

Criminalization and the closure of borders as producers of migrant deaths

Guillermo Castillo Ramírez

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Since the last decades of the last century, international migrations have increased and are present in various regions of the world (Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa). According to data from the National Population Council, in 2020 there were already more than 280 million international migrants. This migratory increase has been linked to the effects of the expansion and consolidation of neoliberal capitalism and globalization. The increase in poverty, the increase in inequality and the deterioration/disarticulation of the productive structure in the global south have only made the expulsion contexts that force hundreds of thousands of people to leave more numerous and have a much greater intensity. annually from their places and communities of origin. A good part of these migrations goes to the global north (USA, Europe), through very adverse routes, in situations of irregularization and under strong conditions of violence and violation of the rights of migrants; Not infrequently, and in very hostile places (such as the Darien jungle, the US-Mexico border and the Mediterranean Sea), these cross-border movements of human populations lead to hundreds of migrant deaths.

These migrant deaths, and their strong increase in recent years, are not random and neutral events. On the contrary, it has a genesis and is the result of certain state sociopolitical and legal processes, such as criminalization and the closure of borders - carried out by destination countries in the global north. In the case of the US-Mexico border, the newspaper La Jornada, taking a report from the US media based on internal data from the Border Patrol, reported that in the US fiscal year 2022 (which runs from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022) there were 853 deaths of migrants -only in US territory-. This figure is an unprecedented record and far exceeds the figure of 546 migrant lives lost in fiscal year 2021.

Particularly for the US-Mexico border and for many years, academics from various universities (Cornelius at UC, Heyman at UTEP, Martínez at UA, among others) based on various records, have shown that, since the mid-1990s and to date, The processes of criminalization and closure of US borders against irregular migrants have modified migratory routes, and have displaced them to much more hostile places and environments (such as the Altar desert and certain places on the Rio Grande). This has made the routes much longer, more strenuous and dangerous, and, consequently, has led to a very significant increase in migrant deaths and disappearances.

Migrant deaths and disappearances are preventable and must stop. It is urgent that the governments of the receiving and destination countries stop addressing migration as a matter of national security, which has implied the criminalization of irregular migrants. These countries of the global north and their anti-immigrant and border control policies -such as the Stay in Mexico Program and US Title 42- play a fundamental role in the occurrence of these migrant deaths. Migrants are not criminals, but people who, in very adverse life contexts and with different unresolved needs in their places of origin, seek to improve their lives through migration and hard work outside their countries of origin. No person is illegal, and we all deserve a decent life.