The Impact of Border Externalization and Militarization in Latin America and the Caribbean

Results from Phase 1 of the project

Border Externalization and Militarization: A Global Analysis

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This report contains the results from Phase 1 of the Project Border Externalization and Militarization: A Global Analysis. The research was commissioned by the AFSC International Programs Just Migration Thematic Hub/Lead, and highlights the results of research that was conducted by AFSC to critically examine the global impact of border externalization and militarization on people on the move, border, transit, and impacted communities.

Contents

General Context

According to IOM, 4 out of 6 migrants in the South American regions are South American nationals.[1] However, there has been a progressive increase in extra continental migration mostly coming from a diversity of countries such as India, China, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Cameroon, as well as Haitians entering the region through Brazil.[2]

According to Migration Policy Institute, in the last ten years, the number of migrants doubled from 8.3 million in 2010 to 16.3 million in 2022.[3] Since 2010, the number of forced displacements in the region has dramatically risen. Political and economic crises, violence and inequalities, as well as natural disasters, primarily affected nationals from Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti. UNHCR 2022 Global Trends on Forced Displacement indicates that, at the end of that year 800,600 refugees and 5.2 million other people in need of international protection resided in countries in the Americas region, most of whom were 6 million Venezuelan.[4]

MIGRANT FLOWS AND ISSUES

The forced migrant profile in the region has diversified, as families including women, men, the elderly, and children are moving. According to UNICEF, children moving in Latin America and the Caribbean account the larger share of the migrant population than any other region in the world, being one of every four people on the move in LAC.[5] Most of these flows attempt to reach United States territory; according to UNICEF, more than 541,000 nationals from northern Central American countries were recorded at the southern border of the United States in 2022; this included more than 140,000 children and family members, and 114,585 unaccompanied children.[6]

A significant increasing trend in the region is the rise of forced displaced who are willing to seek asylum in Mexico. According to the Mexican National Commission for Refugees, in 2013 only 1,295 migrants sought asylum, compared to 141,053 in 2023. Most of the asylum seekers in Mexico are from Haiti (44, 201 asylum seekers), Honduras (41, 962), Cuba (18,458), Guatemala (6,115), El Salvador (6,123), Venezuela (5,521), Brazil (3,671), Chile (3,485), Colombia (2,573) and Afghanistan (1,744).[7]

Two of the most critical migration dynamics are the 2018 “caravan” type of mobilization, and the increase of irregular travels through the “Darien gap”, at the Panama-Colombia border. In 2018 migrants started to deploy a massive mobilization called “caravans” departing mainly departing from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, this as a way to travel safer and to reduce the cost of smugglers, and also a strategy to give more visibility and accompaniment by humanitarian organizations and media[8] From the end of 2017 to 2022, approximately 30 caravans have made the long journey through Mexico to reach U.S soil, being approximately more than 230 thousand migrants.[9]

The 60-mile jungle that covers part of the Colombian- Panamanian border has become a key transit route for forced migrants. While the register of migrants crossing through the Darian gap was minimal in 2010, more than 500,000 people crossed it by the end of 2023.[10] One reason for this increase is the lack of regular pathways, as the economic and security crises in countries like Venezuela, Ecuador and Haiti persist.[11]

Although there are different routes to cross Darien Gap (depending on the economic capacity of migrants to pay for "fares") the journey is dangerous for all because of the adverse conditions of the jungle,[12] where they are also subjects of multiple human rights violations.

According to Doctors Without Borders mission in Panama, in 2023, the team attended 17,400 wound dressings and treated 397 cases of sexual violence.[13]

MACRO-LEVEL CONTEXT (STATE PERSPECTIVES)

Since the increase of forced migration flows to the United States coming from Central America in the 1980's due to civil wars and massive violence, the U.S has progressively developed an externalization strategy by using Mexico as a "vertical border"[14] as it serves as a buffer for forced migrants willing to seek asylum in the U.S.

