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MEXICO SECURITY INITIATIVE

THE IMPACT OF SECURITIZATION ON CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANTS

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Project Directed by
Stephanie Leutert

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List of Acronyms

AMEXCID	Mexican Agency of International Cooperation for Development (<i>Agencia Mexicana de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo</i>)
AVGM	Warning System for Gender Violence against Women (<i>Alerta de Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres</i>)
CAIMFS	Coordinating Mechanism for Comprehensive Attention to Migration for the Southern Border (<i>Coordinación para la Atención Integral de la Migración en la Frontera Sur</i>)
CAMRD	Central American Migrant Risk Database
CISEN	National Security and Intelligence Center (<i>Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional</i>)
CNDH	National Human Rights Commission (<i>Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos</i>)
COMAR	Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (<i>Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados</i>)
DIF	National System for Integral Family Development (<i>Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia</i>)
GANSEF	High-Level Border Security Group (<i>Grupo de Alto Nivel de Seguridad Fronteriza</i>)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IIRIRA	U.S. Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, 1996
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography (<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía</i>)
INM	National Migration Institute (<i>Instituto Nacional de Migración</i>)
IOM	International Organization of Migration
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NTCA	Northern Triangle of Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala)
OPI	Child Protection Officers (<i>Oficios de Protección Infantil</i>)
PEM	Special Program for Migration (<i>Programa Especial de Migración</i>)
PF	Federal Police (<i>Policía Federal</i>)
PGR	Federal Attorney General (<i>Procuraduría General de la República</i>)
PND	National Development Plan (<i>Plan Nacional de Desarrollo</i>)
REDODEM	Documentation Network of Migrant Defender Organizations (<i>Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes</i>)

RNPED	National Registry of Data for Lost and Disappeared Persons (<i>Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas</i>)
SEDENA	Mexican Army (<i>Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional</i>)
SEGOB	Ministry of the Interior (<i>Secretaria de Gobernación</i>)
SEMAR	Mexican Navy and Marines (<i>Secretaría de Marina-Armada</i>)
SENSP	Executive Secretary of the National System of Public Security (<i>Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública</i>)
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SIOM	Integral System of Migratory Operations (<i>Sistema Integral de Operación Migratoria</i>)
TCO	Transnational criminal organization
UIDPM	Investigation Unit for Crimes Against Migrants (<i>Unidad de Investigación de Delitos para Personas Migrantes</i>)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN Refugee Agency)
UPM	Migratory Policy Unit (<i>Unidad de Política Migratoria</i>)
WOLA	Washington Office on Latin America

Foreword

The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs has established interdisciplinary research on policy problems as the core of its educational program. A major element of this program is the nine-month policy research project, in the course of which one or more faculty members direct the research of ten to twenty graduate students of diverse disciplines and academic backgrounds on a policy issue of concern to a government or nonprofit agency. This “client orientation” brings the students face to face with administrators, legislators, and other officials active in the policy process and demonstrates that research in a policy environment demands special knowledge and skill sets. It exposes students to challenges they will face in relating academic research, and complex data, to those responsible for the development and implementation of policy and how to overcome those challenges.

The “Beyond the Border: Policy Responses for Central American Migration” policy research project addresses the questions that Mexico faces as a migration country of origin, transit corridor, and destination for Central American migrants, and provides policy recommendations for Mexican authorities and civil society organizations. This project was sponsored by the Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law in partnership with Sin Fronteras, and led by Mexico Security Initiative Director Stephanie Leutert.

Throughout the 2017-2018 academic year, the graduate students interviewed over one hundred migration and security experts in the United States and Mexico, made transparency requests to each Mexican state on migration and public security related topics, and created an original Migrant Risk Database from open-source media reports to document crimes committed against migrants and their geographic trends. The students’ research and subsequent recommendations were also informed by their winter break work in the FM4 migrant shelter in Guadalajara, Mexico, a research trip to El Paso/Ciudad Juárez, and volunteer legal work in the family detention center for asylum seekers in Dilley, Texas. The final report, presented in Mexico City to Sin Fronteras representatives on April 27, 2018, evaluates the Mexican government’s past and current migration and asylum policies and focuses on the impact of Mexico’s national security approach to migration. The research contained in this report aims to assist Mexican authorities with better fulfilling their legal mandates and to design more effective strategies for protecting Central American migrants as they transit through Mexico.

The curriculum of the LBJ School is intended not only to develop effective public servants, but also to produce research that will enlighten and inform those already engaged in the policy process. The project that resulted in this report has helped to accomplish the first task; it is our hope that the report itself will contribute to the second.

Finally, it should be noted that neither the LBJ School nor The University of Texas at Austin necessarily endorses the views or findings of this report.

Angela Evans
Dean

Executive Summary

Mexico is a country of origin, transit, and destination for various migratory flows. Since 2011, Mexican governmental agencies, civil society groups, and international organizations have reported an increase in the number of migrants traveling to the United States from Central America, especially from the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. A combination of factors, including high rates of violence, lack of access to basic services, and the impunity with which criminal organizations operate in the Northern Triangle countries contributes to increased outward migration to Mexico and the United States.

This report evaluates Mexico's migratory policies as well as the legal mandates of government bodies whose agents regularly interact with Central American migrants. It documents advances such as the decriminalization of irregular migration and the enactment of laws that protect certain high-risk groups. It also covers backsliding, such as when migratory officials and police officers fail to comply with Mexico's migratory laws. Additionally, the report describes the abuse of authority, corruption, and high rates of impunity within the Mexican federal agencies tasked with implementing migration policy.

For over a decade, Mexico's government has increasingly viewed migration policy as a national security issue. This report will examine how Mexico adopted this lens and how a national security approach affects migrants traveling through the country. Increased levels of militarization along Mexico's southern border have coincided with elevated rates of detention and deportations for irregular migrants. These policies—including the most recent Southern Border Plan of 2014—have pushed migrants away from populated areas with heavier law enforcement presences, increasing their exposure to environmental and criminal risks. This report demonstrates how restrictive migration policies affect the risks that migrants encounter during their journeys through Mexico. It draws on data obtained from transparency requests, publicly available reports, and an original Migrant Risk Database.

Finally, this report makes several recommendations to various Mexican agencies and organizations involved in migration policy. These recommendations aim to improve security for migrants transiting through Mexico. They also seek to enhance institutional effectiveness in agencies that deal with migrants. They generally represent short-term steps that could be implemented by the next Mexican presidential administration to improve protections for migrants and the country's overall migratory policy. However, for significant progress, Mexico will need to better address systemic issues that endanger migrants, including corruption, rule of law and access to justice, and the control of transnational criminal organizations.

Resumen Ejecutivo

México es un país de origen, tránsito y destino migratorio. Desde el 2011, diferentes agencias migratorias Mexicanas, organizaciones internacionales y grupos de la sociedad civil han reportado un incremento de los flujos migratorios provenientes de la región Centroamericana, especialmente de Honduras, El Salvador y Guatemala. Entre los diferentes factores que han causado la presente crisis migratoria, los altos niveles de violencia, la constante falta de oportunidades laborales y de acceso a servicios básicos, así como el contexto de impunidad en el cual operan los grupos delictivos del Triángulo Norte son considerados como los más significativos.

El presente reporte evalúa la política migratoria Mexicana actual, así como las acciones de los diferentes organismos que interactúan con la población migrante. La despenalización de la migración irregular, así como la creación de leyes que protegen a ciertos grupos vulnerables son algunos de los avances que se han observado recientemente. Sin embargo, también se han observado diferentes retrocesos: diversos casos de abuso de autoridad, corrupción e impunidad, así como la falta en el cumplimiento de la ley de parte de los oficiales migratorios y de seguridad pública son algunos de los problemas más relevantes dentro de la política migratoria Mexicana.

El gobierno Mexicano ha manejado su política migratoria como una instancia de seguridad nacional durante los últimos diez años. El presente reporte examinará el impacto de mencionada perspectiva de seguridad sobre las comunidades migrantes transitando por el país. El incremento en los niveles de militarización de la frontera sur ha coincidido con un alto porcentaje de detenciones y deportaciones en México. Esta política migratoria enfocada en seguridad nacional—en la cual se incluye el Programa Frontera Sur de 2014—también ha provocado que migrantes irregulares se vean obligados a transitar por rutas alejadas de centros urbanos, así como de los puntos de verificación. Este reporte demuestra que la ejecución de mencionada política migratoria por parte de las autoridades Mexicanas ha incrementado los riesgos a los que se enfrenta la comunidad migrante al transitar por el territorio mexicano. Como evidencia, este reporte utiliza información relevante proveniente de reportes públicos, solicitudes de información, y su propia Base de Datos sobre Riesgos para Migrantes.

Finalmente, este reporte realiza recomendaciones a las diferentes agencias gubernamentales encargadas de manejar la política migratoria en México. Estas recomendaciones tienen como objetivo mejorar el contexto de seguridad para los migrantes transitando por territorio Mexicano. También tienen como propósito aumentar el nivel de eficacia institucional. La mayoría de las recomendaciones pueden ser implementadas en el corto plazo; esto con el objetivo de mejorar las protecciones brindadas a la comunidad migrante en México, así como la política migratoria en general. Sin embargo, México aún debe reconocer los diferentes problemas estructurales que ponen en peligro la vida de las personas migrantes para lograr un progreso significativo, como la corrupción, el Estado de Derecho, el acceso a la justicia y la presencia del crimen organizado.

I. Central American Migration Through Mexico: History and Evolution

Causes of Migration

Migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala), or NTCA, to Mexico and the United States is influenced by a complex set of social, economic, and familial factors. In contrast to previous generations of NTCA migrants who were fleeing civil wars, natural disasters, or seeking improved economic opportunities, today's NTCA migrants leave their homes for a longer list of reasons, including economic challenges, family reunification, educational opportunities, political instability, victimization by gangs, and generalized violence (including sexual and gender-based abuse). Since 2011, combinations of these push-and-pull factors have contributed to an increased number of NTCA migrants who transit through Mexico.

Gang Influence and Violence

The widespread presence of street gangs across the NTCA is a principle driving factor behind today's migration trends. In particular, MS-13 and Barrio 18—which operate mainly in El Salvador and Honduras—contribute to the instability and high rates of violence throughout the region that have forced hundreds of thousands of residents to leave their homes. These gangs originated in Los Angeles in the 1980s as Central American migrants settled in the city after fleeing civil wars and repression at home. In the early 1990s, U.S. authorities carried out mass deportations of undocumented immigrants with criminal records to Central America as a result of the 1996 Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). These deportations took place without disclosing the deportees' criminal backgrounds to the region's governments and ignored these countries' conditions as post-conflict zones with many ex-combatants and abundant weapons.¹

As a result, gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 now wield significant influence over Central America's economic and social structures. Low-level extortion (also known as "*cuotas de piso*") has become a widespread activity across the region, with everyone from small business owners to taxi drivers paying the illicit fees.¹ The Honduran Chamber of Commerce reported that approximately 80 percent of its registered small business owners are regularly extorted.² Central Americans often flee the violence that accompanies unmet extortion demands and gang members' retaliatory violence against their neighbors and family members.³

Economic Factors

Widespread poverty and a lack of economic opportunities also prompt NTCA migration to Mexico and the United States. In 2015, approximately 18 percent of Hondurans lived on less than \$1.90PPP a day (the World Bank's definition of extreme poverty), and in 2014, this indicator included 9.5 percent of Guatemalans.⁴

Higher wages in both the United States and Mexico, coupled with available jobs, attract migrants looking to provide for their families. These wages are then sent back as remittances, which may deter some

¹ Cases of gang-related violence also demonstrate the lack of state capacity in the NTCA countries. In 2015, El Salvador's gangs (both MS-13 and Barrio 18) held the country's transportation system hostage as a display of power, crippling the country's essential infrastructure. In 2014, Guatemalan gangs were responsible for the assassination of 179 bus and taxi drivers, also demonstrating their ability to paralyze transportation networks and commerce.

Central Americans from migrating but incentivize others who want to send money back to their own families. In 2016, 18 percent of Honduras's GDP came from remittances sent from the United States, compared to 17.9 percent in El Salvador, and 10.9 percent in Guatemala.⁵

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Another factor that contributes to migration flows—especially of women and children from the NTCA countries—is domestic abuse, including prolonged sexual and physical abuse.⁶ In 2015, a new case of sexual violence was reported in Guatemala every 46 minutes, and 64 percent of the victims were children.⁷ In 2014, 85 percent of sexual violence cases investigated in Honduras were against girls aged 19 or younger.⁸ Similarly, in El Salvador, approximately 63 percent of reported sexual violence cases were perpetrated against girls between the ages of 10 and 19.⁹ Overall, a 2017 survey conducted by the NGO Kids in Need of Defense found that 64 percent of migrant children experienced sexual and gender-based violence in their countries of origin. Over 95 percent of these children specifically cited sexual violence as a reason for fleeing their countries.¹⁰ This endemic culture of gender-based violence and a lack of criminal accountability for perpetrators spurs many women and children to seek safety in Mexico or the United States.

Family Connections

The desire for family reunification also drives NTCA migration, especially for unaccompanied children and migrant families.¹¹ In 2016, the United States Census Bureau estimated that Northern Triangle diaspora communities totaled approximately 2.2 million individuals of Salvadoran origin, 1.4 million individuals of Guatemalan origin, and 948,000 individuals of Honduran origin.¹² Members of previous generations of migrants maintain transnational social networks with their families back home. These family connections incentivize other family members to make the journey and also represent a crucial source of support for migrants leaving their home countries.

II. Mexico's Legal Framework and Institutional Infrastructure to Address Migration

Mexico's legal framework regarding migration has evolved over the past century, and this section will focus on its transformation from the 1974 General Law of Population to the 2011 Law of Migration. These laws have sought to balance Mexico's desire to regulate migration through its official ports of entry with a commitment to protect the human rights of every person within its territory. The following section traces Mexico's legal mandates and the protections they provide for migrants in Mexico.

Mexican Laws on Migration: 1974 to 2014

Mexico's Constitution

Mexico's Constitution provides the legal framework for regulating migration into and through Mexico. Article 11 establishes the right of anyone to enter, leave, or move freely through the country, provided that he or she is not "criminally or civilly liable," "limited according to laws on immigration or public health," or "an 'undesirable alien.'"¹³ This article also provides the government with the legal authority to regulate migration through targeted legislation. Article 33 of the Constitution states that non-Mexican citizens are entitled to human rights and "constitutional guarantees," establishing a precedent for foreigners' rights within the country.¹⁴

General Law of Population, 1974

From 1974 through 2011, Mexico's migration system was governed by the General Law of Population (*Ley General de Población*), which outlined the conditions for permissible migration and the categories of desirable migrants. The law severely curtailed immigration into Mexico, especially by individuals with less education or fewer skills. It criminalized crossing the border irregularly and established fines and jail sentences for the crime of irregular migration (traveling to or through Mexico without authorization from the Mexican government). This law also opened doors to corruption and human rights abuses, as it established specific entrance categories that limited opportunities for NTCA migrants to legally enter Mexico.¹⁵ In 2008, an amendment was introduced to the General Law of Population that decriminalized irregular migration, changing it from a crime to an administrative infraction.

Law of Migration, 2011

In 2011, under internal pressure from Mexican civil society after the 2010 San Fernando massacre of 72 migrants—as well as external pressure from multilateral organizations such as the UNHCR—Mexico passed the sweeping Law of Migration (*Ley de Migración*). This law created a set of procedures for addressing irregular migrants within Mexico, including protections for migrants' rights.

Among these procedures, the law established the right to free transit (Article 7), the right to educational and medical services (Article 8), and the right to due process and avenues to make claims of human rights violations (Article 11). The law also reiterated the aforementioned 2008 amendment to the General Law of Population that abrogated criminal penalties for crossing the border irregularly and affirmed the National Migration Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*, INM) as the agency in charge of migration policy enforcement.¹⁶ This includes solidifying the INM's right to conduct "verification visits," where agents can verify the legal status of migrants and detain irregular migrants for deportation proceedings. However, the law bars the INM from apprehending migrants staying in migrant shelters or in locations where migrants' rights defenders provide services (Article 76).

The Law of Migration also created the “humanitarian visa,” a temporary regularization process for any foreigner who is a victim or witness of a crime in Mexico (Article 52). The Law of Migration’s Implementing Framework later amended this protection in September 2012 to include only witnesses or victims of “serious crimes.”¹⁷ Under Article 52, these individuals can apply to remain in Mexico until the end of their legal processes with permission to travel throughout the country and to work. This provision also applies to unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents, individuals requesting political asylum or refugee status in Mexico, and those for whom humanitarian reasons or public interest make their regularization necessary.

