

# US immigration policies sending thousands of children, including babies, back to Mexico

By Kevin Martinez  
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According to an analysis of 2019 government data by Reuters, the US government has forcibly moved some 16,000 migrant children to attend immigration proceedings in Mexico this year. At least 500 of these migrants are infants.

The migrants live in squalid conditions, usually congregating in tent cities, along the US-Mexico border. The immigration court hearings can last for weeks or months, if not years. Many migrants are easy prey to violent gangs and drug cartels as well as smugglers.

Families with young children are especially vulnerable to catching diseases and receive no official assistance aside from volunteer organizations.

The large numbers of migrants languishing along the border in limbo are a direct result of the Trump Administration's Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP). Most of the immigrants are from Central America fleeing from gang violence, bitter poverty, and political repression, all caused by over a century of US imperialist domination.

Government agents from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) must determine whether a person can stay in the US or go to Mexico on an individual basis. While unaccompanied minors are usually taken into the sprawling network of American concentration camps, children detained with their parents are usually sent back to Mexico with their families.

Of the 50,000 migrants in the MPP program as of Oct. 3, almost one third were children under the age of 18, according to data from the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). This figure included 4,300 children under the age of 5, and 481 under 1 year old.

Many health and immigrant advocates have pointed

out the start of the flu season threatens the lives and wellbeing of infants and small children forced to live on the street and without access to clean water, adequate nutrition, medicine, and bathrooms. Children under the age of 5, and especially under the age of 2, are especially susceptible to serious flu complications.

The US government has said that individuals with known health issues are not candidates for the MPP program, but the qualifications for medical exemptions have never been made clear to immigrants. Of the total number of migrants assigned to the MPP, Reuters found that only 1 percent were moved out of the program for medical reasons.

The Trump administration implemented the MPP to deter immigrants from entering the US, knowing full well that many would refuse to await lengthy hearings in crime-ridden and unsanitary encampments along the border. In previous years, the government's policy—dubbed “catch-and-release” by the extreme right—meant that immigrants caught in the immigration dragnet could await their hearings out of detention living with family members in the US.

In May of this year, 85,000 “family units,” i.e. parents and children, were arrested at the US-Mexico border, a monthly record. By August, this number had dropped by 70 percent.

At least 5,600 children in the MPP program had cases waiting in the San Diego immigration court with another 6,800 assigned to San Antonio and El Paso and 3,400 to Brownsville. Ciudad Juarez, and Matamoros, Mexico, south of El Paso and Brownsville, Texas, respectively, are infamous for their high murder rates and violent drug cartel battles.

**Nearly 1 million immigrants arrested along southern border in 2019**

During a White House briefing, Mark Morgan, the

acting commissioner of US Customs and Border Protections (CBP) said that nearly 1 million immigrants were detained along the US southern border in fiscal year 2019, the highest total since 2007.

About 52,000 immigrants were arrested in September, the fourth consecutive month of decline. The number of arrests peaked in May with 133,000 migrants apprehended.

By comparison just over 500,000 migrants were detained in fiscal year 2018. The higher figures in 2019 were blamed by Morgan on the exodus of Central American migrants.

Morgan arrogantly told the press, “We are closing those loopholes. If you are coming here as an economic migrant, you’re not going to be allowed in the United States, and that’s driving a lot of people in return.”

The Trump administration has aggressively outsourced the war on immigrants to other countries like Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, signing a series of bilateral deals which would stop migrants from even reaching the US border. Morgan said the cooperation with Mexico is “exactly where we need it to be.”

The spike in immigration is a reflection of the deepening social crisis across Central America, where US-backed governments oversee massive repression of social protests, as in Honduras and Guatemala, and where social inequality is higher than anywhere else in the world.

### **Matamoros-Brownsville border crossing reopened after 15-hour occupation by migrants**

CBP announced that traffic across the Gateway International Bridge between Matamoros and Brownsville was reopened late Thursday afternoon after hundreds of migrants occupied the bridge to protest their lengthy stays in Mexico and wretched living conditions in tent camps.

All vehicle and pedestrian traffic had been diverted to other points of entry as 300 migrants marched overnight across the bridge sitting in the vehicle lanes and blocking cars in both directions for over 15 hours. Before dawn the next morning, traffic had resumed both ways.

The bridge is adjacent an immigrant camp, where around 1,000 men, women, and children, mostly from Central America, sit and wait out their immigration court hearings in the US. Families told the press how

they have attacked by criminals, children have gotten sick, and many have decided to leave as their hope for entry fades.

Jodi Goodwin, an immigration attorney, told the *New York Times*, “They are absolutely desperate, with no international presence in the camp to organize anything such as food delivery or medical care.”

A Cuban migrant, Dani, told Texas Public Radio about the conditions at the camp, “We don’t have anywhere to bathe, so we have to bathe in the river. I’ve saved two 4-year-old girls from the river. Then me and some other Cubans rescued five little girls who were drowning. There was also a body found in the river.”

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