Among Central America countries, there has been a diplomatic effort to develop a regional approach to migration, an example of that was the creation of the Central American Commission of Directors of Migration of 1990 that followed the Tegucigalpa Protocol that aimed to develop a shared vision on migration issues and the standardization of border procedures, as well as tackling human trafficking.[15] Despite these efforts, it is difficult to say that there is a regional migratory system among Central America, Mexico and the United States,[16] but there are continuous American efforts to solidify its buffering system through Mexico.

As part of these efforts, the "Plan de Acción para la Cooperación sobre Seguridad Fronteriza", "Plan Sur", the agreements "Fronteras Inteligentes" of 2001, "Iniciativa Mérida" of 2008, and "Plan Frontera Sur" of 2014 between U.S and Mexico[17] have involved U.S funding, equipment and training to Mexican authorities to increase their contention of migratory flows before arriving to U.S, soil, and has caused an increment of migratory detention from Mexican authorities than Americans, as of 138,000 detentions in 2002 by Mexican authorities by 2020, to 240,00 in 2005.[18]

The most recent U.S efforts to externalize its border through Mexico had been during the Trump administration, as its xenophobic and racist migration rhetoric was a key issue for his electoral campaign. In 2016, due to the increase of the migratory flows coming from Haiti at the Mexican northern border, the U.S administration promoted a lists system called "metering" on which asylum seekers must be set on physical lists to indicate its turn for crossing to the U.S. The implementation of these lists were set on a very arbitrary basis. Still, in all the northern Mexican cities where it was implemented there was an involvement of Mexican migration authorities in the administration of those lists,[19] which is evidence of the

nature of externalization, as it implies the shift of administration of migration governance functions to one state to another, stated by Cantor et al.[20]

In 2021, a sanitary norm called "Title 42" started to operate under the justification of the pandemic. As part of it, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) denied the entry to the US to any person who could mean a risk in terms of public health, besides facilitating the apprehension or expulsion of any irregular migrant in the U.S for the same reason.[21] By mid 2023, over 2,861,755 migrants were expelled from the U.S due to the sanitary norm.[22]

In December of 2018, while metering and Title 42 were still operating, the Trump administration announced the activation of section 235 (b)(2)(C) of their Immigration and Nationality Act, which forced any irregular migrant willing to seek asylum in the U.S to do their asylum proceeding and waiting for its resolution in Mexico's border cities. Tijuana, Mexicali, Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, and Nogales, are border cities considered by the State Department as some of the most dangerous in the world, recommending American citizens not to travel.[23] Ironically, those were the same cities where over 81 thousand migrants had to wait their asylum proceedings under the so-called "Migrant Protection Protocols" (MPPs). Migrants under MPPs were mainly from Central America. Still, there was also an important percentage of nationals from Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Perú, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Belize, and Bolivia.[24]

International organizations, humanitarian agencies, and non-governmental organizations profoundly documented severe human rights violations. AFSC documented the arbitrary application of the MPPs, which showed an inconsistency on how the protocols were applicated differently depending on the immigration judges,[25] as well as the indiscriminate application of this policy to vulnerable populations, like a pregnant minor and a Honduran woman that just had a miscarriage and was alone with his son, who had mental health issues.[26]

According to a recent report developed by AFSC, Universidad Iberoamericana and United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, most of the migrants under MPPs were victims of extortion, robbery, threats, assault, verbal violence, threats, and kidnapping.[27] Even though there was a binational litigation in the U.S and in Mexico led by American and Mexican organizations - such as American Civil Liberties Union, Al Otro Lado, and Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración - for the MPPs dismantling, it remained until august of 2022 during Biden administration on.

As part of the MPP's bilateral negotiations between the U.S and Mexico, in May 2019, Mexico deployed over 25 thousand National Guard Forces on the Southern Border,[28] which marks the beginning of the militarization of migration controls in Mexico, by being pressured by the U.S, and implied a quantitative progress on its agenda of converting Mexico into a "vertical border".