Law on Refugees, 2010

The 2010 Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection, and Political Asylum (*Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político*), along with its implementing framework, protects the rights of refugee status seekers in Mexico. This law is based on the United Nations’ 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, to which Mexico is a signatory. It also references the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which broadened the definition of “refugee” to include those fleeing “poverty, economic decline, inflation, violence, disease, food insecurity and malnourishment, and displacement.”¹⁸ Many of these categories apply to Central American migrants transiting through Mexico, which may make them eligible for refugee status in Mexico.

The law charges the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (*Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*, COMAR) with adjudicating refugee claims and details the conditions under which an applicant can be awarded refugee status. These include the United Nations’ criteria: a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, particular social group, or political opinion. Mexico’s refugee laws also include gender as a protected category, and victims can qualify for refugee status if they suffered persecution as a result of their gender.¹⁹ If COMAR determines that applicants do not qualify for refugee status, they can still potentially receive “complementary protection” to remain in Mexico if they have a reasonable fear for their safety upon return to their country of origin.

General Law of the Rights of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents, 2014

The 2014 General Law of the Rights of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents (*Ley General de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes*) provides additional protections for child and adolescent migrants within Mexico. These include the right to reside with their families, the right to access education, and the provision that children’s cases will receive processing priority over adults. The law also reiterates that children may not be subjected to discrimination along the lines of socioeconomic status, national origin, sexual preference, and/or disability.²⁰

The law also promotes the creation of housing and shelters to receive child and adolescent migrants and allows children to stay in centers administered by the National System for Integral Family Development (*Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*, DIF) until their migratory or refugee cases are resolved. It also prohibits the separation of minors from their parents or siblings. Finally, it protects migrant children from *refoulement*, or forcible return to situations where they might face persecution or violence.²¹ Mexico’s Ministry of the Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*, SEGOB) is tasked with implementing the law’s provisions in order to protect children and adolescents.²²

Mexico's Federal Agency Structure

The following Mexican federal agencies are involved with migration issues (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Mexican Federal Agencies that Work on Migration Issues

Agency	Role in Migration
Subsecretary of Migration, Population, and Religious Affairs (<i>Subsecretaría de Población, Migración, y Asuntos Religiosos</i>)	The body that designs Mexico's migration policy through the Migratory Policy Unit (<i>Unidad de Política Migratoria, UPM</i>). This Unit also publishes migratory statistics and evaluates programs and objectives related to migration.
National Migration Institute (<i>Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM</i>)	The agency responsible for implementing Mexico's migration policy.
Grupo Beta	The body that provides humanitarian aid to migrants; located within the INM.
Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (<i>Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados, COMAR</i>)	The agency that reviews refugee status applications and identifies those in need of international protection.
National Human Rights Commission (<i>Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDH</i>)	The body that monitors internal compliance with human rights standards, investigating accusations of human rights abuses.
Federal Police (<i>Policía Federal, PF</i>)	The body that assists INM in border security operations upon request and provides armed security support for INM.
Federal Attorney General (<i>Procuraduría General de la República, PGR</i>)	The body that investigates federal crimes against migrants through the Unit of Investigation of Crimes Against Migrants (<i>Unidad de Investigación de Delitos para Personas Migrantes, UIDPM</i>).
National System for Integral Family Development (<i>Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, DIF</i>), also present at the state and municipal levels	The body that cares for migrants who are minors; also assists in detention and deportation of child migrants.
Navy (SEMAR) and Naval Infantry (Marines)	The bodies that assist INM in select migration cases by providing military force to operations that may involve organized crime or large numbers of migrants.

III. Historical Overview of Policies and Programs

The following section presents a historical timeline of Mexico’s migratory policies and programs, starting in the 1970s with tightened border controls and ending with President Enrique Peña Nieto’s 2014 Southern Border Plan (*Programa Frontera Sur*). This section also includes an evaluation of the policies and programs—including both advances and backsliding—and their effects on NTCA migration flows.

Examining Mexican Migration Policy in the 1990s

Historically, Mexico’s southern border with Guatemala has been characterized by a high degree of fluidity and transnational migration. Since the early 1970s, agricultural workers and economic migrants have crossed the southern border of Mexico to work in states like Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco, and Chiapas.²³

Two major events—the outbreak of civil wars across Central America and Mexico’s participation in international trade agreements—caused Mexico to develop a more formal policy to control migratory flows across its southern border. In 1983, largely in response to the refugee crisis created by these civil wars, Mexico imposed strict visa requirements for Central American migrants.^{ii,24} In the early 1990s, Mexico also imposed more stringent migration enforcement along its southern border as a strategy to pursue closer economic ties with the United States and Canada under the GATT and NAFTA.²⁵

Large-scale migration from the NTCA to Mexico and the United States began when Guatemala’s civil war sparked significant migration out of the region. Guatemalan security forces (supported by the United States) adopted a scorched earth strategy and displaced an estimated one million Mayan indigenous peoples from 442 destroyed villages in the highlands. This caused 200,000 Guatemalan nationals to flee across the border into Mexico.

Although Mexico allowed the establishment of refugee camps along its border with Guatemala in the 1980s, by the early 1990s deportations of Guatemala migrants and refugees were already taking place.²⁶ This was in response to pressure from the Ronald Reagan Administration, which felt that refugee camps in Chiapas were being used by members of Guatemala’s leftist insurgency. The Reagan Administration also rejected 98 percent of Guatemalan asylum claims, until a class action lawsuit forced the U.S. government to recognize Guatemalan refugees at higher rates.²⁷

Mexico’s increasing desire to regularize migration patterns along its southern border led to the creation of the INM in 1993, which replaced the previous General Directorate on Migration Services.²⁸ During this time, Mexico adopted a mixed approach to migratory enforcement policy. The INM cooperated with the UNHCR and the Guatemalan government to repatriate Guatemalan refugees, and authorities deported more than 100,000 people per year.²⁹ Yet, Mexico also recognized a need for Guatemalan labor in agriculture and the importance of historic economic linkages between its southern region and northern Guatemala. For this reason, Mexico established a short-term visa program (*Formas Migratorias de Visitante Local*). These short-term visas allowed Central American migrants to legally enter Mexico through land checkpoints and remain in southern border states.³⁰

ⁱⁱ Between 1981 and 1990, an estimated one million Central Americans traveled through Mexican territory on their way to the United States, fleeing repression at home.

In 1998, Mexico's security agencies began to implement Operation Sealing the Border (*Operación Sellamiento*) to reduce drug trafficking and control illegal migration. This program was implemented by President Ernesto Zedillo to stop the flow of drugs into Mexico through its southern border and coastline. As many as 22,000 soldiers, Federal Police, and Federal Attorney General agents were involved in its execution.³¹ Operation Sealing the Border further deepened security relationships between federal actors along Mexico's southern border.

Movements Toward Reform: 2000s

During the early 2000s, there were migratory reforms and a renewed focus on migrants' rights. However, Mexican officials continued to frame migration policy as a national security issue, which only escalated after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

In June 2001, President Vicente Fox announced the Southern Plan (*Plan Sur*) after a meeting with U.S. President George W. Bush that was supposed to have set the foundation for a new bilateral migration strategy. The Southern Plan increased the participation of the Mexican military and the Federal Police in migratory enforcement operations across Mexico's southern border region and aimed to demonstrate to the United States that Mexico would serve as a trustworthy partner in controlling migration flows.³² Only two weeks after the Southern Plan's implementation, the *World Press Review* noted that deportations of Central Americans had increased to an average of 18 buses per day, representing a 30 percent increase from 2000 to 2001.³³ However, the plans for a bilateral agreement were interrupted by the events of September 11, 2001, which had a lasting impact on the region's migration and security policy.³⁴

As the INM increased enforcement along Mexico's southern border, it became more difficult for migrants to transit through the country. Securitization policies caused an increase in the number of apprehensions and deportations, and as migrants sought to evade the authorities, they often looked to smugglers to help them cross the country. The rising demand and heightened risks pushed smugglers to raise their fees by US\$1,000 to US\$3,500 per person.³⁵ The Southern Plan was also augmented by Guatemala's 2001 push of "orderly repatriation" for the floating population of foreign nationals waiting to cross the Guatemala-Mexico border on their way to the United States.³⁶

In the early 2000s, Mexico began taking steps to address migration issues and migrants' rights amid pressure from the country's civil society organizations.³⁷ This included a 2006 package of policy proposals titled "Mexico and the Migration Phenomenon," which the Mexican legislature adopted in preparation to address shortcomings in protections for migrants' rights. In 2008, the legislature also abrogated the articles of the 1974 Law that criminalized undocumented migration—changing it to an administrative infraction—and amended the law to guarantee migrants the right to report cases of human rights violations without fear of prosecution.³⁸ The changes culminated in the 2011 Law of Migration (outlined in the previous section), which repealed some 70 provisions and articles of the General Law of Population, leaving intact only those portions that dealt with demographic issues.³⁹

Special Program for Migration, 2014–2018

The Migratory Policy Unit (*Unidad de Política Migratoria*, UPM) drafts Mexico's federal migratory policy and designs the Special Program for Migration (*Programa Especial de Migración*, PEM) in alignment with the objectives set out in Mexico's National Development Plan (*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*, PND). The most recent PND was passed in April 2014 and includes five core objectives, which are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2.
Goals of the 2014–2018 Special Program for Migration

1. Promote a culture of legality, human rights, and value for migrants.
2. Incorporate migratory issues into regional and local development strategies.
3. Consolidate an effective migration management policy, built on the pillars of facilitation, international co-responsibility, and border and human security.
4. Favor processes that integrate and reintegrate migrants and their families.
5. Strengthen access to justice and security for migrants, their families, and those who defend their rights.

Source: Gobierno de la República (Feb. 2017), *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2013-2018: Programa Especial de Migración 2014-2018*, http://www.gobernacion.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/edicion_impresa_PEM.

The current 2014-2018 PEM enshrines the government’s role in protecting migrants’ rights and fostering a more inclusive and diverse society. Since it was published before the 2014 migration increase, it does not specifically address Central American migration through Mexico (although it does hint at an uptick in Salvadoran migration through Mexico in 2013).⁴⁰ Rather, the PEM expresses concern for the protection of migrants transiting through Mexico but appears to focus largely on Mexican nationals who are either moving to other states, moving across the northern border into the United States, or returning to their cities and states of origin.⁴¹

Enrique Peña Nieto’s Southern Border Program of 2014

In the summer of 2014, there was a sharp uptick in the number of unaccompanied minors arriving to the Rio Grande Valley along the U.S.-Mexico border. As a response—and under pressure from the Obama administration, which viewed the situation as a humanitarian crisis—President Enrique Peña Nieto’s government launched the Southern Border Program (*Programa Frontera Sur*).⁴² This program had two principal goals: 1) to protect migrants entering Mexico, and 2) to better manage Mexico’s ports of entry for the sake of security and prosperity. To accomplish these objectives, the program included five parts:

1. Increased regularization for migrant workers from Guatemala and Belize, including work permits and temporary visas;
2. Improvements in checkpoint infrastructure and technology at points of entry;
3. Support for migrant shelters, DIF care for unaccompanied minors, and specialized medical units in Chiapas to serve migrants;
4. Increased cooperation with Central American countries, especially Guatemala; and
5. More streamlined cooperation among Mexican federal agencies and state governments through the Coordinating Mechanism for Comprehensive Attention to Migration for the Southern Borderⁱⁱⁱ (*Coordinación para la Atención Integral de la Migración en la Frontera Sur*, CAIMFS).⁴³

Peña Nieto described the program as a major step toward safeguarding migrants’ rights and a policy that would address the complex phenomenon of migration.⁴⁴ According to the federal government, the program would focus on the southern region’s economic and social development, particularly for municipalities along the border.⁴⁵ This included 187 proposed economic and pilot programs, none of which have been implemented to date.

ⁱⁱⁱ CAIMFS was eventually dismantled in 2015, when the INM took over administration of the program and continued joint policing practices in conducting raids and administering checkpoints.

Under the Southern Border Program, the Peña Nieto government also sought to increase checkpoints and patrols along highways and train lines, involve additional guards, install motion detection devices, and utilize drones.⁴⁶ According to a Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) report, the “INM transferred at least 300 of its agents to the southern border zone from elsewhere in the country, beginning operations shortly after President Peña Nieto’s launch of the Southern Border Program.”⁴⁷ These migration enforcement measures led to increased migrant apprehensions in these states and drove migrants further away from population centers and highly visible routes.

Advances in Mexico’s Migration Policy Design and Implementation

Many of the laws and programs described above have helped align Mexico’s migratory policies with international human rights standards. The 2008 amendments to the 1974 General Law of Population and the 2011 Law of Migration—passed in response to strong pressure from civil society for a more humane migratory policy—helped create a legal framework that seeks to safeguard migrants’ rights from abuse by the state and criminal organizations. Mexico’s passage of additional policies, including increased inter-agency cooperation and the expansion of key agencies such as COMAR, represent further attempts to better protect migrants within the country.

Increased Legal Protections and Access to Justice

Mexico has adopted a series of positive legal and policy advances in its framework for addressing migration. The 2008 decriminalization of irregular migration was one of Mexico’s most important steps toward creating legal protections for migrants. It changed the criminalization discourse and also addressed allegations of bribery by Mexican police officers, who were accused of taking money from migrants instead of detaining them. The 2011 Law of Migration also created additional protections, such as avenues for migrants to seek justice in instances of victimization and/or abuse of power.⁴⁸ Moreover, the PEM for 2014-2018 under President Peña Nieto provided an outline to better promote migrants’ rights.

Mexico’s migration institutions have also advanced in certain areas. The PGR’s establishment of the Unit for the Investigation of Crimes for Migrants (*Unidad de Investigación de Delitos para Personas Migrantes*, UIDPM) and the Mechanism for Foreign Support for Search and Investigation (*Mecanismo de Apoyo Exterior Mexicano de Búsqueda e Investigación*) serve as important steps to address the impunity with which crimes against migrants are carried out.⁴⁹ The UIDPM provides a specific venue for the PGR to refer investigations of federal crimes committed against migrants, while the Mechanism seeks to improve access to the criminal justice system for victims of crimes who are no longer in Mexico. Moreover, the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Campeche, Veracruz, Coahuila, and Quintana Roo have formed special prosecutors to expand their investigative capacity for crimes against migrants.

Economic Development in the Southern Region

Despite its flaws, which will be outlined in the following section, the Southern Border Program had several positive contributions to Mexico’s migratory policy. First, the Program included the issuance of 112,500 Regional Visitor Cards (*Tarjeta de Visitante Regional*) and Border Worker Visitor Cards (*Tarjeta de Visitante Trabajador Fronterizo*) to tourists and migrant workers from Guatemala and Belize.⁵⁰ By enabling migrants to pass through legal migratory channels, the Southern Border Program strengthened the economic ties that spur regional growth. Second, the integrated information systems allowed government agencies to monitor fluctuations in illicit border traffic and potentially assist migrants in distress throughout the region.⁵¹

Beyond the security-focused Southern Border Plan, the Mexican Agency of International Cooperation for Development (*Agencia Mexicana de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo*, AMEXCID) has implemented several projects in the NTCA that encourage migrants to stay in their countries. The primary project, “Prevention of the Migration of Unaccompanied Children and Adolescents in the Northern Triangle” (*Prevención de la Migración No Acompañada de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes en Comunidades de Origen del Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica y México*) has focused on youth intervention and community support programs for high-risk neighborhoods in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.⁵² This is a proactive step aimed at attempting to improve the NTCA’s economic and security conditions that are currently pushing migrants into Mexico.

