

# PROTECTION MONITORING: MEXICO

## SNAPSHOT SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2023

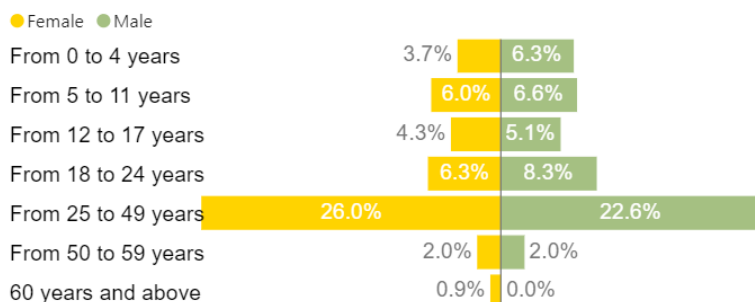
This SNAPSHOT summarizes the findings of Protection Monitoring conducted during the two-month period. Protection Monitoring is part of the humanitarian response of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Mexico to the crisis affecting mixed migration flows. DRC conducts this Protection Monitoring directly in Tapachula, Reynosa and Matamoros and jointly with the Jesuit Refugee Service Mexico (JRS) in Ciudad Juarez. The activities are carried out with the financial support of the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of the United States Department of State. The intervention is conducted in association with Save the Children Spain and Mexico, Plan International Spain and Mexico, HIAS Mexico, Doctors of the World France and Switzerland, and Alternativas Pacificas- To view the interactive Dashboard of the results of this period and since the start of the Protection Monitoring program, click [here](#).

During September and October, changes were observed in the practices of both Mexican and U.S. authorities affecting mixed migratory movements in different parts of the country. The dynamic of new arrivals at Mexico's southern border continued along with arbitrary practices for access to documentation associated with migration management. A high demand was registered for documentation allowing transit through the country, in line with the practice of issuing [transit documentation](#) in some other parts of the route. Despite restrictive measures to initiate the asylum procedure before COMAR in Tapachula, there was a slight increase in the number of new applications received by COMAR: more than [26,000 people](#) formalized their applications at the national level, of which approximately half were filed in Tapachula. At the northern border, U.S. authorities reported a decrease in the number of apprehensions or processing of persons lacking authorization to enter the country, alongside the resumption of deportations of Venezuelan nationals to their country of origin. The trend of approximately 40,000 entries of persons seeking asylum each month continued, with [43,000 persons](#) processed in September and [44,000](#) in October. At the same time, the period saw limitations on the ability to obtain an appointment to apply for asylum in the U.S. through the CBP One application, along with the continuation of the practice of compiling waiting lists of the most vulnerable cases to be processed in parallel to the use of the application. Although there remains a lack of official data on people entering the country, some estimates suggest that approximately 5,000 people enter Mexico daily.

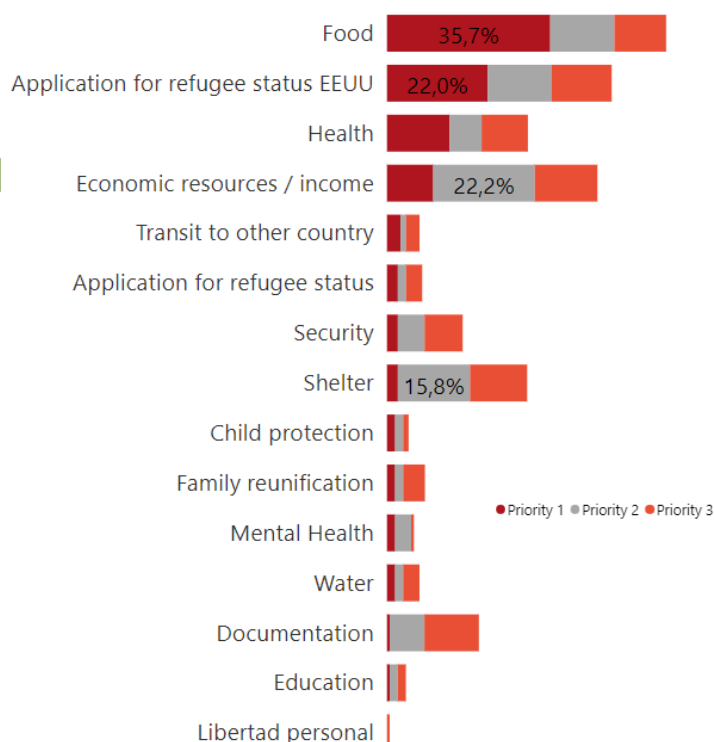
## KEY FIGURES

Between September and October 2023, 171 interviews were conducted, covering a total of 350 people.