It is also important to mention that Mexico is one of the countries in the world that has detention centers (called *estaciones migratorias* or migratory stations) to contain migrants who transit irregularly in the country. Traveling irregularly in Mexico is not a penal type – but an administrative fault. However, all the abuses and violence that migrants experience in these detention centers are largely documented. One of the worst incidents inside Mexico's

detention centers was in Ciudad Juarez (northern Mexico) in March of 2023, when a fire left 40 migrants dead.[29] According to recent independent research where migrant survivors collaborated, there is a probability that the security guards intentionally did not open the men's cell by arguing that "they could not find the keys" but there is an audio recording that evidence an immigration guard saying "we are not going to open to you" (*a ustedes no les vamos a abrir*).[30]

Before the tragedy, testimonies said that some migrants were threatening the migration guards with setting the cell on fire as a sign of protest because of the poor sanitary conditions of the cell, and the scarcity of food and water. To this, the guards answered by saying things like "let them die!" (*que se mueran*) as well as racist and xenophobic comments like "What are you doing in our country? Nobody wants you here, get out of this country, you're not welcome here!" affirms Stefan Arrango, one of the survivors.[31] It is also important to mention that two migrants from Venezuela are accused of homicide and injuries by presumably having started the fire; both are under detention.[32]

MESO-LEVEL: NON-STATE KEY ACTORS

In Latin America, and especially in Mexico, there is a solid network of non-governmental organizations, international organizations and migrants' shelters who are fully dedicated to migrant accompaniment. AFSC[33] mapped over a hundred organizations that provide services, protection, and support to migrant communities in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Dominican Republic.

International Organizations like UNHCR, IOM and Doctors Without Borders have solidly established themselves all over Mexico's southern and northern border. Their response, along with NGO's and Mexican shelters, were essential for attending migrants under metering, MPPs and Title 42. It is also possible to observe the retreat of the Mexican state regarding migrant attention because of the comprehensive network of non-state actors that already exist to provide support to migrants.

During the implementation of the MPPs, a solid coalition of organizations was made to issue press releases[34] and public demands on the dismantling of the protocols. Two of the most relevant events during that period was a discussion promoted by NGOs with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (part of the Organization of American States, "OAS") about Mexico's migration policy of contention.[35] This audience promoted a press release by the Inter-American Commission on which it expressed its deep concerns over the MPPs repercussions for the human rights of migrants.[36]

IO's and NGOs have also been especially instrumental in documenting and bringing key figures on the situation on the Mexican northern and southern border. Reports developed by AFSC[37] Human Rights First,[38] Doctors Without Borders,[39] and Hope Border Institute[40] on MPPs have been essential for bringing visibility and denouncing American externalization policies by Mexican compliance.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZING AND MOBILIZATION

As mentioned in the previous section, there is an important network of active NGOs and shelters that offer attention to migrants all over the region, especially in Mexico's northern and southern border, and Central America. While looking for evidence on how these organizations claims and efforts to tackle militarization and externalization, it was found that these initiatives are always made collectively. Though this is not the exhaustive-definite list of all the organizations of the region, most of them are organized into the following five *colectivos* (collectives) and working groups.

1. Colectivo de Monitoreo Frontera Sur (COMDHSM)[41] – *Monitoring Collective of the Southern Border*

This collective is comprised of 15 organizations[42] based in different cities on Mexico's Southern Border (especially Tapachula). Together they do monthly monitoring reports on the situation of Mexico's southern border. These reports describe the scarce conditions of migrants in the southern border and especially of the most vulnerable. On its last monitoring of February 29th, 2024, they reported the installation of 80 tents in Tapachula inhabited by families with minors in early childhood.[43] On February 21st, 2024, they denounced acts of harassment, intimidation and racial profiling by the State Police in Tapachula towards human rights defenders,[44] and on January 31st 2024 they demanded truth and justice on the death of a Haitian migrant.[45]

All the reports include specific demands to Mexican authorities and are signed by the 15 members of the Colectivo. They do not have an official website, instead the reports are shared through their members' social media and on the website of the Programa de Estudios Migratorios (Migration studies program) of Universidad Iberoamericana, a Jesuit university whose research center Programa de Estudios Migratorios "PRAMI" is very well connected with this Colectivo and member of other working groups.

