

Migration Dynamics and Conditions at the U.S.-Mexico Border

November 2025



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, millions of people have arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border—with some attempting to irregularly enter the country and others seeking asylum at or between ports of entry. The United States’ policy approach toward migrants who try to cross without detection has largely remained the same over the years. This approach focuses on identifying, detaining, and removing these individuals. However, U.S. authorities have enacted a range of different policy responses for asylum seekers. In recent years, these responses have included channeling asylum seekers into specific legal pathways and also partially or fully blocking their access to the U.S. immigration system. During each shift, asylum seeking migrants have reacted in varying ways, such as by creating asylum waitlists or encampments along the border.

On January 20, 2025, President Donald Trump assumed office for a second term and enacted the most recent changes to the asylum processing system along the U.S.-Mexico border. On that date, the president halted all asylum processing, including both at and between ports of entry. This shift left hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers in limbo across Mexico, without any path to make an asylum claim in the United States. Theoretically, unaccompanied minors are still able to seek asylum at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border.¹ However, from March 2025 through September 2025, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that CBP officers processed only 49 non-Mexican unaccompanied minors at these ports of entry.²

Simultaneously, in Mexico, the Mexican federal government has continued its high levels of immigration enforcement at the country’s borders and throughout the country’s interior. Specifically, it has expanded the number of migration-focused checkpoints on highways heading north, deployed more soldiers and National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*) members to the U.S.-Mexico border, and bussed apprehended non-Mexican migrants to cities in southern Mexico. The Trump administration’s elimination of foreign assistance has also impacted many Mexican civil society organizations that work with migrant populations, with some shelters struggling to provide food, other basic resources, or even keep their doors open.

Since January 2025, the number of migrants waiting at the U.S.-Mexico border has dropped dramatically. This report estimates that approximately 5,245 individuals remain in Mexican border cities. These individuals are concentrated in Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Mexicali, with these three cities hosting roughly 77 percent of the border’s estimated migrant population. We approximate this figure to be the lowest number of migrants in Mexican border cities since 2018 or 2019.

These migrants are also less visible than in the past. Many people have moved out of shelters and into rented rooms and apartments, and there are no longer any tent encampments along the border. Non-Mexican migrants are often seeking to obtain refugee status—or another legal status—in Mexico, in order to work and travel freely throughout the country. However, due to higher numbers of applications and reduced international support, the country’s refugee processing agency has been taking up to two years to process applications.³

This November 2025 migration dynamics and conditions update report focuses on current U.S. asylum restrictions at ports of entry and migrants’ experiences in Mexican border cities. It draws on phone and WhatsApp interviews with Mexican government officials and members of civil society organizations on both sides of the border from November 10, 2025 through November 17, 2025. It also relies on local news articles to fill in any gaps.

ASYLUM PROCESSING PHASES

Over the past six and a half years, CBP has passed through seven different asylum processing phases at ports of entry. These phases have alternated between allowing asylum seekers to make protection claims at ports of entry and either partially or fully blocking asylum processing. See Figure 1 for a breakdown of each phase.

**Figure 1: Asylum Processing Phases at Ports of Entry Along the U.S.-Mexico Border
(June 2018 - November 2025)**

Phase	Time Period	Phase Name	CBP Processed Asylum Seekers at Port of Entry	Methods to Access Port of Entry	Asylum Seekers Processed by Date of Arrival at Border
1	June 2018 - March 2020	Metering	Yes	Waitlist and lines at port of entry	Yes ⁴
2	March 2020 - April 2022	Title 42	No	N/A	N/A
3	Summer 2021 & April 2022 - January 2023	Title 42 Exemptions	Only vulnerable individuals	Waitlist	Varied by organizing entity
4	January 2023 - May 2023	CBP One and Title 42	Yes ⁵	CBP One Appointment	No
5	May 2023 - June 2024	CBP One and Walk Ups	Yes	CBP One Appointment Waitlist and lines at port of entry	No Varied by organizing entity
6	June 2024 - January 2025	CBP One and June 2024 Emergency Declaration	Yes	CBP One Appointment	No
7	January 2025 - Present	Executive Order Against Invasion	No	N/A	N/A

Authors' elaboration.

