

BORDER FOCUS MONTH

This report was created by the InterReligious Task Force on Central America (IRTF) for June 2022 border focus month. It touches on eight main issues of the U.S. immigration and detention system as well as other topics around the U.S.-Mexico border. These are all things that migrants, who are coming to the U.S. from Central America and all over the world to seek refuge, have to endure and that contribute to a dehumanizing and xenophobic view on migration that is dominating our society today and directly impacting the lives of so many.

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ICE DETENTION CENTERS

1: WHAT ARE ICE DETENTION CENTERS?

ICE Detention centers are shelters and prison facilities all across the United States that are used to detain migrants and asylum seekers for several weeks, and even years. The people held in detention can be documented or undocumented migrants, waiting for their immigration court hearings or their deportation. Even people that have been granted a right to stay in the US and may have lived in the country for years already, can be put back in detention centers.

2: HOW ARE THE DETENTION CENTERS RUN?

Many concerns have been raised about the catastrophic, and in many ways dehumanizing, conditions in ICE detention facilities. People in detention spend their time in overcrowded cells, with little to no medical support and no access to social distancing or hygienic measures in the midst of a pandemic. For-profit prison companies like GEO Group and CoreCivic make up a tremendous amount of their revenue by converting wings of their prisons into ICE detention facilities. Contracts like that with ICE can last for years and involve hundreds of millions of dollars to increase ICE detention capacities beyond state-owned detention centers.

3: WHAT DOES ICE DO ABOUT IT?

Since 2016, ICE's budget has increased by about 40%. Yet, the agency has shown no efforts to improve the terrible conditions in their detention centers, and hasn't even been able to provide sufficient hygiene measures and COVID-19 screenings in the often overcrowded detention facilities.

ICE has instead used the money to expand surveillance and detention systems, detaining and deporting more migrants.

19,502

People are held in detention centers as of April 2022.

OVER 200

Detention facilities are currently used by ICE to detain the tens of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers crossing the border.

80% of the people detained are held in privately-run detention prisons as of September 2021.

DETENTION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

1: WHO IS AN UNACCOMPANIED MINOR?

Unaccompanied minors are children under the age of eighteen that are crossing the border into the United States without an accompanying parent or legal guardian and usually without lawful status. When Unaccompanied children arrive at the border, they are meant to be treated with high priority, processing and transferring them to a shelter as quickly as possible. 16% of unaccompanied minors crossing the border were between 0 and 12 years old in FY2021.

2: HOW ARE MINORS PROCESSED?

After an unaccompanied minor is apprehended by CBP or ICE officers, they are transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The child stays in ORR custody until they can be placed with a family member or a “sponsor”, or in a foster home. In that period, which is meant to last less than 90 days, the child is placed in the “least restrictive” setting provided by ORR, meaning a shelter or temporary housing facility. There, they receive social, health, educational, and legal services.

122,731

Of unaccompanied minors were apprehended at the border and referred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) for initial placement in FY2021.

Most unaccompanied children in ORR care are from

**GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, OR
EL SALVADOR**

3: WHAT IS THE REALITY OF CHILD DETENTION?

Before being placed in a licensed shelter or foster home, children live in emergency shelters at the border, run by companies that have received up to \$2 billion dollars in total by ICE to manage the shelters. One of these shelters is on the Fort Bliss Army Camp in Texas, where children live in alarming conditions, including a lack of medical attention as well as reports of sexual abuse and serious mental health crises. If ORR fails to find a sponsor or foster home before a child turns 18, they are often sent to ICE detention centers on their 18th birthday.



THE 100-MILE BORDER ZONE

1: WHAT IS THE 100-MILE BORDER ZONE?

The 100-mile border zone is seen as any U.S. territory that is within 100-miles of any land or maritime border of the United States. This means that 34 out of the 50 States lie partially or entirely in the border zone, including 9 out of the 10 largest cities in the country. Within this 100-mile zone, CBP and Immigration officers have additional authorities and powers to operate immigration checkpoints and control who enters the country.

2: WHAT ARE THE RIGHTS IN THAT ZONE?

According to the government, the fourth Amendment that protects Americans from random and arbitrary stops and searches, does not fully apply in the border zone. This is so that at border crossings, federal authorities do not need a warrant to conduct routine searches. However, this rule is applied across the entire 100-mile border zone, meaning it does not only affect people at border crossings, but far into the country.