2. Grupo de Trabajo sobre Política Migratoria (GTPM) – *Working Group on Migration Policy*

The GPTM is a civil society network funded in 2010 composed of 50 civil society organizations that work on refugee and migrants' rights. Some of their key issues regard the protection of the right to seek asylum, migrant children and youth, administrative migration procedures, accompaniment of cases of migrants' deprivation of liberty, access to justice and due process.[46] They also work closely with the Mexican Congress, where they have promoted over 255 initiatives regarding modifications of the Mexican Constitution for the benefit for child and youth migrants and for due process with respect to migration administrative procedures.[47] Of all the networks mapped, this is the largest by concentrating on some of the most active NGOs and having a constantly updated website.

GPTM has also made an essential mapping of non-governmental organizations working on migration issues. According to its mapping, there are over 272 actors (including NGO's, shelters, foundations, networks) working on migration issues in the U.S.A, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Mexico concentrates most of these organizations (99).[48] As COMDHSM, they produce several press releases documenting border violence and making public calls to state authorities. As an example, when in March 2023 the fire of the migratory station in Ciudad Juárez occurred, GTPM issued a press release enlisting specific demands to the Federal Government, the Migration National Institute, Congress, and the municipal government of Ciudad Juárez. Among them, they demanded the cease of detention operations of forced migrants, public apologies, the cease of the militarization of borders, the destitution of the director of the Migration National Institute: Francisco Garduño (who still holds its charge) and assuming the repatriation costs of the victims.[49]

3. **Red Regional de Organizaciones Civiles para las Migraciones (RROCM) – *Network of Civil Society Organizations for Migrations***

The RROCM was established in 1996 as a network of 13 civil society organizations based in El Salvador (3), Guatemala (3), Honduras (1), Mexico (2), Costa Rica (3), and Dominican Republic (1). These organizations aim to "articulate a common front able to dialogue with the states of the region."[50]

Their actions focus on advocacy for public policies for protection and attention to people in forced migration contexts, as well as monitoring existing programs focused on migrants, promotion of compliance of the national, regional, and international commitments towards migrants and refugees, as well as monitoring and documentation of human rights violations.[51] Examples of their work include a Report of human rights situations for people in contexts of mobility during COVID-19.[52] They also have an observatory where they gather and analyze relevant data on migrants in transit, human trafficking, asylum seekers, and deportations.[53]

4. **Mesa de Coordinación Transfronteriza: Migración y Género. (MTMG) – *Cross Border Coordination Table***

MTMG comprises 19 organizations based in Mexico-Guatemala border with the objective of articulating community efforts for human rights defendance, free mobility, the construction of good living (*buen vivir)* with a particular focus on gender, sexual dissidence, health and territory defense.[54]

Their strategic lines are:

- Promoting self-care and collective care in contexts of work with migrants and territory defense.
- Developing research on migration with a specialization in the mobility-gender nexus.

- Promoting deliverables regarding communications and positionings on MTMG research and findings.
- Connecting self-care and collective care by strengthening the organizations capacities.
- Advocacy work by developing forums among the Mexico-Guatemala border on human rights, violence, gender diversity, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable communities.[55] They publish reports elaborated collectively among the members and have a blog where MTMG publishes its updates on border monitoring and human rights situations.[56]

5. **Grupo de Identidad y Educación para Personas Migrantes (GIE) – *Group on Identity and Education for Migrants***

GIE comprises 17 organizations mostly in central and northern Mexico. It was formally constituted in 2017 to give follow up to cases regarding access to identity for migrants and their families by "identifying the diverse problems that these groups face and cause difficulties for access to other rights, such as education, health and labor."[57]

Of all the groups, collectives and networks mentioned in this section, GIE has less visibility since it does not have an official website, but some of the most active organizations in Mexico are part of it. They have an X (Twitter) account[58] that does not have an extensive reach, but they keep updated constantly by sharing (through retweets) their members' publications and by posting relevant information on access to identity documents as a migrant in Mexico.

