

NATIONAL SITREP MEXICO

September 2024

Overview

The humanitarian crisis related to mixed migration movements in Mexico has steadily worsened over 2024, as changing policies and practices hinder safe and regular transit through the country and access to international protection for the most vulnerable. Continued arrivals, fueled by ongoing movements through the Darien and the rise of Nicaragua as a point of entry into the northward migration route, reflects the continued deterioration of conditions in Venezuela, Haiti, Ecuador and Peru, among others. The increasingly diverse migration flow illustrates the heightened level of control exercised by trafficking networks connecting countries as diverse as India, Senegal, China, and Guinea to Mexico.

While entry into Mexico has continued, exiting has become increasingly difficult, as measures introduced by the United States (U.S.) authorities have restricted meaningful access to the territory. As wait times for accessing the U.S. grow, those on the move in Mexico face increased targeting by criminal groups and corrupt actors, including for kidnappings, extortion and sexual and gender-based violence.

A significant number of people decide to stay in Mexico, posing multiple challenges to its already overstretched asylum system. In 2023, Mexico was among the top five countries worldwide with the highest numbers of new asylum claims. While the number of applicants remains high in 2024, with almost 50,000 individuals applying in the first six months of the year, this figure represents a decrease compared to the previous years. This decline is partly attributed to restrictive migration policies and prohibitive barriers to accessing the process.



Key Figures

141,000

Asylum seekers in 2023 (COMAR)

392,000

People internally displaced (IDMC)

712,000

People detained in 'events' between January and July 2024 (UPM)

Mexico continues to be one of the most dangerous places in the world. Eight of the ten most dangerous cities in the world are located in Mexico. Organized crime fuels violence and displacement, with more than 500 people from the state of Chiapas even forced to flee across the southern border into Guatemala, following an escalation in violence in July 2024.

The country is vulnerable to the impact of recurring natural disasters and climate change, a direct driver of displacement, with at least 950 people displaced following natural disasters in 2024. It also aggravates existing needs and risks for those on the move: in mid-2024, Mexico experienced a heat wave that broke temperature records in several cities, with fatal outcomes for several people on the move.

The crisis is exacerbated by the Government of Mexico's failure to acknowledge it, and the lack of a coordinated plan to address the needs of the population on the move. Ad hoc measures by immigration authorities, such as suspending the issuance of humanitarian visas and arbitrary access to transportation, are exacerbating the situation by encouraging unsafe and irregular movements. While the last quarter of 2024 will bring new political leadership in Mexico and will reveal what kind of change can be expected in the United States, **current forecasts suggest that these governmental changes are unlikely to interrupt the ongoing humanitarian crisis.**

Main Migration Routes (August 2024)



! Priority Needs

Community members, local organizations and Government authorities provide essential services and support to those on the move, including through a network of volunteer run shelters. However, urgent needs persist: in August, IRC mobile units interviewed over 150 people on the move (84 women and 66 men) in Chiapas, CDMX, Chihuahua, and Veracruz, to understand their needs and intentions. Nearly all cited access to food as their primary concern (64%), followed by shelter (55%) and safe transport (48%).

Despite the right to free public health services for all individuals within Mexico, access to healthcare remains a significant issue due to a lack of information, discrimination, and insufficient documentation. 21% interviewed by IRC reported an urgent need for medication.

MOBILE RESPONSE TEAMS

To address the immediate needs of the population on the move, IRC operates four mobile units along the northern and southern borders and in CDMX. The mobile teams provide Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), basic health care, water and connectivity. The teams also provide access to InfoDigna, a digital platform created to support people on the move, enabling them to make informed decisions, stay safe, access essential services, and understand their rights.

Access to documentation is an additional critical priority. Due to restrictive migration policies and backlogs in asylum applications, obtaining documents for legal stay in Mexico has become increasingly challenging. Illustratively, 58% of the population interviewed by IRC prioritized access to such documentation. The loss of identity papers further complicates access to services and safety. Notably, one in four people using the IRC's InfoDigna platform sought information on replacing or extending their identity papers.

Additionally, 76% of interviewees prioritize access to work including respondents in Veracruz and Chihuahua who intend to travel to the United States. This highlights the need for programs that extend beyond humanitarian aid, even in transit areas, due to the increased waiting times in Mexico. Illustratively, almost half of the people on the move interviewed by IOM in 2024 are actively looking for work.

Marginalized groups, including individuals with disabilities, people with diverse SOGIESC, those without regular status in Mexico, and non-Spanish speakers, face the greatest challenges in accessing their rights.



Protection risks

The affected population continues to face significant protection risks. Among 817 respondents in DRC's Protection Monitoring from January through August 2024 in Reynosa, Matamoros and Tapachula, **42% reported that a member of their household had experienced violence while in Mexico, with extortion, kidnapping, physical aggression and sexual and gender-based violence** being the most common forms reported. More than half of all of these incidents were reported to have taken place during transit through the country.

