

**The Border City of Reynosa and the Shelters for Mexican Deported Migrants.  
A First Approach**  
**La frontera de Reynosa y los albergues de acogida para migrantes mexicanos deportados.  
Un primer acercamiento**

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## ABSTRACT

For decades, the study of migrations in Mexico has awakened countless publications in different specialties as a country of transit, reception, expulsion, and return of migrants. This article focuses on the deportations of Mexicans from the United States, through the border cities, taking as the place of study the city of Reynosa, Tamaulipas. It also deals with the operating of two shelters that provide space and basic services for deportees for a short period, the *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* and *Senda de Vida*. Altogether, this will help to have a better understanding of the migratory phenomenon from social history in border regions that have had less prominence, but which are also important for the knowledge of our reality.

*Keywords:* 1. migration, 2. deportations, 3. shelters, 4. Tamaulipas, 5. Mexico-U.S. border.

## RESUMEN

Desde hace décadas, el estudio de las migraciones en México ha despertado un sinnúmero de publicaciones en diversas especialidades por ser un país de paso, recepción, expulsión y retorno de migrantes. Este artículo se centra en las deportaciones de connacionales desde Estados Unidos, a través de las ciudades fronterizas, tomando como lugar de estudio la ciudad de Reynosa, Tamaulipas. También se ocupa del funcionamiento de dos albergues que brindan acogida y servicios básicos a los deportados por un breve lapso de tiempo, la *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* y el albergue *Senda de Vida*. Lo anterior contribuirá a tener una mejor comprensión del fenómeno migratorio desde la historia social en regiones fronterizas que han tenido un menor protagonismo, pero que también son importantes para el conocimiento de nuestra realidad.

*Palabras clave:* 1. migración, 2. deportaciones, 3. albergues, 4. Tamaulipas, 5. frontera México-EE. UU.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the history of Mexico, migration movements have been approached from different perspectives and specializations, in all its modalities: from south to north, from north to south, in the interior, abroad, and from the countryside to cities. For some years now, the deportations of Mexican migrants have also been studied, including those detained just after crossing the border, and those who have lived irregularly in the United States for a short time or several years, the latter also implying new challenges in addressing the needs of fellow nationals returning to Mexico.

Mexicans who choose to migrate to the United States without the appropriate documentation are often forced to resort to channels outside the law, for example, hiring a *coyote* or *pollero*. Conditions of precariousness, exclusion, and unemployment directly influence this decision, as various studies on Mexican migrants have shown. Herrera Carassou (2006) points out that “all migration movements have been motivated by necessity...” (p. 62), which depends on the particular circumstances of each case.

Massey, Durand, and Malone (2009) offer a general classification of migration between Mexico and the United States, dividing it into five stages that will be briefly enunciated below to show its development during the past century. Migration to the neighboring country began with a) *the enganche (hooking) era*, from 1900 to 1929; followed by b) the deportations era, from 1929 to 1941, then the following year c) *the braceros era*, from 1942 to 1964; then came d) *the undocumented immigration era*, from 1965 to 1985; and, finally, e) *the great split*, from 1985 to 2000 (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2009, pp. 34-59).

Immediately after the attacks of September 11, 2001, national security became the matter of priority attention in the United States. Entry standards were raised, as well as the sanctions to those who provided any kind of help to undocumented migrants; surveillance at the borders was allotted more resources and staff, and at the same time, attempts were made to promote “building of a wall along more than 1,100 kilometers of the border with Mexico” (Tuirán & Ávila, 2010, pp. 123-124).

In the case of border cities, the flow of people between Mexico and the United States has allowed the formation and/or perpetuation of transnational support networks, legal or not, that seek to support the transit of migrants in various ways. On the one hand, the networks responsible for the surreptitious displacement of people who lack documents stand out, and

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on the other hand, the organizations that provide aid to those who are on the way or have been deported.

Although this work is far from focusing on organizations that provide unauthorized services for the transportation of migrants across the border, it should be noted that according to Suro (2006), until just over a decade ago almost 85% of human transit lacked authorization (p. 348). This indicates that despite all the measures that the United States has undertaken to curb unauthorized migration, and despite the frustrated attempts to cross the border, regardless of migratory regions -such as the one proposed by Massey (1998), which divides the country into four regions, or the one that focuses on the origin of the deported Mexicans- this phenomenon has been perpetuated and is highly relevant in Mexico (Massey *et al.*, 2009).

The border city of Reynosa was chosen for the particular case of this research due to various reasons. To begin with, it is where we reside and work; also, because for some years it has served for us as a natural observatory from which we have been able to study this phenomenon, as well as some of the changes in migration processes; and finally, because it is one of the least studied borders when compared to others in the north, such as Tijuana or Ciudad Juárez.

