

Immobile and Vulnerable: Migrants at Mexico's Southern Border at the Outset of Covid-19

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INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is changing the dynamics of human mobility.¹ Indeed, all over the world human mobility has been disrupted. One such disruption is related to the arrival in Mexico of unauthorized migrants, asylum seekers, and others (e.g., deportees from the U.S. to Mexico) who find themselves stranded along their journey. Migrants from various nations heading to the U.S. through Mexican territory² are facing increased difficulties in reaching their destination, whether they are trying to make it across the border, to get back home, or to seek regularized migration status in their current location. Migrants who recently arrived in Mexico are experiencing increased deprivation, including food scarcity, homelessness, poor sanitation, and disease, and they are unable to find work because of the economic collapse caused by the pandemic.

In a fluid context where circumstances change daily, this paper examines the grim conditions faced by irregular migrants stranded in Mexico due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with attention to the area around the city of Tapachula, Chiapas, 55 miles north of the Mexico-Guatemala border.³ Tapachula is a good case study for the plight of stranded transmigrants, as it is often the first stop for many who journey north through Central America and Mexico toward the U.S., or south on their return home. As a case study, Tapachula shows all the effects

of the pandemic on human mobility; it can also help us understand the response in the migrants' countries of origin, and the Mexican government's response to the migrants' presence and predicament. The paper concludes with policy recommendations on ways the governments of the United States, Mexico, and Central American countries can address the plight of stranded migrants, who have fewer and fewer places to turn for help.

COVID-19: TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, BORDER CLOSURES, AND DEPORTATIONS

As the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded, travelers and migrants around the world found themselves stranded and unable to complete their journeys. This happened because almost as soon as the viral outbreak set off alarms around the world, many governments announced border closures, imposed travel restrictions, banned arrivals from some countries or all foreign nationals, and increased screening for anyone entering or exiting.

The United States

Starting in March 2020, the U.S. government introduced changes to its immigration and asylum policies, announcing that it would "expeditiously return aliens who cross between ports of entry or are otherwise not allowed to enter the country, as the facilities

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in which these aliens would normally be held cannot support quarantine for the time needed to assess potential cases.”⁴ Furthermore, under the assumption that migrants, in particular new arrivals at the U.S.–Mexico border, posed a health risk to the country, immigration authorities imposed stricter provisions for entry into the U.S.⁵ These policies, guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s directive issued on March 20, 2020, under the authority of an obscure provision of the 1944 Public Health Service Act, authorized the surgeon general to suspend the “introduction of persons or property” into the U.S. on public health grounds.⁶ The order also raised concerns about the presence of Covid-19 at asylum camps and shelters along the border, and questioned Mexico’s slow response (travel restrictions, public health measures) to the threat of the disease.⁷ By May 2020, the U.S. had banned nonessential travel through the country’s land borders with Mexico and Canada.⁸

Not everyone agreed with this approach. Some public health experts responded by urging the secretary of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Alex Azar, and the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Robert R. Redfield, to “withdraw—not extend or expand indefinitely—this policy and instead direct U.S. officials to use rational, evidence-based public health measures to safeguard both the health of the public and the lives of adults, families, and unaccompanied children seeking asylum and other protection.”⁹

The Trump administration, however, moved ahead with restrictions on cross-border mobility; paradoxically, it simultaneously pushed to reopen the country’s economy. The administration continued using the pandemic to deny migrants access to courts and to expedite the deportation of migrants, including unaccompanied children. Deportations thus continued, with nearly 21,000 expulsions carried out in March and April 2020 alone.¹⁰ Meanwhile, asylum seekers were left waiting indefinitely at camps and shelters along the border for an immigration court hearing, becoming more vulnerable to the virus in the crowded and squalid living conditions.¹¹

The Trump administration’s coronavirus-related migration restrictions—among the most stringent ever implemented—deny an equitable, just, and humane approach to immigration and, as a result, endanger the well-being and safety of vulnerable populations, including unaccompanied children. Delays in court hearings for asylum seekers waiting in Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) grew.¹² These U.S. protocols, which went into effect without Mexico’s approval in January 2019, require asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while they await an asylum hearing in the United States.

