

As asylum seekers remain in danger

# Mexico cracks down on migrants, performing Washington's dirty work at the border

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It has been just over two weeks since the Biden administration lifted Title 42, the Trump-era border policy that utilized the pandemic to deny asylum seekers entry at the US-Mexico border.

While right-wing politicians sought to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment with warnings of migrants flooding the border, the opposite has occurred. The number of migrants at the US-Mexico border has declined. Crossings have decreased by half since Title 42 expired on May 11. This, however, has less to do with a drop in the number of people fleeing and seeking asylum than with the Mexican government's crackdown on migrants.

In 2019, the Trump administration and the government of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) implemented the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP), previously known as "Remain in Mexico." The purpose of the program is to have Mexican authorities carry out Washington's dirty work, requiring asylum seekers from Mexico and Central America to remain in Mexico while their immigration cases are considered in the United States.

Despite the fact that many Mexican citizens are fleeing conditions in the country, Mexico has been deemed a "safe third country," a designation that only underscores the twisted and punitive nature of the policy.

The crackdown by AMLO and the Mexican government on migrants includes the closure of shelters and busing of migrants to the southern and interior states in Mexico, with restrictions that require them to remain in their assigned state or face deportation.

The *Miami Herald* reported that "the Mexican government has closed dozens of migrant shelters and begun busing migrants away from its northern border to other states. Authorities have also suspended 45-day permits that allow undocumented migrants to travel through the country without fear of deportation or detention."

These recent changes to US and Mexican immigration law are intended to undercut the immigration status of migrants

in Mexico and justify their deportation. No longer able to apply in person, migrants are told they must secure appointments at US ports of entry using the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) One app. However, many migrants are reporting difficulties with the app, which fails to give them an appointment despite multiple application attempts.

The new US asylum process under Title 8 requires migrants who present themselves at the border without an appointment to prove that they were denied asylum in a "safe third country" en route to the US. If migrants cannot prove this at the US border, they face immediate deportation and a ban on reapplying for asylum of at least five years.

The actions of the Mexican authorities differ little from those of right-wing Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who has been busing asylum seekers to Washington D.C., New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia and Denver, where they are dumped without any assistance. The state boasts of having sent more than 19,000 migrants to Democratic-led cities as part of "Operation Lone Star."

A Colombian mother who previously spoke to the WWS sent a testimonial about the situation in the migrant camps, as well as at US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) processing facilities. These include *Hieleras*, or "iceboxes," where men, women and children detained at the border spend several nights crowded into tiny rooms that are kept at freezing temperatures. There they are forced to sleep on bare concrete floors. The traumatic experience is meant solely to punish migrants and deter them from seeking asylum.

"I lasted three days and two nights in the icebox, until they processed me and gave me permission to be here in the United States while a judge decides whether we are allowed to stay or sends me back to Colombia," she said.

"Many of the police are very rude," she continued. "They really have no compassion for the children, who do not have beds. We were on the floor, and some people were without blankets. They do not give good food, only sugary juices, packets of potatoes and a frozen sandwich."

“Where I was with my children, there was a Mexican woman who was seven months pregnant, and she is a minor, 17 years old. They had her without blankets. They kept her in *La Hielera*, and it wasn’t clear when they would let her out, and did not give her any information about her process.”

Ana previously spoke to the WSWs about the conditions that forced her and her children to flee Colombia after her family was threatened and her son kidnapped for 24 hours. She also sent videos showing the appalling conditions in the open air border camps.

A delegation of humanitarian aid organizations recently visited migrant camps along the Texas Rio Grande Valley and in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Erika Guevara-Rosas, the Americas Director for Amnesty International, who was part of the team, posted on the organization’s website a statement declaring: “The Mexico government is complicit in the humanitarian situation and the human rights crisis that these policies are creating at the border.”

The delegation’s report stressed the life-threatening situation facing the migrants, who have been “left stranded in highly dangerous and difficult conditions by the new asylum bar’s restrictions.” The report continued: “In these areas, the level of violence and danger is so severe that the US State Department advises that they are too dangerous for Americans to visit. Recent reports of escalated cartel violence make the areas even more dangerous for asylum seekers, migrants and humanitarian workers.”

Amna Nawaz with PBS reported from migrant camps on both sides of the border—in Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Mexico—calling the conditions in the Mexican migrant camps “absolutely appalling.” She said, “They are unsanitary. They are dangerous.”

Speaking of the migrant camps in Matamoros, she said:

These are sprawling, temporary tarp tent and blanket hut camps that have popped up, and sources tell us they have really grown in size since Title 42 ended, because people are now deciding to stay here and wait, there aren’t resources to support them. There’s no sanitation. There’s no running water.. .. Sources tell us that there is rampant COVID and tuberculosis and dengue and waterborne illnesses. That’s why we were masking the entire time we were there as well, just dozens and dozens and dozens of families and children. And I will tell you this is no place for children waiting, waiting for their chance, 90-degree heat every day, to try and make their case to US officials.

Conditions facing children at border camps and in US custody only continue to worsen. In recent weeks, at least two minors have died in CBP custody. They include Anadith Danay Reyes Alvarez, who died in CBP custody in Texas. Despite having a history of sickle cell anemia and heart disease, Alvarez was denied medical treatment while struggling to breathe. This was despite pleas by her mother to get her medical care. The death of Alvarez followed another death just a few days earlier of an unaccompanied 17-year-old Honduran girl, who was being held at a Florida detention center.

While migrants continue to be brutalized, powerful interests in agriculture and dairy farming are applying pressure to end the crackdown, not out of any concern for the migrants’ well-being or their right to asylum but to better exploit their cheap labor.

Muzaffar Chishti, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute, told the press that despite a wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric, primarily from Republican politicians, the influence of the dairy and agriculture industries had “watered down” anti-immigrant legislation in Florida. The *Daily News* reported that “The legislation (Florida Governor) DeSantis signed allows the transportation of migrants within the state, for example, and it preserves in-state tuition breaks for undocumented students.”

Dairy farmer and Republican US Rep. David Valadao of California said he voted for a Republican anti-immigrant bill only after party leaders promised that provisions would be included to address the farm labor shortage.



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