6. **Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes (REDODEM) – *Documentation Network of Migrant Defense Organizations***

REDODEM is a national network consisting of 21 migrant shelters and organizations based in 14 states in Mexico. They bring direct services to people in contexts of mobility and vulnerability. Along with the support of one of its members, Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes Mexico, they publish annual reports on data regarding migrant flows, sociodemographic profiles, and human rights violations.[59]

Ngo's Alliances and Networks Mobilization Strategies

This section describes the three most common mobilization strategies community organizations use for responding to militarization and externalization. Each of them is now described as evidence of each mobilization type is included. It is important to mention that these strategies are usually implemented simultaneously and interact among themselves to strengthen the organizations' efforts of awareness, advocacy, and complaint.

It is also relevant to mention that in the LAC region it has been more common for the organizations to position, identify, and denounce practices of militarization rather than externalization, and the cases where externalization is identified it is generally described along with militarization.

FIRST STRATEGY: MONITORING AND DOCUMENTATION OF BORDER VIOLENCE

The elaboration of dossiers, reports, and microsites (most of the cases done collectively) is the most common strategy used for making data on mobility visible and keeping records on the practices of migrants' coercion through militarization of Mexican migration policy and border externalization, which have become an increasing tendency since 2019, when the Mexican National Guard was deployed over the southern border.

One of the examples of this kind of strategy is the Report prepared by REDODEM in 2019 called "*Migraciones en México, fronteras, omisiones y transgresiones*" (Migrations in Mexico, borders, omissions and transgressions). As part of this Report, they dedicated one chapter to analyze the U.S. externalization of asylum to Mexico through the MPPs. As part of this chapter, recalling to FitzGerald conceptualization, they defined border externalization as "the political process through which the States of destination of migrants request the States of origin or transit to carry out migratory containment and border surveillance activities such as detentions and deportations, establishment of checkpoints or immigration filters. The externalization of immigration and border controls allows asylum seekers seeking to reach the richest destination countries to be kept at a distance, even under confinement."[60]

Also in this chapter, they focus on reflecting on the U.S capacity to exclude migrants temporarily or indefinitely by transforming the north of Mexico as "an antechamber of immigration U.S courts {...} creating a simulation of due process."[61] Additionally, they interpret the North of Mexico border strip as "a space of exclusion that is difficult for American activists, lawyers or defenders to access, where people are blocked for months or years, without an immigration status, but without being considered undocumented either."[62] They also deepen into the serious life risks migrants are under these border cities, such as

murdering, kidnapping, torturing and health risks because of poor living conditions in camps.[63]

This type of reports is usually elaborated as findings of observation missions and field monitoring. Example of this is the "*Informe de Hallazgos de la Misión de Observación de Derechos Humanos en la Frontera Sur de México*" (Report of Findings of the Observation Mission on Human Rights on the Southern Border of Mexico). This Reports' mission was elaborated by 39 organizations (some of them part of GTPM, COMDHSM, and MTMG) with the collaboration of 5 state agencies of Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, as well as International Organizations -ICRC, UNICEF, UN Human Rights, UNHCR and IOM- and six migrants and asylum seekers. The monitoring happened during August – September 2020 on a remote modality due to the pandemic through virtual work sessions with all the participant organizations and virtual interviews with migrants and asylum seekers.[64]

As part of the Report, the organizations describe the precarious situation of migrants from Central America, Cuba and Haiti that remain stranded in Mexico's southern border because of multiple factors, as barriers to regularization, the long waiting asylum-seeking process in Mexico, and fear of being detained and deported.[65] They also highlighted the eviction of 111 indigenous communities families in Guatemala by the local police, which has caused their forced displacement in southern Mexico,[66] and they also documented a protest that occurred on March 23, 2022, of around 50-70 Central American migrants who were complaining because of the indefinite prolonging of their detention. Federal Police and 20 National Guard agents tortured them using electric shocks, pepper spray and batons. Some of the migrants disappeared by transporting them in a bus with unknown destination.[67]