Beginning in June 2018, CBP launched its first attempt to restrict asylum seekers' access to ports of entry. During this first phase, CBP officers initiated a process that came to be known as "metering." As part of metering, port officials informed arriving asylum seekers that U.S. ports of entry were full and only accepted a specified number of individuals per port of entry each day. In response, migrants waited in physical lines in front of the ports of entry and later relied on self- or externally-run waitlists in Mexican border cities, which acted as proxy lines for asylum seekers.

In March 2020, as Covid-19 began to spread across the United States, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued a public health regulation for Covid-19—referred to as Title 42 authority—that eliminated all asylum processing at ports of entry. This second processing phase resulted in the suspension of asylum waitlists in Mexican border cities and migrants were stuck in limbo at the U.S.-Mexico border. The following year, in 2021, CBP created various temporary Title 42 exemption programs, which then became permanent in April 2022. These exemption programs constituted the third processing phase, whereby CBP officers allowed certain migrants—who were deemed to be particularly vulnerable—to cross at ports of entry and seek asylum.

In January 2023, CBP launched a new model of asylum processing: the "CBP One" mobile application. At this time, Title 42 remained active but CBP required that asylum seekers use the mobile application to request an appointment at a U.S. port of entry, leading to the fourth processing phase. Individuals located in Mexico could submit certain information on the CBP One application—including biographical and demographic details, travel history, and their sponsor information—and request a processing appointment at one of the participating ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border.

In May 2023, the Covid-19 era Title 42 public health order expired, and CBP began its fifth processing phase. During this phase, CBP processed 1,450 asylum seekers a day through the CBP One application, and also accepted small numbers of individuals without CBP One appointments at ports of entry, who were referred to as "walk ups." At the same time, the Biden administration put forward a final rule titled "Circumvention of Lawful Pathways," which banned access to asylum for non-Mexicans who crossed the border in between ports of entry or as walk ups.⁶ This meant that though CBP officials continued to process walk ups, any non-Mexican individual who entered the United States as a "walk up" was then subsequently ineligible to apply for asylum once in U.S. territory.

In June 2024, CBP entered its sixth asylum processing phase. At this time, the Biden administration issued a presidential proclamation and an interim final rule titled "Securing the Border."⁷ This policy change allowed officials to restrict access to asylum during "emergency" conditions, which it defined as periods when the Border Patrol's daily apprehensions surpassed an average of 2,500 encounters per day over a seven day period.⁸ Beginning in June 2024, the Biden administration began applying the emergency restrictions at the border, and suspended walk up processing. Notably, during this phase, CBP officers continued to process 1,450 CBP One appointments each day across eight border cities.

Finally, on January 20, 2025, President Trump assumed office for his second term and immediately halted asylum processing along the border. In a series of changes, the new administration launched the seventh asylum processing phase by shutting down the CBP One application and notifying asylum seekers that all scheduled appointments were cancelled at that time. Later that day, the Trump administration issued the "Guaranteeing the States Protection Against Invasion," executive order.⁹ This executive order declared an invasion at the