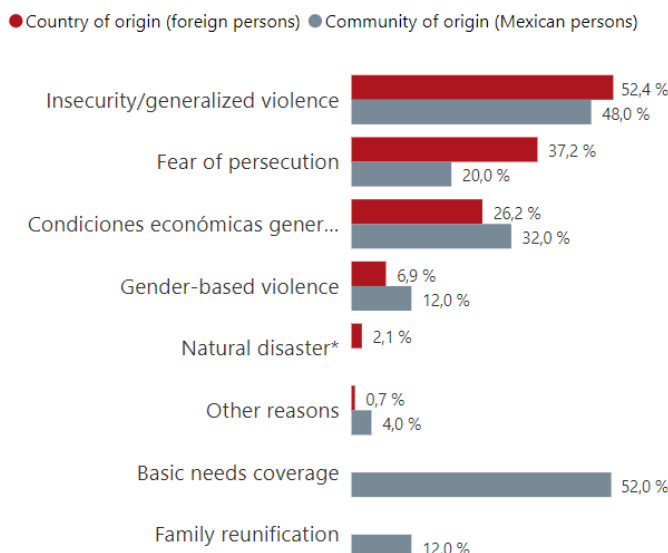
### Sex and Age



### Main Priorities



### Flight Motives



## PRIORITY ISSUE: COPING MECHANISMS

*In the face of the multiple forms of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation that people affected by a humanitarian crisis experience, various mechanisms or strategies are used in an attempt to protect themselves or satisfy their needs. These coping mechanisms are usually categorized into those that reduce the level of exposure to risk - **positive mechanisms** - and those that collaterally increase people's exposure to other risks - **negative or harmful mechanisms**-. These are responses that can have the overall effect of increasing people's capacities in the face of threats or increasing their vulnerabilities. Positive mechanisms are often based on **increasing existing capacities** at the individual and collective levels, ranging from creative strategies for sharing information among affected people in order to enhance their self-protection, to the use of existing specialized services. However, given the effects of the humanitarian crises that affected people face, many coping mechanisms that individuals and households adopt to deal with protection threats can be negative in that **they increase their level of vulnerability**. Establishing an informal settlement alongside the international border, for example, may be one way of attempting to address barriers to accessing asylum, but it also entails exposure to increased risks of violence given the insecure unsafe conditions in these places. Some of these strategies, such as taking children and adolescents out of the school system to work, can also contribute to additional threats such as child labor or exploitation.*

*These responses at the individual, household or community level can also be classified according to their function. There are coping mechanisms based on **avoidance**, such as when people decide not to undertake a transit route that is characterized by exposure to violence, and also those based on **adjusting** behavior, which occurs when they decide to follow that same route, but with a 'guide' or under other conditions that favor their protection against violence. At the same time, there are coping strategies based on **action**, such as efforts to obtain documentation that would allow regular transit in conditions of greater security, and also based on **confrontation**, such as demonstrations, caravans and other demands for safe transit.*

As detailed in the previous [SNAPSHOT](#), the population of concern in mixed migration movements in Mexico lacks the economic resources necessary to be able to protect themselves and cover their most basic needs. The main needs reported by those monitored confirm the persistent lack of means to buy food and cover the costs of decent shelter. To cope with the lack of economic resources to meet basic needs and given the fact that in 87.6% of households, no one is working, persons of concern resort to different negative coping mechanisms. One of these mechanisms is sleeping on the street or in informal settlements. During the two-month period, 66.2% of respondents in Tapachula were sleeping on the street, and 12.9% of respondents between Reynosa and Matamoros were sleeping in an informal settlement. The vulnerability that these situations generate is evident in people's perception of safety: 93.6% of people living on the street and 40.0% of respondents in informal settlements stated that they **did not feel safe** in their current accommodation. At the same time, in Reynosa, there have been recorded incidents of **sexual violence** committed mainly against women and girls in certain shelters, which evidences the possible additional threats faced by people seeking shelter in temporary shelters that do not comply with minimum standards, in the face of an absence of