We deem that this, our contribution from social history, will serve to better understand some of the characteristics of this border, which operates in the four modes of migration: it receives internal migrants, it expulses migrants towards the United States, it receives deported Mexican migrants, and it is also a crossing border for transmigrants from other countries seeking to settle in the neighboring country to the north.

This work focuses on the third modality, meaning the study of deportations, on the understanding that this will allow us to provide greater comprehension of the heterogeneity that characterizes the Mexico-United States border.

However, it should be noted that migrants forcibly returned to Mexico consider themselves deported, whereas the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (INM, acronym in Spanish for National Institute of Migration) classifies them as repatriated. The distinction is made to clarify that these terms will be used interchangeably throughout the text. In any case, what should be noted about this flow that passes through the Benito Juárez I-II Reynosa-Hidalgo bridge is that it increased by 31% from 2017 to 2018 according to the 2018 EMIF Norte *Annual Results Report* (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2019, p. 39). Therefore, in this case, we sought to delve into the social context surrounding those migrants who have tried to cross the border without success and thus seek refuge in one of the two shelters in the city.

This article provides a brief description of the historical and social context of the city of Reynosa, Tamaulipas, including some of the insecurity situations faced not only by migrants, but also by the general local population, and the situations in the places where

deportees can take shelter. In view of the above, this article is divided into three sections: a) brief historical background of the border under study, to understand in some measure its social context from the 20th century to the present day; b) knowing the risks involved in transiting by means approaching the conditions of insecurity experienced in the locality, and c) approaching to the two shelters for migrants established in this city, to publicize the services they provide.

Our methodology was divided into three phases. The first consisted of a bibliographic and periodical archive compilation of Mexican migration to the United States in the national and historical-social context of this region during the last several decades, including the conditions of violence and insecurity in recent years.

In the second phase, participant observation was carried out from October 2017 to June 2018, via random visits to the two shelters for migrants in the city. In this way, it was possible to meet the people in charge of them, some collaborators, as well as their spatial distribution and organization.

Finally, a third phase of systematic observation was carried out. This led to several conversations and the carrying out of unstructured interviews with eight deported migrants of Mexican origin<sup>5</sup> who were temporarily residing in one of the two shelters. This allowed us to know first-hand what the reasons were why they decided to migrate, the story of their repatriation, and their life plans for the immediate future.

## THE REYNOSA BORDER AND ITS POPULATION CONTEXT

In order to locate this Tamaulipas border on the map of Mexico, as described by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía* (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, acronym in Spanish: INEGI, 2009), the city of Reynosa borders the United States of America to the north; to the east, it borders the municipality of Río Bravo; to the south, with the municipality of Méndez and the state of Nuevo León; to the west with the state of Nuevo León and with the municipality of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (INEGI, 2009, w/o page number).

Reynosa experienced accelerated urban growth during the last century when compared to other major cities in the state. In the words of the historian Herrera (2010), during the early 20th century, it went from a “village” to “a modern border city close to half a million inhabitants” (Herrera 2010, p. 39). This is important if one takes into account that Ciudad Victoria is the capital of the state of Tamaulipas, while Matamoros and Tampico are the main ports in the northeast, and that Nuevo Laredo was the first land customs office in this border area (Herrera, 2010).

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<sup>5</sup> To protect the identity of our interviewees, pseudonyms are used throughout the article.

In population matters, the number of inhabitants increased throughout the 20th century as follows:

Table 1. Number of inhabitants in Reynosa by year (1910-2015)

Year	Registered population
1910	1,475 inhabitants
1930	4,848 inhabitants
1940	9,412 inhabitants
1980	194,693 inhabitants
1990	265,663 inhabitants
2010	608,891 inhabitants
2015	646,202 inhabitants

Source: own elaboration based on the information obtained from Margulis and Turián (1986), Herrera (2014), INEGI (2010, 2017).

This population growth is linked to the various social and economic processes implicit in the border dynamics that the city underwent since the second decade of the last century, such as the development of the field and the boost that was given to the oil sector. Years later, there was a boom in cotton plantations, border trade was constant and there was a high demand for workers in the service sector, and finally, the *boom* in the opening of maquiladoras became an attraction for internal migration. In addition to high birth rates, the improvement in the economy caused residents of states or communities with little labor opportunities to decide seeking new jobs in this city (Herrera, 2010).