Migration Personnel Reforms and Expansion

Mexico has also made advances in professionalizing the personnel interacting with migrants. Particularly, the INM has taken steps to professionalize its officials by rooting out corruption and dismissing agents who abuse their power. In 2011, the INM fired more than 200 immigration agents for a number of infractions, including 40 agents who were convicted of abuse of authority, seven regional directors accused of delivering migrants to kidnapping gangs, and two agents arrested on charges that they forced female migrants into prostitution.⁵³ In 2016, INM Commissioner Ardelio Vargas reported having dismissed 3,000 INM staff and agents since 2013 in an attempt to decrease corruption and abuse of authority within the INM’s ranks.⁵⁴ Joint programs between the INM and the U.S. Border Patrol—including the establishment of an INM training center—have the potential to further improve the INM’s accountability and capacity.⁵⁵

Protections for High-Risk Groups

Mexico has also developed specific programs for protecting high-risk migrant groups, which represent a significant step forward in migration policy. One of these advancements is the 2016 INM pilot program for Alternative Care and Housing of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors (*Programa Piloto de Cuidado y Acogida Alternativa de NNA Migrantes No Acompañados en México*). This program aimed to create an alternative to detention for unaccompanied migrant minors, who are prohibited from being detained in adult detention centers under the 2011 Law of Migration (barring exceptional circumstances). Instead, in the pilot program, unaccompanied minors stay in selected migrant shelters where they receive education, healthcare, and legal services.⁵⁶

Another advance for migrants’ rights are the increased protections for female migrants. Article 30 of the 2011 Law of Migration formally established the National Institute for Women, which is charged with addressing issues regarding migrant women. The Institute develops programming for improving migrant women’s social conditions and eradicating gender-based discrimination and helps train migration authorities on strategies to respect and protect female migrants’ rights.⁵⁷

Backsliding on Migration Policies

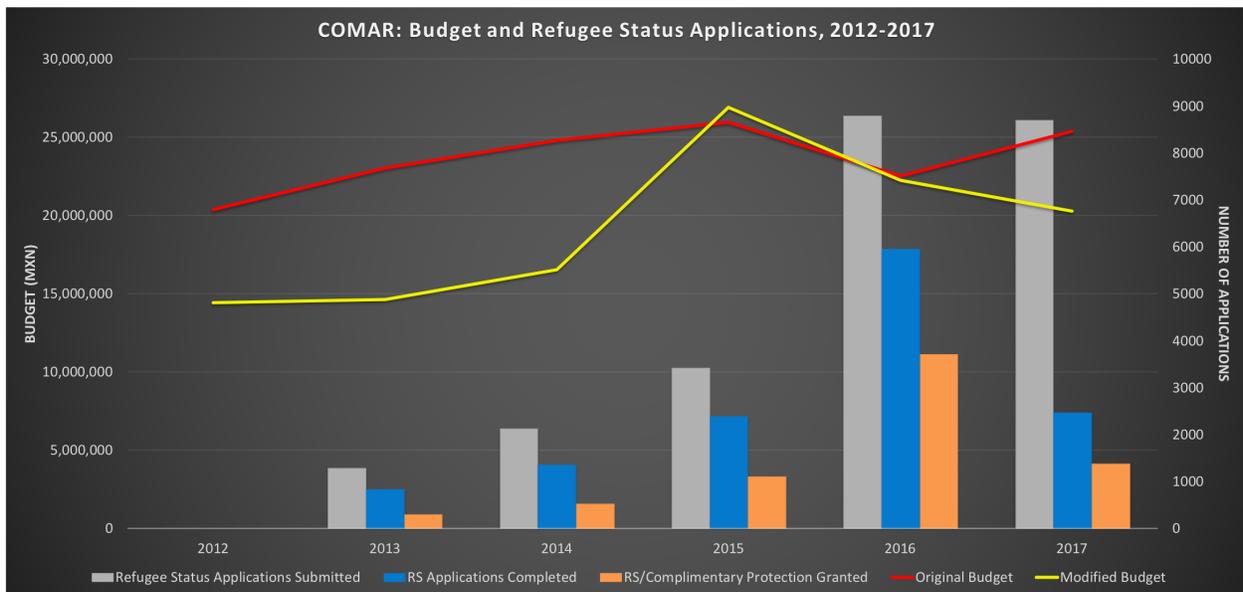
Despite these advances in Mexico’s legal and institutional framework, there has also been backsliding in other areas of the country’s migratory policy. Increased securitization policies along the southern border have raised concerns regarding migrants’ safety and access to protections, while poor funding allocation, inconsistent refugee status application procedures, and overcrowded detention facilities also remain significant challenges in ensuring that migrants can access legal protections.

Lack of Institutional Attention

The first instance of backsliding is COMAR’s institutional capacity, which, despite a growing caseload, has not been an institutional priority. As of August 2017, COMAR had only 15 full-time employees, 29 temporary employees, and three offices to handle the country’s still-rising number of applications.⁵⁸ In 2016, COMAR received 8,796 refugee status claims and in 2017 it registered another 14,596. This means that in 2017, each employee would have had to adjudicate around 330 refugee applications.⁵⁹

The primary challenge are COMAR’s small budgetary allocations relative to the workload. As the number of applications for refugee status increased over the past five years, COMAR’s budget did not follow a similar pattern. Figure 1 displays the disparity between COMAR’s allocated budget and the institutional workload. Although the Mexican legislature increased funding to COMAR in 2015 in response to international attention to migration issues, the increase was short-lived and funding soon decreased. COMAR’s continued lack of budget and staffing means that many applicants for refugee status do not receive appropriate screening for their international protection needs, diminishing COMAR’s ability to comply with its mandate.

Figure 1.
COMAR’s Budget and Refugee Status Applications, 2012 - 2017



Source: Budget data obtained by Transparency Request from COMAR. Refugee status data obtained from COMAR (2017), Estadísticas.

Note: 2017 statistics are complete through August 15, 2017, with 4,690 applications still in process at that time.

Inconsistent Refugee Status Processes

Beyond COMAR’s underfunding, a combination of coercion, abuse, and threats of detention also discourage migrants from applying for refugee status.⁶⁰ Mexican law stipulates that refugee status cases should be concluded in 45 days, but most cases take a minimum of 90 days to complete, the upper limit allowed by the law in exceptional cases.⁶¹ Interviews with prospective refugees also sometimes take place just days before the processing deadline, indicating that officials may be making decisions based on information from intake forms rather than interviews.⁶²

A correlation also appears to exist between cancelled refugee status applications and COMAR's lengthy wait time. According to interviews conducted by the Guadalajara migrant shelter FM4, INM detainees who were applying for refugee status often opted for deportation with plans to cross again, rather than wait for months in a detention center. The long wait time—caused by COMAR's lack of resources and personnel—constitutes a *de facto* infringement on migrants' right to apply for refugee status, as they are forced to make their decision to apply under duress.⁶³

Overcrowded Detention Facilities

Mexico's migratory stations often lack the basic requirements guaranteed by the Law of Migration's implementing framework. These include access to sufficient medical attention, legal representation, indigenous language translators, or Child Protection Officers (*Oficios de Protección Infantil*, OPIs) to meet the detained population's needs. Civil society groups also continue to face restricted access to these migratory stations, despite Article 224 of the Law of Migration's Implementing Framework that grants them access to the facilities.⁶⁴

In 2013, the Institute for Security and Democracy (*Instituto para la Seguridad y Democracia*, Insyde) published a report on the conditions within Mexico's migratory stations, noting that they vary in quality and capacity, with inconsistent treatment of migrants. Yet overall, they note that throughout the migratory stations, migrants' cells were small, the facilities overcrowded, and there were testimonies of migrants sleeping on the ground without mattresses or blankets.⁶⁵ Migrants have also reported cases of aggressive behavior and psychological abuse from INM agents during detention, along with reports that INM agents had asked for payment in exchange for migrants' release from the migratory stations.⁶⁶

Under the 2011 Migratory Law, unaccompanied minors are supposed to await the processing of refugee status claims or deportation proceedings in the DIF shelters, but these often function as *de facto* detention centers.⁶⁷ Child refugee status seekers may wait months in DIF shelters during the adjudication of their claims, despite the laws' prohibition of the detention of minors. These detention practices also contradict the spirit of international refugee law, which claims that detention should be used as the exception rather than the rule.⁶⁸ Finally, observers have documented cases of minors who are still being housed in adult migratory stations, in violation of their rights.⁶⁹

IV. Mexico's National Security Approach Toward Migration Policy

Since the early 2000s, Mexico has increasingly approached migratory policy as a national security issue. As INM Commissioner Ardelio Vargas Fosado stated in 2013, "migration must be understood as a policy of the Mexican state that is carried out through a national security scope."⁷⁰ This has been clearest in Mexico's increased law enforcement and armed forces activity along its southern border area. This heightened security presence and increased inter-agency collaboration has led to reduced impunity for particular criminal actors, but it has not deterred migration and has at times only made it more dangerous. The following section explains how Mexico's securitization policies have affected Central American migrants transiting through the country, and how this approach has been influenced by the United States.

Mexico's Securitization Efforts towards Migration

Mexico's 2005 National Security Law defines national security as the actions taken to preserve the country's sovereignty, stability, and integrity (Article 3). According to the National Security and Intelligence Center (*Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional*, CISEN) this definition includes, but is not limited to, the Mexican government's efforts to protect the country against risks and threats, preserve sovereignty and territory, and defend the country from other states or subjects of international law.⁷¹ The government bodies charged with maintaining national security include the Mexican Navy and Marines (*Secretaría de Marina-Armada*, SEMAR) and the Mexican Army (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*, SEDENA).

The Fox Administration (2000–2006)

Contemporary securitization efforts date back to the beginning of the Vicente Fox Administration. In 2001, President Vicente Fox pivoted from a campaign platform that promised multilateral cooperation between Mexico and Central America's governments to a more securitized approach through the Southern Plan. As previously mentioned, this program increased the presence of the Mexican military along the southern border and facilitated greater cooperation between these soldiers, the Federal Police, and the INM.⁷²

This national security focus continued in 2002 when the Mexican government established the High-Level Border Security Group (*Grupo de Alto Nivel de Seguridad Fronteriza*, GANSEF) with Guatemala. A similar agreement with Belize followed in 2005.⁷³ Both groups were created as part of regional security measures implemented after the September 11, 2001, attacks, with the purpose of addressing issues related to migration, human rights, border affairs, terrorism, international security, and organized crime.⁷⁴

In 2004, the INM established the Integral System of Migratory Operations (*Sistema Integral de Operación Migratoria*, SIOM), which regulated and verified migratory flows through Mexico.⁷⁵ In the same year, the INM collaborated with LaserFiche (an international document imaging company) to create a digital database that recorded the migratory documents of non-citizens residing in Mexico.⁷⁶ In 2005, Mexico's National Security Council (Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Nacional) formally recognized the INM as a part of the national security system, requiring it to support Mexican security agencies by providing intelligence and data on potential terrorism, espionage, and rebellion.⁷⁷

The Calderón Administration (2006–2012)

After entering office in 2006, Mexican President Felipe Calderón continued to approach migratory issues through a national security lens. His administration created the 2007-2012 Program for National Defense, which framed national security issues to include flows of people, goods, and illicit activity, efforts to protect human rights along the southern border, and international cooperation to protect national sovereignty.⁷⁸

The Federal Police's legal framework in 2009 and the 2011 Law of Migration also mandate that their officers maintain order in border areas and checkpoints, where they may come into contact with irregular migrants.⁷⁹ Since irregular migration is considered an administrative infraction, the Federal Police is not authorized to detain migrants or check their migratory status. However, under the Law of Migration, the INM may request the Federal Police's support in conducting migration operations.⁸⁰

The Peña Nieto Administration (2012–2018)

Under the Peña Nieto administration, Mexico has continued to pursue migration policy that prioritizes national security concerns. In addition to the 2014-2018 Special Program for Migration, President Peña Nieto launched the 2013-2018 Sectoral Program for National Defense, which provides guidelines for armed forces that are involved in public safety and security operations. This document outlines the government's commitment to increase border security, maintain nationwide deployments in sensitive areas, and allocate 30,000 troops to border regions, primarily in the southern part of the country.

As part of the 2014 Southern Border Plan, the Peña Nieto administration also established three security belts throughout Chiapas, Tabasco, and Oaxaca.⁸¹ As part of this plan, 5,000 members of the country's Gendarmerie were deployed to Chiapas in September 2014, adding to the 400 Federal Police that were already along the border.⁸² This deployment built on the June 2014 agreement between the INM and the Federal Police (called in Spanish *Convenio de Colaboración para brindar apoyo en el control, verificación, revisión y traslado de migrantes, así como resguardo perimetral de Estaciones Migratorias*), which outlined how the Federal Police would support the INM in the control, verification, search, and transfer of migrants, and resulted in the Federal Police's increased participation in migration operations.⁸³

The United States' Influence on Mexico's Securitization Policy

Since the early 2000s, the U.S. government has leveraged its diplomatic power to influence Mexico and Central America's migration policies. The following section evaluates this U.S. influence and how it has affected migrants transiting through Mexico. It focuses specifically on Mexico's securitization of its southern border over the past decade.

Early 2000s: The September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attacks and their Impact on Regional Migration Policy

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks changed the United States' approach to national security and the structure of its cooperation with Mexico. Irregular migration became a potential threat, as the United States feared that terrorist groups could take advantage of smuggling routes to enter the United States.⁸⁴ This meant that controlling the U.S. Mexico border became a national security focal point, with the goals of curbing irregular migration and preventing terrorist attacks.

This new perspective led to a series of changes in bilateral security cooperation. In 2002, Mexico and the United States signed the Border Partnership Agreement, which promised to enhance cooperation on border security, intelligence, and irregular migration. In the same year, the United States also established the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM)—which included Mexico and Canada—as part of its intensified efforts to increase national security. Notably, NORTHCOM expanded the definition of the U.S. defense perimeter to include Mexico’s territory and prioritized a collaborative effort by the two countries to secure their borders against terrorism.⁸⁵ This collaboration also gave rise to the Security and Prosperity Partnership in 2005, in which the United States and Mexico agreed to create secure borders, unite their security agendas, and pursue mutually beneficial economic opportunities.⁸⁶

The Mérida Initiative

When Felipe Calderón took office in December 2006, he petitioned the United States for assistance in combating drugs and organized crime. The following year, in October 2007, the two governments officially announced the Mérida Initiative. As part of this agreement, the Mexican and U.S. governments made specific commitments: Mexico would attempt to target crime and corruption and the United States would target domestic drug demand and illicit trafficking of firearms.

Since the Mérida Initiative began, the U.S. Congress has appropriated nearly \$2.8 billion in economic support, equipment, and military training for Mexico’s security efforts.⁸⁷ In its first year, the United States requested that 61 percent of the total funds be used for counter-narcotics, counterterrorism, and border control.⁸⁸ Allocations for narcotics enforcement have consistently outpaced allocations for economic support, which was funded at previous levels but did not increase at the rates of security-based enforcement procedures.⁸⁹ Table 3 shows Mérida Initiative budget requests from FY2007 through FY2017.

Table 3.
Estimated Mérida Initiative Budget Requests, FY 2007-2018 (Millions USD)

Year	Economic Support Fund (ESF)	International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE)	Foreign Military Financing (FMF)*	Total
FY2007	11.4	26.7	0	48.1
FY2008	20.0	263.5	116.5	400.0
FY2009	15.0	406.0	39.0	460.0
FY2010	9.0	365.0	265.2	639.2
FY2011	18.0	117.0	8.0	143.0
FY2012	33.3	248.5	n/a	281.8
FY2013	32.1	190.1	n/a	222.2
FY2014	35.0	143.1	n/a	178.1
FY2015	33.6	110.0	n/a	143.6
FY2016	39.0	100.0	n/a	139.0
FY2017	49.0	90.0	n/a	139.0
Total	320.4	2,119.9	428.7	2,879.0

Source: Transparency Request from U.S. Congressional Research Service.

* Foreign Military Financing was re-categorized as general bilateral military assistance after 2011.

The United States' Role in the Southern Border Plan

The United States also exerted influence over Mexico's migratory policy during the rollout of the 2014 Southern Border Plan. On June 19, 2014, during the increase in unaccompanied minors arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, U.S. President Barack Obama spoke with President Enrique Peña Nieto about his desire to work with the Mexican government to address increased irregular migration to the United States.⁹⁰ Three weeks later, on July 7, Enrique Peña Nieto announced the launch of the Southern Border Program.⁹¹ After the announcement, State Department Counselor Thomas Shannon informed the U.S. Senate of his intentions to support the Southern Border Plan as an international narcotics enforcement initiative. The Obama Administration initially requested US\$90 million, Congress allocated a higher amount (US\$100 million),⁹² and US\$24 million had been delivered as of January 2017.⁹³ This money was administered through the Mérida Initiative.

Table 4.
United States Funding for Securitization Policies

Activity	Actors	Details	Allocated Money
Training	INM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained 19,473 INM employees and Mexican military units in interviewing techniques, including how to identify at-risk migrants, smugglers, and potential terrorism suspects.⁹⁴ The Program for Training Federal Migration Agents (Programa de Formación para Agentes Federales de Migración) launched in May 2017 to improve INM's inbound inspections at Mexico's southern border.⁹⁵ U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents work in collaboration with the INM to develop investigator-training programs.⁹⁶ 	US\$75 million earmarked for INM agents placed along Mexico's southern border ⁹⁷
Equipment	INM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment and training for migration agents at Mexico's southern border, including assistance for gathering biometric data (fingerprints, photographs, and written descriptions of detainees and border crossers).⁹⁸ 	US\$20 million (2016) with \$3.5 million specifically earmarked for biometrics
Equipment	SEMAR, potentially INM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates to communications infrastructure for the Mexican agencies engaged in migration control efforts along the southern border, with most investments concentrated on naval bases.⁹⁹ 	Part of the above US\$75 million (2016) ¹⁰⁰

Recent Instances of U.S. Regional Influence: Cooperation on Security and Migration Policy

In June 2017, Mexico and the United States co-hosted the Conference on Prosperity for Security in Central America, where they expressed their continued support for the Alliance for Prosperity, a plan that encouraged security improvements and foreign investment in the NTCA countries. The conference aimed to establish a plan to enhance regional security and economic prosperity through a range of initiatives. Several of these efforts included the creation of migration observatories and information-sharing platforms between the United States, Mexico, and NTCA countries. These efforts would create "early warning systems" to inform the U.S. Department of Homeland Security about potential increases in migratory flows.¹⁰¹ Despite the conference's sweeping promises, in a recent interview with *Reuters*, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez stated that the Donald Trump Administration had not increased support aside from police training and modest assistance from USAID.¹⁰²

V. Migrant Safety and Security

Increased road checkpoints and restricted access to the country's train network have made it more difficult for Central American migrants to transit through Mexico. The difficulties have forced some migrants to hire smugglers to move through the country in cars or buses, while the migrants who cannot afford a smuggler often stay in migrant shelters and pass through rural, forested, and desert areas on foot. Doctors Without Borders, which operates in the shelters along the Tenosique, Ixtepec, Huehuetoca, Bojay, and San Luis Potosí migration routes, reports that 68 percent of the migrants they treated had been victims of one or more crimes during their transit through Mexico.^{iv} The group also states that approximately 31 percent of female migrants have been subjected to sexual violence, although the true number may be even higher.¹⁰³

Along these migration routes, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) also extract “taxes” from migrants or migrant smugglers. TCOs control territory along the border, and securitization policies funnel illicit activity into specific areas—such as the border towns of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, and Reynosa, Tamaulipas—that become highly lucrative. These groups add risks to migrants' journeys, especially for those who have not paid the required taxes.¹⁰⁴ Figure 2 is a map taken from the Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD),^v an original dataset created for this project, which geolocates crime hotspots for the top three crimes committed against migrants in Mexico. Twenty percent of the database's total victims came from kidnappings in Reynosa.

