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Articles

Humanitarian infrastructures in the border cities of Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana

Infraestructuras humanitarias en las ciudades fronterizas de Ciudad Juárez y Tijuana

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Abstract

Based on theories on migration infrastructure and on migration industry, this article analyzes the installation and development of humanitarian assistance institutions for asylum seekers on the northern border of Mexico. It describes three types of institutions and procedures created between 2019 and 2021 in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana: Integration Centers for Migrants administered by the Mexican federal government, the filter hotels led by the International Organization for Migration, and the CONECTA system, coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It shows the effects of outsourcing migration control and humanitarian policies to non-state actors and international agencies, and the consequences of humanitarianism in security policies.

Keywords: humanitarianism, migration infrastructure, confinement, migration control, asylum seekers.

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Resumen

Con base en las teorías sobre las infraestructuras migratorias y la industria de la migración, este artículo analiza la instalación y desarrollo de instituciones para la ayuda humanitaria a solicitantes de asilo en la frontera norte de México. Describe tres tipos de instituciones y procedimientos que fueron creados entre 2019 y 2021 en Ciudad Juárez y en Tijuana: Centros Integradores para Migrantes administrados por el gobierno federal, hoteles filtro dirigidos por la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones y el sistema CONECTA coordinado por el Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados. Se muestran los efectos de la subcontratación de actores no estatales y agencias

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internacionales para la ejecución del control migratorio y de la asistencia humanitaria, así como las consecuencias del humanitarismo en las políticas de seguridad.

Palabras clave: humanitarismo, infraestructuras migratorias, confinamiento, control migratorio, solicitantes de asilo.

Introduction

From the beginning of Donald Trump's administration (2017-2021), U.S. immigration policies forced asylum seekers to wait for increasingly longer periods in northern Mexico. These policies involved the delegation and outsourcing, from north to south, of border control and humanitarian aid tasks (París Pombo, 2022). Some programs required the participation of Mexican authorities and a range of intergovernmental and non-governmental actors in regulating flows and providing services to people seeking asylum in the United States. Migration containment policies thus transformed Mexico's northern border cities into an antechamber of the U.S. asylum system (París Pombo, 2020). They also led to the installation of a network of migration infrastructures designed to provide humanitarian aid to migrants waiting to cross the border.

This article proposes to analyze the functioning of what is called "humanitarian infrastructures" in the management of migration flows. These infrastructures are defined as apparatuses[1] jointly managed by intergovernmental agencies, public institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs),[2] and the private sector, aimed at containing, selecting and filtering migration flows, providing housing, food, health, migration documentation, labor integration and education services, among others (López Reyes, 2022). The concept of humanitarian infrastructures used is akin to that of "migration infrastructures" developed by Xiang and Lindquist (2014, 2018). The authors defined these as technologies, apparatuses and intermediary institutions that condition (manage) human mobility through labor training and qualification to promote the integration of migrant populations through employment.

From the theory of the migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sorensen, 2013), it can also be considered that these new apparatuses, installed in the cities of northern Mexico to "rescue migrants," represent market niches opened up as a result of border security and migration control policies. These markets involve a range of public and private, local, national and international actors subcontracted by governments to manage the prolonged stay of asylum seekers at the border and meet their basic needs. Humanitarian infrastructures respond to the need to provide humanitarian aid to these migrants in the cities of northern Mexico.

[1] Based on texts by Michel Foucault, Agamben (2006) defines the apparatus as a heterogeneous whole that may include discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police regulations, and philosophical propositions. The apparatus itself is the network that is established between these elements and has a specific strategic function that is always inscribed in a relation of power.

[2] These are NGOs as transnational or binational non-profit organizations and CSOs as national and local civil society associations for assistance, advocacy, and community intervention.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, some migratory infrastructures were installed to conduct sanitary and migratory triage[3] of migrants arriving in Ciudad Juarez (Chihuahua) and Tijuana (Baja California). Others, such as the Integrating Centers for Migrants (CIM, by its acronym in Spanish, Centro Integrador para Migrantes), were installed in former industrial buildings and administered by the federal government to contain, house and promote the labor market participation of migrants.

Considering the particular context generated by the health emergency, the partial closure of the United States-Mexico land border, and the prolonged wait for asylum seekers in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, this article seeks to answer the following questions: What are the functions of border security, management and triage of migration flows fulfilled by the above-mentioned humanitarian infrastructures in these two cities? How do they boost the migration industry in Mexico? What niches and economic opportunities do they offer for public and private stakeholders?

In order to answer these questions, results from two research projects on the U.S. government's immigration and border control policies and their effects on entrapment and violence against migrant and asylum-seeking populations in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana were collected.[4] For this research, the strategy was qualitative, based on field observation, 42 semi-structured interviews with key actors, and 38 interviews with migrants housed in the CIMS. The first ones were addressed to public officials, international officials, members of CSOs, managers of migrant shelters and staff of the filter hotels in both cities. Finally, interview forms and field visit sheets were devised for recording and analyzing the processes.

The article is divided into four sections. First, it analyzes the migration and health context in the cities of the United States-Mexico border from 2016 to 2021, repeatedly described as a migration crisis or emergency (París Pombo, 2019). This crisis must be understood from a contextual perspective, as constructed based on different interests, purposes and political and economic usufructs. In other words, it is not focused on the behaviors of migrant populations but on the political-discursive construction of the border (Menjívar et al., 2019).