Guatemala

On March 20, 2020, Mexico’s government agreed to receive Central Americans deported from the U.S. and to send them south through Mexico. However, this raised issues at the Guatemala border: Mexico bussed the migrants to Tabasco and Chiapas, but Guatemala had closed its border. The migrants were barred from moving through and were stranded in various cities in southern Mexico. Guatemala’s government went as far as blocking flights carrying deportees from the U.S. “as a precautionary measure.”¹³

Mexico

In spite of Mexico’s policy of open borders, it made no difference to migrants facing closed borders in the U.S. and Guatemala. They still could not move either way. Moreover, although Mexican and U.S. policies appeared at odds on the issue of transmigrants, in practice the differences were only minor. For example, in April 2020, a judge in Mexico ruled in favor of protections for migrants, including health care for detainees, and mandated residence permits for those especially vulnerable to the disease—such as migrants over the age of 60 and those with a disability, chronic illness, or conditions that place them at higher risk of contracting Covid-19.¹⁴ Instead of complying with the judge’s order, Mexico simply freed most unauthorized migrants in detention, leaving them unprotected and on their own. Thus, Mexico’s official discourse is less harsh than

that of the U.S., but its policies are effectively in line with the U.S. government.

Interestingly, although Mexico's federal government chose not to close its borders, some communities did implement local lockdown measures. Fearing the possibility of infection from the outside, these communities put up checkpoints preventing the entry of unauthorized migrants. By early April 2020, a border resident reported to authorities that a new clandestine border crossing on the Suchiate River, between Guatemala and Mexico, had opened; the nearby port of entry at Tecun Umán–Ciudad Hidalgo and previously established unauthorized crossing points had been blocked off by locals.¹⁵ Foreseeably, smugglers simply changed their routes as part of the shifting dynamics of migration in the context of the pandemic.¹⁶

Another issue stemming from the Covid-19 emergency came from riots involving unauthorized migrants held in Mexico's migration detention centers. Migrants argued that crowded and unsanitary conditions in detention facilities put them at greater risk of contagion, and demanded immediate release.¹⁷ Protests were reported in places such as Tenosique, Tabasco, where one man died due to a fire in the facility, and Tapachula, where internees demanded to be released.¹⁸ Finally, due to pressure from the National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), and other organizations to free and send migrants to their home countries, the government complied.¹⁹ Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM, using its acronym in Spanish) said that by late April, it had freed and deported from its holding facilities 3,653 migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.²⁰

Asylum seekers are another example of a migrant population left in limbo at Mexico's southern border. According to the head of the UNHCR's field office in Tapachula, the number of asylum applicants had grown steadily until the coronavirus outbreak.²¹ In March, Mexico's refugee agency, the Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR), announced

that it would temporarily halt the processing of asylum requests to stop the spread of the coronavirus.²² Migrants with pending hearings at INM also faced difficulties, with multiple reports of the INM turning people away without a hearing. For example, a Cuban woman said that on April 14 she approached INM's office and noticed that people who showed up without an appointment were being turned away instead of being given a future notice to appear. She also complained about lack of information by INM's staff. This woman, who had spent five months in Mexico waiting for resolution on case, said she had not received updates on her claim and did not know what caused the delay.²³ Like many others, her life was upended partly due to a sluggish bureaucracy, and was made worse by the government stalemate caused by the pandemic.