Since the year 2000, Reynosa has undergone great changes in urban planning issues, growing in a disorderly way due to a large number of irregular settlements that lack basic public services (such as paving, sewer system, public lighting, among others), which contrasts to a great extent with the cultural centers opened in recent years, or the industrial parks that house transnational companies (Herrera, 2014).

In this understanding, it was found that during thirty years (1950-1980) the economically active population (EAP) of this municipality quadrupled in such a way that the local dynamism absorbed since then the population boom and increase into its economy. At the onset of the 1980s, there was a very low unemployment rate; only 1.3% of the population was looking for a job. Summarily, the industry in this locality was divided into three main categories: a) oil and petrochemicals, b) that related to the maquiladora industry, and c) small industry (Margulis & Tuirán, 1986).

As for international transit, there are three bridges in the city connecting it with Texas, in the United States. The first is called Benito Juárez I-II (Reynosa-Hidalgo), which in 1967 replaced its old suspension bridge, ushering in a new era of cross-border exchange. 27 years later, in 1994 the Reynosa-Pharr international bridge was built. Finally, in December 2009, the Anzaldúas international bridge began to function for the vehicular transit of individuals between Reynosa and Mission, although it was only officially inaugurated in January 2010 (AA.VV., 2012).

Another important point in the study of border cities in the north of the country is that they also represent a space for internal migration to arrive in; as these cities hold greater job opportunities in some sectors, such as the maquiladora industry, they become temporary settlement or permanent residence spaces (Quintero Ramírez, 2011).

This is confirmed by the fact that during the first decade of this century, the maquiladora industry located on the Reynosa and Matamoros borders employed a high percentage of low-skilled workers (only 65% of the total had basic education) and also “access to cheap labor is decisive in the definition of its location, so the greater presence of a technical industry has not translated into a greater participation of more qualified workforce” (Pérez Cruz, Ceballos Álvarez, & Cogco Calderón, 2014, pp. 195-196).

In other words, employment in the maquiladora industry, even with all the problems that the city may have, constituted for several decades -and even today to a lesser extent- a pole of attraction for internal migrants who traveled to this border due to how easy it is getting basic jobs here.

## MIGRATION AND VIOLENCE IN RECENT YEARS

As pointed out by historian Herrera (2014), those internal migrants who settle in the city come mainly from the State of Mexico, Veracruz, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí, to which those from other places must be added. However, as of 2012, there was a notable decrease in migratory transit due to factors derived from the violence of criminal groups fighting for the control of this border. In this sense, there have been three key aspects: the first, the increase in arrests made by the border patrol in neighboring cities; the second, the consequent deportations of undocumented persons via Reynosa, and the third, the closing of maquiladoras because of the economic recession in the United States, which translated into a lesser possibility of obtaining employment (Herrera, 2014).

In the case of national migrants who fail in their attempt to cross the border and so return to Mexico as returnees, the possibility of seeking a job in a maquiladora is not an option. People in this situation tend to first contact their family or friends to ask for help and so decide as soon as possible what they will do immediately: whether to stay, cross or return to their homes.

On the other hand, deportees, returnees, or repatriates are exposed to the public insecurity and violence of transit contexts in places unknown to them, making them vulnerable, even more so due to the violence and insecurity that they continuously experience in the region, which has been recorded on various occasions in press publications and continues to be pointed out in various informational spaces.

Migrants and deportees are considered a vulnerable group since “by virtue of their gender, race, economic, social, labor, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, chronological and functional condition they suffer from omission, precariousness or discrimination” (González Galván, Hernández, & Sánchez-Castañeda, 2001, p. 227), given that their contexts —local and national— drive them to leave their places of origin to seek new opportunities in a foreign country.

To the above, it must be added that many times these people are left defenseless and with little or no legal protection before immigration authorities are abused in various ways suffer discrimination and harassment, and given that they are in an irregular situation, they are also detained and deprived of their freedom even for long periods (Redes Globales de Advocacy Ignaciano, 2013, p. 78).

Thus, once in Reynosa, recent deportees focus their efforts on seeking the support of their relatives to try to leave this city as soon as possible. This situation worsened since the strategy implemented by former President Felipe Calderón, when during his administration he promised to reduce drug abuse, despite the fact that at that time, by itself, such was not a problem for the country (Aguilar & Castañeda, 2012).

According to Villoro, the previously described struggle “broke tacit agreements between multiple social actors, altered the codes [...] In other words: the profound impact that the war would have on the social fabric was not taken into account, creating fractures and a structural imbalance difficult to recover” (Villoro, 2012, p. 46).