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[3] Health triage has been defined as the classification of patients according to their clinical risk and morbidity characteristics, in order to establish the order and place in which they should be attended (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*). For the past ten years, some countries and international organizations have been using the notion of migration triage to designate the processes of classifying people according to their socio-demographic characteristics, their conditions of vulnerability, and the causes of their migration.

[4] *Entre la espera y el asentamiento: inserción laboral y residencial de inmigrantes y desplazados en ciudades fronterizas del norte de México*, 2020-2021, funded by AFL-CIO, coordinated by Laura Velasco Ortíz, El Colef, and UCLA Labor Center.

Risk and resilience among asylum seekers waiting in Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana under the Migrant Protection Protocols, 2020-2022, funded by PIMSA, coordinated by Josiah Heyman (UTEP) and María Dolores París Pombo (El Colef).

The results of the doctoral thesis in migration studies at El Colef, presented by Emilio Alberto López Reyes in September 2022, *Infraestructuras migratorias y políticas de externalización del asilo en Ciudad Juárez y Tijuana. 2016-2021*, are also used.

In the second section, elements of the theories on the migration industry, the rescue industry and migratory infrastructures are used to justify and explain the notion of humanitarian infrastructures. Considering the specific case of Mexico's northern border, the functions of these apparatuses to process, "rescue" and attend to the humanitarian needs of the population in need of international protection are shown.

Third, it reconstructs the financing and flourishing of humanitarian infrastructures in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez to analyze the inter-institutional and international relations involved in these new apparatuses. These forms of collaboration and division of labor between multiple public and private actors are generally referred to by the actors involved as "migration governance" (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones [OIM], 2021).

Finally, the links between border security policies and the installation of humanitarian infrastructure are discussed. An analysis is carried out of how these apparatuses contribute to the control of mobility and the selection or filtering of migration flows, promote the externalization of asylum processes from the United States to Mexico and comprise new niches of the migration industries in the region.

Policies for the containment of migrants at Mexico's northern border seeking asylum in the United States

To limit the arrival of asylum seekers from the world's poorest regions, rich destination countries have developed policies of remote control of human mobility. These include strict screening of passports, visas and biometric data of passengers at places of origin and ports of entry and the rollout of security agencies in territorial seas and border regions. Thereby, asylum seekers' main countries of origin are excluded from the visa policy of almost all of the global North (FitzGerald, 2019). To reach their destination, people fleeing from these places due to situations of generalized violence and political persecution have to overcome numerous obstacles along migration routes and in border areas, such as routine document checks on public transport, checkpoints and patrolling by security agents. Asylum seekers, thus, generally travel via the same routes, networks and means as undocumented migrants (Watson, 2015). Once they reach the territory of the destination country, they present themselves to the migration authorities to request international protection.

In order to apply for asylum, the person must be in the territory of the state of destination. According to FitzGerald (2019), states conduct micro-distinctions in a process he calls "hyper-territorialization" (p. 10). Thus, some countries enable an application for international protection to be initiated in their embassies, others in territorial waters, while in some countries—as in the case of the United States—the asylum process is initiated only on land.

There are two ways to apply for asylum in that country. If the person voluntarily presents him/herself at an office of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), regardless of his/her immigration status, he/she can affirmatively

apply for asylum. If intercepted while crossing the border irregularly or in deportation proceedings, the person has the right to file for protection from deportation in an immigration court, which is known as defensive asylum. During the trial, which can last more than two years, individuals remain in a detention center or are released in exchange for bail and the obligation to appear at their hearings before the judge (Meissner et al., 2018).

In any case, the migration authorities must conduct a credible fear interview to determine whether the person is eligible for international protection, as defined in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the U.S. Refugee Act (1980). Credible fear interviews on the southwest U.S. border increased from 9 000 cases in 2010 to 79 000 in 2017 (Meissner et al., 2018, p. 2). The extraordinary growth of asylum applications led U.S. migration authorities to initiate a process of unofficial metering, forcing applicants to wait at the northern border of Mexico (París Pombo & Montes, 2021).

Metering began in 2016 at the Tijuana-San Diego border and was generalized to all northern Mexican border cities during the Donald Trump administration. Individuals seeking to cross the border to request asylum were required to enter their names and origin and were given a number that represented a turn to enter the United States. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials would inform the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) of the number of asylum seekers they were willing to admit that day, and INM officials would announce the consecutive numbers on the waiting list who would be crossing into the U.S. territory. Thus, with the volume of demand, asylum seekers had to wait for months until the time came for them to cross the border (Miranda & Silva, 2022).

When Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) took office as President of Mexico in December 2018, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) officials began negotiations with their U.S. counterpart. They reached an agreement whereby a program called Remain in Mexico, also designated by the euphemism Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), was initiated, which consisted of returning to Mexico individuals from third countries who had already conducted a credible fear interview in the United States.

Individuals in the MPP program first crossed the border when it was their turn to apply and spent a few days in a CBP detention center. After being interviewed by a U.S. immigration officer, they were returned to Mexico with their file in English and an appointment to appear at the border on the day of their hearing in a U.S. immigration court. Throughout 2019 and 2020, more than 71 000 non-Mexicans were returned to Mexico. In that period, only 733 people subject to MPP were granted asylum, that is, only 1%, while most did not attend any of their hearings, resulting in the judge sentencing them to a deportation order *in absentia*[5] (París Pombo, 2022).

