



**CANAMID**  
Central America·North America  
*Migration Dialogue*

# PB#13

➤ DECEMBER 2016

## Organized Civil Society in Response to Transit Migration through Mexico

BY LETICIA CALDERÓN CHELIUS



**Policy Brief** Series

GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY



# Organized civil society in response to transit migration through Mexico



LETICIA CALDERÓN CHELIUS<sup>a</sup>

## SUMMARY

Over the last two decades transit migration flows through Mexico, mainly of Central American migrants, have grown substantially. This phenomenon has created a wide solidarity response in civil society in Mexico involving different activist groups such as NGOs or religious groups as well as individual volunteers; legal experts, professionals, academics and lay citizens. They together represent a rich rainbow of activities and causes that have actually conformed the new migration agenda in Mexico. This Policy Brief synthesizes the key contributions from these Mexican civil society groups to the protection of immigrant human rights in Mexico. Beyond their incidence in migration policy, these civil society groups offer an extremely valuable humanitarian service to transit migrants in Mexico, bridging the wide gaps in official protection and assistance that the State is not providing. Their speed in reacting to events and organizing civic response is well beyond the capacity of other sectors traditionally dealing with migration in Mexico, namely civil servants, public institutions, the media and the academic sector. This extraordinary response in civil society cannot be understood in isolation. It must be interpreted in a context of extreme violence against transit migrants, a rise in internal migration and the return of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans from the U.S. Despite of the perils and difficulties associated to the situations in which these groups operate, the example of solidarity, braveness and ability to respond very quickly to crises that these groups have demonstrated once and again, is extraordinary in the Mexican political context. Beyond the individual groups achievements, they have primarily built solidarity networks and cross-sectional teams to lobby the government and manage to give visibility to the vulnerability and problematic situation of transit migrants in Mexico. Without their solidarity and decisiveness, without doubt, the social and political situation with respect to migrants in Mexico today would have been much more difficult.

- 03  Introduction
- 07  The debate begins
- 08  The massacre in Tamaulipas, the watershed moment
- 09  Migrant activism
- 14  Contributions of activism to the political and social agenda
- 17  Conclusion
- 19  Policy recommendations

<sup>a</sup> Instituto Mora (Mexico)



entral American migration in transit towards the United States has taken place continuously (although in lower numbers) for decades, although it has been practically invisible to the broader Mexican population.<sup>1</sup> While the difficulty of the trip was common knowledge, it was assumed that the ingenuity and bravery of the migrants made it possible for them to overcome the “Mexican phase”. Popular culture, songs, stories, and jokes narrated the story of a journey that would inevitably end successfully.



The “war on organized crime” declared by President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa in December of 2006 brought with it even more dangerous migration routes from Central America to the United States, especially in the states of Coahuila and Tamaulipas

in the states of Coahuila and Tamaulipas (see Policy Brief #12 in the CANAMID series).<sup>3</sup>

However, beginning in 2010 the situation changed, and references to migration in transit transformed into accounts of horrifying crimes that demonstrated the extreme risks at the heart of migrants’ reality.<sup>2</sup> Political disputes and conflicts over control of organized crime in certain areas of Mexican territory led to a scenario in which violence against immigrants increased dramatically. The “war on organized crime” declared by President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa in December of 2006—a “war” that consisted in the deployment of the Mexican military to directly confront various drug-trafficking cartels in certain regions of the country—brought with it even more dangerous migration routes from Central America to the United States, especially in





**Map 1: Principal railroad routes used by migrants in transit through Mexico and locations of the principal shelters**

Source: CANAMID Series Policy Brief # 05; Red DH Migrantes, <https://reddhmigrantes.wordpress.com/albergues/>

Beginning in 2008, the United States initiated a policy of contention and massive deportations that began to seal off the Mexico-U.S. border, making it even more complicated to cross without immigration documents. This is as true for Mexicans, who have been deported in historic numbers (almost 2 million deportations), as it is for Central Americans who have opted to take even more dangerous routes<sup>4</sup> or have chosen to stay longer periods of time in Mexico (see Policy Brief #14 in the CANAMID series).<sup>5</sup>

The political and economic crisis in Central America has provoked mass migration in numbers even higher than earlier crises, such as the 1972 earthquake in Nicaragua or the civil war in El Salvador from 1980 until 1992.





Thus, the new Central American scenario includes processes such as the aftermath of the military coup in Honduras, which, in 2009, displaced then President Manuel Zelaya and generated an environment of political and economic uncertainty (due to the sudden reactivation of the electoral process). As a consequence, criminal groups multiplied and continue to control large territories across the countries comprising the region, known as the Northern Triangle of Central America: El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. The rise of criminal groups, the weakness of rule of law, and escalating inequality create the structural causes of unprecedented migration of people from the region (see Policy Brief #1 in the CANAMID series).<sup>6</sup>

As if that were not enough, the violence in Mexico has led to the extreme vulnerability of migrants in transit who are trying to avoid detection, detention, and deportation while passing through the country.<sup>7</sup> It is not only organized crime that constantly threatens migrants in transit based upon their “invisibility,” but also Mexican authorities that, on various levels, take advantage of the situation or, when not directly complicit in the crimes, simply look away.<sup>8</sup>



---

## The debate begins

Violations of the human rights of migrants, particularly those in transit, has been denounced on repeated occasions by international forums—including by the former special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants of the United Nations, Jorge Bustamante of Mexico.<sup>9</sup> However, the publication of a report on migration by the National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH, according to the Spanish acronym), first in 2009, and again in 2010 and 2011, was the watershed point that inspired broader public debate.

