PROTECTION MONITORING: MEXICO

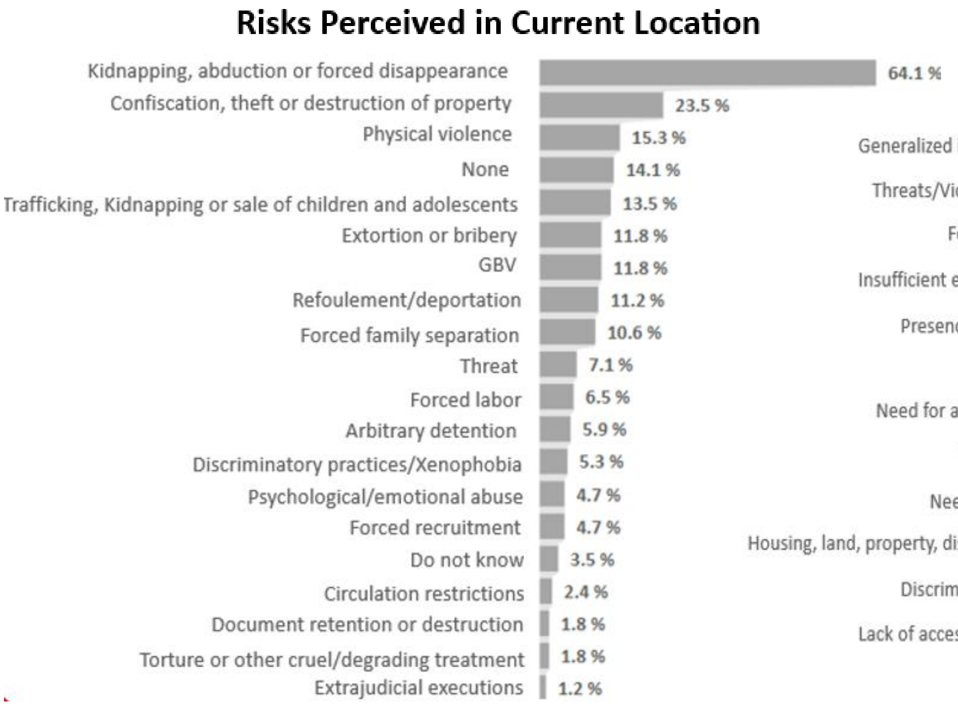
SNAPSHOT JANUARY – MARCH 2025

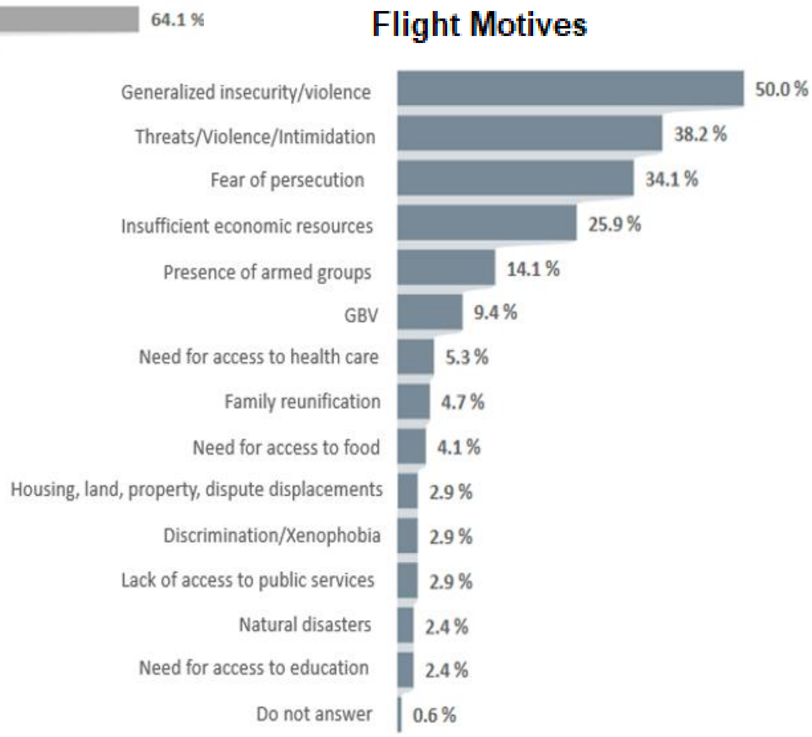
This SNAPSHOT summarizes the findings of Protection Monitoring conducting during the quarter. Protection Monitoring is part of the humanitarian response of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Mexico to the crisis affecting mixed migration flows. DRC conducts this Protection Monitoring in Tapachula, Reynosa and Matamoros. The activities are carried out with the financial support of the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) and, through January 2025, 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, and Doctors of the World France and Switzerland. Beginning in October 2024, this exercise is aligned with the ProLAC initiative to harmonize the Protection Monitoring of DRC and NRC regionally. To view the interactive Dashboard of the results of this period and since the start of the Protection Monitoring program, click here.