[5] This implies that they have a criminal record because of that deportation order, so if the person is ever detained in the United States, they are considered a criminal and may be sent to prison.

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic health emergency was declared, immigration courts were closed and MPP hearings were extended month by month. Waiting lists were also canceled as U.S. authorities no longer permitted any asylum seeker to cross the border. As for Mexican, Latin American and Caribbean migrants attempting to cross the border without authorization, most were immediately deported to Mexico without the opportunity to seek protection. These removals were justified under Title 42 of the US Health Act (París Pombo, 2022).

As of January 2021, the incoming administration of Joseph Biden decreed the end of the MPP, and only asylum seekers who were in Mexico and had their cases open in U.S. immigration courts were tracked. The re-entry of persons under the MPP involved the implementation of logistics by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with various state agencies such as the Secretaría de Salud, the INM, the SRE, as well as national and international NGOs. This system was based on a previous registration of people on a web page called CONECTA.[6]

As this first phase of the MPP[7] ended, flows of migrants and asylum seekers expelled under Title 42 showed unprecedented growth. While from March 2020 to January 2021, the Trump administration conducted about 445 000 removals, between February and December 2021, the Biden administration conducted 1 050 000 removals (CBP, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

The various policies of blocking the border and returning migrants and asylum seekers to Mexico caused thousands of people to remain living in the northern cities of Mexico for an indefinite wait (Miranda & Silva, 2022). Faced with overcrowding in the shelters and migrant homes run by CSOs and religious institutions, the business sector, state officials and various social organizations pressured the federal government to assume part of the costs of the humanitarian crisis. In response, the federal government installed a Migrant Integration Center (CIM) in a former manufacturing plant building in Ciudad Juarez. The CIM Leona Vicario was inaugurated in August 2019; in December of that year, the CIM Carmen Serdán was inaugurated in Tijuana.

The following section proposes an analytical framework for understanding the characteristics of these infrastructures and their role in managing migration flows, particularly of people eligible for international protection.

[6] This was a program carried out between January and August 2021, comprised of a joint strategy between the humanitarian agencies IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, the U.S. and Mexican governments, and civil society organizations. The objective was to follow up on cases of asylum applications under the Migrant Protection Protocols that had been put on hold before the arrival of covid.

[7] This is considered a first phase since several months later, a federal judge in Texas ordered the resumption of the MPP, such that in December 2021, what is known as MPP 2.0 was initiated. This second phase lasted eight months until, in July 2022, the Biden administration finally received authorization to terminate the program (American Immigration Lawyers Association [AILA], 2022).

Migration industries, infrastructure development and humanitarianism

To explain the rapid creation, transformation and readaptation of migratory infrastructures of "humanitarian aid" for migrant populations on the northern border of Mexico, a theoretical outline by Hernández-León (in Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sorensen, 2013) on the migration industry is used as a starting point. This author explains how, historically, a social network of intermediaries and legal and illegal companies has been created to facilitate human mobility or, on the contrary, to control and repress it. Multiple public and private entities profit from the commercialization of migration, that is, capitalizing on people's desire or need to migrate. Some of these companies are funded by states to control, detain or deport migrants (Hernández-León in Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sorensen, 2013). Other companies, civil associations and international agencies are subcontracted to provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable migrants, victims of human trafficking and asylum seekers. Governments actively sustain and fund a large part of the migration industry through migration control and management policies and programs (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sorensen, 2013).

As a result of the penetration of the "governance" paradigms promoted by intergovernmental organizations such as the IOM, the outsourcing of services and privatization of the management of centers to process asylum applications, conduct deportations, implement mass arrest processes for undocumented migrants and provide different services to detained, stranded or blocked migrants along their route has intensified. This has given rise to markets for the mobility management involving companies that provide security services, transportation, food, NGOs, private contractors and professional personnel, among others.

According to Hernández-León (in Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sorensen, 2013, pp. 25-44), the migration industry has developed in three distinct fields that should be treated and analyzed differently: the control industries, the facilitators of documented or irregular mobility and the rescue industry. The latter is reflected in the growing presence of humanitarian actors in migrant transit, waiting or processing areas, such as religious communities, civil associations, reception areas and transportation services. This group of actors may be closely related to governmental or intergovernmental cooperation and sponsorship.

Meanwhile, Xiang and Linquist (2014) coined the concept of "migrant infrastructures" to explain the creation of complex institutions, systems and procedures that seek to control human mobility and provide services to migrants. These infrastructures are installed or constructed due to the multiplication of national and international regulations and non-migrant actors involved in migration management. These authors emphasize migrants' recruitment, hiring and training for labor markets. They postulate five analytical dimensions to understand the functioning of these infrastructures: commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian and social. The humanitarian dimension, which is the focus of this article, centers on the intervention of NGOs and international agencies.

Based on the ideas of these authors, *humanitarian infrastructures* are defined as physical spaces, technologies, bureaucratic procedures, organizations and institutions dedicated to providing services to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees considered vulnerable. As will be seen, humanitarian infrastructures fulfill both control or lockdown tasks and humanitarian services: their objectives are to rescue, care for, protect, feed and facilitate the economic insertion of migrants and asylum seekers. Table 1 presents a typology of humanitarian infrastructures.

