

PROTECTION MONITORING: MEXICO

SNAPSHOT JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2024

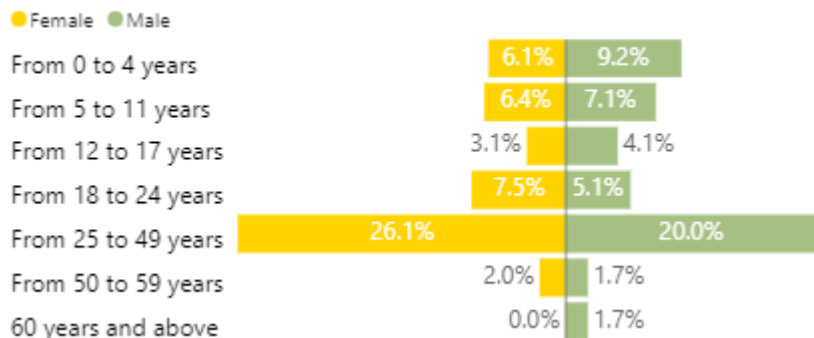
This SNAPSHOT summarizes the findings of Protection Monitoring conducted during the two-month period. Protection Monitoring is part of the humanitarian response of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Mexico to the crisis affecting mixed migration flows. DRC conducts this Protection Monitoring in Tapachula,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

The first two months of 2024 brought a steady flow of arrivals to Mexico, with COMAR receiving asylum applications from more than [16,000 people](#) nationwide, while measures were implemented in Tapachula that further restricted access to the formal registration of applications. These statistics reflect a notable increase in people from Nicaragua and Ecuador, while monitoring activities also revealed significant numbers of people from Peru. Departures from Mexico to the United States continued, mainly through the CBP One application, with more than [45,000 people](#) in January and [42,000 people](#) in February. However, monitoring confirmed the persistence of barriers to obtaining appointments – none of the people monitored in Reynosa or Matamoros had an appointment, despite the fact that 63.5% of respondents had been in these locations for more than one month – and of prolonged wait times.

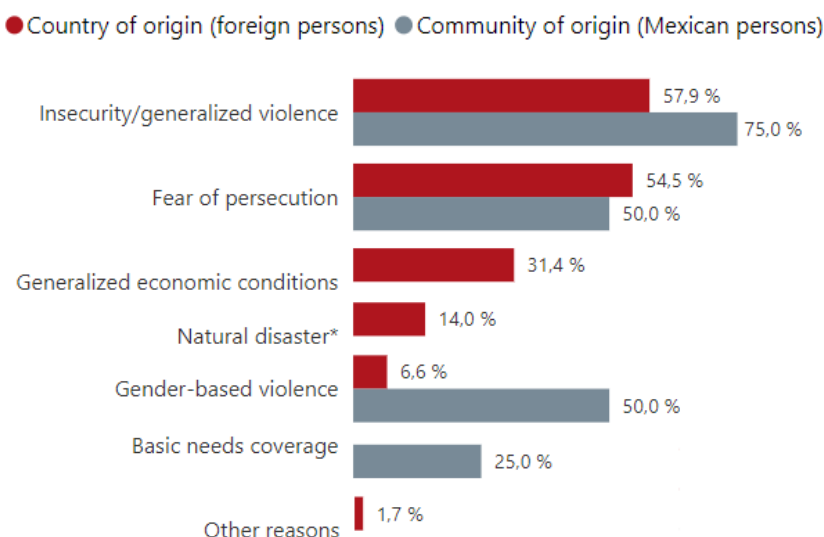
KEY FIGURES

Between January and February 2024, 125 interviews were conducted, covering a total of 295 people.