Donald Trump's inauguration as President of the United States on January 20th was accompanied by a series of executive orders that directly impacted the protection environment for people on the move in Mexico. Among these, one order cited the need to protect the American people against invasion to justify the suspension of the law at the border, including the ability to request asylum at ports of entry. Another measure, citing the need to secure the border, ended the implementation of the CBP One app as a way to schedule an appointment to request asylum in the United States and resulted in the cancellation of approximately 30,000 pending appointments. These changes coincided with an increase in asylum applications in Mexico, with more than 16,000 applications filed with COMAR in the first months of the year, before interest in remaining in Mexico declined again. Increased interest in information on options for returning to one's country of origin and persistent barriers to voluntary return for Venezuelans were documented. At the same time, the U.S. president's decision to suspend and later terminate funding for various humanitarian response projects and institutional support led to a reduction in response capacity in the face of increased humanitarian needs for people on the move in different parts of the country.

KEY FIGURES

Between January and March 2025, 170 interviews were conducted, covering a total of 355 people.





DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL
Funded by European Union Humanitarian Aid

PRIORITY ISSUE: EFFECTS OF PROTECTION THREATS

*In humanitarian contexts, the various forms of violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation that threaten affected people produce multiple and distinct **impacts** that directly contribute to their protection needs. According to the Protection Analytical Framework, understanding the effects of protection threats on populations requires identifying the **characteristics** of the affected population, the **consequences** of the threats, and the **coping strategies** they employ to deal with these consequences, as these also contribute to the effects of the threat. In this way, the impacts of protection threats are recognized to be different for **different population groups** (for example, for women or for children) and in **different geographical areas** (for example, in areas with the presence of armed groups or removed from service providers). The consequences also manifest themselves in different ways, from the **physical** consequences felt on the bodies of those affected, to **social and psychosocial** consequences, including marginalization, the breakdown of family relationships, and psychological impacts, and even **material** consequences, including economic impacts, among others.*

*A clear understanding of the effects of different protection threats on the affected population is necessary to define responses aimed at mitigating the impacts on the population and thus promoting a protection outcome for the specific beneficiary. Recognizing, for example, that in a particular context, the threat of **forced recruitment** into armed forces or groups has different physical, social, and psychosocial consequences for adolescents compared to their adult family members, who primarily face social, psychosocial, and possibly material impacts, can inform the design of specific interventions aimed at reducing exposure to this protection threat or reducing the magnitude of these impacts for the many people affected. Similarly, identifying that survivors of **sexual and gender-based violence** in one part of the intervention area have greater access to psychological and health services as a coping mechanism than those affected in more distant areas allows us to conclude that strengthening these services in remote locations is a priority.*