3: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN THAT ZONE?

The 4th Amendment is meant to protect all people from unreasonable searches. Taking this part of the Constitution away means opening the doors for racial profiling and arbitrary arrests, interrogations or detention without even as little as a suspicion in the border zone. Human and civil rights in that zone are disregarded, and many people, an unproportional amount part of the BIPOC community, become victims of surveillance and discrimination.

34

Of the 50 States in the U.S. lie partially or entirely within the 100-mile border zone, including

9

out of the 10 largest cities in the country



THE DIGITAL BORDER WALL

1: WHAT IS THE DIGITAL BORDER WALL?

The digital “smart” border consists of several advanced surveillance technologies like aerial drones, surveillance towers and high-tech cameras within the border zone. With this technology, ICE and CBP are able to read license plates, track movements anywhere along the border, and compare biometric data collected at checkpoints to biometric databases with millions of entries.

2: WHAT DOES THE "SMART" BORDER MEAN FOR MIGRANTS?

ICE and CBP immigration officers don't need a physical wall anymore to keep control of who is entering the country. They can track people's movements from below the ground in the most remote areas, and even distinguish between animals and humans. This "smart" border system results in more expulsions, as migrants can easily be detected and arrested. To escape this surveillance, many migrants are pushed into taking remote and more dangerous paths across the border, resulting in heat strokes, dehydration or even death.

3: WHO IS AFFECTED BY THE DIGITAL BORDER WALL?

While all this data collection is for the purpose of securing the border, local communities living within the 100-mile border zone are also seriously affected by those technologies. The roughly 200 million people living in that zone are subject to ICE surveillance like license plate readers or drones which are often abused, for example at Black Lives Matter protests in several cities.

The “smart” border wall is violating the rights of privacy of those living in border communities and has led to increased surveillance and enforcement in the border zone.

\$780 MILLION

In federal funding was given to DHS in 2021 to expand and sustain this digital border wall.

Some of the technologies DHS uses at the border are:
**UNDERGROUND SENSORS AND CAMERAS |
DRONES | SURVEILLANCE TOWERS |
BIOMETRIC DATA COLLECTION**

ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION

1: WHAT ARE ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION?

Alternatives to Detention (ATDs) are a wide range of technologies and mechanisms used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to restrict and monitor immigrants through their asylum proceedings without holding them in detention centers.

ICE itself describes ATDs not as a substitute for detention, but a system to increase supervision over those who are not detained.

2: ARE THEY BETTER THAN DETENTION?

Many think that ATDs are a good alternative to detention in ICE detention facilities. But in reality, migrants are still heavily controlled and surveilled when enrolled in the ATD program. They have to perform check-ins on their phones every few hours, be home by 5 pm every day or stay in a restricted area.

ATDs give the illusion that migrants can move freely while waiting for their immigration hearings, but rather they provide ICE with mass surveillance tactics to keep an eye on individuals and entire immigrant communities.

3: WHO REALLY BENEFITS FROM ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION?

ATDs are supposed to offer a more humane alternative to detention centers. But like often, money is a key factor in driving the system, not human rights. While the cost for a bed in a detention facility is about \$140 per day, the government only pays \$3 per day when using ATDs. And in 2021, ICE received \$440 million to operate ATDs. While Alternatives to Detention may sound like an improvement, all it does is provide the same grade of surveillance and control for less expenses.

227,508

People are currently enrolled in the Alternatives to Detention Program as of April 2022.

ICE's alternative detention technologies currently include :
parole, home visits and check-ins, curfews, telephonic monitoring, GPS monitoring through ankle bracelets, and more

ICE 287 (G) AGREEMENTS

2: HOW DO 287 (G) AGREEMENTS WORK?

There are two types of 287 (g) agreements: The Jail enforcement model allows officers to interrogate suspected noncitizens regarding their immigration status and hold those thought to be subject for removal to be referred to ICE. With the Warrant service officer (WSO) model, ICE trains and authorizes certain local law enforcement officers to execute ICE administrative warrants, allowing these officers to act as immigration officers within the law enforcement agency's correctional facilities.

3: HOW DOES THIS AFFECT MIGRANTS?

When these sheriffs are given authority to perform ICE immigration officer tasks, it allows for a whole new level of racial profiling. They are abusing their power to intentionally harm and detain immigrants, forcefully separating families and arresting immigrants for minor charges, meaning that many immigrants now live in fear of encountering local law enforcement. This has driven up deportation numbers by a lot, and has resulted in more local arrests of Latinx people. The more immigrants sheriffs can identify, the more they can transfer to detention and get paid for.

