
Jesuit Report on Missing Migrants: a 291% increase in 2021

They are first of all persons, not numbers, albeit staggering ones. Persons who end up being swallowed up in thin air on their plighted migration route to the United States. They are "Desaparecidos" - the Spanish word for missing persons. Sometimes they are caught in the grips of criminal groups, other times they end up in detention centres, or in prison. They are increasing in number, as an increasing number of people are attempting to cross into Mexico (according to the latest news a caravan of 15,000 people set out from Honduras), despite harsher migration policies. In fact, these very policies are driving migrants to explore more dangerous routes. Their relatives are trying to obtain some news and, faced with a widespread lack of commitment, they find help and support only from Mexico's Jesuit Migrant Service (SJM- Mexico). The Missing Migrants Search Programme of the Jesuit Migrant Service is a unique project. In this context, the first ["Report on the Disappearance of Migrants in Mexico"](#) was published a few weeks ago by [SJM Mexico](#). As mentioned above, the primary concern is not to compile a list of numbers, which are indeed hard to track, but rather to provide an account of the context surrounding the disappearance of thousands of migrants, and what can be done to locate them. "The primary objective of this document is to provide an overall picture of the nature and findings of the SJM-Mexico Missing Migrants Search Programme, while simultaneously outlining a number of outstanding issues and recommendations that could enhance support for those who fall victim to this plight." **A 291% increase in 2021.** Available figures, however, reflect a dramatic situation, given that unlike arrivals from Africa to Europe, there is no ocean to cross here, but rather a huge country fraught with risks and dangers. The Report indicates that, more than 2,000 disappeared people were officially registered by the Mexican Federation of Public Human Rights Bodies. But the reality of this phenomenon is definitely much more widespread. The International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project indicates that over 6,150 people have died or disappeared in the period January 2014 - March 2022. It should be noted that Mexico holds the sad world record of more than 100,000 people registered as missing or disappeared, which includes missing migrants, according to official figures. According to the SJM programme records, started in 2007, the organization attended to 1,280 cases of missing persons, with the highest numbers of requests recorded after 2018, and especially in 2021, when 27% of all cases were attended to, marking a 291% increase. As regards the places from which the requests were made, the Report highlights that 28% came mostly by family and friends from the United States, 24% from Mexico, 13% from Nicaragua and Honduras, 11% from Guatemala, 5% from El Salvador and 6% from other countries of the continent. These percentages are crucial because they suggest that the migrants are reported as missing not only by relatives in the places of departure, but also by relatives in countries of destination, presumably because of greater economic and technological resources. At any rate, 29% of missing persons came from Honduras, 22% from Mexico and 18% from Guatemala. One in four of all missing persons is female. 14% are minors. **Sound experience and comprehensive commitment.** Speaking to SIR, **Xamara Elizabeth Navarrete Cisneros**, a lawyer and legal consultant of the SJM Search Programme, one of the authors of the Report, said: "The report encompasses our fifteen-year experience of search for missing migrants. We offer assistance and accompaniment to family members looking for them, and we try to create a networking process among the various agencies. "The search is often successful: 75% of the persons located were detained in a migration station or temporary stay. But some people fall victim to organised crime." Once the case is reported, the Jesuit Migrant Service contacts prisons, detention centres, migrant homes, morgues. It is a solid network, developed over time. The SJM worker confirms that the numbers have increased in recent years: "This is mostly due to stricter migration policies implemented in Mexico and other Central American countries. As a result of these policies, persons entitled to protection, to refugee status, are being denied these rights. Consequently, migrants take unsafe and less protected routes and are often subjected to extortion and violence. In any event, the longer a person remains in this state of limbo, the greater the chances of falling prey to

organised crime networks.” Family members, having no news of their loved ones, start looking for them, but their requests are hardly ever responded to by the Mexican public authorities: “The Commissions tasked with searching missing persons are often understaffed. Relatives risk waiting for an answer for months, and it is often incomplete. However, through our activities we are in close contact with all involved entities.” Legal and psychological support for the relatives of the missing persons is simultaneously carried out: “They must be provided with appropriate guidance, made aware of their rights, and supported at a difficult time.” Lawyer Navarrete concludes: ‘We find that our service is being requested ever more frequently, especially at our border zone branch offices, such as in Ciudad Juárez.’ The Report calls for a greater effort on the part of public authorities and for the creation of a “unified registry”. (*) *journalist at “La Vita del Popolo”*

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