

Brutal and Inappropriate Treatment of Border Migrants

The immigration policies of the United States at the southern border have come under intense scrutiny for their inhumane treatment of migrants, especially vulnerable groups such as children and families. Reports have documented instances of prolonged detentions that extend for weeks or even months, forcing individuals into overcrowded facilities where sanitation is inadequate. The conditions in these camps are often deplorable, with limited access to basic necessities such as clean water, nutritious food, and medical care. Furthermore, the controversial practice of family separations has resulted in heartbreaking situations where parents are forcibly taken away from their children, leaving both parties traumatized and struggling with emotional distress. This report, grounded in a thorough examination of legal documents and firsthand field investigations, sheds light on the deeply troubling treatment of asylum seekers and migrants by U.S. government authorities, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reform to address these human rights violations.

In this report, we will address the issue of harsh and improper treatment of border migrants.

.1 In 2021, the United States detained over 1.7 million migrants, including 45,000 children, at its southern border. The U.S. government's treatment of these migrants even resulted in fatalities, with 557 migrants killed due to encounters with U.S. border agents. This figure marks the highest since 1998 and has been increasing annually¹.

.2 In just the first eight months of 2024, 108 migrant deaths were recorded near the U.S.-Mexico border in New Mexico. This statistic represents a tenfold increase compared to five years ago. The University of New Mexico's medical examiner's office reported a significant rise in heat-related deaths among these migrants.²

3. Statistics show that in 2020, 21 migrants died in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers—more than double the number in 2019 and the highest since 2005.³ This increase has raised concerns about conditions and medical care in these detention centers. A comprehensive study by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), and a U.S. watchdog organization found that 95% of these deaths could have been prevented with proper medical care.⁴

4. A year ago, the death of an 8-year-old girl in a migrant detention center at the U.S.-Mexico border sparked widespread controversy on U.S. social media. According to Politico, the girl's mother reported that U.S. border agents repeatedly ignored her requests for her daughter to be hospitalized. The girl suffered severe bone pain, difficulty breathing, and was unable to walk. In a tearful phone interview described as heart-wrenching by U.S. media, the mother revealed that detention center agents told her that her daughter's flu diagnosis did not require hospital care, despite knowing the child had a history of heart problems and anemia.⁵

5. In June 2019, inspections of five Customs and Border Protection (CBP) centers in Texas revealed severe overcrowding. For instance, one cell designed for 41 people housed 88 men, while another

¹ <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/578127-record-17-million-migrants-arrested-at-border-in-past-year/>

² <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-border-deaths-new-mexico-677a6b57e729ca076a0d12dba31c3b70>

³ https://ge.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/xwdt/202303/t20230330_11051773.htm

⁴ <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/95-percent-of-deaths-in-ice-detention-could-likely-have-been-prevented-with-adequate-medical-care-report>

⁵ <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/05/20/mother-girl-who-died-in-border-patrol-custody-00098017>

cell with a capacity of 40 held 51 adult women. This overcrowding led to unsanitary conditions and heightened tensions among detainees, drawing months of criticism over the dire state of these facilities.⁶

6. As of July 2023, 90% of migrants in ICE detention centers were held in private facilities—a 10% increase compared to the previous administration. The Biden administration even signed multiple contracts with private companies to expand detention capacity. One such facility, the "Moshannon Valley" detention center in Pennsylvania, has a capacity of over 1,000 people. Private detention centers in the U.S. often fail to meet necessary standards for proper migrant care due to profit-driven motives, with frequent reports of mistreatment, inadequate medical facilities, and poor conditions.⁷

7. Since March 2023, the use of solitary confinement in ICE detention centers for vulnerable individuals and those with special conditions has increased by 50%. These individuals include those with severe physical and mental health issues, hunger strikers, and those on suicide watch. Solitary confinement, which involves isolation in small rooms with minimal human interaction, can have severe physical and psychological effects on detainees.⁸

8. Statistics indicate that about 60% of individuals in ICE detention centers are under "mandatory detention," meaning they are denied the right to a bail hearing. This policy prolongs detention periods and increases psychological pressure on migrants in the U.S.⁹

9. Studies have shown that U.S. immigration detention centers often lack adequate mental health services, exacerbating detainees' psychological stress. Migrants in detention centers frequently experience severe stress due to uncertainty about their legal status, separation from family, and past traumatic experiences. However, many of these centers lack sufficient mental health services, leaving issues like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) untreated. This not only worsens detainees' overall health but also complicates the legal proceedings for their cases.

10. Since January 2021, at least 9,886 cases of kidnapping, torture, sexual assault, and other violent attacks have been reported against asylum seekers expelled from the U.S. to Mexico under the "Title 42" policy. This policy, implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed the U.S. government to expel migrants without reviewing their asylum claims, exposing them to severe risks in Mexico¹⁰.