Nowadays, armed confrontations continue to take place on this border, altering the population and its social dynamics. Notes regarding violence and the situation of insecurity appear continuously in the press. For a sample, some data published during the last two years is sufficient; in them, events such as the constant armed confrontations are narrated (El Mañana Staff, 2018), some recorded in broad daylight, such as the one that occurred on April 11, 2018, which between blockades, persecutions and shootings resulted in eight civilians killed (El Debate, 2018); there is also talk about the continuous stress experienced at this border due to the situations of violence resulting from the clashes between the authorities and organized crime (El Sol de Tampico, 2017). As it can be seen, the municipality is unfortunately in the news due to the violent events taking place daily.

For its part, in the National Survey of Urban Public Safety (ENSU, acronym in Spanish for Encuesta Nacional de Seguridad Pública Urbana - INEGI, 2018) for June 2018 it was reported that Reynosa, Tamaulipas, was precisely the city with the highest negative

perception of insecurity, with 79.3% according to data collected in March 2018. By June, this figure rose considerably, as 97.2% of those surveyed stated feeling unsafe in the activities they carry out daily, such as going to an ATM, going to the bank, using public transportation, driving their vehicle, or simply walking on the streets (INEGI, 2018).

However, when it comes to the security of religious or social organizations that provide support to migrants, it is clear that there is still much work to be done. Cárdenas-Rodríguez and Vázquez Delgado (2014) have emphasized how relevant it is that the resources to provide said security cover not only migrants but also the personnel working in the shelters; they point out that:

The security of facilities and the resources destined to maintain said security is greater in official facilities. Migration Stations have human security resources and establish security protocols in each of their actions; on the other hand, social and religious organizations are exposed to groups of migrant hookers and smugglers linked to organized crime (Cárdenas-Rodríguez & Vázquez Delgado, 2014, p. 185).

The above data serves to illustrate the fact that, although public safety is not guaranteed in general for the common population, neither is that so for migrants who seek to cross the border fleeing from contexts of poverty, lack of opportunities, and marginalization. Finding themselves again in Mexico, now as repatriates with no alternatives and having lost the investment made, leaves them completely exposed and vulnerable. This can cause them to join the statistics, due to the fact of being on a border that they do not know and in which they are completely alone.

In Tamaulipas, there is also an important migration flow of undocumented foreigners, mainly of Central American origin. Although they are not the object of study of this work, we would like to point out that despite their greater notoriety in recent years due to the wide dissemination that their presence has had in the media and on social networks, these movements have been studied for decades now.

Regarding the above, Sánchez Munguía (1993) points out that although this presence was not so evident during the 1970s and 1980s, and although it was always temporary and rather discreet, in a period of six years “between 1979 and 1985, more than 500 thousand Central Americans traveled to the United States” (Munguía, 1993, p. 183). He also stated that at that time that border city had “become the main crossing point into United States territory” (Munguía, 1993, p. 183).

Izcara Palacios (2012a, 2012b, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b) has also dealt with this issue in more recent years and from different perspectives and lines of research, pointing out that violence against migrants made world news due to the discovery of the San Fernando graves, in which 72 bodies were found (58 men and 14 women), on August 25, 2010 (Camarena, 2010). In the graves, they found 24 migrants from Honduras, 14 from El Salvador, 13 from Guatemala, five from Ecuador, three from Brazil, and one Hindu (De Llano, 2016). All of



them sought to reach the United States and achieve the so-called “American dream,” making their journey through Mexican territory (Varela Huerta, 2017, p. 136). To this terrible event must be added another equally chilling one: the exhumation of 194 bodies of undocumented immigrants who sought to reach the border with the United States traveling by bus (Izcara Palacios, 2012b, p. 7).

Now, in the local context, the city of Reynosa has also been in the news for several years, as various safe houses have been discovered here, in which undocumented migrants were held regardless of their origin -national and foreign- guarded by *coyotes* or *polleros* until it is the right time to cross the border, or wherein they were held hostage.

In order to rescue migrants from those safe houses, the navy, the national army, the National Institute of Migration, and/or various local, state, and federal police forces intervened (El Norte, 2018). In this case, the migrants not only came from within Mexico, but also from other countries, mainly Central American, and many of them had been rescued from unsanitary and overcrowded conditions (Castellanos & Henríquez, 2016). In addition, as criminal gangs are well aware of the routes used by migrants, they have chosen to diversify and do not focus anymore exclusively on adults, since they also profit now from the illegal retention of minors, teenagers, and children, who are often rescued in *inhumane conditions* (Martínez, 2013).