Table 1. Typology of humanitarian infrastructures

Type of intermediation	Role and description within the humanitarian infrastructure
International executive agents	Intergovernmental representatives, diplomats and consuls, multilateral agents, presidents of international funders and NGOs, international consultants and experts
Financing agents	Promoters and managers engaged in fundraising and administration for humanitarian aid; foundations, politicians, specialists in international cooperation, development aid and goodwill ambassadors
Private sector	Entrepreneurs providing various services such as rental or sale of tents, mobile offices, cargo trailers, hygiene materials, construction materials, real estate rentals and others
Liberal professions	Bar associations and organizations of lawyers, psychologists, physicians, among others
Field organizations	Religious missions and NGOs dedicated to the temporary provision of basic services such as lodging, food and health care
Advocates	Human rights organizations and civil associations dedicated to strategic litigation, research, advocacy and promotion of migrants' rights
Irregular and opportunistic intermediaries	Organizations located in "gray zones",* agents pretending to be humanitarian causes that engage in the recruitment and exploitation of migrants; co-optation of irregular accommodation spaces (camps)

* In other words, zones of ambiguity, where there are both legal and illegal factors that give rise to the practices and dynamics of different intermediaries in the formal and informal migration industry, ranging from recruiters in the places of origin, "coyotes" and guides to the border crossing point and even inside the United States.
Source: created by the authors based on López Reyes, 2022

In the migration context of Mexico's northern border, it can be seen how migrants and asylum seekers' containment or blockade caused an overflow of humanitarian services, particularly those traditionally provided by CSOs and some religious congregations, such as shelters and soup kitchens. The growing vulnerable migrant population led local politicians and the media to speak of a humanitarian crisis and to pressure the federal government to provide resources and prevent the concentration of homeless migrants (López Reyes, 2022).

Therefore, this crisis was generated by U.S. immigration policies, particularly by the containment and removal programs described in the first section of this article. The response to alleviate the emergency was not a change in policy to avoid an indefinite blockade in cities such as Juarez and Tijuana but rather the transfer of public and private funds to multiply housing, food, health and employment services for people stranded in these cities.

Similarly, Gammeltoft-Hansen (2011) explains how outsourcing asylum promotes the development of offshore economies focused on migration control and refugee protection. As wealthy destination states delegate the control of migration and the protection of refugees to other states, considered states of origin or transit, all kinds of outsourcing, payments and compensations are developed. Humanitarian commitments, transfers to international organizations and co-investment funds with local, national or international NGOs often accompany this flow of resources to third countries.

The counterpart to the mass removal and indefinite blockade of migrants and asylum seekers in northern Mexico was the arrival of humanitarian actors in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana. In addition, the health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary to generate new socio-spatial services for the isolation, lockdown or medical care of migrants and asylum seekers or even humanitarian agents themselves.

Financing, subcontracting and humanitarian infrastructure development

Humanitarian missions are rooted in various religious traditions and are historically based on values such as charity and compassion (Ticktin, 2016). The churches were the first to institutionalize humanitarianism. Some of the most prominent missions in the field of human mobility have been the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), established in New York in 1881 (with an office for migrants on Ellis Island since 1904); the Catholic congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo or Scalabrinians, which originated in Italy in 1887; and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), founded by the Quakers, which began its activities in 1918 in interwar Germany (López Reyes, 2022).

At the end of World War II, European states promoted the formation of the international refugee regime, with the main objective of caring for millions of people forcibly displaced by that armed conflict. With the birth of the United Nations system, instruments were adopted for the international protection of people suffering persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion: the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the New York Protocol (1967). Likewise, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950 to protect and assist refugees. Within the international protection framework, UNHCR established partnerships with NGOs, religious associations and governments to implement humanitarian responses in the reception, shelter and relocation of refugees. Based on this background, this section analyzes the evolution of migration infrastructures in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana.

Humanitarian infrastructures on Mexico's northern border

On Mexico's northern border, Catholic and Evangelical Christian communities have traditionally provided primary care to vulnerable groups, including migrants, deportees and refugees. Since the 1980s, with the increase in irregular migration to the United States, the Catholic Church has identified the need to install shelter and food services for migrants in transit and repatriated people.

During the last two decades of the 20th century, Tijuana was the main transit and deportation point, which is why the Catholic order of the Scalabrinians founded the first migrant house there in 1987. In 1994, the order founded the Mother Assunta Institute for migrant women and children. Likewise, in 1991, the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) opened a shelter for unaccompanied adolescent migrants. This organization laid the groundwork for the founding in 1996 of the Coalición Pro-Defensa del Migrante, AC (Coalipro), a specialized network whose objective is the care and defense of the population's human rights in mobility, particularly in the cities of Mexicali and Tijuana.

In contrast, until 2014, Ciudad Juarez had only two shelters for migrants: the Casa del Migrante, which served single adults and families, and the Mexico Mi Hogar shelter for unaccompanied children and adolescents of the Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF). It should be noted that, as a result of the violence generated by the fight against organized crime, between 2007 and 2012 several civil associations for the promotion of human rights and attention to victims emerged (such as Casa Amiga and Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Juvenil). In addition, under pressure from local authorities, deportations through the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez nexus have been reduced since 2010.

Due to Tijuana's proximity to San Diego (California), which together with Los Angeles constitutes the main urban corridor of destination for Mexican migrants, cross-border social assistance associations have emerged that were originally founded as non-profits in the United States and later settled on the Baja California border (Border Angels, Al otro lado, Espacio Migrante, among others). With the sharp increase in deportations during the Barack Obama administration (2009-2017), a dozen shelters were founded and run mainly by Protestant churches and deportees (Albicker Aguilera & Velasco Ortiz, 2018).