In sum, Mexico's "open" border was effectively cancelled out by the United States' and Guatemala's closed borders. Migrants were stuck and unable to move north or south. They were also unable to pursue their cases for legalized status, even as a UNHCR representative interviewed for this brief said that closing borders should not mean denying or limiting the right of petitioners to file for protection.²⁴ This comment is in line with the plea made by the United Nations for continued assistance to migrants and asylum seekers around the world despite the pandemic.²⁵

The Rest of Northern Central America

The pandemic also prompted other Central American governments to close their borders, worsening conditions for migrants. On March 11, El Salvador shut its borders, barring entry for all foreigners except accredited diplomats and legal permanent residents.²⁶ Five days later, Honduras followed suit.²⁷ This further expanded the immobilization of migrants, a situation that remains to this day. Stranded migrants cannot go home, and those wishing to migrate cannot leave. In desperation, many others have sought legal status in their current location, but the legal system is not able to process them, either.

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Finally—and perhaps in a result desired by the government—the closed borders hindered the formation of a caravan due to depart from Honduras on March 9. According to media reports, the caravan disbanded the following day due to the fear of contagion among the migrants.²⁸

Impact on Migrant Services

Because of the pandemic, social services—mainly provided by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—that under normal circumstances would be available to migrants along the way have diminished or ceased. Many church-sponsored and private shelters that cater to the needs of in-transit migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico closed their doors or stopped receiving immigrants deported from the U.S. or Mexico.²⁹ Thus, migrants found themselves stuck in border areas and beyond, but largely left to fend for themselves. These conditions are now a widespread problem: restrictive immigration policies and closed borders are leaving migrants in limbo, with limited access to health and other basic services and rights that were once in place.³⁰

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MIGRANTS: CONDITIONS IN TAPACHULA

As this paper demonstrates, the pandemic has severely altered the life of migrants—those wishing to stay in Mexico, those in transit to the U.S., those deported to and through Mexico, and those with a pending asylum claim. Nowhere were the social and economic impacts on migrants more evident than in Tapachula, Chiapas, near the Guatemalan border.

The pandemic-related actions of authorities in Tapachula have compounded the economic hardships for migrants. For instance, on March 30 the mayor of Tapachula decided to close public parks—where migrants had been able to interact among themselves—in an effort to disperse large crowds.³¹ Furthermore, INM personnel, National Guard members, police officers, and Public Health Department staff carried

out a joint operation to remove migrants from downtown Tapachula. Again, the idea was to prevent gatherings in large numbers.³² But the result was that spaces where migrants could get moral support from each other, exchange information, etc., were now off limits.

The harsh effects of such actions could be seen in the example of a Honduran woman who left her country five months prior and arrived in Tapachula with her children. She sold masks in the streets to feed her children and paid for the room where her family slept (they were not allowed to be there during the day). Her situation worsened after local government measures were implemented. She explained that she could not go back to Honduras, because there is no access to Guatemala and in her country a strict curfew is in place.³³ She could not make a living in Tapachula, nor could she return home. Her case is one of thousands.

Adding to the migrants' financial pressures is the pandemic's devastating impact on remittances, a vital economic safety net for people on the move. Due to rising unemployment in the U.S., money sent to migrants from relatives elsewhere is running low. In this sense, another lifeline for migrants stuck in place is threatened.

Socially, migrants are stigmatized as a threat. Migrants roaming through Tapachula are a so-called “hanging” population that causes uneasiness among authorities and residents. The local media has contributed to this feeling and encouraged anti-migrant sentiments by portraying migrants as carriers of the virus, particularly those who have been deported or been in detention. Often, their presence generates tension.³⁴ The headline of an article published in the daily *El Orbe* read “Migrants Who Wander in Downtown Tapachula, a Latent Menace to the Spread of Covid-19.”³⁵ The social stigma of migrants has fed into their portrayal as unsafe and possibly diseased. Thus, they have become an easy target for xenophobia, ostracism, and racism.

Governments across the region—the U.S., Mexico, and Northern Central America—have implemented a series of measures in

response to the pandemic. These actions were presumably designed to stop the spread of the disease. However, some of them—closing borders, suspending asylum processing, detaining or releasing migrants, preventing social and economic activities—have had a brutal effect on migrants. This population, already living under precarious conditions, is now prevented from continuing its journey, making a living, or gaining social acceptance. They are in limbo, with no end in sight.