This surreptitious crossing attempt has become “a nightmare, with a high monetary cost for the scrawny pockets of migrants and an unacceptable cost of human lives” (Durand, 2002, pp. 5-6). Despite this, the Tamaulipas borders continue to be frequented by irregular migrants who hope to have an opportunity at crossing through an unguarded gap on the border between Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo, that is, along the border strip that connects Tamaulipas with Texas.

As Izcara Palacios and Andrade Rubio (2016) point out, “no other state in the Mexican Republic presents higher risks for the migrant crossing than Tamaulipas; however, this has not slowed down the transit of migrants, both nationals and foreigners” (2016, p. 77). They add that this wave of violence has affected “both nationals and foreigners; but more so to the latter, since their irregular immigration status makes them more vulnerable to violence, especially kidnapping” (Izcara Palacios & Andrade Rubio, 2016, p. 121).

For his part, Correa-Cabrera (2017) points out that contrary to an improvement in public security, currently “the main violent events have more to do with conflicts within criminal organizations themselves and with their confrontations with federal police forces” (2017, p. 187).

To conclude this section, it should be noted that deported migrants suffer countless hardships and face great risks in their transit through Mexican territory (either on the way or back). Especially so in the last legs of their journeys, when they find themselves in cities

that are unknown and disconcerting to them—in this case, the Reynosa border. After deportation, many of them keep their hopes of having new opportunities to try another furtive crossing in the not-so-distant future, despite the high price implied and the impact it has in many ways, both personal and social.

Such is the case of Severo (personal communication, February 8, 2018), who was extremely concerned about having to return to his place of origin after having resided for so long in the United States, in addition to having to leave his children there. During the interview, Severo claimed not to know what he was going to do to achieve family reunification.

### SHELTERS FOR MIGRANTS IN REYNOSA AND THEIR OPERATION

For this research, it was essential to know a little more about the role of religious organizations that provide support to migrants. Paris and Müller (2016) refer to them as *field* organizations, since they are “dedicated to the assistance and protection of the migrant population in transit through Mexico and expelled from the United States to the border cities of the Mexican northeast” (2016, p. 258).

In turn, these organizations exercise “a protective role, that is, they specialize in hosting migrants, providing them with information on their rights and duties, and providing them with humanitarian services” (Paris & Müller, 2016, p. 258). The resources that these houses on the Tamaulipas borders have, both to survive and to provide their services, come mostly from donations and collections made in the community; the work carried out by them is mainly welfare-oriented (Hernández-Hernández, 2016, p. 288).

For the most part, the establishment of migrant houses in our country began at the end of the 1980s and continued throughout the 1990s, their main function being that of assisting and protecting migrants in transit. However, to this must be added the arrival of Mexican migrants deported through the country’s northern border, which increased from 2008 and which, at least until 2013, reached annual figures that ranged between 250,000 and 275,000 Mexicans (París & Müller, 2016, p. 260).

In March 2017, the National Observatory of the Episcopal Conference of Mexico (Observatorio Nacional de la Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano) released the report entitled *Study on Catholic Migrant Houses* (Estudio Sobre las Casas de Migrantes Católicas - Miranda Guardiola, 2017). The study counted a total of “75 organizations led by people from the church, including shelters, dining rooms, support centers, parishes, care modules, medical dispensaries, among others. These houses are divided into 3 regions: the northern border, the southern border, and the center” (Miranda Guardiola, 2017, para. 5).

This publication also explains that there are a total of 38 support facilities in the northern part of the country, mainly serving migrants who seek to reach the United States or who are

deported from that country to Mexico (Miranda Guardiola, 2017, para. 8). Although it only refers to Catholic care facilities, the report is considered to represent a good starting point for understanding the assistance provided by these religious organizations.

There are two shelters in the city of Reynosa that provide shelter for migrants, both deported and nationals (and foreigners) seeking to cross into the United States. For this reason, a description of their operation and the particular characteristics of both will be provided below, as observed in the visits made to *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* and *Senda de Vida*. This will also be complemented with the information offered verbally by the directors of both sites, to which some references provided by the migrants who we managed to interview will be added.

#### *La Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe House of Migrants)*

Located in the city of Reynosa and with more than two decades of service, *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* is included in the *Directory of shelters for migrants* (Directorio de albergues para personas migrantes - Hernández-Ardieta, 2015). Its purpose is described in this directory in a few lines: “it aims to be an oasis to which those who require it can go and receive the minimum utilities that all people should have in life” (2015, p. 48). It belongs to the diocese of Matamoros; its manager is Father Francisco Gallardo.

