

Migrants coming from Central America to US: 'We don't have many options'

Desperate travelers face robbery, assault and treacherous conditions.
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Battle over immigration

The Biden administration said it is trying to dismantle and rebuild from the previous administration's immigration policy.

Crossing the Rio Grande is the last leg of an often long and always harrowing journey for hundreds of people hoping to start a new life in the U.S. It's there that, even in the dead of night, the Texas Department of Public Safety patrols the border for human smugglers.

Father Flor Rigoni, the director of a shelter in southern [Mexico](#), told us in 2016 that he has witnessed many take on the extremely risky trek to U.S. soil, including women, children and the elderly.

He said desperate migrants face robbery, assault and treacherous hiking in varying weather and terrain.



Minors are housed inside a pod at the Donna Department of Homeland Security holding facility, the main detention center for unaccompanied children in the Rio Grande Valley r...[Show more](#)
Dario Lopez-mills/AP, FILE

As of February, [nearly 100,000 people were being held](#) at U.S.-Mexico border facilities, according to the U.S. Border Patrol. There was a 28.8% increase of migrants between January and February alone.

Early into his new administration, President Joe Biden took swift action to reverse several [immigration](#) policies of the Trump era. While the new White House has come under fire for pulling back hard-line restrictions before it was fully prepared to handle the surge of migrants, some remain in place, [ABC News has reported](#).

As a result of intensifying pressure from the U.S. to secure the border, the Mexican and Central American governments have cracked down on people trying to make their way to the U.S. Thousands hope to avoid Mexican authorities by traveling different ways to get up north, including crossing the Usumacinta River along the Guatemala-Mexico border.

In order to cross the river undetected, thousands pay local human traffickers, who are often affiliated with the cartels, to ferry them across, according to locals in the area.

Those with money hire local smugglers known as coyotes, who can provide resources like cars, while poorer people often ride atop freight trains.



Francisco, 34, an asylum seeking migrant from Honduras, cradles his nine-month-old daughter Megan from the early morning cold and wind, as they await for transport to a pro...[Show more](#)
Adrees Latif/Reuters

One train, known as “La Bestia” or the Beast Train, is infamous for the many people hurt or killed while trying to board its moving freight cars.

Not only are trains hard to board, but organized crime and local gang members often take advantage of migrants, according to Adam Isacson, the director for defense oversight for the Washington Office on Latin America, an advocacy group. Many of these poor migrants face robbery and assault.



US Border Patrol agents take asylum seekers into custody near the US-Mexico Border on March 23, 2021, in McAllen, Texas.

John Moore/Getty Images

“Organized crime and local gangs and thugs have gotten pretty good at trying to squeeze whatever money they can get from the people who board these trains,” Isacson said. “People who don't pay a fee to these gangs get thrown off the trains.”

Some, like children, don't make it all the way and turn around. Two boys were on their way to the U.S. but decided to return to their home country of Honduras. They told ABC News that since heading back, they have been walking for five days straight.

“We wanted to go to the United States, but now I just want to go home and be with my family who need me, and I need them,” one boy said in Spanish. “Immigration officials are not helping us because we are underage.”



US Border Patrol agents question asylum seekers after their group of immigrants crossed the Rio Grande into Texas on March 25, 2021, in Hidalgo, Texas. A large group of familie...[Show more](#)
John Moore/Getty Images

“We just want to go back with the help of God,” the other boy added in Spanish.

Unofficial locations known as “safe houses” are found along migrant routes and house weary travelers.

Honduras migrant Irmana Morado told ABC News in March that she has been staying at one of these safe houses in Mexico since October 2019, after she was deported from the U.S. She said her journey to find a better life is essential for her family.

“I want a better future for my kids. Like our parents wanted a better future for us,” she said while holding a baby boy. “That’s why we’re forced to take steps and leave our own country and risk our lives here, because necessity forces us.”