dignified alternatives. On the other hand, given the lack of resources to cover their basic needs, families - including children and adolescents - have been observed resorting to begging in public places. It has been observed how this dynamic exposes people to greater probabilities of suffering harassment and, depending on the location different forms of violence, such as kidnapping, since this behavior makes them very easy to identify.



Another series of risks is linked to the lack of migratory documentation: 89.0% of respondents state that they do not have valid documentation conferring legal status in the country. It has been observed that, in response to restrictions on access to documentation for regular transit through the country, people subject themselves to human trafficking, exposing themselves to risks such as extortion, kidnapping and exploitation, as well as [traffic accidents](#). Direct observation activities in Tapachula confirmed that these trafficking dynamics operate in an organized manner, avoiding detection by the authorities and subjecting the persons of concern to conditions of overcrowding, violence and other abuses. Monitoring activities in Reynosa detected a mechanism whereby individuals can purchase a bracelet from the trafficker they have contracted to indicate that they have paid a specific fee, thus protecting themselves against kidnapping.

As the priority that affected people give to an issue increases, so does their willingness to resort to negative coping mechanisms. This is evident in the strategies adopted to gain access to U.S. territory, as 73.7% of respondents express this intention and access to U.S. territory is among the top priorities of the population. The fact that the possibility of requesting an appointment to be processed for asylum in the United States through the CBP One application is limited to people in central or northern Mexico has led significant numbers of people in southern Mexico to resort to virtual private network (VPN) services until this option was eliminated through fixes to the CBP One platform during October. This practice increases their exposure to unauthorized services, potential scams and criminal networks. In parallel, activities in Matamoros registered how some persons of concern have been forced to provide sexual favors in order to gain access to lists for entry into the United States on the margins of the CBP One application. This is complemented by an increase in irregular river crossings that pose a greater risk of drowning to demonstrate the desperation of the population in the face of restrictions on access to the United States. In Ciudad Juarez, the presence of there have been reports of groups of different sizes made up of individuals and families who gather around U.S. entry gates in an attempt to gain access to the United States. In October, the concentration of people in this situation reached around 3,000.

Notwithstanding the proliferation of negative coping mechanisms, there have also been positive strategies to reduce the level of risk. Those monitored report that the efficient use of their savings and the support of other individuals have been among the factors that have contributed most to their success during the transit to the places where they are currently located. Regarding misinformation and insufficient official information on services, rights and risks, a focus group discussion in Tapachula showed that a large part of the population resorts to humanitarian organizations, support networks and social networks as a way of coping with the situation. However, it was noted that reliance on social networks and word-of-mouth communication among the population can sometimes lead to the dissemination of false information and confusion of relevant processes. In this regard, the [Mixed Migration Centre](#) has documented that the use of social media lends itself to widespread sharing of incorrect or misleading information. This situation exposes people to a greater degree to immigration scams or fraud.

The population of concern must also cope with the psychosocial effects of experiences in their place of origin, during their journeys, and in the places where they are currently located. The consequences that these harsh experiences have on psychosocial well-being diminish their ability to cope with various protective threats, with 94.7% of respondents reporting symptoms of anxiety and 91.2% of depression. Some people referenced positive coping mechanisms, such as practicing sports or physical activities, and participation in group activities promoted by humanitarian organizations where they can share experiences with other people and alleviate symptoms of emotional isolation.