This report, from an official governmental institution, details the experiences of migrants in transit, international immigrants to Mexico, and internal migrants across the country. The collection of direct witness accounts described how organized crime took advantage of the undocumented status of migrants to extort, kidnap, physically attack, and in the worst of cases, kill them.<sup>10</sup>

But that which really sparked the conversation in public debates was not the content of the reports (other documents had made the situation clear for years), but rather the fact that the Mexican government took steps to explicitly undermine the CNDH report. The Mexican government asserted that the report was marred by “methodological inconsistencies” in its findings of the numbers of potential victims and the eye-witness accounts, especially in regards to the aspects that linked immigration authorities and police to crimes perpetrated against migrants.<sup>11</sup>

The controversy unfolded in the context of increasingly generalized violence throughout the country, repeated forced disappearances, and numerous crimes against the civil population in the Mexican states of Michoacán, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas, where military and police deployment concentrated in the previously mentioned “war against drugs and organized crime.”<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, during this time period (2008-2019), a parallel debate flourished that would generate a national law of migration guided by the highest international standards.



---

## The massacre in Tamaulipas, the watershed moment

*The horror produced by the discovery of a mass grave of 72 Central American migrants murdered by organized crime in San Fernando, Tamaulipas in August 2010, marks a watershed moment*

Although social and political interest and dedication to the challenges faced by migrants in transit was increasing,<sup>13</sup> the horror produced by the discovery of a mass grave of 72 Central American migrants murdered by organized crime in San Fernando, Tamaulipas in August 2010, marks a watershed moment.

The evidence that the murder of dozens of migrants was perpetrated by networks of drug-traffickers and kidnappers protected by government authorities on various levels—local and federal (including members of the National Institute on Migration)—undermined the credibility of former

accusations by government entities that existing reports were alarming or exaggerated (including those by CNDH and others by experts/academics). In 2010, the debate took a 180-degree turn.

The 72 migrants massacred in Tamaulipas inspired even more sectors of organized civil society, Mexican as well as Central American, who were already working in favor of migrants and their rights. It was now clear that Central American migrants in transit, due to their condition as foreigners with minimal economic resources, are one of the most vulnerable subpopulations in a network of violence and impunity that threatens everyone in Mexico.

The presence of migrant minors (children and adolescents without adult accompaniment), observed for over a decade but with increasing numbers due to new outbreaks of violence, inspired even more activism on the part of diverse organizations in the region, including groups that did not have a history of working with the issues around human mobility (such as organizations dedicated to human rights, children's rights, public health, and education).<sup>14</sup>





## Migrant activism

There are many organizations currently working in favor of the migration cause or that include migration as one of their areas of attention. We can divide the social justice interventions into two main lines of work.

- **Organizations that alleviate transit migration**

Mostly religious, but also secular, organizations have established shelters to provide for the needs of migrants in transit.<sup>15</sup> Today, the majority of these shelters provide housing, food, basic services such as a place to get clean and donated clothing. Most shelters only receive migrants for a couple of days and under the strict conditions to avoid problems with the local population where the shelter is situated, as well as organized crime networks that keep watch and stalk vulnerable people. The dynamic, as has been documented by several organizations, often leads to economic and interpersonal conflicts within the shelters which are dedicated to providing hospitality for migrants in transit.

In the case of shelters for families, women, and children—such as the Center for Reception, Formation, and Empowerment of International and National Women (CAFEMIN, in Spanish)—longer stays are allowed and an emphasis is placed on preserving the family unit, especially mothers and their children. These spaces often suffer from a lack of economic resources, most getting by with limited funds and donations from the surrounding population. Although charity for this unprotected population has been part of the mission of some groups of the Catholic Church over the last several centuries, the Mexican Catholic church has not had, paid specific attention to this population, except for a few exceptional cases known internationally such as Father Flor Maria Rigoni in Chiapas of the Scalabrini Order.<sup>16</sup>

*Out of the recent humanitarian crisis, key figures have emerged who have joined with the movements against violence and in favor of peace via the protection and care of migrants*

However, out of the recent humanitarian crisis, key figures have emerged who have joined with the movements against violence and in favor of peace via the protection and care of migrants. They are well-known names that lead groups extending across the country such as Alejandro Solalinde, director of the shelter Hermanos en el camino in Oaxaca; Miguel Concha, director of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Francisco de Vitoria; Pedro Pantoja, director of the shelter Casa Belén and of the Posada del Migrante in Saltillo,



Coahuila; Raúl Vera, bishop in Saltillo; and Fray Tomas González, of the Casa del Migrante La 72 in Tenosique, Tabasco.