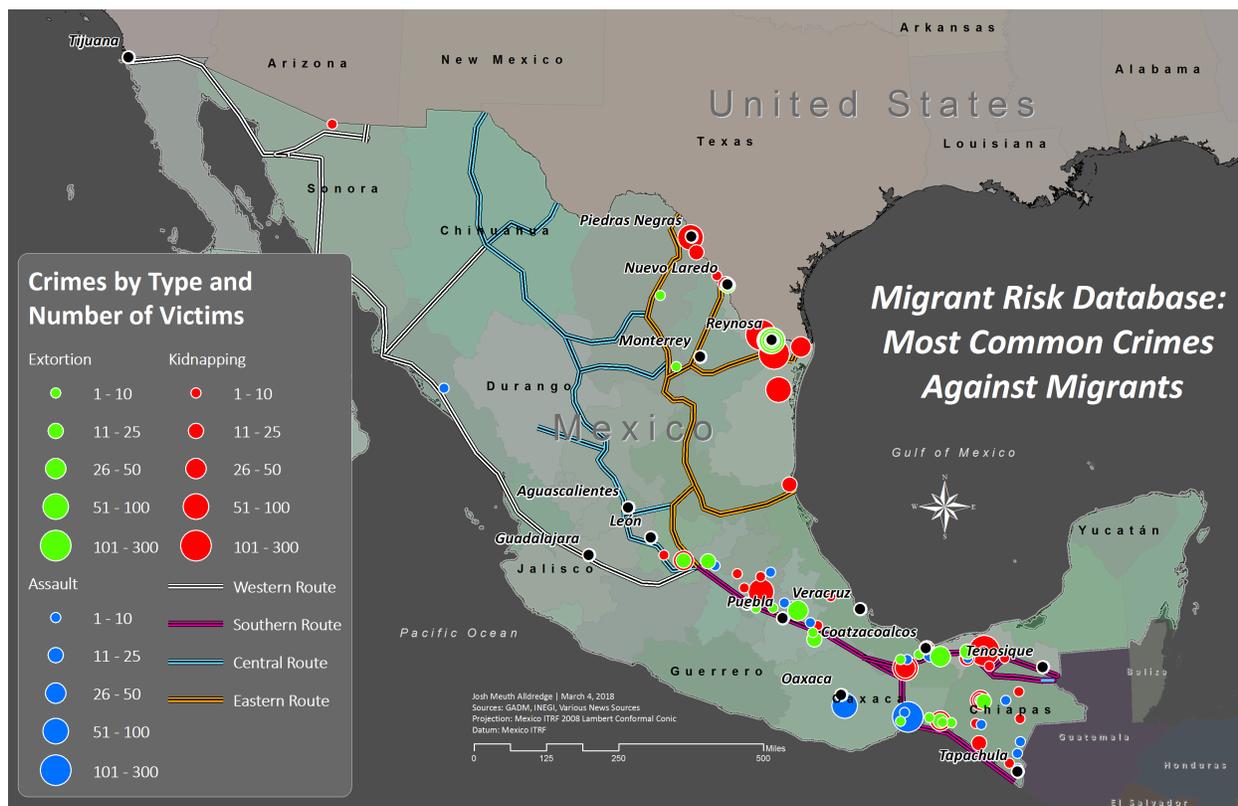
The dangers migrants face can also depend on their mode of transportation. According to a 2017 University of Texas at Austin report, migrants who take the train are three times more likely to be assaulted compared to those who travel in cars, trucks, or buses. Migrants also face the unique risk of falling or being pushed from the train, which can result in serious injury, mutilation, and even death when they fall beneath the train wheels. Migrants traveling in cargo trucks also face considerable risk. In July 2017, ten migrants died and dozens were hospitalized after being locked in an unventilated trailer in extreme heat on the journey from Laredo to San Antonio, Texas.¹⁰⁵ Without air conditioning or ventilation, these trailers can reach temperatures of up to 140 degrees during summer months, creating life-threatening conditions.¹⁰⁶ During the data-gathering process for the CAMRD, the research team found several examples of migrants who were rescued from packed trailers that smugglers had abandoned alongside Mexico's highways. In one specific case, smugglers abandoned 147 migrants, including 48 minors, in a remote municipality of Veracruz without food or water for several days.¹⁰⁷

The transportation method migrants choose depends on their economic power. In 2016, 48.17 percent of Honduran migrants traveled by train. In comparison to the relatively low rates reported for Guatemalans (9.11 percent) and Salvadorans (1.04 percent), this could indicate the strong link between poverty and means of transportation, as Hondurans tend to face more extreme poverty.

^{iv} Doctors Without Borders utilized the Victimization Assessment Tool or VAT to conduct a sample of interviews with approximately 467 migrants in migrant shelters. The survey consists of asking questions to migrants about the acts of violence they have suffered and how they feel about those acts. Approximately 88 percent of survey respondents were men and 12 percent were women. Doctors Without Borders administered 33,953 medical consultations in Mexican migrant shelters and mobile health clinics from 2013 to 2016. Given that these migrants are often traveling alone along the migration route, they cannot afford the cost of a coyote and are often the most visible and vulnerable irregular migrants traveling north.

^v For additional methodology and information on the CAMRD and this report's other data sources, please consult the appendices.

Figure 2.
Map of Overall Crimes Committed Against Migrants



Source: Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD).

Additionally, the migrant route presents environmental and incidental dangers such as starvation, exhaustion, lack of access to medical treatment, and accidents along roads and train tracks. Groups such as Grupo Beta, migrant shelter workers, and international organizations such as the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders offer free medical services to migrants, but at various points along the journey migrants may not have access to water or health care. A 2017 Doctors Without Borders report notes that migrants often lack sufficient access to health clinics.¹⁰⁸

The following sections outline general trends and regional hotspots for crimes against migrants, including kidnappings, homicides, and disappearances. Table 5 features an overall snapshot of the risks that migrants face along their journeys and illuminates broader patterns for kidnapping, homicides, and disappearances.

**Table 5.
Overall Trends in Key Crimes Against Migrants**

	Kidnapping	Homicides	Disappearances
Trends over Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From 2012 to 2014, the number of reported migrant kidnappings spiked from 72 to 682, according to INM From 2013 to 2016, there was a 227 percent increase in reported migrant kidnappings according to REDODEM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mexico’s overall homicide rates have increased 59 percent since 2014 Official data and transparency requests indicate rising numbers of homicide in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Tabasco 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reported disappearances of NTCA migrants peaked in 2014; after a short decrease in 2015, disappearances have been increasing again 74 percent of reported disappearances are males 60 percent of reported NTCA disappearances are from Guatemala
Regional Hotspots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Tamaulipas</i>: The majority of kidnappings take place in Reynosa <i>Coahuila</i>: There have been large-scale kidnappings in Piedras Negras. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Chiapas</i>: There has been a steady increase in homicides against foreigners since 2013, with a peak in 2017 <i>Veracruz</i>: Has the highest number of homicides in the CAMRD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Tamaulipas</i>: The largest number of disappearances for Mexicans and NTCA nationals take place in this state <i>Chiapas</i>: 12 percent of all disappearances in Chiapas are of migrants
Data Used	INEGI, REDODEM, Transparency Requests, CAMRD, UIDPM	SESNSP, INEGI, IOM Missing Migrants Project, CAMRD, Transparency Requests	RNPED, CNDH, and miscellaneous news reports

Kidnappings

Kidnapping is one of the most common high-impact crimes that Central American migrants face during their journeys to Mexico and the United States. Organized criminal gangs prey on migrants and members of other marginalized groups since migrants are unlikely to report crimes due to fear of potential deportation if they come into contact with authorities. Kidnappers often present themselves as smugglers, promising to guide migrants into the United States, before depriving them of their freedom. Typically, criminal organizations kidnap migrants in order to extract ransoms from family members residing in the United States. These payments are generally made through money transfers.¹⁰⁹ Some migrants’ families may pay the ransom, resulting in the migrant’s release. Other times, migrants are killed in spite of their families’ paying the ransom. Still others are killed for not providing contact information or if their families are unable to provide sufficient funds. Despite the increase in securitized policies, kidnappings committed against migrants in Mexico continue with impunity, affecting thousands of migrants and providing criminal groups with a significant revenue source.

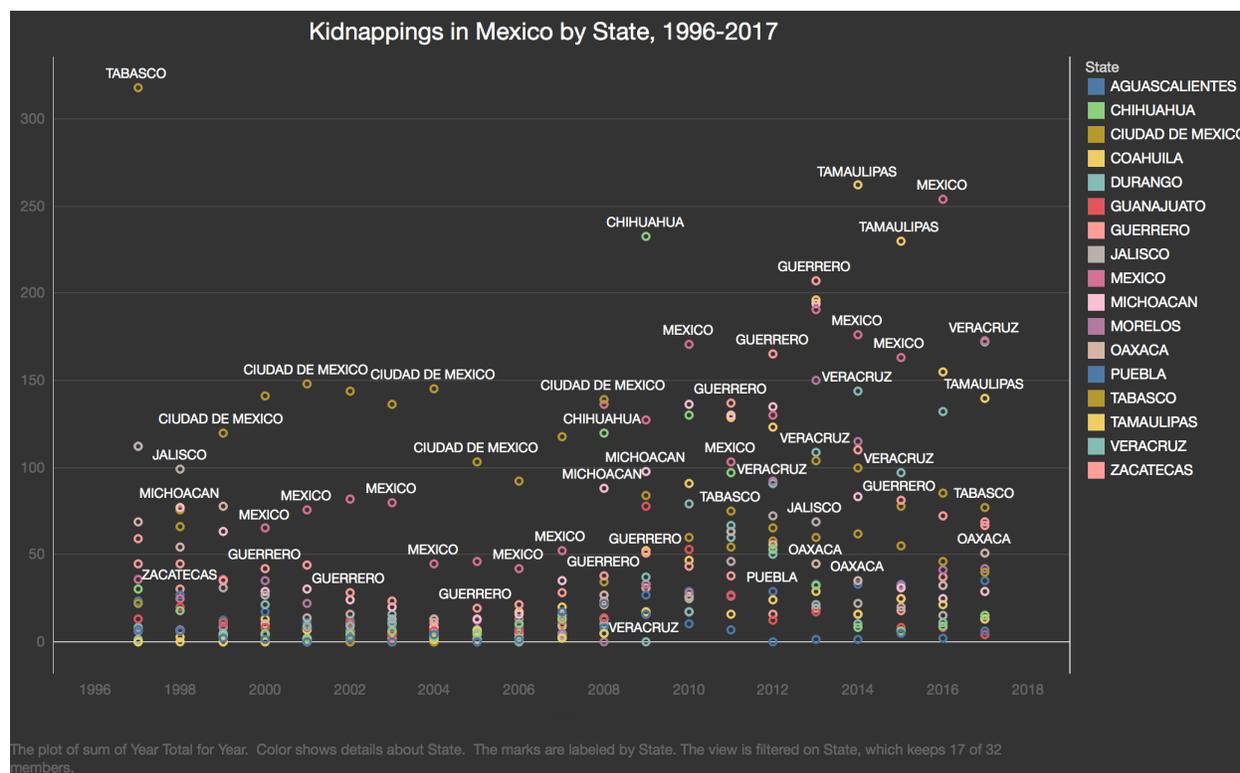
Kidnapping Trends in Mexico

Mexico has experienced an overall upward trend in kidnapping since the mid-1990s, including over the past few years.^{vi} There were 6,235 kidnapping cases reported across Mexico during the first four years and ten months of the Peña Nieto Administration, compared to 4,955 cases during the same time period

^{vi} Kidnapping in concert with a criminal organization is considered a federal crime, and otherwise is considered a state crime.

of the Calderón Administration.¹¹⁰ Over the past ten years, states such as Tamaulipas, Guerrero, and Michoacán had the greatest increases in kidnapping, while the State of Mexico had the second highest overall kidnapping rate in the country (after Tamaulipas).¹¹¹ Although data from the Executive Secretary of the National System of Public Security (*Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública*, SESNSP) is not disaggregated based on migration status, some portion of these kidnappings likely involves migrants. Figure 3 displays state-level data for kidnapping and changing geographic patterns.

Figure 3.
Kidnappings in Mexico by State, 1996-2017

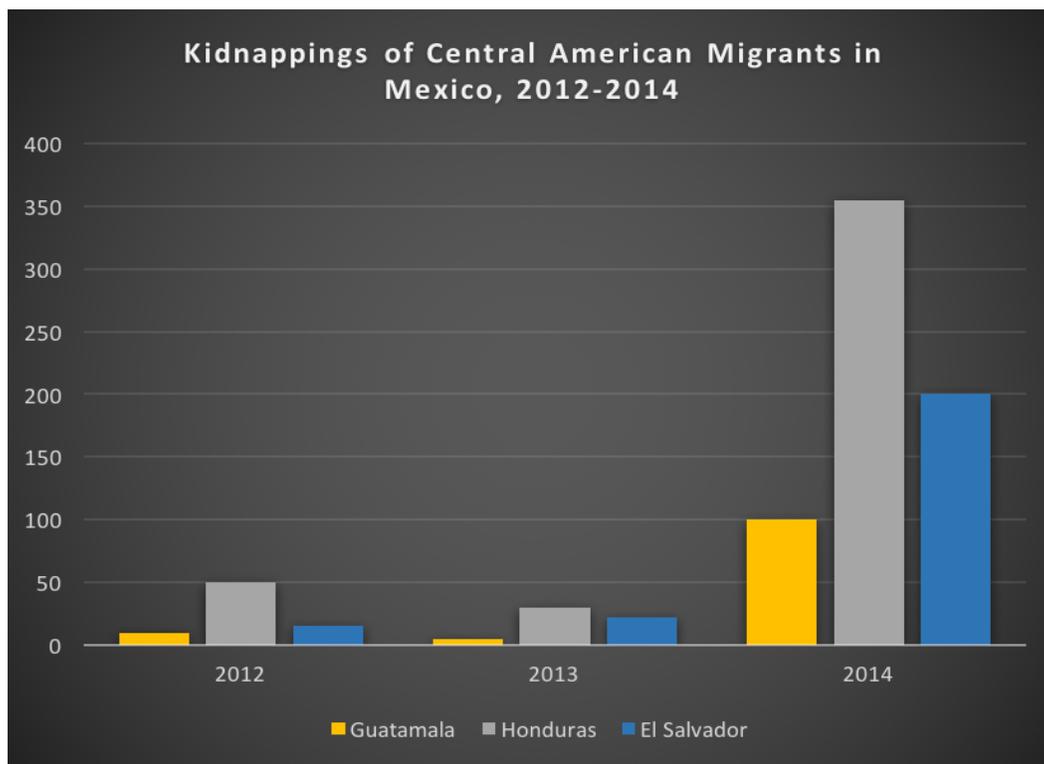


Source: Secretaría de Gobernación y Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad (June 2017), “Cifras de homicidio doloso, secuestro, extorsión y robo de vehículos 1997-2017,” June 2017, http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/docs/pdfs/cifras%20de%20homicidio%20doloso%20secuestro%20etc/HDSECEXTRV_092017.pdf.