Protection threats to people in mixed migratory movements in Mexico are diverse, as are the consequences they produce for the affected population. In other reports, DRC has identified extortion, kidnapping, physical assault, and sexual and gender-based violence as recurring forms of violence against people on the move in the country, along with deliberate deprivation through the denial of services and rights and arbitrary detention and refoulement as manifestations of coercion. Of the 58.2% of households responding to the Protection Monitoring during the quarter that reported some experience of abuse in Mexico, 89.9% reported experiencing **economic impacts**. This includes the dispossession of economic resources and essential items during kidnappings or assaults and the loss of money paid as part of extortion. Many people reported being stripped of essential belongings, such as clothing, cell phones, and documents, generating a new need for the resources required for to replace them. These effects of protection threats on the economic situation of persons of concern are aggravated by the conditions and dynamics faced in their location. In Tapachula, the challenges of accessing decent housing and obtaining employment, along with labor exploitation characterized by long work hours, excessively low or unpaid wages, and threats of being taken to immigration authorities, reinforce the relationship between the economic impacts of protection threats and the impacts on the psychosocial well-being of the population. Likewise, coping mechanisms also depend on the specifics of the context. Some participants in a focus group in Tapachula described seeking informal jobs and creating small businesses as mechanisms for coping with the impacts of threats on their economic situation.

During the quarter, 82.8% of respondents who reported abuse stated that it had produced **psychosocial impacts**, and 40.4% reported **family and social impacts**. This includes symptoms of post-traumatic stress, fear, dejection, depression, isolation, and anxiety, among others, along with the disruption of relationships with their families and others in their environments. According to a key informant in Reynosa, in cases of sexual violence, these symptoms are exacerbated by rejection by some members of the host community or shelter administration, or even by some family members, due to certain religious beliefs. This dynamic fosters the silence of survivors, who often do not access available services for medical and psychosocial care for fear of being identified or stigmatized. The provision of psychosocial support services at the individual, family, and group levels is extremely limited in both Tapachula and Reynosa, with some specialized organizations, such as MSF, providing specialized care to victims of extreme violence, sexual violence, and torture.

Among the effects of the abuses faced in Mexico, 39.4% of respondents who reported experiencing abuse reported suffering **physical impacts**, including injuries or other physical damage that often requires medical attention. These consequences on people's bodies are impacted by the **performance of the health system** in each locality and by the availability and accessibility of humanitarian services in this sector. The limitations of health systems in providing medications and treatments for these physical conditions generate new economic needs for those affected, who often must find ways to cover the costs to mitigate the physical impacts of the abuse they experience.

Beyond accessing services offered by state and humanitarian actors, affected individuals report various coping mechanisms to manage these impacts. Among the positive mechanisms, 19.2% of respondents who reported experiencing abuse indicated reaching out to their **support network** as a coping mechanism, with some participants in the focus group discussions in Tapachula stating they had sought emotional support from friends and family. Also, some individuals described joining forces with other people of concern to share information about risks and services, using informal networks and digital platforms that facilitate exchanges. Women survivors of gender-based violence create solidarity networks where they provide emotional support and share essential resources, such as clothing, hygiene products, and food. Regarding the negative coping mechanisms experienced in Mexico that can cause additional harm to those affected, 44.7% of respondents reported reducing the number of meals they eat, 44.7% restricting their movements, and 36.5% borrowing money. These and the other negative mechanisms noted confirm the overwhelming economic impact of these threats on people.

REYNOSA & MATAMOROS

The month of January was characterized by high demand for appointments on the CBP One application, with people of concern seeking to advance this process before the changes expected with the arrival of the new president in the United States. During the first weeks of the month, 78.0% of respondents in Reynosa and Matamoros intending to travel to the United States reported not having obtained an appointment through CBP One, citing a lack of knowledge of how to use the application and barriers to applying as the main obstacles in the process. During the first weeks of January, the presence of Mexican Navy personnel was observed in the area, contributing to a heightened sense of militarization.