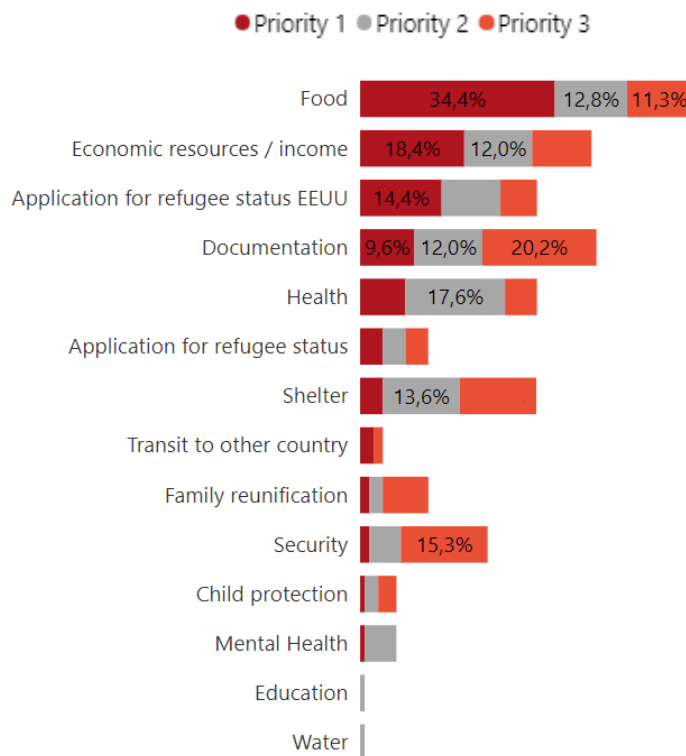
Sex and Age



Flight Motives



Main Priorities



PRIORITY ISSUE: VIOLENCE & INSECURITY

*At their core, protection risks arise when people affected by situations of crisis face real or potential exposure to different types of threats, including those arising from violence. If, as established by the Protection Analytical Framework, the category of **violence** includes all types of intentional use of physical force, both materialized and in the form of a threat, which results in or is very likely to result in injury, psychological harm, developmental problems or even death, then there are many protection risks related to violence that arise in humanitarian contexts.*

*Given the regular vulnerability of people affected by an emergency, **harassment** is a recurrent form of violence, which manifests itself in systematic threats or pressure from individuals, authorities, armed groups or other actors to harm or force an affected person to do something. While harassment is characterized by the impact of generating fear or anxiety in the victim, it can also be a sign that other forms of violence are likely to occur. To avoid the threatened harm, people often end up complying with demands, which turns the situation into one of **extortion** and causes deprivation or destruction to people's property. In the same way, **kidnapping** can be a way to prevent circulation or disappear affected people and, on some occasions, it is instrumentalized to reinforce the demands made on the affected people and damage their physical and psychological integrity. The materialization of a threat can become a **physical aggression**, insofar as hitting, pushing or any other act at the hands of those with greater power causes pain, discomfort or injuries in the affected people who are unprotected and deprived of the power to avoid exposure to these forms of violence. Likewise, threats can lead to **sexual and gender violence**, to the extent that they lead to non-consensual sexual contact. Regardless of whether they are preceded by a threat or not, these forms of violence – together with a multiplicity of factors that increase people's vulnerabilities and reduce their capacities – generate protection needs in humanitarian contexts.*

Violence against people on the move in Mexico is a [well-documented](#) historical trend, particularly in the north of the country and on its border with the United States. However, Monitoring confirms that exposure to violence is a constant reality. 40.8% of respondents nationwide reported that a member of their household had experienced violence in Mexico. This figure is much higher – 82.7% – among respondents in Reynosa and Matamoros, considering the transit through the country and their experiences in the very locations where they are monitored. In Reynosa and Matamoros, the first months of 2024 have seen an [increase in violence](#) in the area that affects the population in general, and [people on the move](#) in particular. Although violence against people on the move is not new in [this part of the country](#), the situation has [deteriorated](#), with greater identification of cases of **kidnapping** by organized crime groups. 48.1% of respondents in these locations confirmed an experience of kidnapping among members of their household, of which 85.7% signaled criminal groups as responsible for these incidents, and 7.1% the authorities. Likewise, through DRC's individualized protection assistance activities in this area, it was possible to verify the prevalence of this form of violence and the main impacts on the population, including the link with the **extortion** that individuals or families must pay to secure their liberation and with the **sexual violence** that often occurs during kidnappings. Kidnappings and other incidents of violence reported by those monitored occurred mainly during their transit through the country. There have also been incidents of **physical aggression** against people on the move by the authorities, as part of efforts to [disperse and contain](#) migration flows, as well as incidents of **theft** by

individuals or local groups in different parts of the [route](#). Similarly, [local organizations](#) have reported high rates of **sexual abuse** before reaching the northern border.

On the southern border, the beginning of 2024 has been characterized by a [deterioration in the security situation](#) due to the conflict between different **armed groups** of organized criminal actors, leading to an intensification of the [militarization](#) of the border area with Guatemala. In Tapachula, there has been an increase in the [detection](#) of incidents of violence at the hands of organized crime groups, including acts of kidnapping, extortion, robbery and intimidation, and [gender violence](#) at the hands of authorities. The [arrest in Tapachula](#) of the leader of one drug trafficking cartel in January due to a reported **kidnapping** shed greater light on the dynamics of insecurity in the area. According to some participants in a focus group discussion, fear of violence on the route north encourages people to connect with **traffickers** who represent being able to help people transit in safe conditions as a mechanism to deal with the insecure conditions of the route. Some participants pointed out that traffickers claim to have agreements with immigration authorities and pay fees to various actors to guarantee safe transit, while in other cases, traffickers evade checkpoints through clandestine routes.

