southern border.

In 2019, the Mexican Refugee Commission (known as COMAR)¹¹ received 70,302 requests for asylum, more than double the 29,630 requests in 2018. The top three countries of origin in 2018 were Honduras, Venezuela, and El Salvador. In 2019, the number of Hondurans requesting asylum more than doubled, followed by El Salvador and Cuba.¹²

At the end of 2019, at least 59,000 asylum cases were still pending resolution, mostly due to lack of resources and capacity. The proposed budget for COMAR for 2020 is only \$2.35 million, about a third of what it had requested.¹³ UNHCR – with support from the US – has provided financial assistance and staff to enable COMAR to open new offices and increase its capacity to process asylum cases.

Photo: Migrant Caravan, January 2019





In the first three months of 2020, asylum applications in Mexico increased by 33 percent, compared to the same period in 2019. The nearly 17,800 new asylum claims in 2020 were primarily from Honduras, Haiti, Cuba, El Salvador, and Venezuela. Amid border restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of people continue to apply for refugee status in Mexico. Although COMAR suspended some of its operations, resulting in additional delays in processing for many, Mexico has continued to register new asylum claims.¹⁴

At the same time, in response to increased pressure from the United States to reduce the number of migrants and asylum seekers at the US southern border, the Mexican government has also increased enforcement operations in an effort to prevent individuals from making their way further north.

Photo: Migrant Caravan, March 2019

In June 2019, the US threatened to impose tariffs on Mexican goods in response to increased migrant arrivals at the US southern border. As a result, Mexico deployed a new National Guard to its own southern border, which has impacted migration flows and access to asylum both in Mexico and the US.

In January 2020, JRS/USA staff traveled to Tapachula, Mexico, and further south to Suchiate, Mexico, on the Guatemala border. This visit coincided with the arrival of one of the more recent caravans, composed of approximately 1,500 people, mostly from the Northern Triangle. The Mexican National Guard used force to push back members of the caravan and then detained and almost immediately deported them all.

TESTIMONIALS¹⁴

Firsthand accounts from individuals served by JRS Mexico and partners help explain the circumstances that compel individuals to flee their countries of origin and demonstrate the challenges they face in petitioning for asylum. Some individuals have been directly impacted by MPP, others by the further externalization of the US border as they are unable to make their way north through Mexico.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, asylum proceedings in Mexico and the US have stalled and the individuals profiled here continue to wait as their futures remain uncertain.

MAGDALENA | EL SALVADOR

Magdalena, a 40-year-old mother of three from El Salvador, and her family became survivors of gang-related violence beginning in 2017 when her 19-year-old daughter Olga was recruited by a local gang. After months of being physically and mentally abused, Magdalena found Olga murdered, hanged in her own home with barbed wire. “The police said they would protect my daughter, but they didn’t,” she said.

After her daughter was killed, Magdalena lived in fear for a year. She wouldn’t even go to the market, and the gang continued to harass her and her family. She was worried that her younger daughter would suffer the same fate as Olga, so she and her remaining family members decided to flee. They contacted a cousin in the US, but he said he couldn’t help them. She knew that the US wasn’t going to be an option. They decided to try their luck in Mexico, where they had heard that asylum was being granted, although they worried that Mexico was dangerous.



They arrived in Tapachula, and a friend told them about JRS. “They have helped me so much,” Magdalena said. Given her serious case, Magdalena was assigned a lawyer and became a member of the Women’s Support Group. “When I first joined the Women’s Group, all I could do was cry,” she said. “JRS helped me face things.”

In January, Magdalena and her family were granted refugee status in Mexico. Their asylum claim was validated and, with assistance from JRS Mexico staff, they’re able to start a new life in Mexico.

MARIA | HONDURAS

Maria is a 30-year-old mother of two young children. Her neighborhood in Honduras was controlled by a local gang that fights for control of its territory to engage in illegal activities like drug dealing, extortion, and hijackings. One day in early 2019, her daughter witnessed a girl selling drugs at her school. After telling some friends what she saw, her daughter was targeted by the gangs and beaten up. Maria decided to take her daughter out of school.

A few days later, a young boy came to their home and told them that they had 24 hours to leave. Three days later, Maria left Honduras with her two children. They arrived in Mexico, and Maria contacted the father of her two children, who lives in the US. He encouraged her to make her way north. The family took a minibus traveling north and were stopped by a van with four armed and tattooed people inside. They kidnapped the minibus, took all their personal belongings, and blindfolded them. Maria and her children could hear how some people were beaten, tortured, and electrocuted.