After the change of administration in the United States, there was an increase in people deported to Reynosa and Tamaulipas in general, and a growing sense of despair among those stranded in the state due to the cancellation of the CBP One appointment system.

The suspension of humanitarian assistance announced by the United States at the end of January prevented the implementation of DRC Protection Monitoring in Reynosa and Matamoros for several weeks during the quarter, limiting the ability to document the immediate impacts of the new restrictive measures adopted by the United States. However, the opening of reception centers for deported Mexicans in Reynosa and Matamoros and the reactivation of the repatriation process within Mexico were confirmed.

After the resumption of Protection Monitoring activities at the end of February, 86.7% of respondents stated they still intended to transit to the United States. This figure also coincides with high levels of confusion about the impacts of the multiple measures adopted by the United States at the end of January, and the fact that 41.0% of these individuals had been assigned an appointment at CBP One that was later cancelled. The fact that 100.0% of respondents had been in the monitoring location for at least one month and that no one had been in the monitoring location for a shorter period reflects the decrease in new arrivals to this part of the border and that U.S. measures have left many people stranded indefinitely in Mexico. Of all the people monitored in Reynosa and Matamoros in this latest phase of monitoring, 89.7% reported having suffered some form of abuse in Mexico, with extortion, kidnapping, and confiscation or theft of property being the most common forms, with organized crime cited as the primary perpetrator. These figures confirm the high exposure of people stranded in Mexico to protection threats. In this regard, more than 95.0% of respondents during this period indicated that their family is at risk, with 80.0% citing a fear of kidnapping, 33.3% of refoulement or deportation, and 22.2% of extortion and gender-based violence.

The termination of U.S. funding for DRC's intervention in Reynosa and Matamoros led to the closure of the field office on March 31. This is the final report with data and information collected in these locations.

TAPACHULA

In Tapachula, the quarter saw the persistence of prolonged wait times for asylum seekers before the COMAR, with some waiting for more than 18 months to be served. 89.2% of respondents there had requested international protection, but 65.8% were still awaiting their interview. Legal aid activities showed an increase in the number of people requesting assistance in preparing briefs to request their eligibility interviews be scheduled. During February, there was an overcrowding of people waiting to be served at COMAR facilities, apparently due to new restrictions on access to the United States, followed in March by a significant decrease in demand for COMAR services. Through information dissemination activities in different parts of the city, a widespread lack of awareness about the nature and functioning of the COMAR procedure and the process for requesting an appointment was documented. In this regard, multiple informational signs with outdated content were observed, contributing to the confusion. At the end of March, the opening of the Multi-Service Center was announced to expedite COMAR's work.

In the context of legal aid activities, the Venezuelan population, which represents 30.1% of those interviewed in Tapachula, expressed greater interest in voluntarily returning to their country of origin, citing changes in US immigration policies. However, access to the IOM's assisted voluntary return program was limited for Venezuelans nationwide due to the lack of response from Venezuelan authorities in validating and accrediting travel documents.

At the same time, persons of concern described adverse living conditions in Tapachula, which led, among other things, to the departure of caravans prior to the policy changes in the United States. Some participants in the focus group discussions shared experiences of discrimination in their search for employment, access to housing, and interactions with the local community. When they approach the COMAR or the INM to complete certain procedures, they are forced to wait on sidewalks and streets, without access to shade or water, and exposed to high temperatures. This situation is replicated in some informal settlements, where families with young children have been observed living in unsanitary and precarious conditions. The lack of housing options is exacerbated by the dismantling of some informal settlements during the quarter. The presence of criminal groups operating in the area further increases the feeling of danger and vulnerability. The testimonies collected in the focus group discussions confirm a constant fear of violence, extortion, and theft, as well as a feeling of insecurity even within their own homes. This coincides with the fact that 18.1% of respondents perceive their environment as unsafe and 2.4% as very unsafe.

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.