As part of the Report they also documented the critical situation inside the detention centers in southern Mexico, where they highlight overcrowding, prolonged detention, detention of unaccompanied migrant children and youth, difficulties in accessing to protection, lack of hygiene, sexual harassment towards women and LGBT communities, and physical, psychological, and sexual torture.[68] "People who protest are usually punished and violently repressed, even if they demand access to basic rights such as health and quality food"[69] the Report highlights.

The Report concludes with final demands directed towards Mexican authorities regarding the attention of the indigenous communities displaced in the border with Guatemala, to guarantee access to health and medicines for migrant populations, to ensure legal security to migrants in the process of regularization, to cease deportation of refugees, to seek alternatives to detention of migrants and measure to eradicate discrimination and xenophobia.[70]

Similar reports have been developed by COMDHSM, such as their 2022 "Dossier Documental" where they document the migratory context on the southern border regarding militarization, absence of regularization options, migratory detention, and the rights to defend rights. An important element of their analysis is that they have a transversal approach where they put racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and gender perspectives (including non-binary persons) at the center. As part of their reporting, they highlight the death of 55 migrants in a car accident in Tuxtla, Chiapas, Mexico, where migrants were found inside a trailer in conditions of suffocation.[71] They also highlight the operation detentions of the National Guards at the

southern border and highways of Mexico. As part of these operations, minors, pregnant women and people with disabilities have been in need of medical attention.[72] The dossier also remarks on the lack of options for the regularization of migrants, since migratory authorities promote detention, expulsion and deportation before migrants have the chance to seek asylum.[73]

They analyze the arbitrary differential treatment of authorities towards migrants by offering selected groups - based on discretionally- a visitor card for humanitarian reasons (*tarjeta de visitante por razones humanitarias*, which regularizes migrants in transit).[74] They also identify the decision of changing migration offices from the bordering cities of Chiapas to the center, which forces migrants to change their migratory routes. "We identify this decision as a clear example of establishing a vertical border, since it seeks to mobilize people and force changes in the routes from Tapachula to Tuxtla." COMDHSM affirms.[75] Regarding detention, they highlight that the National Guards detain approximately 1,025 migrants daily.[76]

"The continued militarization of immigration detention centers is worrying, even though a lower presence of the NG (National Guard) has been documented in some detention centers, we identify the reinforcement of torturous practices by INM (National Institute for Migration) agents and officials." COMDHSM states, while highlighting cases of migratory detention of child migrants.[77] Finally the Dossier remarks that human rights defenders face high risks by being threatened by organized crime gangs and National Guards Members, which put their physical and phycological integrity at risk. For example, they refer that member of COMDHSM where harassed by members of the National Guard and the National Institute for Migration while crossing from Tapachula to San Pedro Tapanatepec, Chiapas.[78]

They conclude by mentioning that militarization affects especially vulnerable migrants: "The intensification of militarization is observed in the region and for migratory control and containment, the null regularization options in the country and the expulsions and deportations as a systematic response, the institutional and media racist discourses, the differentiated impacts on women, children and LGBTIQ+ population and the continued criminalization and harassment of the work of defending rights."[79]

As part of another report made by COMDHSM in 2022 called "La Frontera Vertical" (The vertical border), they have identified the installation of an informal camp in San Pedro Tapanatepec, Oaxaca (Southern Mexico) - that had the objective of attending and regularizing migrants – as a strategy to restrain migrants mobility and procure their contention and detention.[80] According to the report, in the camp were approximately 29, 470 migrants from Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Argentina, Peru, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Cuba, India, Bangladesh, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, who denounce practices of mistreatment and discrimination by personnel of the National Institute for Migration.[81]