These activists of the Catholic faith are well-known as international and national references in the defense of migrants in transit.<sup>17</sup> The power of their activism has been in the capacity to ally with and pull together disparate groups without putting religiosity first and foremost. Also inspired by religious affiliation, groups like Las Patronas have provided exceptional humanitarian assistance for over twenty years. They offer food and water to migrants passing through their town, Guadalupe La Patrona, Amatlán de los Reyes, in the state of Veracruz.<sup>18</sup>

Via coordination with one another, such groups accomplish distinct activities to call attention to the migrant population. One of these activities includes the representations of the Stations of the Cross during Holy Week, personified by a migrant. In the same line, the Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano has organized several trips on La Bestia (The Beast), the cargo train upon which migrants travel, in an intent to challenge migration authorities and create visibility around the crisis (the activists Martha Sánchez and Elvira Arellano are key figures).<sup>19</sup> Finally, the caravans of Central American mothers travel across Mexico to look for their children who disappeared while in transit through Mexico to the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Groups that combine pastoral work with humanitarian assistance also include organizations producing materials for reflection and support, such as the Manual of Best Practices for the Attention to Groups in the Vulnerable Situation of Transit Migration through Mexico; Women, Children, and the LGBTQ Population<sup>21</sup> published by the Program for Migrant Issues of the Universidad Iberoamericana of Mexico. The manual is the product of an extended period of work in shelters throughout Mexico.<sup>22</sup> The organization FM4 Paso Libre A.C. of Guadalajara produces reports that describe the experiences of migrants in western Mexico, as well as the challenges that the organization faces in order to accompany migrants.<sup>23</sup>

- **Organizations making impact on legal reforms**

A broad range of civil society organizations focuses on changing the legal framework that defines the limits and possibilities of the migrant population across the region. A key example includes the informed debate, proactive and with remarkable competence in legal language, around Mexico’s Law on Migration that was passed on May 26, 2011.<sup>24</sup> Groups specialized in articulating impact through political action, lobbying, diffusion, and awareness-raising about the migration crisis continued to push within the legal framework that became law<sup>25</sup> on November 9, 2012, a law that modifies articles and procedures that are considered to be in contradictory to the spirit of the law.

*A broad range of civil society organizations focuses on changing the legal framework that defines the limits and possibilities of the migrant population across the region*

Today, organizations dedicated to political impact exist from the United States to Central America, as can be appreciated in the following table.

**Figure 1:** Examples of civil society organizations working in favor of migrant rights in Mexico



*IMUMI led the campaign to eliminate the requirement of the apostille to validate identity and education documents in order to facilitate access to public education for children and adolescents in Mexico*

The causes that motivate these organizations can be very specific, such as the case of the Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI). During more than two years, this organization documented, organized, disseminated, and lobbied authorities in a successful campaign to make legal changes to improve the situation of migrants, especially women and children, who had returned under forced conditions as a consequence of mass deportations from the United States that begun in 2008. The separation of families, a consequence of these deportations, leads to social and

emotional challenges for many people and their communities, worsened by the legal obstacles that deported mothers and their children face upon return.<sup>26</sup>

IMUMI led the campaign to eliminate the requirement of the apostille<sup>27</sup> to validate identity and education documents in order to facilitate access to public education for migrant children and adolescents in Mexico. After a drawn out process of more than two years, the elimination of the apostille requirement was published by the Department of Public Education in June 2015 under Agreement 286.<sup>28</sup>

Together with allies from the Collective for Migration in the Americas, IMUMI has also won the facilitation of dual nationality for U.S. citizen children when one of the parents is Mexican. When the process to register dual nationality is not completed at a Mexican consulate in the United States, the application for Mexican nationality can be very complicated (as it also requires an apostille, or legalization, of the birth certificate from the state of birth in the United States and an official translation by a government-approved translator in the state of residence in Mexico). This process has excluded thousands of minors from access to Mexico's public education system.

With the waiver of the requirements for an apostille and translation of the foreign birth certificate, which IMUMI lobbied for and the Department of State (SEGOB) finally approved with the support of the U.S. Embassy, more than a half million Mexican-American children and adolescents will benefit. Their lives will not change in all aspects, but they will have one obstacle less and they will be able to access official school documents which allow them to continue their studies in either of the two countries.



Photo credit: Rafael del Río/FM4

*Various international organizations have also denounced the Southern Border Program because the cases of abuse, extortion, assaults, and arbitrary detentions of migrants in transit have multiplied*

Mexico's Southern Border Program has also inspired civil society organizations to come together. The program began in July 2014 to control and regulate migration. Under the leadership of President Enrique Peña Nieto, the program responds to United States pressure to stop Central American irregular migration.

Various international organizations have also denounced the Southern Border Program because the cases of abuse, extortion, assaults, and arbitrary detentions of migrants in transit have

increased.<sup>29</sup> For many activists, the program is a "big stick that targets migrants."<sup>30</sup> In addition to violating human rights, the program has been characterized by a flagrant lack of accountability and transparency in the use of public funds.<sup>31</sup>



*Activism on the part of civil society organizations in the Central and North American region has contributed in significant ways to make the dangers of migration in transit through Mexico a more widely recognized issued. Organizations in the countries of origin, principally Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, have also contributed to the growing attention to the migrant populations from the different countries in the region, as well as countries beyond Central America*

## Contributions of activism to the political and social agenda

Activism on the part of civil society organizations in the Central and North American region has contributed in significant ways to make the dangers of migration in transit through Mexico a more widely recognized issued. Organizations in the countries of origin, principally Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, have also contributed to the growing attention to the migrant populations from the different countries in the region, as well as countries beyond Central America.<sup>32</sup>

Activism has not only consolidated a network of national and international organizations, but it has also positioned demands in spite of resistance by authorities and public institutions from the various countries on the migration route.