Kidnappings of Migrants on the Rise

Given that migrants report crimes at especially low rates, it is difficult to quantify the number of kidnappings committed against migrants in Mexico. To attempt to map out this crime, this report uses data from the INM and REDODEM. According to INM statistics, from 2013 to 2014, there was a ten-fold increase in the number of reported kidnappings of migrants, from 62 to 682.¹¹² Though part of this dramatic jump is due to an adjustment made to correct previous INM underreporting (the INM only started keeping records of kidnappings in 2012), REDODEM data also reflects an increase in kidnappings in 2014.¹¹³ Even with significant gaps in the data, both sources suggest that migrants continue to be at a high risk for kidnappings.

Figure 4.
Kidnapping of Central American Migrants in Mexico



Source: Julio Ramirez, “Repunta El Secuestro de Migrantes; Se Multiplican Por Diez Los Casos” (March 30, 2015), *Excelsior*, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2015/03/30/1016260>.

Table 6.
REDODEM Crime and Kidnapping Statistics

Year	Central American Migrants: Interviewed	Central American Migrants: Victims of a Crime	Percent of Total	Central American Migrants: Kidnapped	Percent of Total
2013	19,650	847	4.30%	36	0.18%
2014	27,670	2,052	7.40%	41	0.15%
2015	27,288	1,881	6.90%	26	0.09%
2016	30,450	4,798	15.80%	128	0.42%

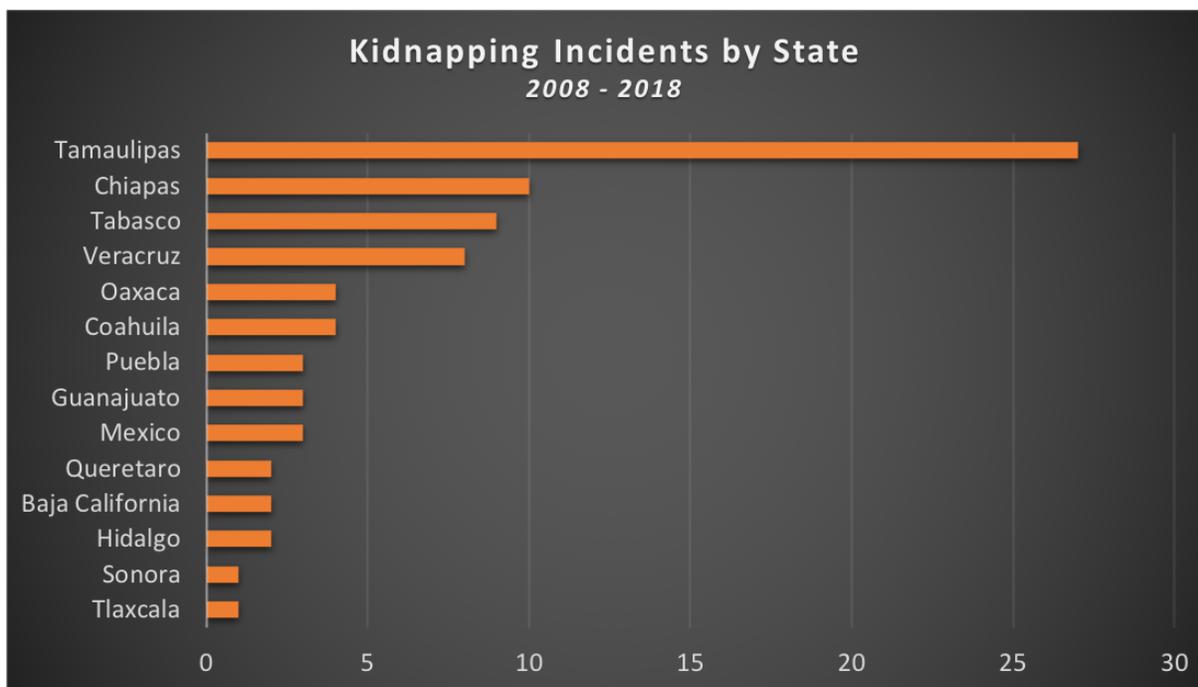
Sources: REDODEM (2014), *Migrantes invisibles, violencia tangible*, http://www.fm4pasolibre.org/pdfs/informe_migrantes%20invisibles_redodem2015.pdf; REDODEM (2015), *Migración en Tránsito por México. Rostro de una Crisis Humanitaria Internacional*, http://www.fm4pasolibre.org/pdfs/Informe_redodem_2015.pdf; and REDODEM (2016), *Migrantes en México: Recorriendo un Camino de Violencia*, http://www.fm4pasolibre.org/pdfs/informe_redodem_2016_17.pdf.

Exploring Regional Hotspots: Migrant Routes Have High Kidnapping Rates

By breaking down kidnapping events by state, it is possible to analyze geographic trends. This section examines several states with high levels of migrant transit and describes state-specific kidnapping

patterns.^{vii} Figure 5 illustrates how kidnappings concentrate along migrant routes and border regions. Each incident likely includes more than one victim.

Figure 5.
Total Kidnapping Incidents by Mexican State, 2008-2018



Source: Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD).

Tamaulipas

Tamaulipas has the highest number of kidnappings committed against migrants. According to the Tamaulipas state government, there were 211 kidnappings of migrants since 2014, of which 40 occurred in Reynosa. These high numbers are also reflected in the CAMRD, which documented 27 cases of kidnapping in Tamaulipas, 17 of which were in Reynosa. This included nine kidnapping cases in 2016 alone that totaled 300 victims.^{viii}

The Gulf Cartel and the Zetas both control territory in Tamaulipas, and the high rates of migrant kidnappings in this state can be attributed both to the presence of these criminal organizations and Tamaulipas’s importance along the migrant route. The CAMRD reports eight incidents of large-scale kidnappings wherein TCOs were the primary perpetrators in Tamaulipas, more than in any other state. As mentioned previously, migrants who do not pay these groups’ required taxes are at risk of kidnapping.

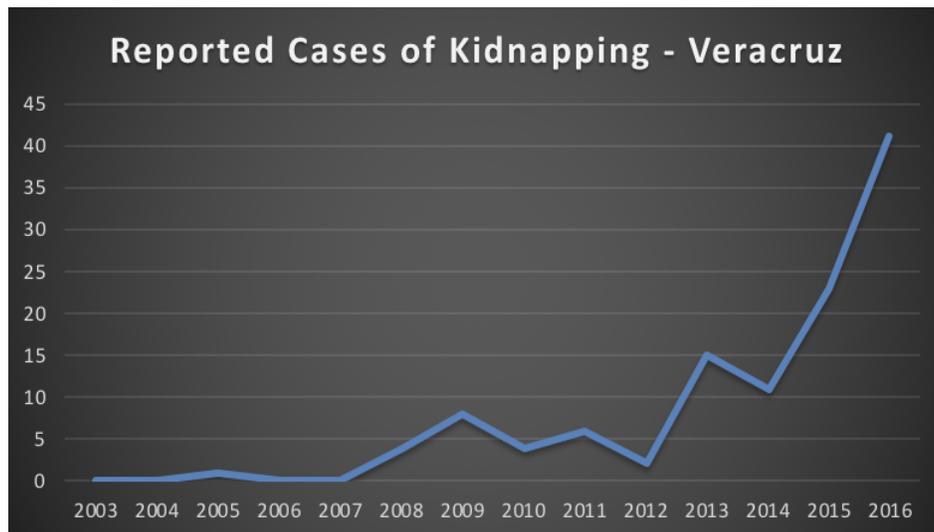
^{vii} This section uses transparency requests to Mexican states, which had varying quality of crime reporting, and data from the original CAMRD database. This database contains 80 incidents of kidnapping, which constitutes nearly half of the total number of crimes covered in the database.

^{viii} The data provided by the Tamaulipas state government documented crimes committed *by* migrants rather than *against* migrants. As a result, this report relies on a 2017 transparency request that documented total kidnappings.

Veracruz

According to Veracruz's state statistics on kidnappings committed against migrants, there have been 117 reported cases of migrant kidnappings since 2003. This number increased most dramatically from 11 kidnappings in 2014 to 41 in 2016. Although these cases include foreigners of all national origins, they likely involve large numbers of NTCA migrants. According to the same Veracruz data, 409 Hondurans were victims of crimes in the state since 2003, double the size of the next subgroup (199 North Americans). This data, however, should be viewed as incomplete. In 2017, the Veracruz state government documented only two cases of kidnapping against migrants, while the CAMRD (using open source data) identified three kidnapping cases in a shorter timeframe.

Figure 6.
Veracruz Kidnapping Statistics, 2003-2016

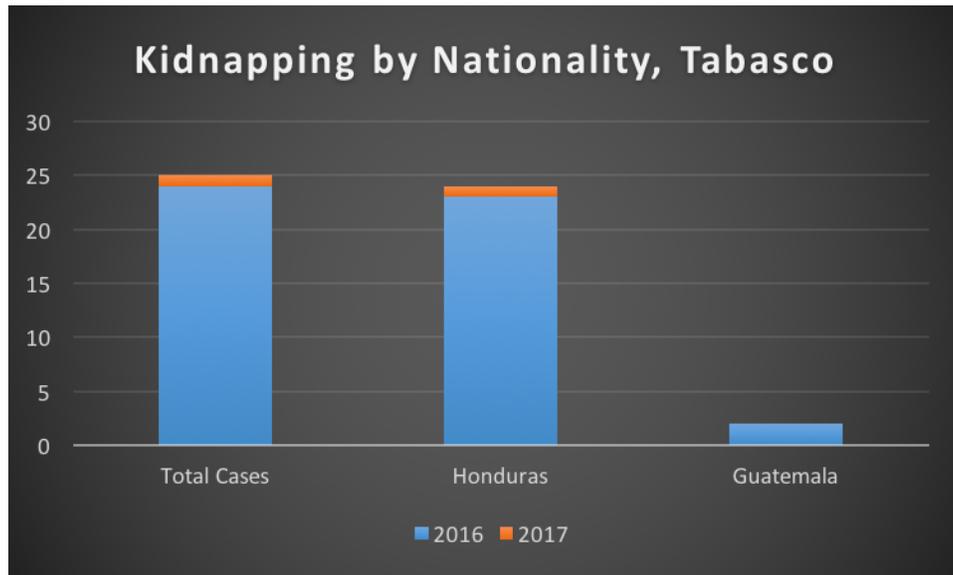


Source: Transparency request to State of Veracruz.

Tabasco

Although Tabasco reports kidnapping data from 2007 to 2017, its state level data only includes kidnappings for 2016 and 2017. Between these two years, Tabasco's statistics show a sharp increase in kidnapping of migrants from 1 to 24 documented cases. Hondurans were the primary target of these kidnappings, with only one case of a kidnapped Guatemalan citizen, as seen in Figure 7. The age breakdown of the victims reveals an even split between migrants between the ages of 21 and 30 and those who are between 31 and 40 years old.

Figure 7.
Tabasco Kidnapping Statistics, 2016-2017



Source: Transparency request to State of Tabasco.

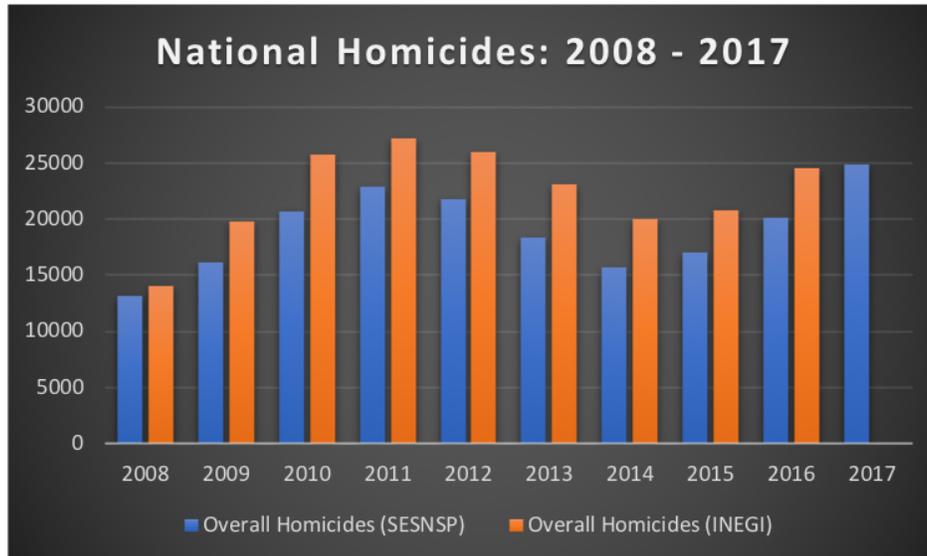
Homicides

No single dataset accurately captures the number of homicides committed against migrants in Mexico, which makes it difficult to estimate the true scope of the issue. This section, however, uses data from Mexican federal homicide statistics, reports by multilateral organizations such as the International Organization of Migration (IOM), transparency requests, and the CAMRD to attempt to understand homicide trends over the past decade. The following section is divided into three parts: 1) a general overview of high-level homicide trends in Mexico and specifically against migrants, 2) regional patterns in Mexico, and 3) case studies of Veracruz and Chiapas.

Homicide Trends in Mexico: Increasing since 2014

According to data from SESNSP and Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI), the country's overall homicide levels (for Mexican citizens and foreigners) increased during two periods over the past decade: 2008 to 2011, and 2014 to 2017. During the first period, the number of homicides increased by 74 percent. This was partly due to the escalation of hostilities between organized criminal groups and Mexican government forces, with migrants and civilians often caught in the crossfire.¹¹⁴ The more recent increase in overall homicides suggests a different phenomenon, in which the dissolution of larger cartels has led to fighting among smaller groups over territory, along with increased competition over poppy production in Guerrero.¹¹⁵

Figure 8.
Overall Homicides in Mexico from INEGI and SESNSP^{ix}



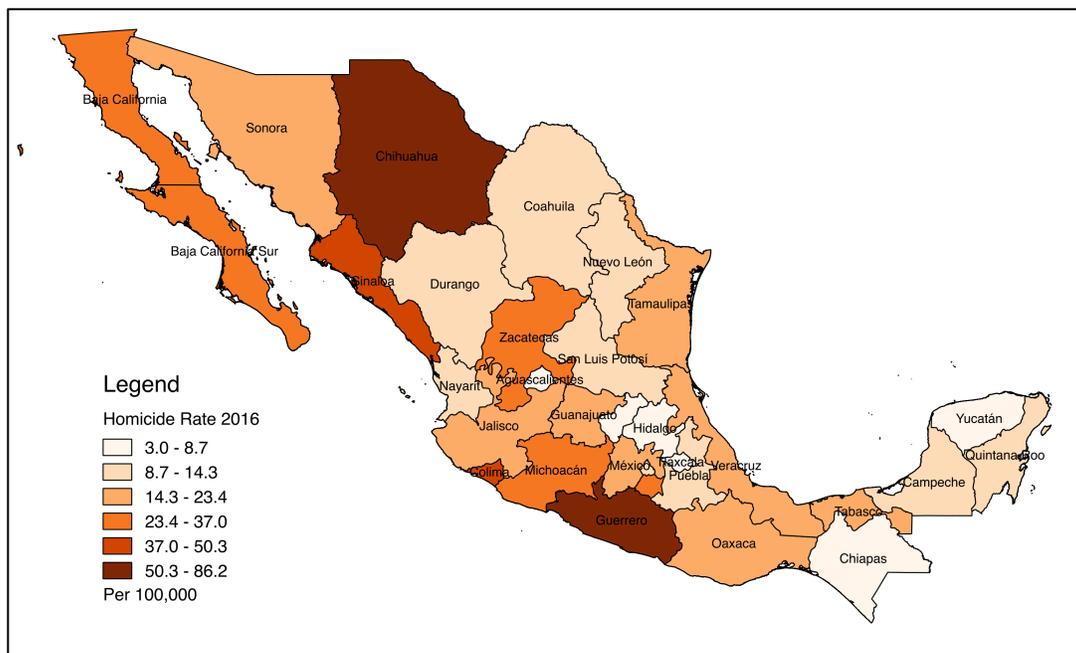
Sources: Secretaría de Gobernación y Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad (June 2017), “Cifras de homicidio doloso, secuestro, extorsión y robo de vehículos 1997-2017,” http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/docs/pdfs/cifras%20de%20homicidio%20doloso%20secuestro%20et%20c/HDSECEXTRV_092017.pdf; and INEGI (2017), “Mortalidad - Conjunto de datos: Defunciones por homicidios,” <http://www.inegi.org.mx/default.aspx>. (Note: INEGI has not released its 2017 homicide statistics as of this writing.)

In 2016, the five states with the highest homicide rates were Chihuahua, Guerrero, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Zacatecas, which are not along the traditional migrant routes. For states that have high levels of transit migration—such as Chiapas, Tabasco, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Tamaulipas—the average homicide rate was 17.6 per 100,000 residents, which is lower than the national average of 20.6 murders per 100,000.^{116,117} The map below depicts the homicide rate for every 100,000 people for 2016.