THE RESPONSE: GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND MIGRANT MOBILITY

To assess the response to the migration crisis outlined above, we administered a short questionnaire to stakeholders working with migrant populations in Tapachula. (See endnote 3 for the names of the organizations queried.) The survey comprised three questions: What is your organization's assessment of the migration issue today? Under existing conditions, what has been your organization's response? What medium-term scenarios are foreseen for migration trends and your work?

Respondents agreed that the number of migrants arriving in Mexico, including asylum applicants, declined at the outset of the pandemic. The key question was how long the trend would last. At least one representative from an NGO speculated that mobility was likely to remain restricted for quite some time in some Central American countries—meaning that people would not be able to migrate as easily as in the past.³⁶ Others predicted the opposite: as even harsher economic conditions developed in their home countries, people may have no choice but to attempt to migrate as soon as possible. Some respondents stated that stricter policing and containment regulations in Mexico and the U.S. will likely continue to hinder unauthorized migration and access to asylum.³⁷ If this scenario comes to pass, many migrants could opt to stay in Mexico. All respondents

from international organizations and NGOs concurred that xenophobia, discrimination, and stigmatization were on the rise. UN agencies with offices in Tapachula have adopted several measures to support the work of NGOs and government agencies, but have primarily focused on preventing the spread of the virus.³⁸

All respondents agreed that migrants are among the most at-risk groups within the general population. Precarious living conditions, an irregular status, and limited access to health services make them more susceptible to infection.³⁹ A representative from a local NGO who works with the LGBTQIA+ community noted that in addition to the inability to access health care and social services, this group also faces barriers such as homophobia and transphobia.⁴⁰

The response from government agencies was limited. From the few questionnaires completed, it is evident that action from government agencies is sporadic, lacks clear purpose, and does not demonstrate a broader plan to deal with the crisis. One example: health personnel occasionally visit migrant shelters, hotels, and motels to check for symptoms of infection—as prompted by a state-level health office and the Human Rights State Commission in Chiapas—but such check-ins are hardly systematic.⁴¹

Respondents also said that lockdowns and other measures intended to slow transmission of the virus have limited the ability of international organizations and civil society organizations to deliver aid to migrants. Thus, most have shifted their approach from face-to-face exchanges to remote interactions to, for instance, provide information and guidance via telephone conferences.⁴² However, government agencies approached for this paper continue to provide services as usual, such as a center for girls, boys and young migrants that offers meals, social services, and mental health support during normal business hours. Many of these agencies have implemented safety measures, including social distancing, sanitizing, and avoiding large groups in closed spaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All Parties

Migrant populations require programs designed to reduce their vulnerability, be it social (i.e., access to livable housing) or economic (i.e., opportunities to make a living). An effective approach would be for government agencies to create joint platforms for coordinated efforts among different stakeholders. Inter-governmental teamwork is urgently needed due to the massive spread of the virus and the disparate challenges that must be addressed. A distant relationship between the U.S. and Mexico⁴³ and a lack of cooperation among Central American nations and their North American neighbors can only translate into negative outcomes in the long run as conditions worsen, and people are forced to migrate. Governments and NGOs should learn from the current situation and be better prepared to handle and aid an influx of migrants in the event of a second or third wave of the virus.

Central American Governments

Border closures should be flexible to allow international agencies to help address difficult conditions for migrants. Measures should be in place that permit the re-entry of migrants to their country of citizenship, while also protecting their human rights and health.