At that time, CSOs specializing in legal, psychosocial or human rights care also began to operate in both cities. Cross-border activism characterized these organizations initially; many conducted on-the-ground actions with binational allies, obtained fund transfers and in-kind donations, or conducted charity events in the southern United States.

As a result of the significant increase in flows of migrants in need of international protection, in 2019, various UN agencies, in particular IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, opened territorial missions or offices in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana. In both cities, forms of collaboration were established with the so-called strategic partners of these agencies, that is, transnational NGOs such as Save the Children, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

At the global level, CSOs and local governments played an increasingly important role as promoters and implementers of humanitarian assistance, inter-agency agreements and outsourcing. In a context of increasing strengthening of migration control, surveillance and border security policies, IOM developed its "global governance framework for migration", which involved strategic multi-stakeholder partnerships for the implementation of policies to protect migrants' human rights, but also to control migration and combat human smuggling and trafficking (Pécoud, 2017).

UNHCR and IOM became key players in fundraising, intermediation between governments and civil society and financial transfers to local public and private actors. Multiple modes of contracting CSOs, public institutions and private companies for primary assistance and aid have emerged. Diversification of outsourcing modes is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Humanitarian infrastructure outsourcing and financing structures

Outsourcing and financing	Description
Transnational recruiting companies (global recruiters)	Private outsourcing firms, with contracts based on international public tenders focused on strategic partners and local implementing allies
Interinstitutional agreements and other para-diplomatic agreements	Managed between local and transnational governments, NGOs and the private sector (e. g., town twinning, inter-institutional agreements on security and development)
Competitive bidding, project-under-objective contracts and transnational tenders	Competitions and public calls for tenders on international, national and local platforms
Hybrid outsourcing	Contracting between different public, private and social stakeholders
Agreements and conventions based on altruism, donation-financing events	Fundraising events focused on the support, maintenance or rescue of shelters, asylums, soup kitchens (e. g., telethon, "asiloton," raffles, etcetera)

Source: created by the authors based on López Reyes, 2022

In Mexico, legal and institutional reforms during the 2000s encouraged social participation through CSOs, in matters such as legal representation of vulnerable groups, human rights promotion and defense and attention to victims, among others. These reforms were fundamental in forming a model for the financing and support of civil society by the three levels of government. In this way, resources such as the Disaster Response Fund (Fonden), the Border Fund, and, between 2009 and 2017, the Migrant Assistance Fund (FAM, by its acronym in Spanish, Fondo de Atención a Migrantes) were allocated to local governments and social organizations. Baja California and

Chihuahua received FAM resources through their government ministries, collaborating with municipal agencies and registered CSOs for administration and execution.

In December 2018, at the beginning of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's presidency, the policies of allocating funds and trusts for civil society were reversed. This measure occurred in an increasingly complex migratory situation in Mexico. With the arrival of the so-called "migrant caravans" and the implementation of MPPs, the blocking or trapping of people in need of international protection at the country's northern border worsened (París Pombo et al., 2021). Migrant shelters in Juarez and Tijuana were already insufficient to serve a growing population, largely composed of families with children and forcibly displaced people from Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

As the Mexican government withdrew funds from CSOs, the budget transferred by UN agencies grew. Despite this, the resources were insufficient to cover the needs generated by the continuous growth of the population and its vulnerability. Thus, for the first time on the northern border, Juarez and Tijuana municipal governments were forced to open shelters or housing spaces in buildings rented for that purpose, in public schools and sports facilities (París Pombo et al., 2021).

Integrating Centers for Migrants (CIM)

Between April and May 2019 in Ciudad Juarez, a group of entrepreneurs concerned about the possible economic consequences of a unilateral border closure by the U.S. government in the face of growing undocumented migration flows pressured the Mexican federal government to channel funds and address the migration issue in the city. The business organizations were joined by CSOs and officials from the three levels of government, who expressed concern about the increase in the number of homeless migrants.

In response, the federal government founded the Integrating Centers for Migrants (CIM) Leona Vicario and replicated the model in Tijuana with the CIM Carmen Serdán. These centers were installed in buildings where manufacturing plants had formerly operated; they were large spaces for housing, humanitarian care, employment and immigration processing, with a capacity of 900 people. At the same time, they comprised inter-institutional collaboration nuclei, empowered by inter-ministerial coordination of the federal government in which the policies of intergovernmental, governmental and civil society organizations converge. Inside the CIMs, long blocks were set up with units staffed by various local, national and international political and social actors to provide services to the people housed (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Based on the different border contexts, the integrating centers have had to adapt and readjust operations, and at least three stages of operation can be identified:

1. Pilot phase (between 2019-March 2020). The CIMs began operations in Ciudad Juarez, at the Leona Vicario Center, on August 1, 2019, and in Tijuana, at the Carmen Serdan Center, in December 2019. The target population