However, despite their lower homicide rates in comparison with other states, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Veracruz have all experienced increasing homicide rates from 2013 to 2016, rising from 12.1 persons per 100,000 to 16.1 persons per 100,000.¹¹⁸ Conversely, Tamaulipas and Coahuila have registered declining homicide rates, with a dramatic drop in Coahuila from 27.1 murders per 100,000 residents in 2013 to 8.7 murders per 100,000 in 2016. These trends seem to corroborate other state-level reports about homicide levels for migrants.

^{ix} To account for discrepancies in these figures, INEGI measures “Defunciones por Homicidios” while SESNSP features “Homicidios Dolosos.” The former is based on coroners’ reports that are provided to INEGI, while the latter represents investigative case files from law enforcement departments and state attorney generals.

Figure 9.
2016 Homicide Rate in Mexico



Source: INEGI (2017), "Mortalidad- Conjunto de datos: Defunciones por homicidios," <http://www.inegi.org.mx/default.aspx>.

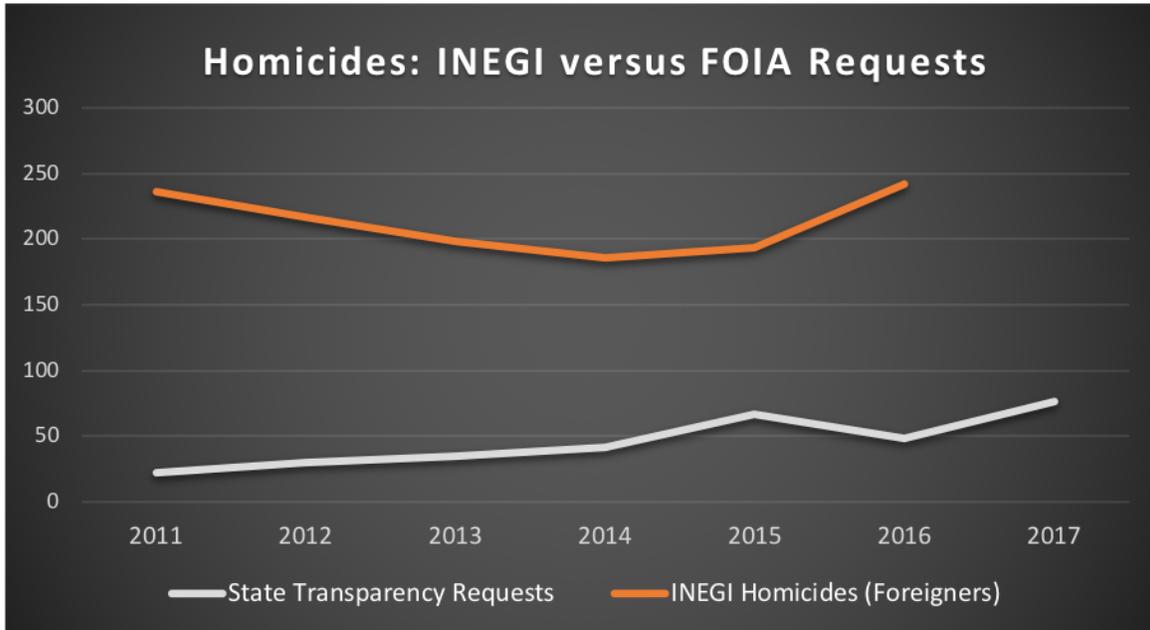
Reported Migrant Homicides are Increasing

Although Mexico does not collect homicide information specifically for migrants in transit, INEGI collects homicide data for foreign nationals. This data showed that from 2013 to 2016 the number of murdered foreigners increased by 20 percent.¹¹⁹ State-level data from Chiapas, Veracruz, Tabasco, Oaxaca, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas depicts an even more dramatic trend, with the number of reported homicides of foreigners doubling from 2011 through 2017.

In several circumstances, researchers were able to find more incidents than were reported in government statistics, suggesting that state-level data does not accurately reflect the actual level of homicides committed against foreigners and migrants in the state. For example, though Oaxaca reported no homicides in 2014, the researchers located a 2014 news article that indicated that four migrants had been killed while transiting through the state. For many other states, state-level statistics were not available, making it more difficult to assess the discrepancies between real conditions and government statistics.

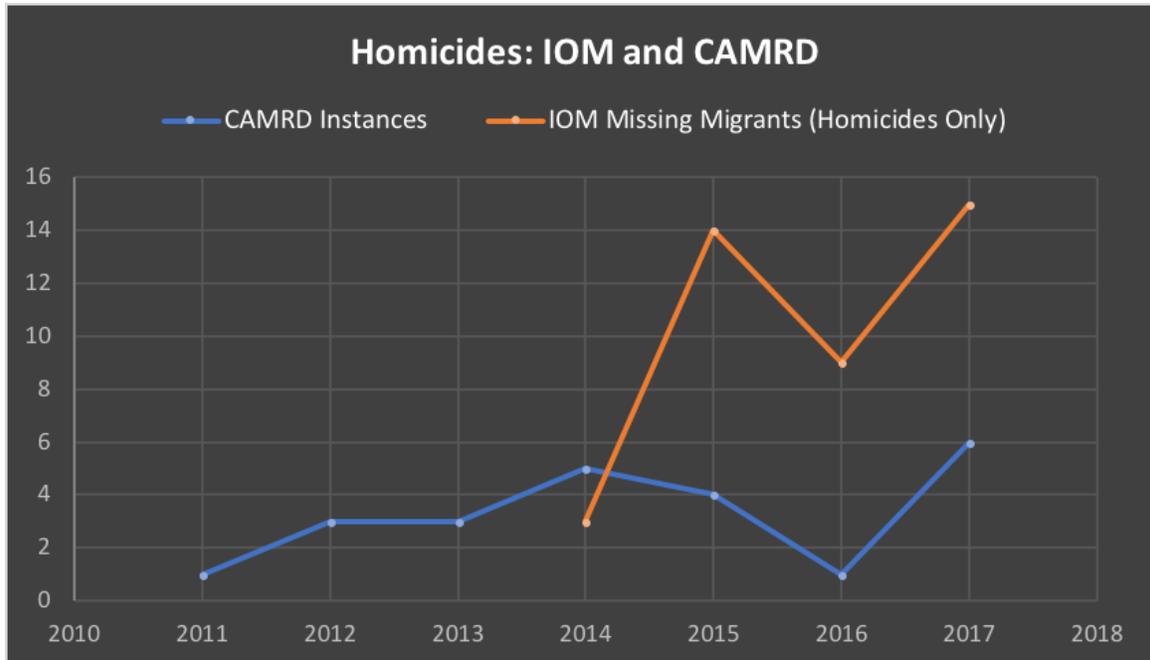
This trend of increasing homicide numbers is corroborated by the CAMRD and by data gathered by the IOM's Missing Migrants Project. These sources reveal that migrant homicides have steadily increased since 2016.¹²⁰

Figure 10.
NTCA and Foreigner Homicides



Sources: INEGI and Transparency Requests.

Figure 11.
Homicides: IOM Missing Migrants and Central American Migrant Risk Database



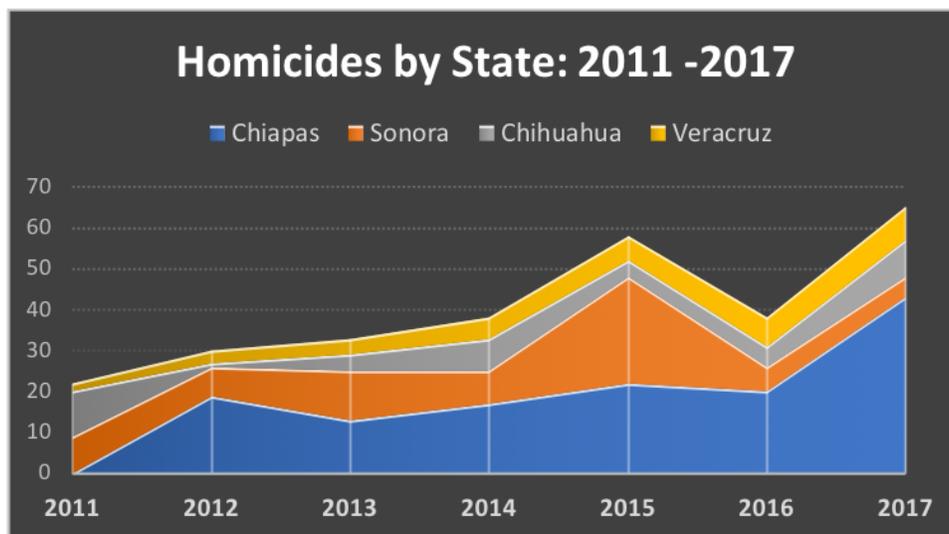
Sources: Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD) and IOM Missing Migrants Project.

Regional Trends in Homicides

Migrant homicides are concentrated in Mexico’s northern and southern border regions and along migrant routes, particularly in areas of heavy foot traffic or along train lines. Since the train routes move through Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Veracruz, these states emerge as the murder hotspots for migrants. Over the past few years, the homicide rate for both foreigners and migrants has increased in Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Chiapas, even as the national homicide rate remains comparatively low.

As indicated previously, many transparency requests did not delineate between foreigners and migrants. However, of the foreigners that Chiapas reported in its transparency request, approximately 91 percent come from the NTCA. Other states disaggregated data based on a country of origin variable, including Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Coahuila.

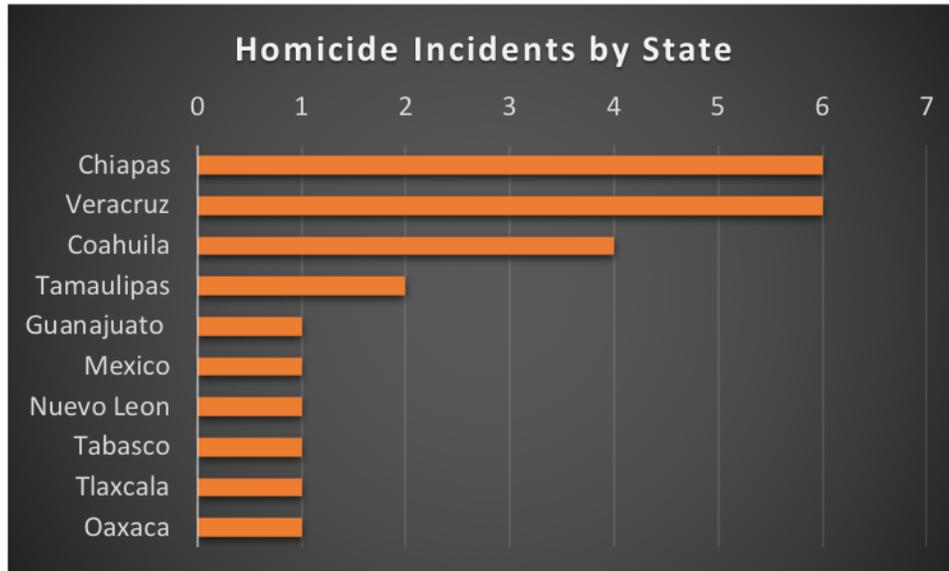
Figure 12.
Homicides of Foreigners/Migrants by State from Transparency Requests, 2011-2017



Source: Transparency requests to state governments.

The IOM Missing Migrants Project and the CAMRD confirm these regional trends. Of the 15 cases of murder listed in the IOM Missing Migrants Project in 2017, seven took place in Chiapas, Veracruz, and Tabasco, and three took place along the northern border areas, including Coahuila and south Texas.¹²¹ The CAMRD also identifies Chiapas, Veracruz, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas as hotspots for migrant homicides, and indicates that these murders tend to occur around the train routes in these states.

Figure 13.
Homicide Incidents by State, CAMRD



Source: Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD).

Case Study: Veracruz

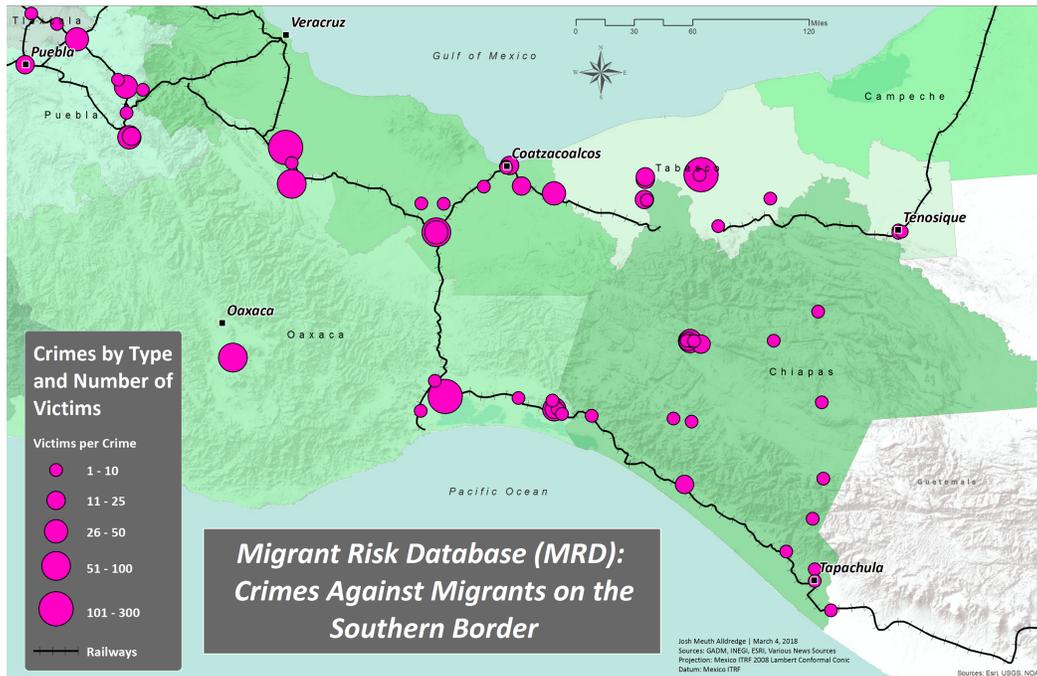
After a temporary decrease in homicides from 2012 to 2014, Veracruz’s homicide rate has spiked over the last two years. In 2016, Veracruz registered 1,258 homicides, making it the bloodiest year since 1996, with nearly 300 more homicides than the next-highest year (2012).¹²² However, when accounting for population, Veracruz has a lower overall homicide rate than Tamaulipas, Oaxaca, and Tabasco. This rate also holds true for migrant homicides, as seen in both the CAMRD and state transparency requests. The CAMRD features six instances of migrant homicides in Veracruz, and INEGI reported that the number of homicides of foreigners increased from three in 2012 to eight in 2017.

Migrant murders in Veracruz appear to be linked to organized criminal groups operating within the state. Most migrants pass through Veracruz on their way north and frequently encounter TCO activity. There are instances of migrants being murdered because they failed to pay the required criminal tax necessary to pass through TCO-controlled territory.¹²³ Most of the recorded homicides appeared to take place on a train or near train tracks.

Case Study: Chiapas

Overall, Chiapas’s homicide rate has been steadily decreasing since the late 1990s, dropping from 1,452 murders in 1999 to 468 in 2016.¹²⁴ This trend means that Chiapas now has a lower homicide rate than neighboring states such as Veracruz and Oaxaca. Yet other crimes such as assault are common across the state. From 2013 to 2017 homicides against foreigners, who are predominantly NTCA nationals, increased by 230 percent, from 13 to 43 homicides. (Though the statistics do not delineate what nationality these individuals were, individuals from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras comprised approximately 9 out of 10 foreigners reported to be victims of crimes in the state.) According to the CAMRD, homicides against migrants primarily took place in Arriaga, Chiapas, with at least half of the database’s recorded incidents occurring in this town.

Figure 14.
Crimes Against Migrants, Southern Mexico



Source: Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD).

Note: This data represents all crimes in this region, not just homicides. See Appendix 1: Data Gathering and Database Methodology for more information about how these crimes were entered and geocoded.

In Chiapas, criminal gangs are frequently the actors involved in murdering migrants. Both local bandits and transnational groups such as MS-13 and the 18th Street gang have killed migrants, often when migrants refuse to hand over their belongings or money to assailants during a robbery. In 2014, the local news outlet *20 Minutos* reported that members of a local armed group threw several migrants off the train to their deaths for not paying their \$100 tax.¹²⁵ Other cases in the CAMRD confirm this narrative as criminal organizations murder migrants riding the trains for refusing to pay the fee.

Disappearances

Unlike homicides, in which authorities find and count a body, some migrants simply disappear as they cross through Mexico. Because of the nature of the crime, it is difficult to quantify how many migrants have gone missing, especially if their families do not report them as missing or if the individual turns up as an unidentified body. While the IOM, CNDH, and the Movimiento Mesoamericano, among others, have tried to estimate the number of migrants who have disappeared when transiting through Mexico, the National Registry of Data for Lost and Disappeared Persons^x (*Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas*)

^x RNPED maintains a comprehensive dataset at both the federal and common levels. The federal level (*fuero federal*) has 1,142 instances of disappeared individuals, which includes nationality of the individual, date last seen, date of filed claim, and the municipality and state the person was last seen in. Locals submit their claims to the database, which keeps all records in a publicly available Excel database. Of those 1,142 documented cases, approximately 119 are cases of migrants from the NTCA, which are displayed in Figure 16. The Common Law Registry (*Fuero Común*) features a larger dataset of 34,269 instances as of April 14, 2018.