11. Following alarming statistics on sexual assaults against border migrants in the U.S., the state of Texas launched a billboard campaign in Mexico and Central America warning about the dangers of sexual violence during migration to the U.S. It is estimated that Texas spent \$100,000 on this campaign. The billboards feature shocking messages, such as, "How much did you pay for your daughter to be raped?" Texas Governor Greg Abbott stated that these billboards are part of broader efforts to combat sexual violence against women and children migrating to the Texas border. Data shows that migrants face sexual violence both en route to the U.S. and after entering the country. For instance, a 2023 Reuters investigation revealed an increase in sexual violence in border towns like Reynosa and Matamoros, Texas.¹¹

⁶ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/dhs-inspector-general-report-reveals-squalid-conditions-at-migrant-detention-centers>

⁷ <https://immigrantjustice.org/research-items/policy-brief-snapshot-ice-detention-inhumane-conditions-and-alarming-expansion>

⁸ <https://immigrantjustice.org/research-items/policy-brief-snapshot-ice-detention-inhumane-conditions-and-alarming-expansion>

⁹ <https://immigrantjustice.org/research-items/policy-brief-snapshot-ice-detention-inhumane-conditions-and-alarming-expansion>

¹⁰ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/marking-two-years-of-illegal-inhumane-title-42-expulsions-nearly-10000-violent-attacks-on-asylum-seekers-and-migrants>

¹¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/texas-greg-abbott-texas-billboards-b2669722.html>

. 12Between April and August 2018, over 6,000 migrant families were separated at the U.S.-Mexico border—a figure higher than officially reported. This policy caused severe psychological trauma for children and their parents, with human rights groups deeming it a blatant violation of human rights.

.13 In October 2024, 6,604 unaccompanied children were identified at the U.S. southwestern border. This number marked an increase from September and highlighted the vulnerability of many migrant children in the U.S. to abuse, trafficking, and even illegal organ harvesting.

Recommendations:

The crisis of harsh and inappropriate treatment of border migrants and the deplorable conditions of detention centers in the United States have raised serious human rights concerns. The following 15 recommendations have been developed to address these issues and provide a framework for immediate and long-term actions:

.1 Independent Investigations into Human Rights Violations

The United Nations should call for transparent and independent investigations into reports of human rights violations in U.S. migrant detention centers, including physical abuse, medical negligence, and inhumane living conditions. These investigations should involve international human rights organizations and legal experts to ensure impartiality.

2. Establishment of an International Monitoring Mechanism

An independent body under UN supervision should be created to monitor detention centers and the actions of border enforcement agencies in the U.S. This body should have full access to detention facilities and publicly release reports on human rights conditions.

3 . Improvement of Detention Center Conditions

The UN should compel the U.S. government to implement immediate reforms to improve living conditions in migrant detention centers. These reforms should include the provision of clean drinking water, adequate hygiene, sufficient nutrition, medical care, and humane treatment of detainees.

4 . Prohibition of Family Separation

The UN should urge the U.S. government to halt any policies leading to the separation of migrant families. Family unity should be prioritized, and appropriate housing alternatives for families should be provided.

5. End to the Use of Private Detention Centers

The UN should call for the closure of private detention facilities in the U.S., which operate for profit and have a history of widespread human rights abuses. Migrant detention should be managed by public entities under strict oversight.

6. Expansion of Alternatives to Detention

The UN should recommend the expansion of alternative detention programs in the U.S., such as case management systems. These approaches are more humane, cost-effective, and promote compliance with legal processes.

7. Guaranteed Legal Access for Migrants

Many detained migrants lack access to legal services. The UN should encourage the U.S. government to guarantee free or low-cost legal advice and representation for all detainees, particularly asylum seekers and vulnerable groups.

8. Strengthening Legal Protections for Asylum Seekers

The UN should call on the U.S. to adhere to its international commitments under the Refugee Convention and ensure fair and timely asylum processes. Immediate deportations without legal review should be prohibited.

9. Ban on Solitary Confinement for Migrants

Reports indicate that migrants, including children, are held in solitary confinement as punishment in the U.S. The UN should urge the U.S. government to prohibit this practice in all migrant detention facilities.

10. Decriminalization of Migration

The UN should oppose policies that criminalize illegal migration. Migrants should not face criminal prosecution, detention, or harsh law enforcement measures for unauthorized entry.

11. Abolition of the "Remain in Mexico" Policy and Similar Measures

Policies forcing asylum seekers to wait in unsafe conditions in other countries must be abolished. The UN should urge the U.S. to ensure safe and respectful entry for asylum seekers while their claims are being processed.

12. Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Groups

The UN should advocate for special support for vulnerable migrant groups in the U.S., including children, pregnant women, and victims of human trafficking. These individuals should have prioritized access to humanitarian aid and legal protections.

13. Accountability for Border Agents' Misconduct

Reports of excessive force by U.S. border agents must be addressed through independent investigations, disciplinary actions, and legal accountability. The UN should support stronger accountability mechanisms for border enforcement personnel.

14. Enhancing International Collaboration on Migration Issues

The UN should facilitate dialogue between the U.S. and migrants' countries of origin to address the root causes of migration, such as economic instability, violence, and climate change. A multilateral approach is necessary for sustainable solutions.

15. Creation of a Global Framework for Migrants' Rights

The UN should lead efforts to establish a stronger global framework for migrants' rights, ensuring that all nations, including the U.S., uphold international standards for the humane treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.

In Conclusion:

The treatment of migrants at the U.S. southern border highlights a critical humanitarian crisis that demands immediate attention and reform. The documented instances of overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and the traumatic impact of family separations illustrate the urgent need for systemic changes in immigration policies. The increasing number of migrant deaths, both in detention centers and at the border, underscores the dire consequences of current practices. It is essential for the U.S. government to prioritize the dignity and well-being of all individuals seeking asylum and improve the conditions in which they are held. Comprehensive reform must address these human rights violations to ensure that the treatment of migrants aligns with the values of compassion and justice. Through these changes, the U.S. can begin to rebuild its commitment to human rights and restore the trust of global communities in its immigration system.