This Catholic shelter is run by the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul (Hijas de la Caridad de San Vicente de Paul). We had the opportunity to contact the staff who served there. Its director at the time of the interview, Sister María Nidelvia Ávila Basulto,<sup>6</sup> offered us a tour of the facilities during our first visit and introduced us to some of the collaborators.

They provide services of “accommodation, food, medical care, clothing and footwear, spiritual guidance, and they accompany migrants to apply for their refugee status” (Hernández-Ardieta, 2015, p. 48). A 2017 directory states that they provide care to people of both sexes (Córdoba Luna & Galván Serrano, 2017, p. 76).

Aurora (personal communication, October 18, 2017) and Octavio (personal communication, October 18, 2017), are migrants who have been deported while trying to cross the border to secure a better quality of life for their respective families. During the interview, they were hopeful and relieved for having had the opportunity to take shelter in this House of Migrants.

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<sup>6</sup> We would like to thank Sister María Nidelvia Ávila Basulto for her kindness, the short conversations we had some of the times we visited the house, and the help provided for us to carry out this research.

Aurora told us they can't go out alone, as they are likely to be kidnapped if they take a taxi. They both planned to stay at the border for a few days. She hoped to return to her relatives in Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas, to regain strength and try to cross again; while Octavio was convinced that he would make a new attempt to cross into the United States, with the help of a *coyote*.

In order to provide further knowledge on the operation and services of *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, the following is the information we collected during our observation visits, with some additional data provided by Sister María. We will begin by pointing out that the capacity of the shelter in times of high deportation —when it works at its maximum capacity— is around 250 people. Even so, every migrant who arrives asking for asylum finds a space where to sleep, even if improvised. The time limit to stay is 72 hours, that is, a maximum period of three days. Gabriel (personal communication, October 20, 2017) would spend the days allowed at the shelter, since he would again try to cross and go back to work in the United States, thus being able to send money to his family.

During their stay in this place, migrants are served hot food three times a day in a common dining room. It should be noted that before eating their food, a collective prayer is made as a blessing and an encouraging religious message is usually given by some of the sisters, to lift the spirits of the migrants.

The shelter also provides beds and sheets to sleep, distributing people by gender. There are two large rooms —galley-like— and a smaller room with four bunk beds (eight beds) for women. Generally, the galleries house the men, but if many women arrive, a different distribution is made and the auditorium is also set up; in this way, there is a better distribution of space. There are some shared showers and toilets, which are used by gender.

Upon arrival, all migrants and/or deportees receive a personal care kit. In the case of men, it contains soap, shampoo, safety razor, toothpaste, toothbrush, hairbrush, shower towel, and sandals. Women are given soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, hairbrush, shower towel, sandals, and if requested feminine hygiene products.

As for the multiple difficulties that deported migrants face, we would like to highlight the fact that once they are detained and deported, the possibility exists that they lack identification, money, or means to survive. In this sense, the support provided by the shelter's volunteers is complemented by the possibility of facilitating a phone call or internet access to them so that they can get in touch with their family, friends, or acquaintances, and thus have a chance and to try to solve their immediate circumstance as soon as possible.

For example, Fortunato (personal communication, October 19, 2017) showed us the repatriation letter that was issued to him at the INM, after deportation. Fortunato commented that with that letter he could get his voter ID card again, because when they arrest you in the

United States: “they take everything from you; in detention, they took my belongings, my phone, my money, everything. After thirty days, they throw everything away; as of right now I have no identification, I have nothing” (personal communication with Fortunato, October 19, 2017).

In matters of medical care, the shelter has a medical office taken care of by a Red Cross doctor, open in the mornings, and an office that serves as a psychological office. Every Friday several collaborators from Doctors Without Borders (Médicos Sin Fronteras) come to give talks on hygiene, health, and personal care. Similarly, the shelter was attended by groups of volunteer beauty students, who offer free haircutting services to those who want them.

The shelter is supported by donations from various solidarity groups in the city and patronage. They are in direct communication with the INM and for a few months before the beginning of our fieldwork, they also worked with the municipal police, which escorted the vehicles in which migrants were transported to the bus station to travel back home, or for migrants to visit financial institutions and collect money transfers from their families. This gives them two options to solve their situation: the first, returning to their place of origin, and the second, trying to cross the border again.

Finally, it must be added that in mid-2017 *Casa del Migrante* obtained a certification from the Secretary of Health of the State of Tamaulipas, being considered “a suitable place to receive or shelter people who are deported from the United States, or who are passing through this border looking after the American dream” (Salas, 2017). The above, taking into account its facilities, the conditions of the place and the services provided.