Governments of Mexico and the United States

Government agencies in both countries must facilitate the work of international and charitable organizations that provide medical help—including testing for Covid-19—before migrants are returned to their countries of origin. Such agencies should set up binational working groups to develop methods to resolve the plight of stranded migrants. For instance, shared initiatives should focus on providing temporary shelter or housing to the most vulnerable groups in the migrant population—namely, the elderly, women with children, unaccompanied minors, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Government of Mexico

The INM must facilitate the resolution of migration cases so that people are not indefinitely waiting while stranded and vulnerable. Mexico should also allow international, national, and local organizations to advocate for asylum petitioners. Currently, joint work on behalf of migrants and asylum seekers is limited, but such efforts should involve government agencies, international organizations, and other interested NGOs. In the past, distrust between government authorities and civil society groups has hindered the possibility for more effective action toward all migrant populations. Amid this emergency, it is critical for parties to overcome such apprehensions.

The government should educate the Mexican public to dissociate the spread of Covid-19 from the presence of migrants. This should be done along with a campaign to eradicate negative sentiments, stereotypes, and misconceptions that feed into xenophobia and the rejection of migrants.

The government should not release migrants into the streets, which only creates a new homeless population that is vulnerable to criminals. Provisional housing should be set up for stranded migrants.

U.S. Government

Ideally, law enforcement should cooperate and work with humanitarian organizations, particularly those that provide aid to the populations currently most in need of aid and protection: migrants and asylum seekers from Central America and Mexico. The U.S. must also fulfill its obligations under international law when it comes to asylum seekers. As a signatory of treaties that offer protection to those seeking asylum,⁴⁴ the U.S. administration should honor their terms. In this regard, the Migration Protection Protocols should be revoked.

The U.S. should also halt current deportations to countries that are heavily affected by Covid-19 and have few resources to fight it. If deportations continue, the U.S. should establish stricter protocols to ensure the health of those detained and transported—as well as those who come into contact with them. The

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government should avoid, for example, again sending infected migrants to Guatemala.⁴⁵

U.S. agencies should consider the impact of an almost certain decline in remittances from the U.S. to the migrants' countries of origin, as predicted by analysts.⁴⁶ If such a scenario comes to pass, it will likely spur a new era of outmigration from Central America, and perhaps from Mexico. The U.S. will then be challenged to address the consequences for its labor force and immigration policies.

ENDNOTES

1. Human mobility encompasses migration in all its forms, including tourism and commuting, etc. Immobility applies when people are unable to travel, including people who are being detained, stranded, waiting, or in limbo. In this brief we concentrate mostly on migrants and to some extent on asylum claimants.

2. Many migrants come from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. As of late 2019, there was an increase in the numbers of Cubans and Haitians at Mexico's southern border, according to an agent working in the field (UNHCR representative, e-mail correspondence, April 29, 2020).

3. Findings are based on the authors' monitoring of developments between mid-March 2020 and April 2020. The information comes from news articles and responses to questionnaires sent to a number of groups and organizations. Due to the lockdown, in-person interviews were not an option. In most cases the respondents chose to remain anonymous. The organizations queried include: *Una Mano Amiga en la Lucha contra el SIDA/UMA* [A Friendly Hand in the Struggle Against AIDS]; *Iniciativas para el Desarrollo Humano/IDH* [Initiatives to Foster Human Development]; *Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías de Córdoba/CDHFMC* [Center for Human Rights Friar Matías de Córdoba]; International Organization for Migrations/IOM (Tapachula office); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/UNHCR (Tapachula office); United Nations Infant, Children and Education Fund/UNICEF

(Tapachula office); *Docteurs do Monde/DM* [World Doctors, Mexico chapter]; *Fiscalía de Inmigrantes, Fiscalía General del Estado de Chiapas/FDI* [District Attorney's Office for Immigrants, State of Chiapas]; *Desarrollo Integral de la Familia/DIF* [Program for Comprehensive Development of Families, Regional Office, Government of Chiapas]; *Albergue Temporal para Menores Migrantes* [Temporary Shelter for Migrant Children, Government of Chiapas]; *Centro de Atención a Niñas, Niños y Jóvenes Migrantes* [Day Center for Girls, Boys and Young Migrants, Government of Chiapas].