## REYNOSA & MATAMOROS

Through the beginning of the Protection Monitoring in Reynosa and Matamoros at the end of September, it was possible to document the volatility of the security situation in the area, which affects the [population in general](#) and the people who make up the [mixed migratory movements](#) in particular. During the two-month period, [attacks](#) against groups of migrants and attempts by armed groups to enter several shelters in Reynosa were recorded. A high perception of insecurity was observed, with 18.6% of respondents indicating that they perceive the area where they are staying as very unsafe and 44.3% as unsafe. At the same time, there were incidents of **abductions** of persons of concern - from reports of people known to have disappeared to accounts from released persons of their own kidnapping experiences - and the presence of armed groups in the vicinity of shelters and other spaces where persons of concern are concentrated. Although the conditions of vulnerability make many people reluctant to talk about their experiences of violence, 18.6% of respondents stated that a member of their household had been a victim of some form of violence in Mexico. 68.6% of respondents in Tamaulipas stated that they do not believe that the authorities have the capacity to protect them against violence. 21.4% report having faced checkpoints in the area where they live, with the majority of these - 75.0% - being operated by the immigration authorities, but only but with a significant portion - 25.0% - under the control of criminal groups. Seventy-five percent of respondents who have faced these checkpoints or other controls report having suffered or observed different types of abuses, such as extortion, threats and confiscation of property.

Nevertheless, it is estimated that the flow of people of concern to Tamaulipas remains constant, with between [5,000](#) and 10,000 people distributed between the two cities. In Matamoros, with the opening of the Pumarejo Shelter in August, there was a noted increase in vulnerability of those remaining in the informal encampment on the banks of the Puente Nuevo bridge connecting Matamoros with the United States. Forty-four percent of respondents in this location reported feeling unsafe, and there was a withdrawal of some of the humanitarian actors previously present in this place. In both Matamoros and Reynosa, a reduction of the population in the informal camps was confirmed, with greater demand at the shelters due to security risks, in addition to continuous crossings to the United States. At the end of October, the Pumarejo Shelter was noted to have already reached its maximum capacity.

With respect to crossings into the United States, it was confirmed that in addition to people with appointments through CBP One - only 11.6% of people monitored in Tamaulipas said they had an appointment with CBP One - and those who cross irregularly from Reynosa and Matamoros into the United States, the practice of using lists to identify particularly vulnerable cases and prioritize their crossing into the United States continues. This dynamic contributes to confusion among persons of concern about the mechanisms for gaining access to U.S. territory and increases their exposure to fraud. 33.3% of respondents stated that they do not understand the requirements and processes for entering the United States.



## TAPACHULA

Protection Monitoring in Tapachula shows that while a significant portion of persons of concern intend to transit to the United States - 42.6% - there are still important numbers of persons willing to remain where they are - 32.4% - or transit to another destination within Mexico - 22.1%. However, 22.1% do not know how to obtain status during their stay in Mexico, while the largest percentage - 44.1% - intend to obtain residency in Mexico. It was also evident that very few people - 2.2% of respondents - have sufficient information about the risks of transit.

During the month of September, COMAR in Tapachula experienced a significant increase in the number of people seeking to obtain a summons to request asylum, with between 5,000 and 6,000 people arriving to concentrate around the COMAR attention module in the Los Laureles Market. These dynamics evidence a high number of arrivals in Tapachula, among which [Cuban](#), Haitian and Central American people are the most visible. The vast majority of these people - 95.6% of respondents – were found to have left their country of origin in 2023, and that the reasons for departure are associated mostly with generalized violence, fear of persecution and gender-based violence. The monitoring activities confirmed the interest of a large part of the population in obtaining documentation to facilitate their transit through the country and the misinformation that leads people to believe that COMAR is the authority that processes the TVRH instead of the INM.

At the same time, COMAR's efforts to manage the disproportionate demand for its services given its limited resources continued and increased, including measures that have the effect of limiting access to the asylum procedure. The concentration of persons of concern in Mercado Los Laureles, along with incidents of confrontation in this location, led to the relocation of COMAR's appointment service to a larger space in Parque Ecologico towards the end of September. In that month, a change in the mechanism for assigning appointments was also detected, with the adoption of a notice format without a specific date for the appointment, but instead a general range of ninety days to be notified via social mediate of the date to formalize the asylum request. Of the 70.6% of respondents who claimed to have attempted to initiate the procedure with COMAR, 60.5% of these still did not have an assigned date to formalize their application. Numerous concerns and much confusion about appointment scheduling system were documented following this change, before COMAR abandoned issuing physical notices altogether in October, leaving those who had requested an appointment without evidence of their ongoing process, thus increasing their exposure to detention and refoulement.

