

# Mexican government joins Biden administration in renewed crackdown on refugees and migrants

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The inhumane conditions facing asylum seekers and migrants on the US-Mexico border have been accompanied by collaboration between the Biden administration and the Mexican government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in a brutal campaign to suppress migration.

After ending the reactionary agreements with Guatemala and Mexico to force those seeking asylum in the United States to wait in those third countries, the Biden administration is working with these same governments to revoke the right to request asylum at all, from anywhere.

Mexico and the United States have turned to summarily deporting migrants under the pretext of “health security” over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tens of thousands of migrants were encouraged by Biden’s promise to end Trump’s fascistic policies and turned themselves in at the US border, only to be deported. These included many of the 25,000 asylum seekers under “Remain in Mexico,” who had waited for months to present their case at US immigration court hearings.

At the same time, Mexican migration authorities and police have moved to forcibly disband the growing makeshift camps and harass asylum seekers along the border.

“They are treating us like animals,” a Guatemalan migrant told *Excelsior* on Friday, after his camp of about 100 asylum seekers was dispersed in the border city of Reynosa. He added in tears: “If we return [to the US border], they will jail us for six months, so we will return to our country. Sadly, I have a lot of debt. I have nothing now in Guatemala, I’m out in the streets.”

The group had been deported by the Biden administration and told that they would not be transported

to their countries of origin for five months, which constitutes yet another cruel “dissuasive” policy.

In other words, they were returned to Mexico even after the supposed ending of the “Remain in Mexico” policy.

Effectively, this is an escalation of the policy pursued under the Trump administration, which summarily deported over 400,000 migrants after March 2020, using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext. About 71,000 asylum seekers sent back to Mexico registered under the “Remain in Mexico” program, but the vast majority of their requests were rejected.

The number of unaccompanied migrant minors in US custody has risen to over 4,200, while the Mexican government has reported that it “attended” over 1,000 unaccompanied minors between January and February.

When asked by *Jornada* about how many minors it currently has in custody, the Mexican National Migration Institute (INM) claimed that it has no record of these numbers. Since November 2020, the custody of migrant children shifted to the System for Integral Family Development (DIF), which runs shelters for children in partnership with UNICEF.

Most minors seeking asylum who remain in Mexico, however, continue to wait in makeshift, unsanitary camps with their parents or other adults. Last weekend, over 50 minors had to be treated by doctors for respiratory illnesses at a tent camp in Tijuana, where migrants have faced hailstorms and near-freezing temperatures at night.

After an investigation of legal documents and interviews, Human Rights Watch (HRW) concluded in a report published last week that “migrants in Mexico are exposed to rape, kidnappings, extortion, assault and psychological trauma.”

The agency adds that “the Biden administration continues to expel asylum seekers arriving at the border

on misleading public health grounds, and has made no provision for the 30,000 whose asylum cases were unfairly terminated after they were sent to Mexico.”

While Republican and Democratic officials and media spokespeople have insisted that smuggling by cartels is a key driver of the migration, the report makes clear that the Mexican security forces supported and financed by Washington are an integral part of these criminal structures abusing migrants. Uniformed police have constantly threatened to turn migrants over to the cartels or kill them if they fail to pay bribes of hundreds of dollars, with one victim saying, “I don’t understand who is a criminal and who is law enforcement.”

On the other hand, while López Obrador had decreed that asylum seekers waiting in Mexico can access an identification card known as the CURP to work legally and access health care and education services, migrants speaking with HRW said that, even with the CURP, the denial of jobs, education and health care for migrants was generalized.

Moreover, as favored targets for kidnappings and extortion, migrants told HRW that the police refuse to even file their complaints when they are victimized.

Washington and Mexico, meanwhile, are collaborating in a renewed, militarized campaign to cut off migration routes.

On January 22, shortly after officials from the Biden transition team and the Mexican government encouraged the Guatemalan military and police to violently break up a caravan of 8,000 Honduran migrants, Biden and López Obrador held an initial call and agreed to “work closely to stem the flow of irregular migration.”

The Trump-appointed ambassador to Guatemala, William Popp, then announced at a meeting with his Mexican counterpart and the Guatemalan foreign minister that they had agreed on a “renewed effort to keep the border safe during the COVID-19 emergency.”

In Guatemala, far-right President Alejandro Giammattei promised Friday, in a ceremony with the families of 16 migrants massacred presumably by drug cartels in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas, that he would halt migration through “walls of prosperity and development.”

However, Giammattei’s response to popular demonstrations against cuts to education and health care and the lack of aid for hurricane victims last November was the same as that meted out to the migrant caravans in January: “walls” of violent repression meted out by the US-trained and financed police and military.

Meanwhile, the López Obrador government continues

to deploy National Guard troops to round up migrants after Trump repeatedly praised his “friend,” López Obrador, for mobilizing the Mexican military as an extension of the US border patrol.

Throughout February, the Mexican media reported that the National Guard “rescued” 108 Central American migrants in Nuevo León, 235 in Oaxaca and Veracruz, and 156 and then another 116 in Chiapas, only to add that the federal forces “intercepted” the trucks in which the migrants were traveling.

This is the result of dozens of checkpoints set up by the National Guard and the INM across roads and train tracks. As reported Sunday by the *New York Times*, those intercepted or caught in increased raids are being deported, with a Foreign Ministry official telling the *Times* that they “have a right to deport undocumented migrants.”

Speaking on condition of anonymity, officials of the López Obrador administration told Reuters that they were working toward developing the infrastructure along the border with Guatemala to prevent migrants from coming in at all. “Mexico spends more on every new wave of migrants than that would cost,” one said.

As early as mid-November the UN International Organization for Migration warned that the back-to-back hurricanes and the pandemic crisis would spark a migration crisis, but neither the Mexican nor the US government prepared to receive and shelter these desperate refugees who had lost everything. Along with the pandemic, the migrant crisis underscores that capitalism and its nation-state system are utterly incapable of meeting the basic social needs of workers everywhere.



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