1: WHAT ARE 287 (G) AGREEMENTS?

A part of the 1996 Immigration and Nationality Act, the 287 (g) agreement allows local law enforcement agencies to carry out certain duties normally reserved for Immigration and Customs (ICE) agents. Depending on the type of agreement, local officers are authorized to investigate a person's immigration status or to hold and refer people to ICE detention facilities. 92% of agreements are with local sheriffs, who are not appointed into office but rather elected and are therefore more like politicians than regular police officers. The remaining 8% of agreements are signed with correction departments and county-level detention facilities.

59%

Out of the 142 participating sheriffs in 24 states have records of racism, abuse, and violence, publicly making anti-immigrant statements in their role as sheriff and claiming that migrants are a threat to public safety, as well as promoting immigration enforcement.

DEPORTATIONS AND FORCED REMOVALS



1: WHAT ARE DEPORTATIONS?

Deportations are the formal removal of a migrant from the United States for violating an immigration law or other laws. These removals can happen through deportation proceedings in immigration court or as expulsions under regulations like Title 42 or the Migrant Protection Protocols. In FY21, 59,011 persons in total were “removed” by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. When ordered to be “voluntarily” or forcefully removed from the United States, migrants leave the country primarily by foot or air, often leaving behind children and other family members.

2: WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR MIGRANTS?

When a person crosses the border, they have to “prove” their fear of persecution to seek refuge, meaning that if an immigration officer is not convinced of their fear, they could be expelled immediately or put into deportation proceedings. As a result, a large group of migrants crossing the border are ordered deported, even though they should be allowed to seek refuge because of serious safety threats in their home country, sending them back into great danger or even death that they tried to escape from.

44,146

Were ordered deported by an immigration judge in FY22 up until April.

That is 24.7% of the total amount of completed immigration cases during that same period, meaning roughly 1 in 4 deportation proceedings ends in a deportation order.

535,621

People were expelled under Title 42 in FY22 and returned to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and other countries in states of crisis.

485,525

New deportation proceedings filed so far in FY22 through April. Expecting a deportation order in 24.7% out of the cases, it would mean that there are 119,925 migrants waiting for a deportation order just from the past 6 months.

ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION

1: WHAT ARE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION?

Root causes are certain factors in a migrant's home country that force the person to leave the country and seek refugee somewhere. These root causes are often anchored deep in the political and economical system of that country and cause migration over a longer period of time since they can't usually be resolved easily. Different political/safety factors, economic factors, environmental factors or social factors can all be root causes of migration. By examining the root causes, we can better understand global migration and how to prevent it.

3: WHY DO WE HAVE TO START AT THE ROOT?

When fighting migration, it does not suffice to just close the borders and push people back into countries of despair. If we do that, nothing will change for the people in their home countries, and they will put themselves in great danger (exhausting economic reserves, taking on dangerous routes, facing deportation and death) again and again to be safe. One needs to address the root causes of migration in order to break this cycle and work to introduce radical measures and eliminate corruption and militarism in Central American countries and improve life and safety, so that migration is the only chance of survival anymore.

2: WHY DO THESE CAUSES EXIST?

In many Central American countries, corrupt governments or even dictatorships that emerged from the civil wars and revolutions of these countries, gang leaderships, and militarism force large parts of the population to live in poverty and fear. Instead of supporting rural communities, most of the state money goes to the hands of the already rich. Climate change is causing food and economic insecurity, and police and military forces cause violence and persecution for those trying to defend their rights and lands. Because little is done to eliminate these factors, many are forced to leave their home to seek safety and better opportunities.

Root causes of migration in Central America include:

**WAR
PERSECUTION
POVERTY
CLIMATE CHANGE
ECONOMIC INSECURITY
DISCRIMINATION
LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES
FOOD INSECURITY
VIOLENCE**

THANK YOU

This report on different migration and border issues was created to raise awareness, advocate and educate about the, in many ways, faulty and xenophobic U.S. immigration system. We stand in solidarity with those who are affected by it on a daily basis. Thank you for reading this report and supporting the fight for migrant justice! If you want to stay updated on migration issues, subscribe to IRTF's bi-weekly migrant justice newsletter at irtfcleveland.org/blog/

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