#### *Albergue Senda de Vida (Life Path Shelter)*

Senda de Vida is a private organization of the Christian church of the same name and belongs to the civil association called *Casa y Asociación Regional Humana y Auxiliadora del Migrante* (Regional Association and House for Humanitarian and Migrant Aid). It was founded in 2000 by Pastor Héctor Joaquín Silva de Luna,<sup>7</sup> who serves as its director.

This shelter also provides support to people who migrate, providing better living conditions to the families they receive and trying to motivate them so that they do not fall into discouragement and can get out of difficult situations that can even lead to depression and abandonment, which can get to turn them into homeless people roaming the city. Such was the case of Marcelo (personal communication, May 18, 2018), who was deported from the United States for being *homeless*, after being detained at a bus toll, and now after having passed the deportation process states he will remain temporarily at this border until he makes

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<sup>7</sup> We greatly appreciate Héctor Joaquín Silva de Luna for his support, patience, and the time gifted to us in our conversations with him at the shelter

a decision: either returning to his place of origin or trying to cross the border again to look for his son who lives in Minneapolis, United States.

This shelter has the capacity to accommodate around 250 to 300 people in times of high deportation, and is divided into sections. The first is for the care of the elderly or the disabled; the second is for single women or for women who travel with their young children; the third, which is the one with the largest capacity, is for men and it has capacity for 95 people sleeping in bunk beds, and there is also another space where they sleep under a roof but outdoors; and finally the fourth section is intended for families, that is, couples who travel together with their children. As the priority is to provide them with the best care, this separation allows a better understanding and promotes greater respect for space among the guests.

The heart of the shelter is the church, where they have service every Sunday, and messages of encouragement and support are given so that migrants do not feel alone. The pastor noted that many of the people who come to the shelter tend to reunite with their families, even after not seeing each other for decades. The shelter also has a kitchen and a dining room that work thanks to the same people staying there. They provide three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They also have some shared showers, bathrooms, and laundry rooms for both sectors.

They receive deported Mexican migrants, both those who had resided for many years in the United States and those who failed in their attempt at crossing the border to enter, and migrants from within Mexico, from states such as Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero, Michoacán, Jalisco, among others. It should be mentioned that it also welcomes Central Americans from various countries, including Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Argentina, and even from remote places such as the Congo or India. Almost all migrants from these countries invariably arrive intending to cross the border to reach the United States, a matter that warrants a separate research work.

Both shelters are in constant coordination with the Tamaulipas Institute for Migrants (ITM, acronym in Spanish for Instituto Tamaulipeco para los Migrantes). The latter is an institution created on May 24, 2011, after the events that occurred in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, as an institutional measure to provide support to migrants who transit through the state, as stated in the sixth recital of the *Internal Regulations of the Tamaulipas Institute for Migrants* (Reglamento Interior del Instituto Tamaulipeco para los Migrantes - POE, 2014). Thus, aware of the needs of recently repatriated Mexican migrants, and to protect them, the ITM provides them with support to transport them to the bus terminal or channels them to one of the shelters so that they continue to seek help in their close circles.

The main function of the shelter is to provide immediate help: accommodation, food, and spiritual guidance. They have the support of the International Red Cross, which donated an equipped office that has an examination table, scale, nebulizers, and various medications,

etc., and whose staff attend in urgent cases of the wounded or sick. This effort is joined by the local team of Doctors Without Borders, which makes fortnightly visits to provide medical and psychological care; on the other hand, there is also support from some young people who volunteer.

This shelter provides humanitarian support, accompaniment, gives migrants space to recover from rejection, deportation, and their journey. The main goal is to help them have some time to recover, whether they decide to try crossing again, return home, or ultimately reside in the border area permanently.

In *Senda de Vida*, as in any other shelter, it happens many times that newcomers prefer to remain anonymous, as they are afraid, disoriented and they only think about receiving help to get ahead (Tovar, 2016). The time limit to stay in the place is also 72 hours; however, people can find asylum in the church and extend their stay a little to try to solve their situation.

Cristóbal is a blind person who has prolonged his stay in the shelter for months, since he does not have any relative to assist him, he is waiting for the resolution of a request that he processed in Monterrey to be adopted by a family (personal communication, June 29, 2018). There are other cases, such as that of José, a recently arrived deportee who will have to wait several weeks to obtain his voter registration card. Meanwhile, José has volunteered to work in the preparation of food or in tasks that may be needed, to show his gratitude to the shelter (personal communication, July 30, 2018).