Issues such as refugee status and exile now play a central role in the political debate,<sup>33</sup> due to the efforts of organizations like Sin Fronteras I.A.P., which has maintained over two decades of leadership in legal defense, social assistance, and psychological care for asylum-seekers. Through cases such as that of Stephen Comton,<sup>34</sup> who sued the authorities of the National Institute of Migration (INM) for damages, such organizations have also proven the possibility of litigating in favor of the rights of migrants in Mexico.

As mentioned above, the Migration Law of 2011 was intensely revised by organizations that fought to eliminate articles, sections, and phrases that they considered to contradict the spirit of the law.<sup>35</sup> For example, organizations argued that Article 111, Section V, limits the opportunities of migrants to receive adequate information, and therefore, justice.<sup>36</sup>

Arbitrary or prolonged migrant detention, before which the law is ambiguous, has also been a focus of migration activism. The consequences of detention extend to the emotional and inhumane impact on those who are detained for indefinite periods of time, or without clarity about the detention process.<sup>37</sup> The issue has mobilized groups and networks to demand clear legal limits under which a migrant can be detained, a list of rights while detained, the conditions of migrant children and adolescents, the rights of families to remain together, and the consideration of the need to offer specific guarantees to people in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual community. For many of these groups, the fact that a person can be detained for the sole reason of being a migrant implies a bodily punishment that was eliminated as a legal sentence in 2009 (for which the articles 118 and 125 were modified, and articles 120,121, 123, 124, and 127 were eliminated from the General Population Law).<sup>38</sup>



Photo credit: FM4

*Arbitrary or prolonged detention, before which the law is ambiguous, has also been a focus of migration activism. The consequences of detention extend to the emotional and inhumane impact on those who are detained for indefinite periods of time, or without clarity about the conditions of the detention process*

The reach and efficacy of each organization and solidarity group varies according to local conditions and circumstances. The obstacles that FM4 Paso Libre face in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, are distinct, for example, from those that organizations face in Mexico City. In Mexico City, the Law of Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility offers a local, legal framework towards migration in which many organizations have been able to exercise influence.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to mention the existence of alliances of groups made up of activists of distinct profiles, professionals (pro bono lawyers, doctors, and psychologists), academics, and support organizations joining together in strategic political lobbying.



*The Citizen Council of the Mexican National Institute of Migration (INM), under the Department of State (SEGOB), exemplifies this communication between organizations, networks of academics, pro bono professionals, and functionaries from various areas of government*

The Citizen Council of the Mexican National Institute of Migration (INM), under the Department of State (SEGOB), exemplifies this communication between organizations, networks of academics, professionals, and functionaries from various areas of government. The council meets four times per year in official, formal sessions with all the general directors of the INM, in addition to the Commissioner and Under-Secretary of Population, Migration, and Religious Matters. Together with actors from other government agencies, international organisms and civil society broadly defined (pro-migrant groups, but also business people and experts in human rights, etc.), this space is key for moving official agreements forward because the government functions as one actor among

several decision-makers and informants.

The INM Citizen Council includes particular commissions and working groups around various themes. The presence of organizations and institutions in these smaller groups becomes even more significant as these groups guide and push the council's internal activities.

In the case of the working group on "migrant youth", for example, civil society organizations determined the agenda and the materials to move the process forward. The working group on regularization is coordinated by a government leader, but the participating organizations provide the research materials, etc. On the other hand, although the working group on visas and residency for humanitarian reasons is coordinated by the person who is president of the council, the work is defined by equal collaboration and horizontal decision-making.

The Citizen Council of INM is not a panacea, but it is a significant achievement by and for civil society, as it positions the issues and concerns that the organizations observe in their daily work at the heart of decision-making processes and allows for the new perspectives and demands of activists and affected people to influence problem-solving efforts.

## Conclusion

- The growing numbers of migrants in transit through Mexico observed over the last two decades through the Central and North American region has led to a broader profile for migration activism. Religious and secular groups, but also legal experts, professionals, academic experts, and citizens in solidarity articulate a diverse array of activities and issues under the banner of migration activism.
- Direct work with the migrant population occupies a central component of the day in and day out efforts of these organizations, including: assessment and advice, support, and humanitarian assistance (shelters), but also legal and psychological orientation. The desire to have legal and political impact unites these diverse groups beyond their daily labors and ideological profile. This has led to several successes along with failed attempts that did not find enough political will to move issues forward,<sup>40</sup> or were not able to obtain the agreements between legislators to address concrete demands (as in specific adjustments and changes to norms and articles in law).
- The organizations that attend to the migrant cause have offered solutions to specific issues (as in the above-mentioned elimination of the apostille requirement for official documents to facilitate educational access). They have also offered creative options in response to complex matters (from questioning detention practices to the contention mechanisms for control of migration routes), in addition to providing social and humanitarian services not covered by the State. It is important to take note that shelters and assistance centers throughout Mexican territory are supported by general society and diverse allies. It is a demonstration of the vitality of the groups dedicated to these issues that have developed in spite of the economic challenges that limit their work.
- Furthermore, many of the activists are youth that dedicate great amounts of time, often without pay or low wages, to the work of humanitarian and social service.<sup>41</sup> The technical and academic specialization of some of the activists in certain organizations also stands out, especially those with legal and psychological expertise. Many of the organizations have been able to professionalize solidarity work and have been able to shift the norms of philanthropy to more sophisticated demands in line with international standards of human rights.
- Several of these organizations, the most representative among them, actually influence the political agenda with concrete demands and proposals for legal reforms that imply substantial changes to political and social dynamics. The speed of their reaction and organization exceeds that of many government functionaries, communications companies, and academics.<sup>42</sup>