In this regard, Octobe saw the resumption of the use of the Siglo XXI Estación Migratoria as an immigration detention center after the temporary suspension of these following the fire in the Ciudad Juarez Estación Migratoria at the end of March.

Also, in mid-October, COMAR adopted a new mechanism called triage, through which it seeks to limit access to the asylum procedure (apparently due to the high rate of absenteeism in appointments) to individuals who intend to remain in Mexico and who can articulate a reason for departure from their country of origin that would make them eligible for asylum or complementary protection. Cases were documented of individuals who expressed an intent to transit to the United States or who failed to adequately communicate reasons for departure and were denied the ability to request an asylum appointment with COMAR. On the contrary, these individuals were referred to the INM to explore the possibility of migratory regularization, despite the lack of real avenues of access to temporary regularization for persons in transit through Mexico. To the extent that this early identification mechanism involves an assessment of the reasons for departure without notice of the nature of the process and the results are used to prevent individuals from accessing COMAR proceedings, the mechanism violates **due process** guarantees.

Furthermore, these COMAR practices leave individuals without an option to obtain documentation to safeguard their rights during their transit through the country. In parallel, additional limitations **on access to immigration documentation** were evidenced, including through the suspension of the practice of issuing authorization for the circulation of persons with approved appointments through CBP One to request asylum at the northern border, and the prolongation of the process of obtaining a humanitarian visa (TVRH) due to INM's practice of communication approvals or denials of the TVRH by email after submission of the necessary information for its processing. However, arbitrary practices persist with respect to documentation, including the delivery of Multiple Migratory Forms to up to [8,000 people](#) in a completely discretionary manner to disperse people crowded around COMAR. The population of concern has demonstrated against practices that deny them access to temporary immigration regularization, including through marches and the collective departure of a caravan at the end of October.



## CIUDAD JUAREZ

During the two-month period, immigration authorities presented an estimate that approximately 40,000 people in mobility transit through the state of Chihuahua on a monthly basis, leading to a high concentration of people in border towns, including above all in Ciudad Juarez. Protection Monitoring confirmed a significant and progressive increase in the number of people stranded in Ciudad Juarez awaiting the possibility of entering the United States, with new arrivals of [thousands of people](#) registered via train. Of the 84.8% of respondents in this location intending to transit to the United States, none had an appointment at CBP One and 44.0% stated that they did not understand the requirements and processes to enter the United States. This dynamic has led to extended stays of [unhoused people](#), including at the various ports of entry to the U.S. along the border fence and in [informal settlements](#), and the [saturation](#) of many of the shelter facilities in the area, with some shelters reporting near maximum capacity. Following the **eviction** of some [informal camps](#), in early October, [municipal authorities](#), in collaboration with the INM, opened a new [shelter facility](#). In practice, this space functions

as a closed camp where people do not enjoy freedom of movement. The dynamic of saturation of the shelters led to [efforts](#) by the federal authorities to promote deportations.

The trend of identifying **abduction survivors** continued in Ciudad Juarez, as in previous bimesters and in line with the dynamics detected in Reynosa, Matamoros and [other parts of the country](#). Through the psychosocial support services and the referral of cases from other organizations, there have been reports of increased participation of certain authorities in these kidnapping incidents, from the beginning of the process when the persons are apprehended by the armed groups until their release at the end. In this regard, the Attorney General of the State of Chihuahua stated that [trafficking in migrants](#) is now controlled by organized crime groups. This in parallel to [a case](#) where the actions of [federal agents](#) caused the death of two migrants and injured four more.

*This document is part of the humanitarian response activities of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Mexico, with the financial support of the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of the United States Department of State. It is not a publication of ECHO or PRM. The financing agencies are not responsible for the use that may be made of the information contained in the document and do not necessarily support its contents. All of the opinions expressed herein belong exclusively to DRC and should not be interpreted in any way as the official opinion of the United States or of the European Union or its Member States.*



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