Their kidnappers asked for \$5,000 from each person and told them if they did not pay, they would be killed. Maria contacted her children's father, who was able to send them the money. They were placed in a van and taken to the Rio Grande River, where they were given a rubber ring. They put the children inside, and the adults crossed the river, holding the ring. The water reached their necks, and

all of their documents got wet. They were able to cross the river, and at the other side, US Border Patrol arrested them. They were led to a detention center, where they stayed for six days, without a change of clothing. They were told that "there is no refuge for them in US" and that "the laws have changed." The family answered that they can't go back to Mexico, where they had been kidnapped, or to Honduras, where the gangs threatened them. They were given a court date for their asylum hearing and sent back to Mexico. When they arrived in Mexico, they were given the option of staying in a city where extortion and kidnapping was common or getting on a bus to Tapachula, over 1,200 miles away.

Once in Tapachula, JRS offered assistance for Maria to travel back for her asylum hearing, but she decided to forfeit her asylum claim. She couldn't risk the safety of her children again, and she is now stuck, unable to seek safety in the US and unable to return to where her life is threatened at home. Maria is not alone as many asylum seekers are abandoning their efforts to petition for asylum in the US rather than face further dangers.

"I'm very afraid because of what I suffered in the northern border of Mexico," Maria said. "I don't want to face again everything I already faced."

ANA | EL SALVADOR

Ana never thought that she would have to leave her home in El Salvador. A 50-year-old mother of four and grandmother of two, Ana was collecting a pension after years of hard work and was looking forward to paying off her home and using the proceeds to help take care of her family.

Trouble started when her 16-year-old grandson became the target of a local gang. The gang also sent Ana threatening messages because they knew she had a steady income and could be extorted. After trying to fend off the gang, her grandson was eventually killed, and her daughter-in-law disappeared. Unfortunately, these stories were all too common in Ana's neighborhood. She was so scared that she refused to leave her home out of fear for her life. Ana decided that her only option was to flee the country.

She packed what she could carry and took a bus to Guatemala. She knew it wouldn't be safe to stay there because the same gang could find her, so she traveled on to Mexico. After arriving in Tapachula, she found herself alone and scared. Her 13-year-old granddaughter followed her separately and eventually joined her in Mexico. She heard that she couldn't travel further north, so they decided to apply for refugee status in Mexico.

"I met a woman from Honduras who told me to go to JRS. They helped me complete my paperwork to apply for

asylum with COMAR," Ana said. Yet, after almost a year in Mexico, Ana is still waiting to receive a decision about her asylum claim. COMAR made several mistakes with her paperwork, first listing the wrong nationality and then confusing her story with another's. After several incidents of mismanagement by COMAR, Ana feels anxious and frustrated about her fate.

Yet, if her refugee case is successful, Ana hopes to travel north to find work. In Tapachula, she engages in day labor to earn a little money to support herself and her granddaughter. But it's not enough. "I'm not allowed to work and have lost a lot of weight because I eat very little," she said.

Yet, after almost a year in Mexico, Ana is still waiting to receive a decision about her asylum claim.

MIDALYS | CUBA

In 2007, Hurricane Mitch destroyed Midalys's home in Cuba. The Cuban government helped rebuild some homes, but not others. While waiting for assistance from the government to rebuild their homes, Midalys joined a group of neighbors to protest the government's inaction and to stand up for her rights. As a result, she was detained for four days and began to be monitored by local authorities. "I became desperate because of the constant harassment," she said.

This harassment continued for several years as Midalys was constantly tracked and monitored. She never stayed in the same home for long, moving around to live with a variety of family members and friends. In 2015, she decided to change jobs but began to be threatened by a new co-worker who told her she would be sent to jail. She knew she had to leave and made her way to Mexico. Midalys first flew to El Salvador, then on to Nicaragua, finally arriving in Mexico. She left behind her 15-year-old daughter who is living with her mother.

Midalys's only option is to apply for asylum in Mexico. The Mexican government will not allow her to travel further north, so she is doing what she can to survive in Tapachula. JRS is helping her apply for asylum in Mexico by processing her paperwork with COMAR. "JRS has been a blessing for me," Midalys said. "No one else in the world is willing to help me."



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JRS has been a blessing for me. No one else in the world is willing to help me.

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MIDALYS, CUBAN REFUGEE,
TAPACHULA

KAREN PEREZ, LEGAL COORDINATOR | JRS MEXICO

Karen knows well the struggles that asylum seekers face in Mexico as they petition for safety and struggle day-to-day to make ends meet. She has lived in Tapachula since 2015 and has been with JRS since 2018, coordinating JRS Mexico's legal assistance team, which consists of four full-time lawyers.

"I act as a liaison between asylum seekers and the Mexican government as we provide legal assistance to those in detention and individuals who seek assistance at our office," Karen said.