4. The White House, "President Donald J. Trump is Taking Necessary Safety Measures at the Border to Prevent Further Spread of the Coronavirus," March 20, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-taking-necessary-safety-measures-border-prevent-spread-coronavirus/>.

5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists," March 20, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/pdf/CDC-Order-Prohibiting-Introduction-of-Persons_Final_3-20-20_3-p.pdf; Priscilla Alvarez, "Trump administration has made sweeping changes to the U.S. immigration system during the coronavirus pandemic," CNN, April 21, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/18/politics/immigration-changes-coronavirus/index.html>.

6. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "Nationwide Enforcement Encounters: Title 8 Enforcement Actions and Title 42 Expulsions," June 4, 2020, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics/title-8-and-title-42-statistics>.

7. HHS and CDC, "Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons," March 20, 2020.

8. The White House, "Proclamation Suspending Entry of Immigrants Who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market During the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak," April 22, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspending-entry->

[immigrants-present-risk-u-s-labor-market-economic-recovery-following-covid-19-outbreak/](#).

9. Letter to HHS Secretary Azar and CDC Director Redfield signed by leaders of public health schools, medical schools, hospitals, and other U.S. institutions, May 18, 2020, <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/public-health-now/news/public-health-experts-urge-us-officials-withdraw-order-enabling-mass-expulsion-asylum-seekers>.

10. Camilo Montoya-Galvez. “As Trump pushes to reopen, U.S. continues expelling migrants at border, citing pandemic,” May 18, 2020, <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/public-health-now/news/public-health-experts-urge-us-officials-withdraw-order-enabling-mass-expulsion-asylum-seekers>.

11. Charlie Martel and Grace Meng, “Trump Administration Using Pandemic as Excuse to Target Asylum Seekers,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/07/trump-administration-using-pandemic-excuse-target-asylum-seekers>.

12. According to Juan Fierro, head of the El Buen Samaritano shelter in Ciudad Juárez, until mid-March close to 60,000 people, mostly Central Americans, remained in several cities in Mexico as they waited to appear before a U.S. asylum judge. With the new regulations in place, Fierro said the waiting period would extend to about 10 months. See “Proceso de asilo genera cambios en la frontera con EU,” *Conexión Migrante*, March 6, 2020, <https://conexionmigrante.com/2020-/03-/06/proceso-de-asilo-genera-cambios-en-la-frontera-con-eu/>. The largest share were applicants subject to the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP), otherwise known as the “Remain in Mexico” policy. See María T. Gil-Bazo, “The Safe Third Country Concept in International Agreements on Refugee Protection. Assessing State Practice,” *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 33, no. 1 (2015): 42–77. See also U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Nationwide Enforcement Encounters: Title 8 Enforcement Actions and Title 42 Expulsions”; Camilo Montoya-Galvez, “As Trump pushes to reopen, U.S. continues expelling migrants at

border, citing pandemic,” *CBS News*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/as-trump-pushes-to-reopen-u-s-officials-continue-border-expulsion-policy-citing-pandemic/>; Caitlin Dickerson and Kirk Semple, “U.S. Deported Thousands Amid Covid-19 Outbreak. Some Proved to be Sick,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/us/deportations-coronavirus-guatemala.html>; Ted Hesson, “U.S. again postpones immigration hearings for migrants in Mexico due to coronavirus,” *Reuters*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-immigration/u-s-again-postpones-immigration-hearings-for-migrants-in-mexico-due-to-coronavirus-idUSKBN21J62J>.

13. Molly O’Toole and Cindy Carcamo, “Guatemala turns tables, blocking U.S. deportations because of coronavirus,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-03-17/guatemala-close-borders-to-americans-trumps-deportation-flights>.