- Although conditions of utmost vulnerability characterize the work of civil society in response to social problems like migration, an adequate protection of activists and humanitarian workers does not exist on the part of the State. Humanitarian social work becomes a risky line of work, not only because criminal networks threaten and infiltrate migrant shelters—threatening all the surroundings—, but also due to government actors implicated in questioning, threatening, or inhibiting the work of advocates for human rights of migrants (as described in repeated reports by activists themselves).
  
- In addition to the growing violence at the hands of criminal organizations and in-fighting among drug traffickers, there is marked complicity of the authorities via acts of corruption and the generalized impunity in grave cases of the violation of human rights in Mexico as well as each of the countries in Central America.<sup>43</sup> This has produced a humanitarian crisis that explains the increased migration flows. In light of the severity of conditions, it is surprising how many people, groups, and organizations demonstrate the positive will, bravery, and capacity for sustained response and support. In spite of the financial difficulties, they have been able to construct networks of solidarity and working teams to pressure the government and highlight the issues of transit migration. Without their solidarity and decisive action, the social and political spheres would be very different and much more difficult.

## ○ Policy recommendations

Given the nature of activism in favor of immigrants, it is important to implement the following public policies:

- 1. Generate financial resources for organizations dedicated to the reception and support of migrants in transit through Mexico. The scarcity of resources is one of the principal challenges to taking advantage of the growing specialties of those who form collectives dedicated to migrants.
- 2. Effectively activate the protection mechanisms for activists that work in favor of the migrant population in transit. Even in cases where such mechanisms do exist, they are not efficient in conditions of direct threat. Although the authorities have been informed concerning distinct cases, protection has been scarce or null, and it has led to violent attempts on activists and the impunity of investigations against threats and aggressions.
- 3. Develop mechanisms of control and follow-up on agreed upon activities in forums, working groups, and agreement sessions between distinct groups that include government functionaries, political representatives, and activists.
- 4. Generate projects of education and awareness-raising that include local populations around shelters and centers of attention for migrants in transit. The local population often reacts out of prejudices and stereotypes based in fear and doubts about access to the services provided to migrants in transition. Providing information, clarity about the situation, and reconciliation of interests between the local population and shelters of migrants in transit must be a permanent priority.
- 5. Educate about xenophobia, racism, and discrimination as a form of understanding human diversity and the conditions of the real world. Such understanding should include the theme of migration from various societies, and especially, within the region of Mexico and Central America. This work is a fundamental issue because given predictions of future movement, frameworks of legal and educational action must prevent outbursts of racism and xenophobia.<sup>44</sup>
- 6. Improve the debate in the public sphere about migration-related challenges. Although the issue has become visible and is notable for much of Mexican society, stereotypes continue to deny migrants the capacity for action and decision-making regarding their own future. It would be ideal that media create more spaces to understand this problem, in addition to listening to the migrants themselves, whose voices are the most silenced in the debate and the process for social and political change.



