



The question of migration in North and Central America

United Nations Human Rights Council



From a separated world to global peace: the need
for a new look on institutions



Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: the question of migration in North and Central America

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Introduction

Migration in North and Central America was in the news during the presidency of Donald Trump (2017-2021). Not a day went by on which he did not mention how problematic the migration of Mexicans would be for Americans. Now, the issue is not as overexposed, but not any less relevant. Whether it be for more economic prosperity, to flee from an unsafe environment or something else, there are many reasons for Mexicans and other Central Americans to migrate to the United States. In this research report we will give an overview of this issue.



Definition of Key Term

Refugee

A refugee is a person who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country. (UNHCR, UNHCR- What Is a Refugee?)

Immigrant

From the perspective of the country of arrival, a person who moves into a country other than that of their nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes their new country of usual residence. (UNDES)

Pushbacks

Pushbacks entail a variety of state measures aimed at forcing refugees and migrants out of their territory while obstructing access to applicable legal and procedural frameworks. In doing so, states circumvent safeguards governing international protection (including minors), detention or custody, expulsion, and the use of force. (ECCHR)



General Overview

Background of the conflict

The US-Mexico migration issue has a long and complex history, and has long been a source for conflict between the two countries. Friction has increased substantially in recent years, especially under the American Trump administration, which was in power from 2017 to 2021. One of the main issues driving migration to the United States via Mexico is poverty and lack of economic opportunities in Mexico and the rest of Central America. Many people, particularly from rural areas, have been driven to migrate to the United States in search of better economic prospects. Furthermore, the fact that the United States have the reputation of being the country of opportunity and freedom. This could also play a part in the choice of migration to the US.

Another major issue driving migration from Mexico to the United States is violence and insecurity in Mexico. In recent years, Mexico has been plagued by high levels of violence and crime, particularly in the form of drug-related violence. Many Mexicans have been driven to migrate to the United States to escape this violence and insecurity.

The United States government has taken a number of measures to try to address the issue of migration from Mexico, including building a border wall, increasing border patrols and immigration enforcement, and implementing policies such as "zero tolerance" and "remain in Mexico". These policies have been criticized as inhumane by various parties, and have additionally led to a growing number of pushbacks by US authorities. This harsh way of acting has caused international criticism on the USA, who still claim to be the figurehead of western democracy.

US conflict management

Currently, the situation at the US-Mexico border continues to be a major issue, with many migrants, including children and families, facing dangerous conditions and being held in overcrowded and unsanitary detention centres. The Migration Protection Protocols (MPP), commonly known as "Remain in Mexico" policy, has forced thousands of asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for months or even years for their hearings in the US, putting them in dangerous situations and at risk of violence, kidnapping, and human trafficking.

Impact on American demography

The population of the United States grew by 0,38% between July 2021 and July 2022, compared to 0,16% in the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The major contributor to the nation's population growth was an increase in net immigration from abroad, in sharp contrast with the previous year's very low immigration level. Net immigration from abroad rose in each state. The population increase came mostly from immigration and not so much from births, as the population of the United States is aging.

Immigrants made up 14% of the population of the United States in 2015 and it is projected that they will make up 18% of the population in 2065. Immigrants and their children will make up 36% of the US population in 2065. In 2015 it was 26%. The arrival of new immigrants and



the births of their children and grandchildren account for 55% of the US population increase from 193 million in 1965 to 324 million today.

The US population at this moment is 62% white, 18% Hispanic, 6% Asian and the rest is other. Without immigration since 1965, the population would have comprised of more than half less Hispanics and Asians. It is safe to say that immigration has a big impact on American demography and will continue to do so in the following years.



Major Parties Involved

United States of America

The USA is the biggest country of the western world. It is also the world's leading economy. For long, the USA has been implementing strict immigration laws, with the classic example of the plan for the build of a Mexican border wall, which was executed by the Trump administration.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the main governmental organisation responsible for managing and enforcing immigration policies in the US. (DHS)

Mexico

Mexico, officially The United Mexican States, is the only central-American country bordering the United States, and therefore the country in the region most affected by the issue.

El Salvador, Guatemala and other countries of origin of migrants

Most of the migrants travelling to the US originate from central American countries, with the top three countries consisting of El Salvador, Mexico and Guatemala, followed by Honduras in fourth place. The number one country of origin of immigrants outside Central and South America is the People's republic of China. (Bandyopadhyay)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is an international organisation that is involved in providing protection and assistance to refugees and migrants. It is also the author of the 1951 international convention on the status of refugees, signed by 149 countries. (UNHCR, *The 1951 Refugee Commission*)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is another international organisation that is involved in addressing migration issues, including providing assistance to migrants and working with governments to develop migration policies.



Timeline of Events

- 1994 The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is implemented, leading to increased economic integration between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The agreement leads to an influx of Mexican migrants seeking work in the United States.
- 2006 The US Congress passes a bill to build a fence along the US-Mexico border to deter illegal immigration.
- 2010 Arizona passes SB 1070, a controversial law that requires law enforcement officials to check the immigration status of people they suspect are in the country illegally. Several other states, including Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, pass similar laws.
- 2014 A surge of unaccompanied children and families from Central America, many fleeing violence and poverty in their home countries, cross the US-Mexico border. This leads to a humanitarian crisis and increased political pressure on the US government to address the issue.(Restrepo and Garcia)
- 2016 The US presidential election takes place, with immigration being a key issue. Donald Trump runs on a platform of hard-line immigration policies, including building a wall along the US-Mexico border and ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.(NILC)
- 2017 The Trump administration implements a "zero tolerance" policy at the US-Mexico border, leading to the separation of thousands of families. The Trump administration declares a national emergency to secure funding for a border wall. The COVID-19 pandemic leads to a decrease in the number of migrants crossing the US-Mexico border, but the issue of immigration continues to be a contentious issue in the US. The newly installed Biden administration announces a more humane approach to immigration and starts to work on immigration reform.



Previous attempts to solve the issue

The US-Mexico border wall

The big wall between the United States and Mexico has been discussed extensively, mostly by former president of the United States, Donald Trump. This wall would be placed there to make it even more complex for non-US citizens to cross the US-Mexico border. The so called “wall” is in various states at this moment. In some places, it is unfinished and can be walked past. In others, there is strict border control. There have been plans to finish the wall, but to this day, there are still many different walls, so this attempt has yet to be proven completely successful (CBS News).



Possible solutions

Providing aid to countries of origin

By providing economic aid to the countries of origin of most migrants, authorities of more developed countries like the US are able to support the development of developing central-American countries. Doing so decreases motivation to emigrate and stimulates economic growth in the country of origin, which can subsequently lead to accelerated development of this country, further decreasing motivation for emigration.

Diplomatic efforts

This issue can also be viewed from a diplomatic point of view. By exercising multilateral diplomatic efforts the two countries dealing with e- and immigration can try to find, for example, ways to deal with migration flows or make agreements on maximum numbers of migrants. This is not something that solves the issue as a whole. Still, it can be very useful to systematically deal with the flows of asylum seekers.



Useful documents

Convention and protocol relating the status of refugees

UNHCR - Convention and protocol relating the status of refugees (UNHCR, Convention and Protocol Relating the Status of Refugees) <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>



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