It should be noted that Pastor Héctor has spoken out in defense of the human rights of migrants on various occasions. Especially, by making known the constant discrimination they are subjected to due to their vulnerable situation, which is aggravated by the separation of families; for this reason, this shelter tries to keep families together throughout all procedures. For this reason, *Senda de Vida* has been working on the construction of six modules conditioned to receive entire families, and the men's area has undergone renovations (Zumaya, 2018) intending to provide a better service to those who arrive looking for a place to stop on their way.

The heads of the shelters in which the fieldwork was carried out are in constant communication. The pastor pointed out that many times it has happened that deportees stay in *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* three days and three nights (which is the maximum time granted) and from there those who require it stay another three days sheltered in *Senda de Vida*, thus having a little more time while they make a new decision that will mark their future.

Table 2. Relation of informants, characteristics and reasons for migrating

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Place of origin	Marital status	Reasons for migrating	Center where they stayed (U.S.)	Immediate life plans/Will try to cross in the next few days (Yes or No)
Aurora	26	San Fernando, Tamaulipas	Common Law Marriage, five children	Better quality of life for children, family reunification	Detention center for migrants, with her 7-year-old daughter	Will stay in the border (Miguel Alemán, Tamps.)/Yes
Octavio	44	Orizaba, Veracruz	Married, two children	Better quality of life for the family and job opportunities	Detention center for migrants	Will stay in the border (3 days)/Yes
Fortunato	33	González, Tamaulipas	Single, four children	Better quality of life, family reunification	Detention center for migrants	Will return to the family (González, Tamps.)/Yes
Gabriel	37	Taxco de Alarcón, Guerrero	Married, four children	Better quality of life for the family and job opportunities	Detention center for migrants	Will return to the family (González, Tamps.)/Does not know yet
Severo	42	Tlaxcala, Tlaxcala	Common Law Marriage, three children	Better quality of life for the family and job opportunities	Detention center for migrants	Will return to the mother (Tlaxcala, Tlax.)/No
José	56	San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí	Separated, one child	Better quality of life for the family and job opportunities	Jail (committed a crime), detention center for migrants	Will stay in the border for a while/No



Marcelo	58	Mexicali, Baja California	Single, one child	Better quality of life for the family and job opportunities	Was homeless, detention center for migrants	Will return home (Mexicali, Baja California)/Does not know yet
Cristóbal	50	Reynosa, Tamaulipas	Single	Greater job opportunities	Detention center for migrants	Will stay at the shelter/No

Source: own elaboration based on field work carried out in *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* and *Senda de Vida* shelter, in Reynosa, Tamaulipas.

### BRIEF CLOSING REMARKS

The northeastern border of Mexico, part of the so-called Gulf migration route, implies for migrants perhaps a less extensive transit in their attempt to reach the United States. However, in recent years the passage through Tamaulipas has worsened due to the dangers and latent threats that this journey implies for those who seek to cross the border without documents, yearning to achieve a better quality of life for their families and finding new job opportunities in the U.S.

For this research, it was essential to carry out a brief historical account of the studied border. This has allowed us to provide the reader an overview of the social context of this city in recent times, to which the understanding of the assistance work of two migrant shelters in this town was added. In both places, basic support is provided to recent deportees who find themselves in a vulnerable situation when traveling across a border that is both violent and unsafe for them.

For those who leave and for their families, migration generates uncertainty and unease, since deportees risk their own lives when traveling through unknown cities, such as the border city analyzed in our study. In this region, which—in the EMIF North statistics—also includes the Matamoros border, the increase in deportations rose by around 31% from 2017 to 2018 (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2019).

The two reception centers at the Reynosa border, *Casa del Migrante Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* and *Senda de Vida Shelter* are spaces that, in addition to shelter, provide a bit of tranquility for deportees who seek to re-establish contact with their relatives. This allows them to reenter their support networks, thus being able to make an immediate decision: either returning to their place of origin or trying to make a new surreptitious crossing through the border strip. The number of migrants who choose to stay and reside permanently in the city is minimal. Insecurity itself impels them to try to leave the places where they are as soon as possible, in order to rethink their reality.

It is a priority to stress that for these fellow citizens to receive better care, it is necessary that the supportive public policies established in the laws and regulations be fully respected and complied with, as well as with the programs implemented in the various federal, state and municipal administrations.

Finally, it should be noted that through this work it can be seen that the initiatives of religious organizations that crystallized in the founding of shelters (operating by means of donations: they carry out monumental coordination, organization, and service work), have been providential for the newcomers to preserve their integrity, find temporary asylum and gain a little time to make a new life decision; otherwise, they would be left at the mercy of helplessness and violence in a city far from their homes, that for them is also as alien as it is unknown.

Translation: Fernando Llanas

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