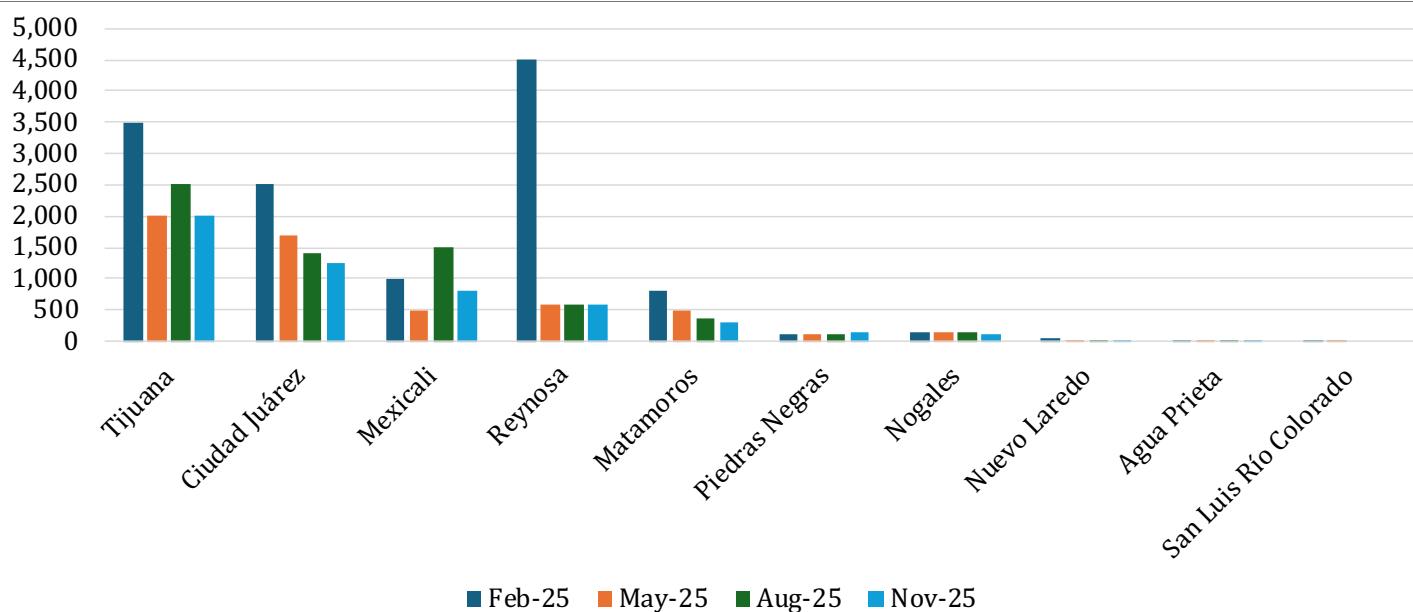
U.S.-Mexico border and barred asylum seekers from both entering the United States and accessing the U.S. immigration system.

On that same day, the Trump administration also called for additional programs to send asylum seekers to Mexico and other countries. Specifically, the “Securing Our Borders” executive order stated an interest in resurrecting the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP)—which sends asylum seekers to Mexico while their cases move through the U.S. court system—and establishing agreements with various countries to send them arriving asylum seekers.¹⁰ In recent months, the U.S. government has begun taking steps to re-implement MPP, and has signed both asylum cooperative agreements and third-country repatriation agreements with a range of countries to accept third-country individuals (i.e. citizens other than their own).

CONDITIONS ACROSS MEXICO AND ALONG THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

Since the Trump administration assumed office and halted asylum processing, the conditions for migrants along the border have changed significantly. In January 2025, the administration cancelled approximately 30,000 scheduled CBP One appointments and closed the pathway for an estimated 200,000 to 270,000 asylum seekers in Mexico who were actively seeking these appointments.¹¹ Many of these individuals left Mexican border cities, with some traveling to larger interior cities—such as Monterrey, Guadalajara, and Mexico City—returning to their cities or countries of origin, or crossing into the United States as clandestine migrants. However, as of November 2025, an estimated 5,245 migrants continue to live in Mexican border cities.

Figure 2: Asylum Seeking Population by City (February, May, August, and November 2025)



Authors' elaboration.

As a result of U.S. policy changes and shifts in migrant flows into the interior of the country, Mexico has also stepped up its own enforcement efforts. Towards the end of the Biden administration, Mexico's National Migration Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*, INM) began apprehending more migrants and bussing those individuals to cities in southern Mexico.¹² This has continued into the Trump administration, with INM and Mexico's National Guard erecting more checkpoints on north-bound highways. While the number of migrants has decreased along the U.S.-Mexico border, an estimated 3,000 migrants continue to live on Mexico City's streets and many more live in rented spaces.¹³ Around 3,000 migrants alone work in Mexico City's main wholesale market (*Central de Abastos*).¹⁴ Some of these individuals are attempting to return to their countries of origin, others are looking to remain in Mexico, and still others are undecided about their future plans.