These dynamics of violence are reinforced by a general environment of **impunity**, which is even more acute with respect to people on the move. Of the respondents who had suffered violence in the country, only 3.9% had filed a report with the authorities, with various reasons, such as fear of reprisals, lack of information and fear

of authorities being the main barriers cited. More than a quarter of those monitored stated that they did not believe that the authorities would be able to protect them from violence, a figure that rises to 57.7% among respondents in Reynosa and Matamoros. Despite the [arrest](#) in January of the alleged person responsible for the kidnapping of 32 people on the move in Tamaulipas during December, a lack of trust in the authorities persists. [Civil society organizations](#) highlighted that the corruption of different authorities and their complicity in kidnappings and other acts of violence underlie impunity, and that the recurring incidents of kidnapping show the authorities' lack of will to prevent and protect the population.

24.0% of those monitored stated that a member of their household was at imminent risk of violence or coercion, with extortion being the most common type of threat in Tapachula, compared to kidnapping in Reynosa and Matamoros. Likewise, in Tapachula, only 16.5% of those monitored during the two-month period affirmed a perception of **insecurity** in the area, compared to 77.0% in Reynosa and Matamoros. The main insecurity factors cited in Tapachula were common crime and the lack of safe spaces, versus the presence of criminal groups and infrastructure conditions in Reynosa. Although the activity of armed groups is more noticeable in Tamaulipas than in Chiapas, the visibility of the dynamics of violence also directly influences perception of security. 16.0% of respondents in Tapachula were not aware of the risks they could face, compared to 0.5% who were unaware of the risks in Reynosa and Matamoros.

Various factors increase the **vulnerability** of persons of concern to violence. **Lack of work**, for example, increases the exposure of persons of concern to violence, to the extent that they lack the resources to access safe accommodation, meet their basic needs, and adopt other self-protection measures. A group of people monitored in Tapachula recounted having experienced an attempted kidnapping by Mexican nationals who had offered them work in the agricultural fields on the

outskirts of the city. They described how they had boarded the truck offered by these individuals to transport the workers to the fields, but indicated that during the journey, they were informed that they were being kidnapped and that they had to pay a sum of money in order to be released. In this context, where 79.5% of the population states that no member of the household is working, the desperation of a large part of the affected population for a source of income to cover their most basic needs increases their exposure to violence.

Similarly, **poor conditions in shelters and informal settlements** increase exposure to violence. 40.0% of those monitored during the two-month period were housed in a temporary shelter, and 21.6% were sleeping on the streets or in an informal settlement. In Reynosa, of those monitored highlighted how the lack of safe showers and bathrooms for the population exposes them to incidents of **sexual violence** in informal settlements. In Tapachula, some people participating in information dissemination activities in informal settlements reported having experienced **harassment** at the hands of members of the local community who hurl verbal insults, cold water, and glass bottles at the tents where people are staying housing the population of concern.

The **impacts** of violence on the population of concern are multiple and affect different aspects. At a material level, assistance activities have confirmed how the dispossession of belongings in the context of extortion or kidnapping for ransom prevents people from meeting their basic needs. When it comes to a cell phone, this deprivation also interrupts communication with support networks and follow-up on legal procedures, such as appointments through CBP One or procedures with Mexican authorities. This situation contributes to greater vulnerability to other risk situations. On a physical and psychological level, other organizations have documented the [serious effects on health](#), including mental health, due to the increase in kidnappings and sexual violence, specifically in Reynosa

and Matamoros. In this regard, monitoring activities confirmed reluctance on the part of the population of concern to leave their places of accommodation in Reynosa and Matamoros to look for work or access services, due to the fear and anxiety they feel as consequences of experiences of violence and as self-protection measures against unsafe conditions. These practices generate additional deprivations in access to services and livelihoods that exacerbate the humanitarian needs of the population. These experiences of violence also generate differentiated impacts on children and adolescents. One person monitored by DRC in Reynosa commented that he had seen child kidnapping survivors imitate the acts they experienced as part of their games, from blindfolding other children and demanding ransom payment to hitting them. Considering the prevalence of violence and the limited

humanitarian response in the country, the **capacities** of the population to confront these dynamics and of the humanitarian community to provide protection are limited. The presence of medical organizations specialized in psychosocial support issues is key to addressing the physical and psycho-emotional impacts. Likewise, access to information provided by humanitarian actors in different languages was indicated by some of the people monitored as a factor that contributed to the identification of risks and strategies to avoid them or reduce exposure. Likewise, some persons of concern mentioned avoiding exposure to violence by limiting their movements or verbal communication in order to reduce the possibility of being identified as a person on the move.