Extraviadas o Desaparecidas, RNPED) offers the most accurate snapshot of disappearances in Mexico. This dataset helps document trends of disappearances across Mexico and provides information on the city and state where the migrant went missing, which allows for regional trend analysis.

Total Reported State-Level Disappearances Increasing Since 2015

While total federally reported disappearances (of Mexicans and foreigners) in Mexico peaked in 2014 with a total of 257 reported cases, state-level cases have continued to rise since 2015—increasing from 3,283 new cases in that year to 4,931 new cases in 2017.¹²⁶ This overall trend does not appear to be correlated with disappearances of NTCA citizens, which had the highest number of disappearances in 2014. The registry data can be broken down by nationality and gender, with males making up 80 percent of disappeared persons from the NTCA (see Table 7 and Figure 15).

**Table 7.
Number of Missing or Disappeared Persons from the NTCA, 2012-2017**

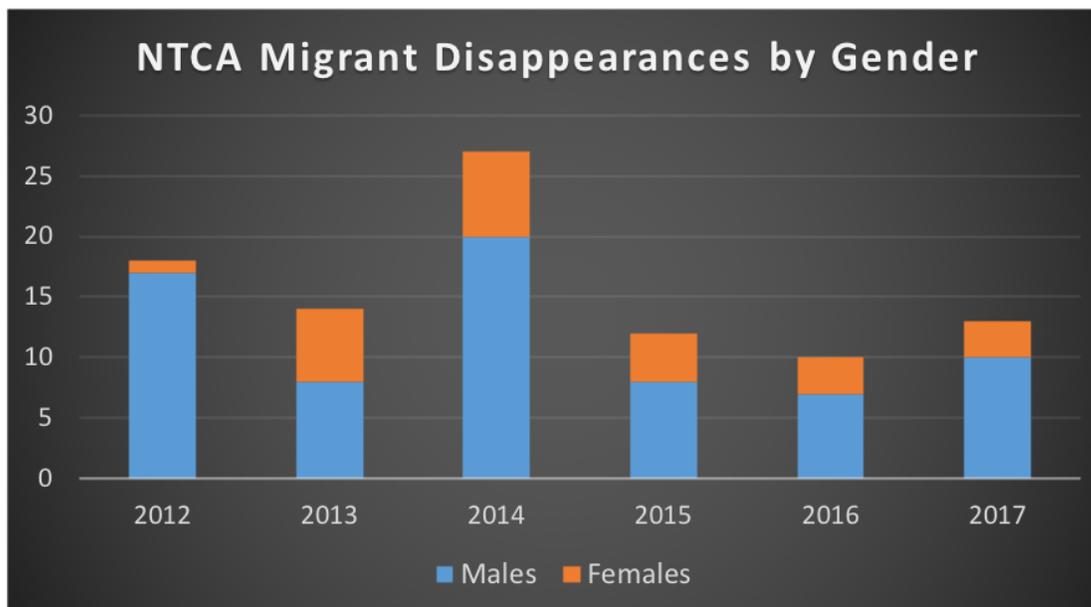
Year Last Seen	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	TOTAL
2012	0	4	3	7
2013	3	2	4	9
2014	0	19	5	24
2015	0	8	1	9
2016	0	4	5	9
2017	1	2	0	3
TOTAL	4	39	18	61

Source: RNPED.

Migrant Disappearance Hotspots Are Different from Total Disappearance Hotspots

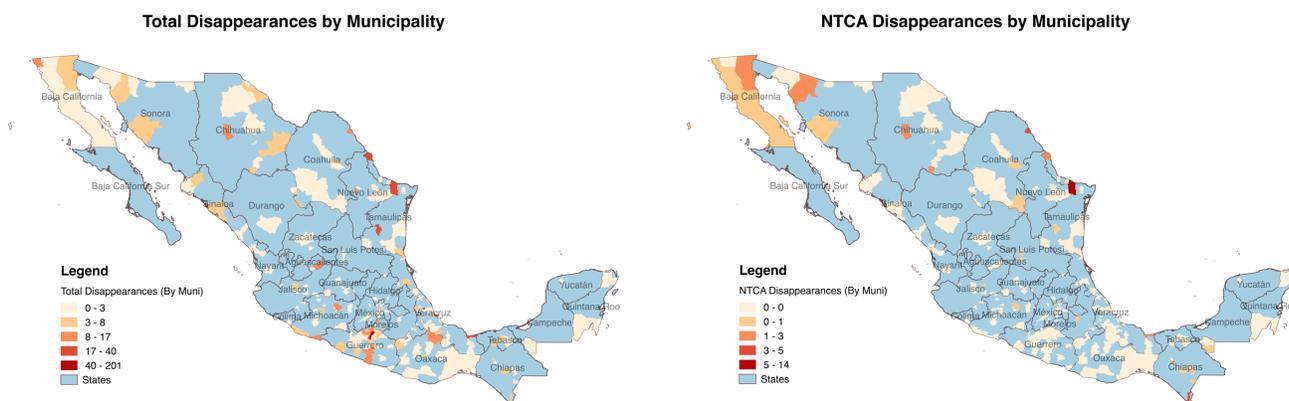
Mexico’s federal-level data on disappeared NTCA citizens reveals that the locations of these crimes are different from disappeared Mexican nationals. Municipalities in southern Chiapas, Baja California, and northern Sonora all appear to have higher instances of NTCA citizen disappearances in comparison to total disappearances. Other municipalities, such as Reynosa, Tamaulipas, and Piedras Negras, Coahuila, have similar rates of reported disappearances among both NTCA citizens and Mexican nationals.

Figure 15.
Migrant Disappearances by Gender



Source: Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, “Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas O Desaparecidas, RNPED,” gob.mx, accessed November 19, 2017, <http://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/registro-nacional-de-datos-de-personas-extraviadas-o-desaparecidas-rnped>.

Figure 16.
Total versus NTCA Disappearances by Mexican State, Federal Reporting

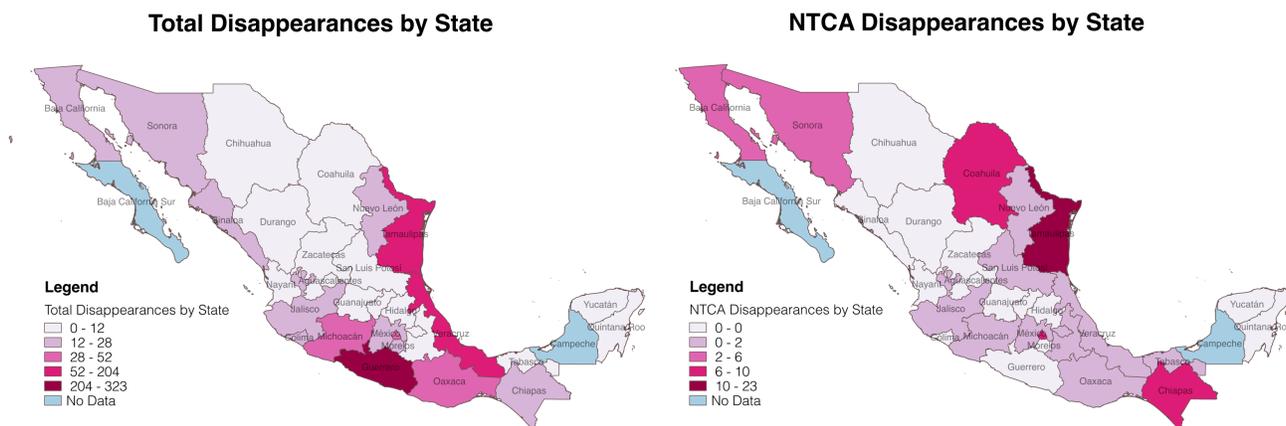


Source: RNPED.

On a state level, the difference in disappearances patterns among NTCA citizens and Mexican nationals is even more pronounced, as shown in Figure 17. These regional trends suggest that disappearances for NTCA citizens are particularly common in the states of Chiapas, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila. Despite states

such as Guerrero having extremely high levels of overall reported disappearances, Guerrero does not have a single reported disappearance of a NTCA citizen.

Figure 17.
Total versus NTCA Disappearances by Mexican State



Note: This data is at the federal level (*Fuero Federal*) for the map on the left but combines the state level and federal data for the map of NTCA nationals on the right. The total count includes 39 recorded disappearances in the *Fuero Común* and 119 instances in the *Fuero Federal*.

In addition to RNPED’s statistics, independent estimates of migrant disappearances from the CNDH, IOM, and the Reverend Alejandro Solalinde range from just over 100 disappeared migrants per year to 70,000 since 2006.^{127,128}

Disappearances: Tamaulipas

Northern and southern border states report higher levels of disappearances. Tamaulipas has more reported disappearances (of both Mexican nationals and foreigners) than any other state, with 5,989 reported disappearances that total 17 percent of all disappearances in Mexico.¹²⁹ (The State of Mexico has the second-highest number of disappearances with 3,834 and Jalisco has the third-highest with 3,060.) New cases of disappearances peaked in 2011 with 1,281 reported disappearances, compared to 422 reported disappearances in 2016. Twenty-four percent of these total incidents took place in Matamoros and 17 percent took place in Reynosa.¹³⁰ To put this in perspective, approximately 7 percent of Mexico’s 34,269 cases of disappearances took place in these two municipalities.¹³¹

For NTCA nationals, there have been 36 reports of disappearances in Tamaulipas alone, which is nearly triple the amount of the next state. Fifteen of the Tamaulipas disappearances were reported in Reynosa, followed by nine in Matamoros. A 2017 CNDH report confirmed the scale of disappearances in Tamaulipas and noted that the state’s Attorney General’s office was not cooperative in providing information regarding mass grave sites that could help investigators resolve pending disappearance cases.¹³² In 2016, the Caravan of Central American Mothers formally reported the cases of three disappeared migrants in Reynosa to Tamaulipas’s Attorney General.¹³³

Disappearances: Chiapas

Chiapas has the second-highest level of migrant disappearances, with 13 disappearances since 1992. Nine of these disappearances took place since 2010, with two reported in 2017.¹³⁴ In most Mexican states, disappeared NTCA citizens constitute a small percentage of total reported disappearances. However, Chiapas is a different story, with NTCA citizens making up 13 percent of total disappearances in its territory.¹³⁵ Although Chiapas represents a small fraction of Mexico's total reported disappearances, it represents a high-risk area for Central American migrants.

VI. Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations represent specific steps for improving Mexico's migratory policy. They do not represent a full overhaul of the policy, and without improvements on broader issues such as strengthening rule of law and tackling corruption, it will be difficult to achieve lasting change. However, these smaller steps are immediate ways that the Mexican government can improve protections for migrants and bring government agencies in line with their legal mandates.

The policy recommendations are divided into four sections: (1) institutional efficiency and accountability, (2) service improvement, (3) access to financial services for migrants in Mexico, and (4) long-term cooperation.

Institutional Efficiency and Accountability

Recommendation 1: Convert the INM's Internal Control Body into an Internal Affairs Unit.

Justification

Mexican and international human rights organizations have documented cases of INM agents abusing migrants in detention centers and during the deportation process. The INM's Internal Control Body should have the legal mandate to investigate criminal allegations against its agents and refer cases to the PGR for prosecution. Currently, SEGOB's internal regulations do not clearly specify the INM's Internal Control Body's functions, making it difficult to process charges and hold INM agents accountable. [Article 94 of the Interior Bylaws of SEGOB (*Reglamento Interior de SEGOB*) establishes the Internal Control Body, but it does not specify its capacities to investigate wrongdoing or refer misconduct to the PGR.] The INM needs to improve institutional transparency and ensure that there are consequences for officials who abuse migrants.

Implementation

The first step for converting the INM's existing Internal Control Body to an Internal Affairs Unit would be to amend SEGOB's internal regulation to include clear language regarding the Internal Affairs Unit's authority and responsibilities. Next, the Internal Control Body should process the existing charges against INM officials who have been dismissed. To ensure effectiveness, the Internal Affairs Unit should ask the INM Citizens' Council to perform internal monitoring of the Internal Control Body. Finally, the Mexican Congress should fund the newly-empowered Internal Affairs Unit to ensure its autonomy and independence.

Recommendation 2: Create an Open Data Repository of Crimes Against Migrants, which would be run by the Migratory Policy Unit in SEGOB in collaboration with the Executive Secretary of the National System of Public Security (*Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública*, SESNSP) and the PGR.

Justification

The Mexican government does not have a transparent or standardized system to monitor and document crimes against migrants. States do not report these crimes in a standardized format, making it difficult to disaggregate crime data, compare across states, or create a nationwide database. Open and

comprehensive data for crimes against migrants would allow the federal government to better build tailored and evidence-based policies.

Implementation

Using Plataforma Mexico, the Migratory Policy Unit in SEGOB should collaborate with the SESNSP and the PGR to develop a database that documents kidnappings, homicides, and disappearances of migrants. This database would be modeled after databases used by the INM and DIF to track the detention of child and teenage migrants. Government agencies and civil society organizations should use this data to identify problematic hotspots within Mexico, which would allow for better resource targeting to address and curb crimes against migrants.

Using the model implemented for the Warning System for Gender Violence against Women (*Alerta de Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres, AVGM*), the INM should also develop a standardized mechanism for publishing state-level crimes against migrants. This information should be updated on a monthly basis and be distributed among migrant routes and shelters in electronic and printed form. The INM should also issue a directive that mandates standardized reporting of crimes against migrants from each state on a monthly basis.

The UIDPM should use the information provided in the Open Data Repository to expand its work on investigating federal crimes committed against migrants. The Unit should also work with the INM to develop a Protection System for Victims and Witnesses. This mechanism would provide anonymity to victims and witnesses in specific high-risk cases.

Recommendation 3: Expand and shift the human and monetary resources of the Investigation Unit for Crimes Against Migrants (*Unidad de Investigación de Delitos para Personas Migrantes, UIDPM*) to states with the highest rates of federal crimes against migrants.

Justification

In 2015, the PGR created the UIDPM to investigate and prosecute federal crimes against migrants such as human trafficking, kidnappings by organized criminal groups, and disappearances. While this was a positive step, the UIDPM's small budget limits its ability to effectively investigate these crimes. So far, the unit has not been able to resolve any of its 110 pending cases. This report recommends increased funding and shifted resource allocation in order for the UIDPM to decrease impunity related to crimes against migrants and to increase migrants' access to justice.

Implementation

To better fulfill its mandate, UIDPM should receive more funding for personnel and operations. From March 2016 to April 2017, the UIDPM expanded its personnel from 5 to 39 employees.¹³⁶ However, UIDPM's 2018 proposed federal budget included only MXN\$1 million for operating costs and \$0 for personnel.^{137,138} Any additional hiring should be undertaken through strict vetting measures.

The PGR should concentrate its investigative staff in the states of Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Mexico City, and Chiapas. According to UIDPM's First Statistic Report (March 2016 - April 2017), these states have the highest incidents of federal crimes against migrants.¹³⁹ While the PGR should place teams in these four states, they should also strive to have a representative in other states with high rates of crimes against migrants, in order to coordinate with state-level authorities on crime investigations.

Service Improvement

Recommendation 1: Mexico should increase its capacity to process refugee status claims and screen migrants for legitimate international protection needs.

Justification

The Mexican government has the responsibility to process refugee status claims within its territory, as laid out in the 2010 Law of Refugees, the 2011 Law of Migration, and its ratified international agreements on refugee rights.

Implementation

Mexico should increase funding and staffing at its COMAR offices in order to reduce wait times and ensure that refugees with international protection needs have access to refugee status. Additionally, this report recommends expanding COMAR's office locations to encompass a wider geographical area, especially providing services in places where there may be high numbers of potential refugee status applicants. For example, COMAR should immediately open an office in Tenosique, Tabasco, and additional offices would be beneficial in Northern Mexico, potentially in Monterrey, Nuevo León, or Matamoros, Tamaulipas.

From 2015 to 2017, COMAR's allocated budget shrank each year, despite significant increases in refugee status applications.¹⁴⁰ In order to improve migratory and regularization procedures, COMAR's actual budget should be increased to at least its 2015 levels for the next two years, which would represent approximately a 32 percent increase. This would enable the agency to increase the number of personnel processing refugee status claims and to develop its infrastructure and legal faculties. COMAR should also increase its staffing by intervals that reflect the increase in refugee status applications, doubling its staff by 2020.

Recommendation 2: Expand the INM's Pilot Program for Alternatives to Detention in collaboration with COMAR and migrant shelters.