In response to the Trump administration's promise to increase deportations, Mexico also launched the program "Mexico Hugs You" ("*Mexico Te Abraza*") to receive deported Mexicans. As part of the program, Mexican authorities constructed reception centers to assist recently deported individuals with legal documents, information about social programs, clothes, and other basic supplies. Buses from these centers also transport deported individuals into the country's interior. However, U.S. authorities are not sending all Mexican citizens across the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead, U.S. authorities also fly Mexican migrants to the country's interior, including to the southern border cities of Tapachula, Chiapas and Villahermosa, Tabasco.¹⁵ From the start of the Trump administration to September 25, 2025, U.S. authorities deported more than 109,000 Mexican citizens to Mexico.¹⁶ On November 13, 2025, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum announced that the Mexican government had filed 30 complaints to the United Nations over the United States' treatment of Mexican migrants.¹⁷

According to Mexico's own data, between January 2025 and August 2025, the Trump administration has also sent more than 7,100 non-Mexican individuals to Mexico. These deportations were temporarily halted in late March 2025, when a U.S. federal judge blocked the Trump administration from deporting people to "third countries" if they did not receive sufficient advance notice and a chance to contest their deportation. However, in June 2025, the Supreme Court sided with the Trump administration, allowing them to move forward with deporting immigrants to third countries while the case moves through the lower courts.¹⁸ This means that U.S. authorities can now continue deporting certain non-Mexican migrants to Mexico.

The situation on the ground in Mexico for migrants continues to be challenging. Migrants face unstable living conditions and security risks throughout the country. Individuals living in Mexican cities without legal status are often unable to formally work, access medical care, or obtain adequate housing.¹⁹ Civil society organizations have also detailed widespread violence against migrants, both in southern Mexico and in cities along the U.S.-Mexico border.²⁰ Certain groups of migrants and asylum seekers continue to experience additional challenges, with Black, LGBTQ+, Indigenous, and non-Spanish speaking asylum seekers often facing targeted discrimination.

Civil society organizations have long supported Mexico's migrant population, including by providing legal and social services for waiting asylum seekers, people in transit, and deportees. However, the Trump administration's actions—particularly dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and halting foreign aid in January 2025—have left many of these organizations with limited funding. Additionally, the foreign aid cuts have also affected small, local organizations, including migrant shelters across the country, which provide migrants with food, housing, and basic services.²¹ In recent months, as the number of migrants has

decreased, international and local organizations have also closed some operations in Mexican border cities. For instance, Tijuana's oldest shelter, Casa Calabriñi, is at risk of closing at the end of 2025, if the shelter is unable to raise additional funds.²² The following sections of this report detail the current conditions for migrants and deportees in ten Mexican border cities.

ASYLUM PROCESSING: NOVEMBER 2025

Mexican City	# of People Estimated in City	City Conditions
Matamoros, Tamaulipas	<p>~300 people <i>November 14, 2025</i></p>	<p>As of mid-October 2025, there were between 200 to 400 migrants who were living in Matamoros.²³ These individuals have generally been attempting to regularize their migratory status in the city. They frequently live in rented apartments, have found work, and have enrolled their children in school. Many are hoping that the United States will eventually change its immigration policy, and they will be able to cross the border.</p> <p>In October 2025, Matamoros city officials temporarily closed the Albergue Pumarejo. At the time, it was housing between 40 and 60 people. These individuals were transferred to another shelter in the city.²⁴ The migrants in the shelter were from Venezuela, Colombia, and Honduras.</p> <p>During the past month, the number of deportations to Matamoros has increased. After a lull in August 2025, videos from October 2025 show groups of deported individuals walking across the international bridge into Matamoros and standing around in the city's reception center for deported Mexican citizens.²⁵ Civil society organizations also report that some non-Mexican migrants have self-deported from the United States and arrived in Matamoros.</p>
Reynosa, Tamaulipas	<p>~600 people <i>November 10, 2025</i></p>	<p>Currently, there are an estimated 600 to 900 people in Reynosa. Overall, the city's shelters remain relatively empty. The Senda de Vida shelters are housing approximately 80 migrants, which is down from 110 migrants in August 2025.</p> <p>Most of the migrants in Reynosa are living in apartments or rented rooms. The Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe reports that it is supporting more than 50 families that live around the city.²⁶ These migrants are often seeking to regularize their status in Mexico. The vast majority of the migrants are from Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, Haiti, and Nicaragua.</p>

Asylum Processing at the Border: November 2025 (continued)