US policies have had a significant impact on the Mexican response to those who arrive at their border, making things very difficult. The implementation of MPP put a stop to people heading north, and the Mexican government no longer offers humanitarian visas to asylum seekers, which limits their ability to move around the country. "Many MPP cases have been sent back to Tapachula, but most have given up on their claims to seek asylum in the US," Karen said. "It was too difficult, and they are too mentally and physically tired."



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KAREN PEREZ, LEGAL COORDINATOR,
JRS MEXICO



Photo: Posada celebrations. Las Posadas commemorate the journey that Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of a safe refuge where Mary could give birth to the baby Jesus.

DAVID RIVERA, PSYCHOSOCIAL COORDINATOR | JRS MEXICO

A refugee from Venezuela, David Rivera arrived in Mexico in 2017 after becoming active in student-led protests against the Venezuelan government. He received refugee status and joined JRS in 2018 when there were two psychologists on staff. Now, the team has grown to five because they could not meet the demand for services from migrants and asylum seekers who sought help from JRS. “We’re able to provide a welcoming atmosphere for our beneficiaries,” David said. “People are treated as equals.”

Working closely with JRS Mexico’s legal team, David and his colleagues identify cases that need psychosocial support. These are often victims of violence and individuals who are struggling amid the harsh environment in Mexico. “The life of a migrant is hard – the border is hostile,” he said.

In addition to one-on-one counseling services, JRS Mexico coordinates a Women’s Support Group, a Men’s Support Group, and a new Youth Group – each meeting once a week. It also organizes a variety of activities, outings, and celebrations to offer a sense of normalcy and solidarity to the individuals that they serve.



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**The life of a migrant is hard —
the border is hostile.**

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DAVID RIVERA,
PSYCHOSOCIAL COORDINATOR,
JRS MEXICO

JOEL | DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Joel – a father of seven – worked as a mechanic in his home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. In December 2016, police entered his home and tortured his son after he began to organize and speak out against the ruling government. Joel himself was then abducted from his home and detained.

After his family paid for his release, he knew he couldn't stay in the DRC. In June 2017, he began a treacherous journey from the DRC to Central America, first arriving in Brazil and then making his way through eight countries, finally arriving in Mexico in August 2017. Along the way, he witnessed the death of his friend, who succumbed to the harsh environment of the Colombian jungle.

His goal was to reach the US to petition for asylum. After presenting himself at the US southern border, he was detained for a total of 13 months during which he was transferred to five different detention centers. Speaking only French, he was unable to adequately present his case and could not secure legal representation. "I was treated like a criminal," Joel said. "Without money, I had no hope in making my case in the US Why does the US treat people this way?"



In September 2018, Joel was deported back to the DRC and taken directly to prison on arrival. His family was able to pay for his release once again, and he felt he had no choice but to begin the same journey back to South America. He knew the US would not welcome him, so he petitioned for refugee status in Mexico, with the assistance of JRS Mexico staff.

KELVIN | HONDURAS

Kelvin – 24 years old – was working at a fast food restaurant in Honduras trying to support his wife and young son when the local gang tried to recruit him. He refused, but they kept coming to his work, telling him that if he didn't join the gang, bad things would happen to him. "I knew that those who didn't join the gang were killed, tortured, or shot up with drugs," Kelvin said.

First Kelvin tried to change his route to work, but the gang found him and would beat him. Finally, he stopped going to work entirely, but the gang kept threatening him. One day, they found him and put a gun to his head – "I thought my life was over and pleaded to God to save me," Kelvin said. There was nowhere for him to go, so he knew he had to leave Honduras. "I couldn't go to El Salvador or Guatemala, because the gang would find me there," he said.

He fled and made his way to Guatemala, where he paid a smuggler to take him across the river to Mexico. He found himself in Tapachula, unable to go further north. "It was very hard," Kelvin said. "I felt alone. There is no work for me. I would like to go to the US, where I can feel safer."



The JRS Mexico team is helping Kelvin as he petitions for asylum in Mexico. He is also an active member of the Men's Support Group – "I was feeling so low, but the Men's Group helped me lift my spirits," he said. "Here I can express my feelings; I am part of a family."

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KELVIN, HONDURAN REFUGEE
TAPACHULA

REFLECTIONS FROM NOGALES, MEXICO

The Kino Border Initiative (KBI) is a binational Catholic and Jesuit organization on the Arizona-Mexico border, which offers humanitarian aid in Nogales, Mexico, where the US government began to implement MPP in January 2020.

Since the implementation of MPP in Nogales, KBI has received 457 people who have been subject to this policy. The majority are from Guatemala, and others are from Honduras and Venezuela. Of the 457 people, 51 percent are children, and there have been 26 reports of family separation while in US custody, primarily parents being detained separately from their children.