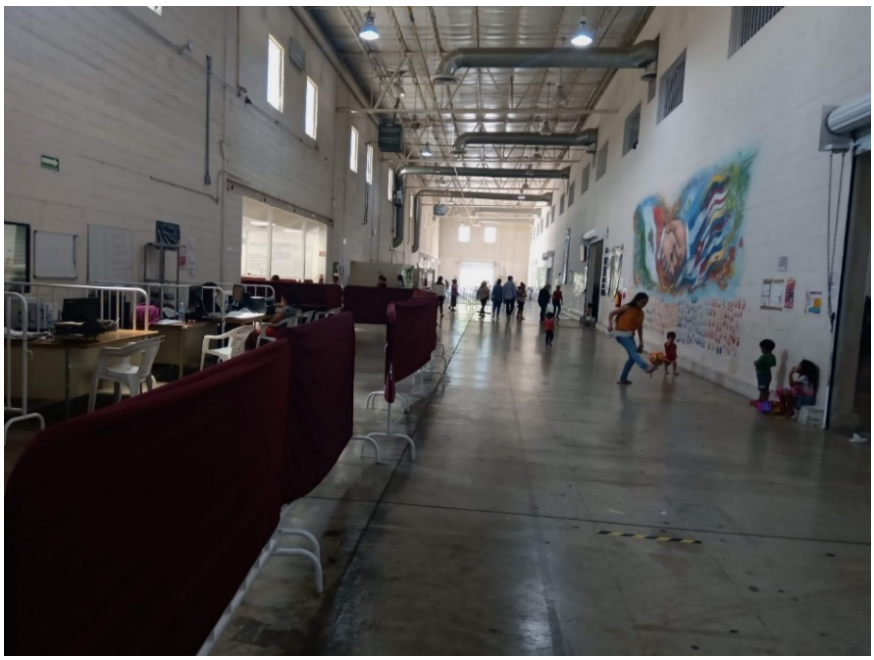
consisted of migrants subject to MPP. The length of stay was determined by the scheduling of hearings in U.S. courts and the rulings of U.S. immigration judges, which varied with an average wait time of three to six months until the program was slowed down in March 2020.

2. Health emergency phase (March 2020-January 2021). In the context of the pandemic, lockdown spaces and so-called "filter spaces" for health-based triage were created. Due to the cancellation of hearings in the U.S. immigration courts, time spent in the reception areas was eliminated. On the other hand, in the face of Title 42 removals, the centers expanded the criteria for receiving expelled migrants.
3. Model consolidation phase. At the beginning of the Biden administration (February 2021), when the "end" of MPP was decreed, the CONECTA system was installed to process people waiting in Mexico and still had open cases in U.S. courts. CONECTA zones were set up outside the CIMS to facilitate gathering points for people and those migrants who needed to spend the night and bathe before crossing. In December 2021, as the Biden administration was forced to re-implement MPP, a second phase of the program was initiated. The Mexican government committed to meeting the humanitarian care needs of the population included in this program, for which the CIMS were again used (López Reyes, 2022). According to the data center of these institutions, between 2019 and 2022, 20 000 migrants were beneficiaries.

Figure 1. Leona Vicario Integral Center for Migrants, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua

Source: Emilio Alberto López Reyes (2019)

Figure 2. Dormitories. Carmen Serdán Integral Center for Migrants, at Tijuana, Baja California



Source: Emilio Alberto López Reyes (2021)

The filter hotels

In May 2020, in a coordinated effort by ninety international, binational, national and local organizations and institutions, it was agreed to create filter hotels with sanitary triage and lockdown objectives (Figure 3). The joint action was based on co-investment: the rent was paid directly with IOM resources while operating costs such as utilities (water, electricity, gas, etcetera), food and medical equipment were paid by different municipal, state and federal public institutions, as well as the private sector (López Reyes, 2022).

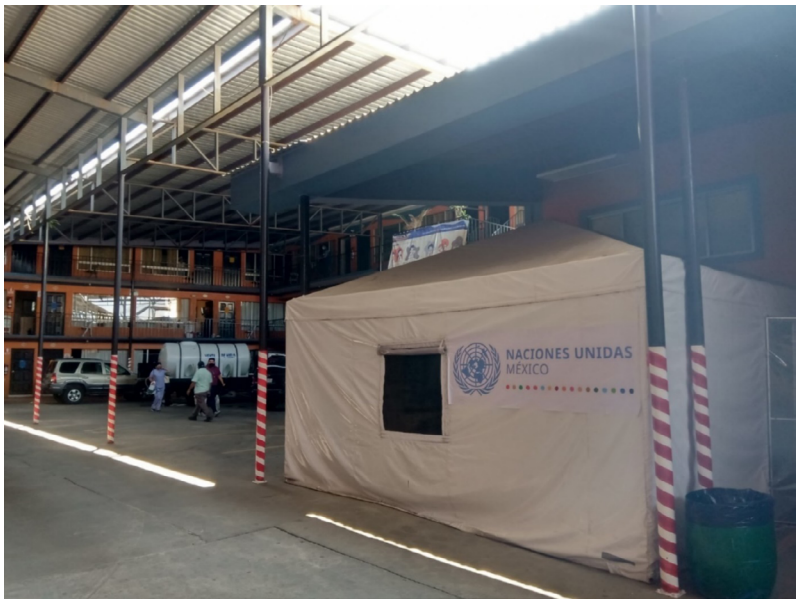
The filter hotels were a model of migration governance and public health originally designed to operate in the short term (three months). Due to the prolonged pandemic and continuity in containment policies, IOM hotels remained in place from May 2020 through January 2023. They served as methods for sanitary control and filtering, thus preventing the spread of the virus in the network of migratory infrastructures, service windows, reception centers and soup kitchens, among others.