Mexican City	# of People Estimated in City	City Conditions
Reynosa, Tamaulipas (continued)		<p>Local organizations report that some migrants continue to arrive in Reynosa. However, these individuals are often attempting to cross into the United States between ports of entry. They are not generally passing through the city's migrant shelters.</p> <p>In October 2025 and November 2025, the number of deportations to Reynosa has increased. In the city's Center for Attention to Migrants (<i>Centro de Atención a Migrantes</i>), there has been an increase in the number of arriving deported Mexican citizens. News outlets have reported seeing buses outside the center, which were waiting to take the deported individuals to areas in southern Mexico.²⁷ The majority of the deported migrants are men from the Mexican states of Guanajuato, Estado de México, and Chiapas.</p>
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas	~25 people <i>November 14, 2025</i>	<p>Currently, there are an estimated 25 migrants in Nuevo Laredo. Most migrants are residing in hotels, apartments, or rented rooms.</p> <p>Deportations have continued to Nuevo Laredo but not necessarily increased. From January 2025 through September 2025, Nuevo Laredo reported receiving approximately 4,700 deportations, which is less than during the same time period in 2024.²⁸</p> <p>There are reports that migrants deported to Nuevo Laredo are being kidnapped soon after crossing into Mexican territory.²⁹ These reports suggest that when migrants cross into Mexico, they are told that they may need to wait for hours until a bus arrives to take them to specialized shelters. They are also told that they can board local buses that frequently pass by the port of entry. However, migrants report that these local buses take them to kidnappers, who use video calls with family members to demand between US\$4,000 to \$10,000. The kidnappers allege that this fee is to not harm the individual and, supposedly, to cross them again into the United States.³⁰</p>
Piedras Negras, Coahuila	~150 people <i>November 10, 2025</i>	<p>In November 2025, local organizations reported up to 100 migrants at any given time were in the city's migrant shelter. Most of the non-Mexican migrants are from Honduras, Venezuela, and Colombia.³¹</p> <p>Most of the individuals arriving at the Piedras Negras' shelter were recently deported from the United States. These individuals often have families in the United States, and are reportedly seeking to cross the border between ports of entry.</p>

Asylum Processing at the Border: November 2025 (continued)

Mexican City	# of People Estimated in City	City Conditions
Piedras Negras, Coahuila (continued)		The United States does not deport migrants to Piedras Negras but rather through nearby Ciudad Acuña. INM officials take these deportees to a center in the town of Rosita, Coahuila, before bussing them into the Mexican interior. Local organizations report that an average of 30 to 60 deportations occur through Ciudad Acuña each day.
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua	~1,250 people <i>November 10, 2025</i>	<p>There are an estimated 1,250 migrants living in Ciudad Juárez. This includes around 450 people in different shelters across the city, and an estimated 800 migrants who are living in other accommodations. The largest number of these individuals are Mexican citizens, followed by individuals from Venezuela, Honduras, and Guatemala.³²</p> <p>The individuals who remain in Ciudad Juárez are generally not looking to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead, they are seeking ways to stay, regularize their status, and work in Mexico.</p> <p>In mid-October 2025 there were reports that criminal groups had turned more toward kidnappings (both of migrants and local residents) as the number of migrants transiting through the city has decreased.³³</p> <p>U.S. authorities continue to deport people to Ciudad Juárez. Over the past month, authorities have deported around 150 to 180 Mexican citizens to Ciudad Juárez per day. Deportees are not allowed to stay in the city for longer than 48 hours, given safety concerns. Further, if they are originally from Ciudad Juárez or Chihuahua, they are sent to the airport. Non-Mexican citizens who are deported to Ciudad Juárez are immediately sent by bus to the southern Mexican cities of Tapachula, Chiapas and Villahermosa, Tabasco.</p>
Agua Prieta, Sonora	~20 people <i>November 13, 2025</i>	<p>There are an estimated 20 migrants (four families) waiting in Agua Prieta. These individuals are all Mexican citizens who have been in the city since before the Trump administration shut down the CBP One application. The city's shelter remains empty.</p> <p>Throughout 2025, very few migrants have arrived in Agua Prieta. Organized crime controls the area, and migrants tend to use other nearby crossing points. The migrants who do arrive in Agua Prieta are almost exclusively displaced Mexican citizens, who are seeking to cross the U.S.-Mexico border between ports of entry.</p>