While criminal groups were the main perpetrator reported by respondents, nearly one third of incidents of violence reported to DRC were attributed to the authorities. This not only suggests significant patterns of corruption, but also evidences the unavailability of protection from violence for those on the move in Mexico. The exposure to violence is compounded by the unsafe and precarious conditions in which many people on the move are housed, with 29% of respondents reporting that they do not feel safe in their current shelter.

At the same time, coercion in multiple forms continues to threaten those on the move in Mexico, including through arbitrary detention and family separation. While litigation led to limitations on the length of immigration detention, the nature of those restrictions on liberty continues to be characterized by its automatic and discretionary nature, without any consideration of the need or proportionality of the detention, and without respect for due process. During the first 6 months of 2024, **Mexican authorities detained twice as many people on the move as they did during the same period last year.** A pattern of automatically detaining individuals at check-points in the northern part of the country and subsequently transferring them to detention facilities in the southern part of the country prior to release was reported by numerous respondents throughout the year. Although just under 7% of respondents confirmed that a member of their household had been held in a detention center, more than 20% reported facing check-points, of which nearly 90% reported the occurrence of abuses at these check-points. Some of those interviewed reported having been separated from family members as a result of these measures.

EVIDENCE-BASED PROTECTION RESPONSE

DRC teams in Mexico are experienced in implementing a robust, evidence-based and context-specific protection response informed by regular Protection Monitoring. On the southern border in Tapachula, DRC has focused efforts on providing legal assistance in obtaining documentation of legal stay in Mexico, including temporary stay for humanitarian reasons and permanent status through family-based regularization, and in supporting asylum-seekers with navigating the process with the COMAR. In parallel, DRC provides tailored in-kind assistance to mitigate specific protection risks while also distributing kits and providing cash and voucher assistance to targeted profiles. On the northeast border in Reynosa and Matamoros, DRC's efforts have grown to include specific measures to support survivors and those at heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including through targeted distribution of non-food items to reduce the harm of these forms of violence and through cash and voucher assistance. DRC's Tamaulipas team will also offer group and individual psychosocial support by the end of 2024. DRC has a growing network of local partner organizations in different locations within the country in order to expand the impact of its humanitarian intervention while also strengthening local capacities to provide a high-quality and principled response.

Similarly, numerous deliberate deprivations persist, including the denial of the right to seek asylum, both in Mexico and the U.S., for certain groups. Mexican asylum authorities continue regular procedures, but practices like triaging and postponing application receptions have delayed asylum-seekers from seeking protection. On the northern border, the multiple policies implemented by U.S. authorities continued to deliberately prevent Mexicans intending to apply for asylum from leaving the country where they fear persecution and people of multiple other nationalities from having a meaningful opportunity to seek effective protection. Asylum processing is now predominantly managed through the the CBP One app, an appointment system inaccessible to many in need of international protection.

The available statistics illustrate how the restrictions in both countries force individuals to take more dangerous routes: a record number of migrant deaths on the U.S.-Mexico border was reported in July, despite significantly lower levels of people entering the country.

PROMOTING PROTECTION

The IRC implements projects to support those at risk along Mexico's main migration routes. By offering case management for survivors of violence, gender-based violence prevention activities, child protection interventions and technical support to shelters, the organization works to prevent and respond to violence. Through the InfoDigna platform, tailored information is provided to aid safe decision-making, and to facilitate access support after rights violations. To promote safe access to effective asylum procedures, the IRC collaborates with the Mexican Commission for Refugees (COMAR) to improve accessibility and inclusivity. This partnership includes training, legal assistance, interpretation support, and providing information and services for successful integration. IRC directly supports a network of local actors providing protection services to the population on the move.



Response Priorities

Funding for the humanitarian response in Mexico remains scarce and the needs are growing. **The following priority actions are required to reduce the humanitarian crisis:**

- Psychosocial support, including through group and individual structured and unstructured formats, particularly for survivors of GBV, other types of violence, kidnapping and family separation
- Interventions tailored to the protection of children on the move, an estimated 30% of the population.
- Family separation case management services,
- Individual protection assistance for crisis response, including by covering the costs of safe shelter, transportation, and other in-kind items needed to mitigate risks or prevent occurrence
- Legal aid for individuals interested in obtaining asylum or legal stay in Mexico
- Mobile response teams and flexible assistance modalities, including CVA
- Continued monitoring to understand changing trends in needs and risks facing the population and to inform a tailored response
- Access to income generation sources and integration support for those intending to stay in Mexico.
- Support to civil society actors, including shelters and community kitchens, to continue and expand their capacity to support those on the move.