Member organizations of GIE, GTPM and ROCM have developed relevant reports and micro websites to delve deeper into the consequences of militarization in Mexico. As part of the findings of the Report and microsite launched in 2022 called "Bajo la Bota. Militarización de la política migratoria en México" (*Under de boot. Militarization of migratory policy in Mexico*) it is stated that militarization of migration controls in Mexico has forced migrants to choose more dangerous travel routes and therefore to be more exposed to forced disappearances,

kidnapping, corruption, racial discrimination, human trafficking, maritime and road accidents.[82] Migrants from Haiti or with African origins are especially vulnerable to racial discrimination, being constantly insulted, stigmatized, and associated with crimes because of their skin tone.[83]

Migrant women are especially exposed to sexual violence and they are usually intimidated and threatened to be deported in case they make a legal complaint.[84] Even though Mexico's Supreme Court has declared as unconstitutional the act of doing migratory revisions - which consists in operations by members of the National Guard or the National Institute of Migration where they review the immigration status of people in transit, usually leaving space to racial-profiling – this is still commonly documented.[85] On March 2024, the Programa de Asuntos Migratorios de la Universidad Iberoamericana, PRAMI (*Program of Migration Issues of Iberoamerican University*), which is member of GTPM and GIE, launched a microsite and an extensive report on the consequences of the militarization of the National Institute of Migration in Mexico. As part of the report, they elaborate a discourse analysis on the use of euphemisms that are constantly used by the media and political actors -like the Mexican president- to disguise concepts that reveal the militarization and securitization of migration policies. Some of these concepts are "safe, orderly and regular migration" for referring to migration control, "humanitarian rescue" for arbitrary detention, "presentation of foreigners" for arrest, "accommodation in immigration stations" for deprivation of liberty in detention centers, and "voluntary return" for deportation.[86]

In this phase of militarization of migration policy in Mexico, some of the key elements that PRAMI identifies are the symbolic construction of migrants as "foreign enemies", the increasement of military training to officers of the National Institute of Migration and the use of military technology for coercion purposes, as well as the U.S involvement in this militarization strategy with the intention of externalizing its border.[87]

SECOND STRATEGY: POSITIONING THROUGH PRESS RELEASES

The second most used strategy by migrant organizations and their networks is elaborating collective positionings to denounce and condemn border externalization and militarization practices. It is widespread to use the GPTM website to publish these positionings, since its website holds a specific section to keep a record of all these press releases. For example, on December 9, 2021, when 53 migrants died in a road accident while being captured in a freight transport, members of GPTM, ROGM, and GIE published a positioning on which they recognize militarization of migration policies and externalization as part of the causes of these kinds of tragedies:

"The death of these people adds to the violations that have been documented in recent years against the migrant population in the context of the pandemic. The militarization of borders and routes, the lack of access to asylum and immigration regularization procedures forces migrants to risk their lives and integrity in an increasingly dangerous transit. The signatory organizations have denounced that the tightening of immigration policies and the

externalization of borders would result in an increase in crimes and human rights violations against migrants, asylum seekers and the refugee population in Mexico."[88]

Another example is a positioning on July 31, 2023, where members of GIE and GTPM make a call to legislative powers of the countries of the region to build regulatory frameworks that respect the rights of people who migrate and seek international protection. As part of this demand, militarization is mentioned as a severe issue:

"Of particular concern is the increase in the militarization of borders and acts of impunity that continue in the face of obvious violations of human rights, which, far from contributing to the respect and guarantee of rights, increases, and creates an environment of systematic violence.[89]

THIRD STRATEGY: BRINGING DEMANDS TO INTERNATIONAL INSTANCES

Along with the first and second strategies already mentioned, it is common that these organizations use the reports, human rights monitoring and positionings as evidence to bring their demands to supra-national institutions. Example of this is the hearing summoned by 32 NGOs (most of them members of COMDSHM and GTPM) before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an autonomous organ of the Organization of American States. As part of this hearing, militarization was a key element of their demands:

"During the hearing, the militarization of borders and the involvement of the Armed Forces and the National Guard in migration policy was highlighted, as well as the systematic practice of *devoluciones en caliente* (devolutions "in the heat of the moment") or push backs that aim to deter and criminalize migration and the search for international protection {...} They pointed out that the deployment of militarized forces has exacerbated cases of illegitimate use of force against migrants."[90]

This last strategy can be interpreted as the result of a cumulative and collaborative effort of documenting border violence, human rights monitoring and a call to authorities – national and international- for countering militarization and border externalization of Mexican migration policy.