Justification

Irregular migrants transiting through Mexico are often detained in crowded INM stations that resemble correctional facilities.¹⁴¹ Civil society and multilateral organizations such as Insyde, Human Rights Watch, FM4, and the UNHCR have also reported that detained migrants do not always have access to legally mandated services, including temporary education, healthcare, and legal representation. A program for alternatives to detention would allow irregular migrants in high-risk situations—such as refugee status seekers, women, families, and unaccompanied minors—to have their migratory cases processed (either with INM or COMAR) while they reside outside of a detention center.

Implementation

The current Pilot Program of Alternative Childcare and Fostering, which grants alternatives to detention for unaccompanied migrant children, should be expanded to states along migration routes, such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Tamaulipas. The program should include more categories of migrants who are in high-risk situations, such as refugee status seekers, women, families, and unaccompanied minors. INM officials should determine in fewer than 36 hours—in compliance with the 2011 Law of Migration—if an apprehended migrant is a member of one of these high-risk groups and therefore qualifies for the pilot program.

The INM's Citizen Council could help select and evaluate potential migrant shelters to determine if these locations would be capable of providing basic services and lodging. Migrants staying in these shelters should have full access to all legally mandated services outlined in the 2011 Law of Migration. Qualifying shelters should have access to a small amount of public funds that could help defray the costs of providing lodging, food, access to healthcare, and access to education for minors. They should also enjoy freedom of movement until their migratory or refugee status processes are resolved.

Financial Services and Identification

Recommendation 1: The Mexican Ministry of Foreign Relations should work with NTCA consulates in Mexico to issue a Consular ID as a recognized and valid form of identification to access financial services, as well as with financial institutions within Mexico to recognize this ID.

Justification

Currently many migrants in transit from the NTCA countries do not have access to financial services in Mexico, especially money transfers, because they lack a valid form of identification.^{xi} Migrants who are able to have money wired to them in Mexico must rely on Mexican nationals or other NTCA migrants who possess a valid identification to withdraw small amounts of money for them as they transit through the country. However, this increases their vulnerability to be extorted by people who withdraw money on their behalf.^{xii}

Implementation

Mexican Consulates in the United States have successfully partnered with more than 400 financial institutions that recognize the Mexican Consular ID. The Mexican government and NTCA consulates should emulate this model for NTCA migrants.¹⁴² Requirements for NTCA nationals to obtain the Consular ID card would include providing proof of identity in their countries of origin, including a birth certificate or another identification form provided by their governments. NTCA consulates could also make visits to migrant shelters or other local institutions that work closely with migrants to register and provide them with a Consular ID.

NTCA consulates should provide the Consular ID free of charge to migrants in-transit and be given the same day the application is submitted, if approved. The card should also be issued without regard for immigration status and should be valid for at least one year from the date it is issued. The application should be submitted online or in person at an NTCA consulate.

Recommendation 2: The Mexican Secretary of Finance and Public Credit, Ministry of Foreign Relations, NTCA consulates, and financial institutions should work closely together to expand flexibility for NTCA migrants to access money transfers using a NTCA Consular ID.

^{xi} Chapter 2 of the Provisions for Article 95 of the General Law of Organizations and Auxiliary Activities of Credit states that the users of money transmitters must present an official form of identification to withdraw money transfers, which includes a passport for foreigners or a document issued by the National Migration Institute that proves his or her legal migratory status in Mexico.

^{xii} This issue was explained by a researcher at the migrant shelter FM4 Paso Libre, which offers money services free of charge to migrants in transit. According to the researcher, the majority of the migrants served at this shelter do not have a recognized form of identification. Some may bring with them a birth certificate or an identification card from their countries of origin. However, these are not valid in Mexico.

Implementation

Following the previous recommendation, the recognition of the Consular ID as a valid form of identification (under the Secretary of Finance's Provisions for Article 95 of the General Law of Organizations and Auxiliary Activities of Credit) will empower NTCA migrants to access money transfers in a safe and timely manner, and at a low cost. Access to money transfers will enable migrants to purchase provisions and to travel via less dangerous routes.

Recommendation 3: The Mexican government could launch a pilot program with municipalities along NTCA migrant routes to issue local identification cards that would enable access to financial services.

Implementation

Similar to the SEDEREC card offered in Mexico City, municipal governments could issue a local identification card to migrants. This pilot program could benefit migrants particularly in the municipalities of Tapachula, Tenosique, Guadalajara, Lechería, Torreón, and Monterrey. This card would facilitate access to money transfers and other basic services. To obtain the card, migrants would have to show proof of identity when submitting the application in person. The municipal government could opt to charge a fee for the identification card. The card should be issued on the same day and should be valid for at least six months.

Recommendation 4: Increase flexibility in the documentation process for obtaining either the Consular ID or local ID.

Implementation

If a migrant lacks any form of documentation that proves his or her identity, there should be a process for determining potential alternatives. Migrants fleeing violence, economic hardship, and/or other extreme circumstances may have lost or may have never obtained an identification document from their countries of origin. As a result, consulates or municipalities should take this into account when determining acceptable forms of identification that migrants may present in order to receive the consular or municipal identification card.

Long-Term Cooperation

Recommendation 1: AMEXCID should focus on the underlying economic causes of migration, including the lack of development in Mexico's southern border region.

Justification

Mexico should leverage its development agency, AMEXCID, to allocate more funding for economic development projects in northern Guatemala and southern Mexico and scale up its current NTCA programs. This would help address the root causes of migration, expand interventions in high-risk areas, and adopt a more comprehensive approach to migration than a strict security perspective.

Implementation

1. **Fund Programa Frontera Sur Interventions:** *Programa Frontera Sur* promised 187 economic development projects. These projects should be funded and expanded to include additional youth intervention and support programs in Guatemala.

2. **Partner with the United States:** Increase the U.S. Economic Support and Development Fund's (ESDF) investment in Mexico's southern border region to its peak funding level of US\$46.8 million in 2014, in order to implement additional development projects in Chiapas and Tabasco.¹⁴³
3. **Replicate AMEXCID's Core Youth Intervention Project:** Along with the NGO Save the Children, AMEXCID currently engages Guatemalan community leaders, schoolteachers and directors, and families to create a culture of peace and understanding in Guatemala.¹⁴⁴ The Southern Border Program should expand this model and also work in high-risk neighborhoods in El Salvador and Honduras.
4. **Expand Visas:** Mexico should increase the number of work permits for NTCA citizens.

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Appendix 1.

Data Gathering and Database Methodology

This report utilizes three forms of data that approximate the scale of kidnappings, homicides, and disappearances committed against migrants in Mexico. The first source includes publicly available data from international organizations, Mexican NGOs, migrant shelters, and government agencies. These include, but are not limited to, reports produced by RNPED, CNDH, the Movimiento Mesoamericano, REDODEM, and the IOM's Missing Migrants Project (see Appendix 2).

Second, the research team augmented publicly available data by filing transparency requests with each Mexican state. Each request was directed to each state's Procuraduría or Fiscalía (state prosecutor). The team asked for digital versions of the statistics on crimes committed against migrants in each state from 1990 to the present.^{xiii} If this information was not readily available for migrants, the request asked the states to provide the same statistics for crimes against foreigners. Of these requests, 18 states responded with data on crimes against foreigners. The quality and scope of the data varied substantially by state, but each of these requests allowed the research team to analyze crime patterns across Mexico.

Lastly, the research team produced the Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD) to supplement the other two sources. This database adds to publicly available information by collating and coding crimes committed against migrants as reported by local and national newspapers and media outlets in Mexico. By providing qualitative information regarding variables not often released with government statistics, the CAMRD provides more granular insights into the nature of crimes against migrants and can help for identifying strategies to improve migrants' conditions in Mexico. The maintenance of the database is an active, ongoing process. Nonetheless, the database provides an unprecedented in-depth and systematic overview of crimes committed against migrants in Mexico.

There were two steps to completing the migrant database: first, constructing a data entry spreadsheet to serve as the repository for migrant crimes, and second, identifying a process to search and record online articles that document crimes against migrants. By the end of this process, these two steps were complementary as the team updated variables in the repository based on new information and issues in the articles. See Appendix 3 for the complete methodology of building the CAMRD.

^{xiii} The original text of the request in Spanish was as follows: *"A quien corresponda al interior de la Procuraduría / Fiscalía del Estado, o en las Unidades Especializadas, solicito en versión electrónica, en datos abiertos y en caso de no existir en copia simple, la información estadística relacionada con las incidencias delictivas cometidas en contra de migrantes en el Estado, durante el periodo comprendido entre enero de 1990 y diciembre de 2017. Requiero la siguiente información desglosada: nacionalidad, edad, género, tipo de delito y el año cuando ocurrió dicho delito. En su caso, si el estatus migratorio de las víctimas no está disponible, se solicita la misma información estadística pero relacionada con los delitos cometidos en contra de extranjeros en el Estado."*

Appendix 2. Table of Data Sources

Source	Type of Crime	Years	Methodology	Limitations
RNPED	Disappearances	2014–2017	Criminal reports from civil society.	Mexico’s low rate of criminal reporting.
CNDH	Disappearances, Kidnappings, Homicides	Only 2016	Information requests to government agencies, interviews and complaints from civil society.	Limited research resources. Government under-reporting.
UIDPM	Kidnappings, Homicides	2016–2017	Based on past criminal investigations and criminal reports from civil society.	Mexico’s low rate of criminal reporting.
IOM: Missing Migrants	Homicides, Disappearances	2015–2017	Data from media reports. Estimates based on year-end government reports.	Government under-reporting. Media reports limited to specific cases.
Rev. Alejandro Solalinde	Disappearances, Kidnappings, Homicides	2006–2016	Unspecified	General estimate. Lack of precision.
Movimiento Mesoamericano	Disappearances, Kidnappings, Homicides	2006–2016	Unspecified	General estimate. Lack of precision.
REDODEM	Homicides, Kidnappings	2014–2017	Migrant shelter network that aggregates statistics on crimes committed against migrants and produces an annual report.	Relies exclusively on populations of vulnerable migrant who use shelters. Sample strategy rather than comprehensive database.
Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD)	Disappearances, Kidnappings, Homicides	2008–2018	Gathered through online searches of Mexican newspapers for crimes against migrants. Cases were manually entered into spreadsheet and coded under the crime along with perpetrator, number of victims and other information. (See Appendix 3 for more information.)	See Appendix 3 for limitations.

Appendix 3.

CAMRD Data Collection Methodology and Limitations

The Central American Migrant Risk Database (CAMRD) is composed entirely of crimes committed against migrants and features data points found in local and regional Mexican newspapers. There were two steps to completing the migrant database: first, constructing a data entry spreadsheet to serve as the repository for migrant crimes and second, identifying a process to search and record online articles that document crimes against migrants. By the end of this process, these two steps were complementary as the team updated variables in the repository based on new information and challenges from the articles. This appendix elaborates on the methodology of constructing the CAMRD, followed by an overview of the database's limitations.

Methodology

Phase 1: Building the Spreadsheet

The initial phase to build the database involved building a shared Google spreadsheet to act as a repository. This process was conducted during a two-hour brainstorming session.

1. **Variables Identification:** The team identified the variables for input as its first task. This initial list included the crime date, number of migrants, breakdown by NTCA country, latitude and longitude, a range of crimes that included kidnapping, disappearance, and homicide, and the potential perpetrators of that violence.
 - a. **Categorical Variables:** Crime types and perpetrators were assigned as binary variables to increase the ease of analysis. Based on the news report, a crime type or a specific perpetrator would be assigned either a 1 or a 0.
 - b. **Discrete Variables:** The numbers of migrants involved in the crime and the breakdown of nationality were considered discrete variables with the exact number of migrants listed.
2. **Emphasis on Border States in Mexico:** Given that the team focused on research of crimes committed against migrants, it decided to direct its attention toward the southern and northern border states of Mexico. This was based on the prior knowledge that crimes committed against migrants happen more frequently as migrants cross through Mexico's northern or southern border regions.

Phase 2: The Search and Entry Process

After the creation of the shared Google spreadsheet, the team determined which data would be entered and an optimal strategy for aggregating searchable newspaper sites. This process lasted approximately three weeks. Some of the searching and aggregation of potential articles employed online web scraping, although most of the data came from manual searching. The range of variables in the spreadsheet expanded during the search process, so a portion of the entry process involved updating older entries to fill in the newly identified variables.

1. **Aggregating Newspapers by State:** The team used <http://www.mexicoperiodicos.com> to identify a complete list of local newspapers by state. This website features hundreds of national and state-level newspapers that are available online.

2. **Identifying Searchable Newspapers:** Each team member was assigned responsibility for a number of states. That individual verified the full range of state-level newspapers that featured an online search feature. Each searchable newspaper was entered into the spreadsheet with the state and newspaper link.
3. **Search Terms and Terminology:** After the aggregation of searchable state-level newspapers, the team identified a list of terms and words that they would search. The team member searched with a combination of terms such as “migrante,” “secuestro,” “centroamericano,” “homicidio,” “asalto,” “plagio,” and others that were appropriate.
4. **Searching and Entering Articles:** After searching through each state-level newspaper, the team member entered each article that documented a specific instance of a crime committed against a migrant or group of migrants. Each entry included the date, number of victims, type of crime, descriptions of key perpetrator(s), and a georeferenced location of the crime. The date range included crimes since 2008.
5. **Cleaning and Duplicate Removal:** After each team member entered a total of 15-25 entries, they were responsible for verifying and updating their entries. Entries that appeared to be duplicates were flagged and separated into a separate tab of the spreadsheet to avoid double-counting crimes.

Limitations and Challenges

This database was built by systematically combing through and recording published events and news stories from digitally accessible state and local newspapers. Given these parameters, the limitations of this methodology include the following

- **Competing Definitions of Crimes Against Migrants:** Journalists throughout Mexico do not use a standard and agreed-upon set of terms when writing about crimes against migrants. In some cases, a crime is referred to as extortion, while another writer may refer to an incident with very similar circumstances as kidnapping. Similarly, a clear distinction between human smuggling and human trafficking is not always apparent. Throughout the data entry process, due to these differing interpretations, there was ongoing discussion among the team members about the definition of crimes against migrants. The need for using personal discretion likely led to a lack of consistency, and as a result, there are competing interpretations of specific crimes at work in the dataset. For example, a duplicate crime entry revealed that two team members had interpreted the perpetrator of the crime differently, one coding it as “Perp: Unspecified” and the other as “Perp: Local Bandit.”
- **Interpretation of “Central American” Migrants:** Like the discrepancies between specific crime definitions, a number of news reports featured stories about “Central American” migrants with no distinction of origin country or consistency of the term. The term was used to signify a number of different nationalities. The research targets migrants from the Northern Triangle, but “Central American” is a broad and wide-ranging catchall that often does not provide granular data on specific countries.

- **Lack of Detail About Perpetrators:** In most cases, the news stories that were surveyed did not contain full and complete attribution of the perpetrators of crimes against migrants. This lapse in reporting could be caused by a number of factors:
 - Migrants do not always know who victimized them.
 - In the event of open cases, law enforcement officers are often reticent to provide sensitive information that could impede or hamper investigations.
 - Local reporters are frequently hesitant to name perpetrators if said perpetrators are members of law enforcement, local gangs, or TCOs for fear of retribution or other consequences.

- **Unreported Crimes:** A significant portion of crimes against migrants continues to go unreported to both government officials and civil society. Due to this limitation, a dataset built upon published reports inherently has significant flaws in scope and depth.
 - Migrants often do not know to whom they should report crimes.
 - Migrants are not always informed of the benefits of reporting crimes that they witness or crimes committed against them.
 - Migrants fear that reporting crimes will ultimately end in their deportation.

- **Journalistic Discretion:** Local and national media sources throughout Mexico have discretion about which news stories to cover and to what extent they will be covered. Even if journalists had information about specific crimes against migrants, they are not obligated to report that information or publish a comprehensive account of crimes against migrants. This regional discretion likely signifies a gap in the collected data and the importance, or lack thereof, of migrant issues to the general public in Mexico. There is also a likelihood that border states, and other states that have significant migrant flows, are more likely to report on crimes against migrants in general.

- **Digital Accessibility:** This dataset does not include any printed or visual public information that was reported by means of radio, television, or local newspapers, which frequently are not digitally accessible.

- **Small Sample Size:** Due to the marginalization of the migrant community in Mexico, media outlets often do not cover criminal activity against migrants. The database contains 159 data points, and thus represent only a small sample of crimes that have received coverage in the news media. However, because news outlets provide a richer source of narrative information, the results of the CAMRD can assist researchers in better understanding newly emerging trends as patterns of criminal activity directed towards migrants change in response to policy and other factors. More data remains to be collected, as a comprehensive understanding of the types of victimization experienced by migrants is necessary for formulating concrete policies addressing attacks on migrants, even if this represents only a small sample of the overall trend.

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