

Is there a crisis at the border? Advocates in Texas say it's 'political manipulation'



A man is detained while crossing the border in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. Photograph: Enncarni Pindado/The Guardian

The Texas governor has sent troops to fortify the border while advocates say the immigration numbers are being politicized

[Nina Lakhani](#) in Mission and McAllen, Texas

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Along the winding road which follows the Rio Grande west from Mission, Texas, dozens of armed border patrol agents, state troopers, soldiers and state and local police are dotted about to catch undocumented migrants entering the country from [Mexico](#).

This is a so-called hotspot for irregular migration – folks crossing the border river without permission to enter the US – in what the Republican party and anti-immigrant activists are calling a crisis at the border. During one afternoon this week, there were more law enforcement

vehicles cruising along this dusty 15-mile stretch towards Los Ebanos, a tiny border community connected to Mexico by a hand-operated cable ferry, than there was local traffic.

For a couple of hours nothing much happens, until agents chase down a group – six men and one woman – trying to hide in the dry vegetation.

They are handcuffed and processed on the side of the road, each giving their name, age and country of origin to a bilingual border patrol agent, before placing personal belongings – wallet, jewellery and phone – into individual plastic bags. The sun is piercing; the migrants look exhausted.



A group of people are detained while crossing the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Photograph: Enncarni Pindado/The Guardian

Christian, a lanky 20-year-old from Santa Bárbara, Honduras, seems utterly bewildered by what's just gone down. His family's crops were destroyed last November when two deadly hurricanes – Eta and Iota – struck within two weeks of each other. The land was flooded for two months, leaving them no harvest and unable to prepare for next season. "There are no jobs, and we have no money or food," he said, shaking his head.

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Christian is among a rapidly rising number of climate refugees from Central America – one of the [most vulnerable regions in the world](#) to the impacts of global heating.

Emerson, 25, a member of the indigenous Maya Q'eqchi community from Puerto Barrios in Izabal, [Guatemala](#), left behind his wife and two young daughters, hoping to find work. "I'm a machinery mechanic, but the work went down with the pandemic and then things got much worse with Hurricane Eta."

Ingrid, one of two Salvadorans, said she's 18 but looks much younger. She's wearing two plastic wristbands – one red, the other white – which [reports suggest](#) are used by coyotes (smugglers or guides) to indicate payments had been made to organized crime groups who control the border.

Ingrid lived with her uncle in Ilopango, a sprawling town on the outskirts of the Salvadoran capital with high levels of gang violence and police brutality, but said she'd come looking for work and a better life after the pandemic left them struggling to make ends meet. Covid has deepened poverty and hunger across Central America and Mexico, and governments have failed to provide adequate, if any, relief.

The migrants were given disposable face masks before being searched and loaded into a green and white border patrol van. They will be expelled; some of them will undoubtedly try to cross again.

The border patrol agents won't answer any questions, but one said to his colleagues: "This is a good day's work." Another said he hoped we would give them good publicity.

After four years of racist, chaotic, anti-immigration policies by the Trump administration – as well as growing desperation fuelled by the pandemic and extreme climate events – the number of people seeking to enter the US is rising.