Methodology Used and Documents Consulted

The research processes included two phases. A systematic literature on border externalization and militarization was developed for the elaboration of this document. For the macro and meso-analysis, reports elaborated by international organizations - such as UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF - were consulted. Academic contributions in social science journals were also reviewed.

For the Meso- level, non-state actors and community-based organizations mapping, NGOs websites, blogs, social media, as well as networks and collectives' reports, and human rights monitoring were analyzed by identifying key contributions on the topic. Once the most relevant alliances and networks were identified, a database was developed for identifying the location, region, website, and contact of each member of the organization of these alliances. 136 organizations were included in this mapping exercise. After reviewing the material produced by these organizations, the materials were categorized according to their principal objectives, which made possible to delimit three main organizations strategies to respond towards militarization and border externalization through: 1) Monitoring and Documentation of Border Violence, 2) Positioning through Press Releases and by 3) Bringing Demands to International Instances.

Observations and Conclusions

- The LAC region has experienced a progressive securitization of migration policies and perspectives. There is not a common regional agenda on migration governance, but a constant attempt of the United States to externalize its borders and to expand the militarization of Mexican migration policies through political pressures.
- In recent years, migration policies promoted by the United States – such as metering, Title 42 and MPPs - have consolidated its strategy of converting Mexico into a "vertical border" that contains and deters forced migration flows intending to reach American soil.
- In 2019, the Mexican government deployed members of the National Guard throughout Mexico's southern border. This deployment symbolizes the highest level of militarization of Mexican migration policies. Previous experiences of bilateral cooperation between Mexico and the U.S. gave the former economic and training capacity to strengthen its military forces, but the deployment of the National Guard to execute migration functions of contention marks a dramatic shift to an even more securitized framework of the implementation of migration policy.
- Along the LAC region – especially in Mexico and Central America – 134 organizations actively operate in the Mexico-Guatemala Border and all over Mexico's northern border. They are organized in six networks that can also be understood as workgroups or collectives. These organization's strategy has allowed them to consolidate their efforts on giving direct attention to vulnerable migrants, while they document the borders' situations and denounce systematic violence.
- It has been more common for organizations to document and refer to "militarization" rather than "border externalization". Thus, they are usually referred to together, and in some cases, these networks have been very useful for analyzing examples of what they have called the development of the U.S.A. "vertical border" in Mexican territory.
- This mobilization strategy, focused on five key networks, becomes helpful for the next phase of this research. Focus groups or group interviews with the most active members and representatives of each of these networks are recommended for phase 2.
- All the reports and human rights monitoring reviewed agreed on the following: the militarization of Mexican migration policy has severely increased the cases of violence towards migrants, as well as arbitrary detentions and migrant disappearance. This violence especially affects vulnerable migrant groups: women, people with disabilities, migrant children and youth, and the LGBTQ community.
- Another common concern is the aberrant conditions in which migrants are being held in detention centers, and the criminalization of migrant protests. According to the references consulted, I can affirm that the systematic human rights violations in migrant detention centers are one of the most serious issues of border externalization and militarization in the region.

- Community organizations have been truly effective in documenting the borders' human rights situation. What remains now is to identify the key challenges they have found while trying to press authorities to follow their recommendations.
- In a very few cases, militarization and border externalization were actually defined by the local organizations, in most of the cases they just condemned them. It would be useful in the second phase to identify their own conceptualizations of border externalization and militarization, and to know if they are developing (or already developed) a collective strategy to challenge these practices.

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