---

**PRINCIPAL MILESTONES REGARDING MIGRATION IN TRANSIT THROUGH MEXICO**

Date	Event
<b>December 11, 2006</b>	The war against organized crime announced by the Mexican State.
<b>June 28, 2009</b>	Military coup in Honduras.
<b>August 23, 2010</b>	Massacre at San Fernando, Tamaulipas.
<b>January 27, 2011</b>	Refugee and Complementary Protection Act
<b>May 24, 2011</b>	Law of Migration passed.
<b>November 9, 2012</b>	Law of Migration goes into effect.
<b>June 9, 2011</b>	The Constitutional Reform in Materials of Human Rights passed.
<b>December 1, 2012</b>	Enrique Peña Nieto takes over as president.
<b>June-July, 2014</b>	Drastic increase in the arrival of unaccompanied Central American minors.
<b>July 7, 2014</b>	Launch of Mexico's Program Southern Border—Department of State.
<b>December 17, 2014</b>	United States and Cuba announce agreement to normalize diplomatic relations between both countries, leading to a period of high levels of migration of Cubans in transit through Mexico to the United States.
<b>June 15, 2015</b>	Elimination of the requirement of an apostille and official, translation of documents in order to enroll in a primary or secondary school in Mexico (Department of Public Education).
<b>October 4, 2016</b>	Haitian refugees begin to arrive in Tijuana.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Historically, immigrant groups came to Mexico before the arrival of significant numbers of Guatemalan refugees—such as the thousands of Republicans from Spain in the forties or South Americans beginning in the eighties. In contrast, the Mexican government invited and facilitated the integration process of these immigrants, the majority as political exiles.
2. Martínez, O. (2010). Los migrantes que no importan. En el camino con los centroamericanos indocumentados en México. Spain: Icaria.
3. Scribner, T. & Appleby, K. (2013). On “strangers no longer”, Perspectives on the historic US-Mexican Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Migration, United States: Paulist Press.
4. Basok, T., Belanger, D., Rojas, M., & Candiz, G. (2015). Rethinking transit migration. Precarity, mobility and self-making in Mexico. New York: Palgrave Pivot.
5. Marconi, G. (2010). “Not just passing through: International migrants in cities of transit countries,” SSIIM Papers Series 6. Venice: UNESCO.
6. Armijo, N. & Toussaint, M. (2015). Centroamérica después de la firma de los acuerdos de paz. Violencia, fronteras y migración. México: Instituto Mora.
7. Anguiano, M. & Cruz, R. (2014). Migraciones internacionales, crisis y vulnerabilidades. Perspectivas comparadas. México: Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
8. Witte, E. (2016). Atrocidades innegables. Confrontando crímenes de lesa humanidad en México, Open Society Foundation.
9. La Jornada (2008). “En México se trata peor a los migrantes que en EU: Jorge Bustamante, relator de la ONU”, September 16. Accessed via: <http://migracion.jornada.com.mx/noticias/en-mexico-se-trata-peor-a-los-migrantes-que-en-eu-jorge-a-bustamante-relator-de-la-onu/>.
10. Farah, M. (2009). “Bienvenidos al infierno del secuestro”. Report. México: CNDH.
11. See: La Razón (2011). “Poire descalifica a la CNDH por migrantes”. January 11. Accessed via: <http://www.razon.com.mx/spip.php?article60777>.
12. Guerrero, E. (2012). “La estrategia fallida”, Mexico: Nexos.
13. Celorio, M. (2014). “Organizaciones emergentes en torno a migración en tránsito por México-EUA: Solidarias y perversas”. In Molina, S. y Méndez, A. Migración, organizaciones civiles y transmigración.
14. Although we do not have an exact count of shelters across Mexican and Central American territory (especially Guatemala), we do have approximate numbers and locations. See: <https://reddhmigrantes.wordpress.com/albergues/>.
15. Camargo A. (2014). Arrancados de raíz. Causas que originan el desplazamiento transfronterizo de niños, niñas y adolescentes no acompañados y/o separados de Centroamérica y sus necesidades de protección internacional, Mexico, ACNUR.
16. Rigoni, F. M. (2010). El norte se vuelve sur. 30 años de presencia scalabriniana en México. México: Publicación de la provincia San Juan Bautista, Congregación de los Misioneros de San Carlos, Scalabrinianos.
17. Najar, A. (2013). “Los albergues de la esperanza”, Letras Libres. Available in: <http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico-espana/los-albergues-la-esperanza>.
18. See: <http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/telediario/docu-patronas/3006508/>.
19. See: <http://laopinion.com/2014/08/26/activistas-rechazan-vigilancia-a-la-bestia/>.
20. Varela, A. (2012). “Del silencio salimos, La caravana de madres hondureñas en México, un ejemplo de resistencias en clave femenina al régimen global de frontera”. En Aquino, A., Varela, A. y Decossé, F., Desafiando fronteras. México: Frontera press.
21. See the complete text: <http://investigacionsocial.org.mx/Manual-de-buenas-practicas-en-la-atencion-a-grupos-en-situacion-de-vulnerabilidad-en-transito-migratorio-por-mexico.pdf>.
22. Urbano, J. et al. (2015). Manual de Buenas Prácticas en la atención a grupos en situación de vulnerabilidad en tránsito migratorio por México. Mujeres, niñas, niños y población LGBTTTI, Mexico, Universidad Iberoamericana.
23. Vega, H. (2016). “El desafío de transitar-vivir en la ciudad para personas migrantes en Guadalajara. México”, FM4 Paso Libre, Second Research Report.
24. See, for example, Guevara, J.A. (2011), Marco institucional y normativo en material de migración internacional en México, análisis y propuestas, Instituto de estudios y divulgación sobre migración. Mexico.
25. Working group on legislation and migration (2011). “Compilación de documentos elaborados por el Grupo de Trabajo sobre Política Migratoria como insumos para el Reglamento de la Ley de Migración”, September-October.
26. Kline, V. (2013). ¿Ahora, hacia dónde? Los retos que enfrentan las familias de migrantes transnacionales entre EUA y México. Mexico: Instituto para las mujeres en la Migración (IMUMI).
27. According to IMUMI, the apostille is a certification process with a signature and seal that appears on official documents, such as the birth certificate, they are original, and a recognized authority must give it. See: <http://imumi.org/uf/recursos/como-obtener-apostilla.pdf>.
28. Kline, V. (2014). Guía para las familias transnacionales. Procesos de custodia y trámites de identidad para madres y padres retornados a México. México: Instituto para las mujeres en la Migración (IMUMI).
29. Cassem, G. (2016). Migrante cero. Una propuesta de indicadores de seguridad para las personas migrantes. México: INEDIM Instituto de Estudios y Divulgación sobre Migración, A.C.
30. See: <http://fundar.org.mx/las-incoherencias-del-programa-frontera-sur/>.
31. Castañeda, J. (2016). ¿Cuánto nos dio EU por sellar la frontera sur?. El Sur, 22 de febrero. Mexico. Available in: <http://suracapulco.mx/9/%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8Bcuant%E2%80%8Bo-nos-dio-eu-por-sellar-la-frontera-sur/>.
32. In 2015 and 2016 the migration in transit of Cubans and Haitians across Central America and Mexico became more visible to the general public. The majority is migrating with the intention to stay in the United States and to ask for political asylum or humanitarian refugee status.