Migrant families and individuals housed in hotel rooms were initially channeled by Mexican migration authorities and by shelters (since these entered into lockdown with the population sheltered at the beginning of the pandemic). After fourteen days of lockdown, people were channeled to civil society shelters or CIMS.

The filter hotels were overwhelmed with active cases with the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of new virus variants. As a result, the shelters

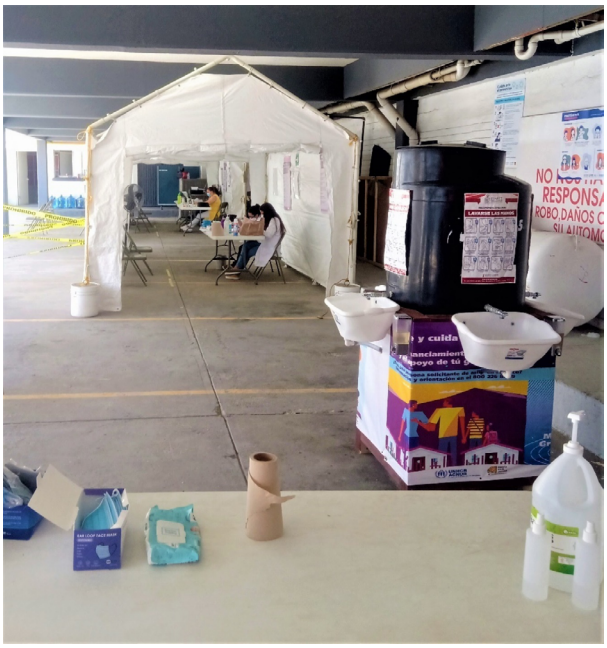
began channeling people who tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus in PCR tests and their family members or companions. This led to the setting-up of isolation areas for suspicious cases in their facilities (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Filter Hotel in Tijuana, Baja California



Source: Emilio Alberto López Reyes (2021)

Figure 4. Sanitary filter at the hotel in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua



Source: Emilio Alberto López Reyes (2021)

CONECTA

A third type of humanitarian infrastructure funded during the pandemic was the CONECTA system to finalize the MPP program. Unlike the CIM and the filter hotels, CONECTA was not an accommodation space but a space for migratory and sanitary triage. When the readmission of asylum seekers under the MPP was enacted in the United States, this system was designed to identify, register and process people who could benefit from this mechanism and avoid health risks during their migration.

The CONECTA system had a web portal administered by UNHCR to register all those who could be beneficiaries. The United Nations agency was also responsible for coordinating, with the support of IOM, the actions of dozens of international, national and local institutions and organizations installed in care modules located outside the CIMS.

The triage process involved several stages in mobile offices outside the CIMS. First, the group of people was admitted to a waiting room where symptoms were checked to identify suspected cases of COVID-19. This procedure was followed by a COVID antigen diagnostic test, a medical consultation and interpretation of their clinical analyses. The migrants were then given breakfast and a legal advice module run by an NGO. There, they were provided with information on their case status in MPP and assisted in pre-filling out the immigration forms for that country.

In the next stage, people were taken to a migration filter administered by the INM where the migration document was left, and their departure was recorded. If the person did not have or had lost their document of stay in the country, the INM authorities helped them draw up a free document, thus concluding their migratory processes in Mexico. Finally, the readmitted migrants were transferred to the border, where they crossed in the company of IOM protection officers and were met by CBP agents (López Reyes, 2022).

Between February and August 2021, out of 21 000 pending applications, about 13 000 individuals were readmitted to the United States through the CONECTA system, representing slightly less than half of the pending cases under MPP (Chishti & Bolter, 2021).

Governance of migration and border security

The three types of humanitarian infrastructures described in the previous section are based on an organization of space that resembles a machine with multiple gears. "Case processing" is conducted in buildings with units representing successive scales of what Mountz (2015) has labeled "the long asylum corridor". To conduct their paperwork, asylum seekers go through offices in a geometric, modular layout. This spatial form facilitates the control of mobility: for example, once admitted to the CIM, people can leave only with certain written permits that are rationed (ordinarily, no more than one exit per day is approved); these permits must be justified for reasons of work, health or immigration procedures. In the case of filter hotels, returning to the premises is prohibited if an individual leaves the premises.

This model constitutes a lockdown apparatus where medical expertise provides the technical knowledge for managing the mobility and governance of the migrant

population (Anderlini, 2022). Humanitarian organizations cooperate with migration and health authorities to ensure the safety of the migrant population and the health of the entire population living in the cities. Segregation and lockdown of migrants are intended to prevent the spread of the epidemic while controlling human mobility and possible unauthorized border crossings.

Humanitarian infrastructures enable the government of bodies and the channeling of behaviors and mobility, that is, what Michel Foucault (1991, p. 101) calls *governmentality*: the government of populations through an assemblage of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics. This form of governance implies an orderly arrangement of bodies and a disciplined control of mobility. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault (1976) also analyzed the importance of architecture and geometric distribution in disciplining bodies.

The classification is based on files per individual or family, compiled from questionnaires or forms administered by various institutions and social organizations. Thus, each person or family has a migration file compiled by the INM, a medical file shared by different health and humanitarian institutions (the municipal, state and federal health secretariats, the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders, among others) and a registry used by social organizations to assist according to vulnerability criteria. Families with children and adolescents are interviewed and registered by the Procuraduría de Protección de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes, under the law that obliges this institution to guarantee the best interest of the child. Having been expelled or returned to Mexico by U.S. authorities, many migrants also have a file in U.S. immigration courts or with agencies of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The three apparatuses also have migration triage functions: they enable the concentration and classification of migrants according to socio-demographic characteristics, national origin, migration push factors and vulnerability factors. Depending on these classifications, a decision is made on humanitarian permission for entry into the United States, assisted voluntary return to the countries of origin or integration in Mexico.