PATRICIA | GUATEMALA

The mother of two young daughters, Patricia left Guatemala after a local gang began to target her 11-year-old daughter. They followed her everywhere. When this happens, the girls become the property of the gangs and they are raped and disappear. This happened to the daughter of someone Patricia knew. The gang told Patricia that her daughter was asking for it because she left the house, but she only left the house to go to school. Patricia tried to report what has happening to the police, but nothing happened.

After leaving Guatemala with her daughters, Patricia arrived at the US southern border and told US officials that her life was in danger. She was told that she either had to return to Mexico and wait there or

return to Guatemala. She said that she didn't want to do either, but she didn't have a choice.

"When I had to decide if I would go back to Mexico or Guatemala, I chose Mexico," Patricia said. "It's dangerous for us as Guatemalans here too. But at least here there's a small chance of opportunity, and that's how I decided. I told the [US] official I didn't know what to do when I got back to Mexico."

In Mexico, Patricia is living in a shelter, but she doesn't feel safe. She is worried about a man who follows her daughter around and doesn't feel protected by the shelter staff. She has her court date in a few weeks but doesn't know how she'll survive until then, or how she'll find the money to travel to her court hearing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Every human being has the right to seek asylum and to do so in a safe, protective environment. We must put an end to unreasonable barriers that make it nearly impossible to seek asylum in our country. JRS and the Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology urge policymakers to implement the following recommendations:

- Re-instate access to asylum at US borders putting in place measures that manage risks to public health, but that do not deny persons seeking international protection from persecution and other threats from doing so.
- Complete the current House Judiciary investigation into the legality of MPP, including a comprehensive review of the policy, its implementation, and its impact on vulnerable populations.
- Support the Asylum Seeker Protection Act, H.R. 2662, which would defund the “Remain in Mexico” policy and allow asylum seekers the opportunity to wait in safety in the US during the adjudication of their asylum.
- Ensure that those seeking asylum can present themselves at the US-Mexico border without delays related to turnbacks that leave them in harm’s way in Mexico.



Photo: American flag on the other side of the border fence in Tijuana.



JRS child protection space in Tapachula, Mexico. Children play while parents meet with staff.

- Continue to provide funding for UNHCR in Mexico and extend that support to organizations that are on the frontlines of providing lifesaving services to those who are forced to return to Mexico from the US.
- Support COMAR with sufficient funds and human resources to adequately address the needs of asylum seekers in Mexico.
- Allow human rights defenders, humanitarian organizations, and family members to access Mexican detention centers. Cease the detention of children, asylum seekers, and indefinite detention for all others.
- Address the root causes of migration by providing effective and strategic investments in development assistance and diplomatic efforts in countries of origin.
- Continue to work for humane comprehensive immigration reform legislation that fully affirms the inherent dignity of all those who migrate to our country.

CONCLUSION

Providing protections for individuals seeking asylum is a universally recognized human right that must not be undermined. In the US, offering the opportunity to petition for asylum is written into our laws and is a critical part of who we are as a nation. Mexico also has a long history of welcoming those who seek refuge within its borders. We must remember that the displacement of people is a result of the failure of national governments and the global community to address the root causes of that displacement, including war, violence, and human rights abuses. We must not turn our backs on the innocent and leave them to suffer the consequences.

Author: Giulia McPherson, JRS/USA



Photo: JRS Mexico staff helps asylum seeker with paperwork at the JRS center in Tapachula.



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13. Washington Office on Latin America (December 17, 2019). "The "Wall" Before the Wall: Mexico's Crackdown on Migration at Its Southern Border." <https://www.wola.org/analysis/mexico-southern-border-report/#ftnt134>
13. UNHCR (April 28, 2020). "Despite pandemic restrictions, people fleeing violence and persecution continue to seek asylum in Mexico."
14. Some names have been changed.



The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, that they may heal, learn, and determine their own future. JRS programs are found in 56 countries, providing assistance to: refugees in camps and cities, individuals displaced within their own countries, asylum seekers in cities, and those held in detention centers.

JRS/USA, based in Washington, D.C., provides support to the broader JRS network, through funding, oversight, monitoring, and evaluation; and to JRS projects and programming throughout the world. JRS/USA also serves forcibly displaced migrants in the U.S. through our Detention Chaplaincy Program.

Visit www.jrsusa.org to get more information and get involved.



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The mission of the Office of Justice and Ecology (OJE) is to help the president and provincials of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States reflect the Jesuits' work for reconciliation on issues such as immigration and economic, criminal, juvenile and environmental justice.

The OJE is the voice of the provincials to the Church, governments, nongovernmental agencies, and others, advocating on behalf of the poor and other marginalized communities and encouraging others to do the same.

Equally as important, the OJE helps the Jesuit Conference fulfill the mandate of General Congregation 36 for developing Jesuit, Ignatian, and other networks by collaborating and cooperating with various groups and encouraging them to live a faith that does justice.

learn more at Jesuits.org/justice.



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