REYNOSA & MATAMOROS

The conflict between **armed groups** and authorities in [Reynosa](#), Matamoros and other parts of Tamaulipas continued during January and February, with [clashes](#) recorded in multiple locations. [State authorities](#) reported the identification of **land mines** in Reynosa and other parts of the state, thus confirming the magnitude of the risks and impacts of violence in northeastern Mexico. Regarding the case of 32 people on the move kidnapped at the end of December, the authorities confirmed that the victims had been [released](#) by the armed group responsible, and not rescued by the authorities. The alleged rescue of another group of kidnapping victims was signaled by some [media outlets](#) as a factor that triggered acts of vandalism and destruction of property in the area.

Following the evictions at the end of 2023 of the informal settlement located next to the international bridge connecting Matamoros with the United States, a [significant reduction](#) in the population was recorded in this location, with estimates of less than one hundred people in February. Religious leaders stated that they had observed a [reduction in the migratory flow](#) in Matamoros in general, apparently due to a dynamic of greater access to the United States through CBP One.

Nonetheless, the high demand for **information** about access to appointments to request asylum in the United States through the CBP One application reflects that the population's main priority is being able to access the territory of that country. The [multiple changes](#) in the procedures and practices affecting the [availability of appointments](#) are reportedly difficult for the population of concern in Reynosa and Matamoros to understand, particularly considering that their main way of obtaining information about these types of changes is by word of mouth. In this regard, 61.5% of respondents in these locations stated that they did not understand the requirements and processes to enter the United States. Although there have been [initiatives](#) by US authorities to disseminate official information, these have had little take-up among the population of concern and have failed to reduce uncertainty and the overall sense of urgency. Faced with this situation, people expose themselves to [risks of kidnapping](#), among others, when arriving at the border in hopes of obtaining an appointment and may resort to other coping mechanisms. In some cases, people frustrated by the long wait times for a CBP One appointment have admitted to falsifying that they are survivors of violence in order to be considered under priority access mechanisms at ports of entry from these locations into the United States.



TAPACHULA

During the two-month period, COMAR in Tapachula formalized the asylum applications of more than [10,000 people](#), while maintaining particular practices for organizing the asylum procedure, including the pre-classification of applicants into four groups: those with no interest in remaining in Mexico, those in a specific situation of vulnerability, those with a high eligibility rate and those with ordinary applications. This classification leads to different forms of processing each type of application, including differentiated wait times and priority processing those who would have a high eligibility rate or are in a situation of greater vulnerability, to the detriment of other categories of applicants. Faced with this situation, some of those monitored indicated that after they expressed their intention of traveling to the United States, they had not received any email in response from COMAR. This dynamic raises concerns about the way in which these practices to pre-filter the population can marginalize and leave unprotected people with international protection needs as well as with regard to due process in the asylum procedure.

Monitoring activities in the *Parque Ecologico*, where COMAR receives the initial expressions of intent to begin the asylum process, evidenced the saturation of this service and the lack of knowledge among people waiting to be served about the nature of the COMAR procedure. Likewise, many people were identified who had already registered their intentions but who had been waiting for months for communication from COMAR in order to proceed with the formalization of their applications. In these cases, people lack both information about the possibility of accessing protection in Mexico and any documentation that confirms that they have sought protection with COMAR.

Similarly, through legal aid activities, changes in INM practices in Tapachula were documented. In particular,

INM's refusal to process applications for a humanitarian visa (TVRH), even for asylum seekers, was evidenced. Instead, INM officials indicate that the applicant must return to INM only after obtaining a positive decision from COMAR, in order to process permanent residence.

To the extent that waiting times for procedures with COMAR grow longer and the possibilities of obtaining INM documentation disappear, a general decrease was observed in the length of stay of affected people in Tapachula. This is aggravated by the deterioration of security conditions and the high costs of remaining in Tapachula – including accommodation and food expenses in the face of a lack of opportunities to generate an income – versus the costs of moving to another location with higher levels of security and more job opportunities. According to some of those monitored, this situation forces them to continue their transit without documents, despite the risks. 45.2% of respondents in this location express an intention to travel to another destination in Mexico, and 11.0% to the United States. In addition to a [caravan](#) of approximately 2,000 people that left Tapachula in January, monitoring activities detected the formation of small groups of between 15 and 20 people who seek to travel together irregularly, including along the coastal highway.

In January, people were observed sleeping in and around various public spaces. During February, field activities confirmed the presence of informal camps in different parts of Tapachula, including around the *Parque Ecologico* and the *Parque Bicentenario*. 32.9% of people monitored during the two-month period reported being unhoused. Some people referred to the insufficient availability of safe and free accommodation options and the lack of resources to pay for decent accommodation.

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