33. See: "Palabras del Presidente Enrique Peña Nieto durante la cumbre de líderes sobre refugiados en el marco de la 71 Asamblea General de la ONU", September 20 2016. Available in: <<https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/prensa/palabras-del-presidente-enrique-pena-nieto-durante-la-cumbre-de-lideres-sobre-refugiados-en-el-marco-de-la-71-asamblea-general-de-la-onu?idiom=es>>.
34. See: "El caso #StephenCompton y la reparación integral del daño", June 29, 2016. Available in <<http://www.sinfronteras.org.mx/index.php/es/>>.
35. Wolf, S. (2013). Diagnóstico del Instituto Nacional de Migración. Hacia un sistema de rendición de cuentas en pro de los derechos de las personas migrantes en México. México: Instituto para la seguridad y la democracia (Insyde).
36. Santiago, M. & Bazzaco, E. (2013). Víctimas entre fronteras. La ausencia del Estado en la defensa de los derechos de las personas migrantes en México. México: I(dh)eas Litigio estratégico en Derechos Humanos.
37. Sin Fronteras I.A.P (2010). "Informe sobre la Situación de los derechos humanos de las personas migrantes y solicitantes de asilo detenidas en las Estaciones Migratorias de México, 2007 - 2009". Mexico.
38. Coria, E & Bonnici, G. (2013). "Dignidad sin excepción. Alternativas a las detención migratoria en México". International Detention Coalition.
39. Calderon Chelius, L. (2016). "Hospitalidad a la mexicana: Algunos elementos a partir del nuevo marco legal hacia los extranjeros en México", SIIM paper Series vol. 15. Venecia: UNESCO; Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal (2013). Migrantes: análisis de la situación de los derechos de las personas migrantes de origen extranjero en la Ciudad de México 2007-2012. México: CDHDF.
40. As was the case with the lawsuit filed in 2014 by the Mesoamerican Commission of Jurists, headed by a number of associations that filed a legal appeal for the Supreme Court of the Nation to rule on the articles of the Migration Law that allow arbitrary detention within Mexican territory; a lawsuit that did not succeed.
41. Paris, D., Zenteno, R. Treviño, J. & Wolf, S. (2016). "Un análisis de los actores políticos y sociales en el diseño y la implementación de la política y la gestión migratoria en México". Final Report. México: Colegio de la Frontera Norte and Ford Foundation.
42. One example is the crisis that caused the arrival of thousands of Haitians to the northern border, specifically to the city of Tijuana in Baja California. While there has been a notable media reaction and there is an academic interest in the subject, the basic care and welcome to the thousands of people waiting for a humanitarian visa from the U.S. government fell to the migrant homes and the shelters in the region.
43. Aguayo, S., Sanchez, D., Pérez, M. & Dayan, J. (2016). En el desamparo. Los Zetas, el estado, la sociedad y las víctimas de San Fernando, Tamaulipas (2010) y Allende, Coahuila (2011). Mexico: El Colegio de México.
44. See: <<http://redintegra.org/index.php/blog/manifiesto-de-integra-sobre-la-grave-situacion-de-los-inmigrantes-haitianos-en-tijuana>>.

## Organized civil society in response to transit migration through Mexico

CIESAS, Guadalajara: México

First Edition, 2016

Author: Leticia Calderón Chelius

Translator: Jill Anderson

Key words: Organized civil society; Citizen participation in favor of migrants; Transnational humanitarian support; Vulnerability and migration in transit; Human rights violations.

CANAMID, *Policy Brief Series*

Directors: Agustín Escobar Latapí y Pablo Mateos

Editorial design: Puntoasterisco®

Cover photo: Juan José Martín / FM4. We would like to thank FM4 Paso Libre en el Camino A.C. and Ernesto Rodríguez for their contribution of the photographs published in this Policy Brief

Editorial assistance: Laura Pedraza

CANAMID project is funded by The John and Catherine MacArthur Foundation

This publication has passed a relevance-reading approved by CIESAS Editorial Committee, who guarantees its quality and relevance. The editor responsible for this publication was Pablo Mateos.



Organized civil society in response to transit migration through Mexico by Leticia Calderón Chelius is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License

ISBN: 978-607-486-388-8

Impreso en México. *Printed in Mexico.*

Suggested citation:

Calderón Chelius, Leticia (2016) "Organized civil society in response to transit migration through Mexico", *CANAMID Policy Brief Series*, PB13, CIESAS: Guadalajara, Mexico.