Asylum Processing at the Border: November 2025 (continued)

Mexican City	# of People Estimated in City	City Conditions
Agua Prieta, Sonora (continued)		Agua Prieta is not one of the United States' designated deportation ports of entry. Most land-based deportations to Sonora occur through Nogales.
Nogales, Sonora	~100 people <i>November 13, 2025</i>	<p>In Nogales, there are an estimated 100 migrants in the city. Currently, some non-Mexican migrants in Nogales are seeking to regularize their status in Mexico, including by applying for refugee status. These individuals often face challenges with their applications—such as obtaining the necessary identification documents—and have been waiting for their responses for longer than the legal time limits.</p> <p>Throughout the year, U.S. authorities have been deporting people to Nogales. Currently, these authorities are deporting 80 to 100 people a day (2,400 to 3,000 per month). In August 2025, there were two weeks with very few deported individuals. However, since then, the numbers of deported individuals have remained steady.</p> <p>In October 2025, Nogales city officials began dismantling the reception center at the “Estrellas Nogalenses” sports complex that received deported Mexican citizens.</p>
San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora	0 people <i>November 10, 2025</i>	<p>There are no longer any asylum seeking migrants waiting in the shelter in San Luis Río Colorado. Although some of the people who were previously waiting are now working in the city and have enrolled their children in local schools.</p> <p>In late October 2025, the local shelter reported hosting a family with four U.S. citizens. This included a father, who was deported from the United States after living there for 20 years. The U.S. citizen mother and three U.S. citizen children traveled to Mexico after the father’s deportation to keep the family together.³⁴</p> <p>There continues to be a low number of deportations to San Luis Río Colorado. There are days when the local shelter and the city’s shelter for receiving deported Mexican citizens are almost or completely empty.</p> <p>On October 12, 2025, Mexican and U.S. faith leaders convened for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees.³⁵ The procession began on the U.S. side of the border before crossing into San Luis Río Colorado. Here, the group joined Mexican bishops, where they</p>

Asylum Processing at the Border: November 2025 (continued)

Mexican City	# of People Estimated in City	City Conditions
San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora (continued)		signed a joint declaration that called for accompanying migrants and then conducted a bilingual mass. ³⁶
Mexicali, Baja California	~800 people <i>November 17, 2025</i>	<p>There are an estimated 800 migrants in Mexicali. Local organizations estimate that about 400 migrants are currently residing in shelters and another 400 migrants are renting rooms or living on the streets. The vast majority of these individuals are from Mexico, especially from the states of Michoacán, Sinaloa, and Guerrero.</p> <p>Since January 2025, Mexicali has only registered 1,914 deportations, with the vast majority of deportations taking place in nearby Tijuana.³⁷ Since August 2025, the Peregrino shelter is the only shelter in Mexicali receiving Mexican deportees.³⁸</p>
Tijuana, Baja California	~2,000 people <i>November 10, 2025</i>	<p>There are an estimated 2,000 migrants living in Tijuana. The number of migrants residing in the city's shelters is generally low. This report estimates that there are about 1,000 migrants residing in the shelters and another 1,000 migrants renting rooms or staying in motels or living on the streets.</p> <p>The vast majority of the migrants in Tijuana are Mexican citizens, from the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, Sinaloa, and Chiapas. There are also individuals from Haiti and Central America who have been in Tijuana for an extended period of time and are attempting to regularize their status. Local organizations also report an increase in the number of deported Mexicans arriving to the city after they were bussed to Mexico's interior. These individuals often return to Tijuana to look for work or if they are considering crossing the border between ports of entry.</p> <p>In recent months, the number of deportations to Tijuana has increased. From January 2025 through the middle of November 2025, the city reported more than 12,680 deportations.³⁹ The majority are adult men. The deported individuals are sent first to the government's Flamingos shelter and then bussed into Mexico's interior.</p> <p>Local organizations report an increase in the number of non-Mexicans being deported through Tijuana, including non-Mexican nationals with withholding of removal statuses in the United States.</p>

*The numbers should be interpreted as a general range rather than an exact figure.

ENDNOTES

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