14. Sandra Cuffe, “Mexico judge orders release of migrants vulnerable to coronavirus,” *Al Jazeera*, April 18, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/mexico-judge-orders-release-migrants-vulnerable-coronavirus-200419004324979.html>; and Oscar Lopez, “Mexico ordered to guarantee coronavirus health care to migrants,” *Reuters*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-migrants-trfn/mexico-ordered-to-guarantee-coronavirus-health-care-to-migrants-idUSKBN21Z3FD>.

15. Miguel Rojas, “Negocio redondo la apertura de un nuevo paso informal,” *Diario del Sur*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.diariodelsur.com.mx/policiaca/negocio-redondo-la-apertura-de-un-nuevo-paso-informal-comerciantes-coronavirus-autoridades-5049689.html>.

16. Jaime Zambrano. “Polleros cambian rutas para pasar a migrantes,” *Milenio*, April 11, 2020, <https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/cambian-polleros-las-rutas-para-pasar-a-indocumentados>.

17. The International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) representative who responded to a questionnaire for this brief confirmed that detention facilities are

overcrowded, sanitary and health conditions are poor, and they lack proper protocols to respond to a Covid-19 outbreak. E-mail correspondence, April 20, 2020.

18. “Migrantes se amotinan en el INM. Se fugan 14,” *El Orbe*, March 25, 2020, <https://elorbe.com/seccion-politica/local/2020/03/25/migrantes-se-amotinan-en-el-inm-se-fugan-14.html>; and Instituto Nacional de Migración, “Tema migratorio 030420,” blog, April 3, 2020, <https://www.inm.gob.mx/gobmx/word/index.php/tema-migratorio-030420/>. Mutinies also took place in northern states such as Sonora (Hermosillo) and Coahuila (Piedras Negras). See Cristian Gómez Luna, “Migrantes se amotinan en INM en Sonora ante temor de contagio,” *La Jornada*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/estados/2020/04/02/migrantes-se-amotinan-en-inm-en-sonora-ante-temor-de-contagio-7516.html>; and Christian Sánchez, “Migrantes sen Piedras Negras se amotinan en albergue del INM,” *Milenio*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.milenio.com/estados/en-coahuila-migrantes-se-amotinan-en-albergue-del-inm>.

19. “Mexico: Free Detained Migrants Amid Pandemic,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/14/mexico-free-detained-migrants-amid-pandemic>; Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, “Reitera CNDH su preocupación por las personas en contexto de migración varadas en territorio mexicano, en estaciones migratorias y estancias provisionales del INM, ante el cierre de fronteras por el Covid-19,” press communique DGC/135/2020, April 16, 2020, https://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/default/files/documentos/2020-04/COM_2020_135.pdf; “Preocupa la extrema vulnerabilidad de las personas en movilidad ante la pandemia por Covid-19,” *UNHCHR, Central America Regional Office*, press release, April 23, 2020, <http://www.oacnudh.org/preocupa-la-extrema-vulnerabilidad-de-las-personas-en-movilidad-ante-la-pandemia-por-Covid-19-onu-derechos-humanos/>. As the IOM representative asserted (see endnote 23) and another NGO representative also wrote in the questionnaire: one of the main reasons the INM released detainees was because it

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38. International organizations have provided personal hygiene and cleaning supplies to shelters in Tapachula; offered on–line training to shelter staff on how to detect, prevent, and deal with Covid–19, on self–care, and other online educational activities. Printed material in several

languages has been handed out at different institutions with instructions on how to deal with illness symptoms. IOM assisted with voluntary return flights to Central America; IOM's Tapachula office requested funding to buy sanitary and cleaning materials that could be distributed to local institutions. UNICEF offered technical assistance to government agents to handle the protection of migrant Children. UNHCR helped set up quarantine spaces for asylum petitioners who could get infected and continued helping people with legal advice and cash handouts so people can pay their rent. IOM representative, email correspondence, April 20, 2020; UNICEF, email correspondence, April 20, 2020; UNHCR representative, email correspondence, April 29, 2020.

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