Available at: [www.canamid.org](http://www.canamid.org)



### CANAMID POLICY BRIEF SERIES

The main objective of the CANAMID project is to generate useful and current evidence to support the design of public policies that address the problems of Central American migrants, including the conditions they face in their countries of origin, in transit, and upon arrival to the United States or settlement in Mexico, as well as their potential return to their places of origin (El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras).

CANAMID is directed by Pablo Mateos and Agustín Escobar, at the Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS, Mexico), and is funded by the MacArthur Foundation (Chicago). The participant institutions are:

- Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM), Georgetown University (U.S.)
- Instituto de Investigación y Proyección sobre Dinámicas Globales y Territoriales, Territoriales, University Rafael Landívar (Guatemala)
- Simeón Cañas Central American University (El Salvador)
- The organization "Reflection, Research and Communication Team" (Honduras)
- International Studies Department, Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico (ITAM)

CANAMID *Policy Brief Series* is a peer reviewed set of papers in which experts from these countries have synthesized the best available evidence covering five priority areas that affect the issue of migration: population, health, education, labor, and governance and security.

CANAMID theme coordinators:

- Population: Carla Pederzini, Claudia Masferrer, Fernando Riosmena
- Education: Silvia Giorguli, Bryant Jensen
- Labor: Pia Orrenius, Phil Martin, Lilita Meza
- Health: Nelly Salgado
- Governance and Security: Pablo Mateos

The CANAMID *Policy Brief Series* publications are available to download for free in English and Spanish at [www.canamid.org](http://www.canamid.org)



## SUMMARY

Over the last two decades transit migration flows through Mexico, mainly of Central American migrants, have grown substantially. This phenomenon has created a wide solidarity response in civil society in Mexico involving different activist groups such as NGOs or religious groups as well as individual volunteers; legal experts, professionals, academics and lay citizens. They together represent a rich rainbow of activities and causes that have actually conformed the new migration agenda in Mexico. This Policy Brief synthesizes the key contributions from these Mexican civil society groups to the protection of immigrant human rights in Mexico. Beyond their incidence in migration policy, these civil society groups offer an extremely valuable humanitarian service to transit migrants in Mexico, bridging the wide gaps in official protection and assistance that the State is not providing. Their speed in reacting to events and organizing civic response is well beyond the capacity of other sectors traditionally dealing with migration in Mexico, namely civil servants, public institutions, the media and the academic sector. This extraordinary response in civil society cannot be understood in isolation. It must be interpreted in a context of extreme violence against transit migrants, a rise in internal migration and the return of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans from the U.S. Despite of the perils and difficulties associated to the situations in which these groups operate, the example of solidarity, braveness and ability to respond very quickly to crises that these groups have demonstrated once and again, is extraordinary in the Mexican political context. Beyond the individual groups achievements, they have primarily built solidarity networks and cross-sectional teams to lobby the government and manage to give visibility to the vulnerability and problematic situation of transit migrants in Mexico. Without their solidarity and decisiveness, without doubt, the social and political situation with respect to migrants in Mexico today would have been much more difficult.

### TITLES PUBLISHED IN THE POLICY BRIEF SERIES:

- PB#01 Three decades of migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America: A historical and demographic outlook**  
Carla Pederzini, Fernando Riosmena, Claudia Masferrer and Noemy Molina
- PB#02 A portrait of U.S. children of Central American origins and their educational opportunity**  
Bryant Jensen and James D. Bachmeier
- PB#03 Central Americans in the U.S. labor market: Recent trends and policy impacts**  
Pia M. Orrenius and Madeline Zavodny
- PB#04 Visitors and residents: Guatemalan, Salvadoran and Honduran workers in Mexico**  
Liliana Meza González
- PB#05 Access to health services for Central American migrants in transit through Mexico**  
René Leyva Flores, César Infante, Edson Serván-Mori, Frida Quintino and Omar Silverman-Retana
- PB#06 Deportation and mental health of Central American migrants**  
Ietza Bojorquez
- PB#07 Consular protection as state policy to protect Mexican and Central American migrants**  
Jorge A. Schiavon
- PB#08 Welfare regimes in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala: Exclusionary and inadequate**  
Úrsula Roldán Andrade and Sindy Hernández Bonilla
- PB#09 Guatemalan migration to Chiapas: Effects on wages and hours worked**  
Liliana Meza González
- PB#10 Central American children and youth schooling in Mexico: Generations 1.5 and 2.0**  
Rodrigo Aguilar Zepeda and Silvia Elena Giorguli Saucedo
- PB#11 Honduran migrants in Mexico: From transit to settlement**  
Carmen Fernández Casanueva and María Teresa Rodríguez
- PB#12 Governmentality and violence towards Central American migrants in the Gulf of Mexico**  
Hipólito Rodríguez
- PB#13 Organized civil society in response to transit migration through Mexico**  
Leticia Calderón Chelius
- PB#14 Central American transit migration through Mexico: New patterns and trends**  
Ernesto Rodríguez Chavez



MacArthur  
Foundation

GEORGETOWN  
UNIVERSITY