Another common factor of the migrant infrastructures studied is that they coordinate activities of numerous public and private stakeholders dedicated to security, control of human mobility, protection of human rights, psychological and medical care, care of children and other populations considered "vulnerable". These forms of cooperation constitute what has come to be known as "migration governance". It legitimizes border security and migration control policies based on humanitarian discourse. Humanitarianism is understood here in the broad sense attributed to it by Didier Fassin (2010), that is, as an affective movement accompanied by moral sentiments that justify governance practices. Humanitarian discourse is thus that of compassion. It is based on political decisions and reproduces relations of power (between the sufferer and the one who helps them).

It is worth noting the mixed roles of several stakeholders involved in the operation of humanitarian infrastructures, that is, their duality as agents of mobility control and migrant protection or humanitarian aid. For example, the army protects the facilities of the CIMS but also prepares food for the housed migrants. IOM works to deterring migrants from continuing with their migration project by promoting its Assisted Voluntary Return program. Nevertheless, this organization also channels huge financial funds and directly provides humanitarian services.

In a text on the temporary shelter installed by the municipal government of Piedras Negras, with the support of some twenty local, state and federal institutions, Bruce

and Rosales Martínez (2021) speak of "forced humanitarian attention", considering that, once channeled to the shelter, migrants had no freedom of movement and were strictly controlled through different security agencies, but received a variety of services such as food, health, communication with their families and communication with consulates, among others. This model reveals a lockdown regime characterized by the preponderance of humanitarian reasons (Fassin, 2010). In other words, the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are based on migrants' vulnerability, illness and fragility, while humanitarian institutions and organizations operate according to the logic of compassion.

Finally, humanitarian infrastructures enable the outsourcing of a variety of public and private actors to perform tasks of medical surveillance, humanitarian assistance, control and channeling of human mobility, according to processes that lead to the privatization of migration policies and care rescue (López-Sala & Godenau, 2019). This outsourcing occurs at the political and economic level in various forms, such as negotiations, transfers of financial and social capital, recruitment of personnel, provision of temporary services and work based on objectives or projects.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic justified the selective closure of the land border, the cancellation of immigration court hearings and the indefinite blockade of asylum seekers in northern Mexico. Rather than altering or transforming migration policy, the effect of the pandemic was to intensify the blocking of asylum seekers and restrictions on seeking international protection in the United States. While there was already, prior to the health emergency, a process of *infrastructuralization* of migration (Xiang & Lindquist, 2018), the pandemic forced not only the creation of new humanitarian infrastructures, as in the case of the filter hotels, but also the rapid adaptation of existing infrastructures to create triage and health lockdown areas.

The U.S. and Mexican governments' declarations of emergency or health and migration crises justify significant financial transfers to northern Mexico through foundations and UN agencies. In Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, outsourcing for migration health triage and humanitarian care favored the transfer of responsibilities to local authorities and CSOs for the urgent attention to vulnerable migrant populations or to recommend their crossing to the United States. Based on criteria that vary according to the actors involved in the triage process, they make decisions affecting the lives of persons needing international protection. The opacity of the classification and selection processes for border crossings means that thousands of people wait indefinitely for a resolution and face different socio-spatial and legal entrapment situations.

These triage and immigration containment systems are a way to circumvent the right to asylum, as stipulated in international and national regulations. According to Didier Fassin, a series of considerations for assessing people's suffering and vulnerability—that is, what the author calls "the humanitarian rationale"—has gradually replaced asylum. This article demonstrates that humanitarian infrastructures serve that purpose and contribute, in the author's terms, to a form of "humanitarian governance": they rely on moral sentiments for the implementation of "apparatuses and measures that administer, regulate and favor the existence of human beings" (Fassin, 2010, p. 8).

Humanitarian infrastructures simultaneously perform security and humanitarian aid functions. The security and humanitarian functions are not antagonistic but complementary and coordinated, and they constitute the matrix from which public actions are formulated in migration governance. The humanitarian discourse that presents migrants as victims and underscores their vulnerability legitimizes containment and lockdown measures to address their basic needs and protect the weakest members, particularly children and sick people.

Concerning the provision of humanitarian services, Agustin (2007) states the risks of the intermediation of social actors and the spaces in which the tasks of rescue, protection and control of migrants converge. Organizations can justify their continuity or sustainability to funders, patrons or donors by maintaining or prolonging the passivity of those harmed or rescued. This author also shows how humanitarian organizations or associations can take over the victim's representation, voice or agency and thus provoke revictimization.

Migration infrastructures represent an effort to govern human mobility in an area where migrations have an image of "turbulence" (Papastergiadis, 2000). These are apparatuses that, on the one hand, aim to take care of migrants by providing basic assistance to cover their physical needs and, on the other hand, enable the implementation of governance models with the assistance of a multiplicity of non-migrant social and political actors. Nevertheless, this model of governance or this lockdown regime is continually being overtaken by the growth of migration flows. This leads to forms of self-organization, improvised encampments and attempts at collective crossing, among others.

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