



AS IT IS

## Mexican Migrant Shelter Aims to Raise Its Own Food

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A shelter in Mexico near the United States border is housing not only migrants and asylum seekers but also chickens, pigs, and possibly fish.

Asylum seekers are forced to wait out their U.S. immigration cases in Mexico. They often spend months at the San Matias shelter run by Rev. Hector Trejo. The shelter is in the large industrial city of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. It is across the border from El Paso, Texas.

The wait is stressful for people who in some cases are fleeing painful situations in their home countries. And the costs of feeding them have also been growing. Raising their own food appears to help with both difficulties.

Trejo said, “On one side you have a space with the possibility of producing food; on the other, you have a safe and **decent** space for the families so they can go through their process in the most **harmonious** way possible.”

The shelter keeps pigs in an area where migrants can stop by to rub their big noses. It also has vegetables in a greenhouse to protect them from the cold winter temperatures. Trejo is planning a fish farm that could produce more than 6 metric tons of a kind of fish called tilapia each year.

“It is relaxing just going to the chicken **coops** to feed them,” said José María Guerrero. He fled his home in the central state of Michoacan, Mexico to avoid violence. He is now seeking asylum in the U.S.

Guerrero told *The Associated Press*, “Of course, it helps you. It makes you forget for a **moment** your problems and additionally, you have something to do here.”

Benjamin Navarrete's Biological Innovations company designed the farm operation. He believes such an operation could be built for other areas experiencing similar crises.

"It is a great model, especially in the case of shelters where most of the **expenses** are for food and all this is an **organic** production," Navarrete said.

## American immigrant policy

The asylum seekers are forced to wait under a U.S. policy known as "Remain in Mexico."

The policy started under the administration of former President Donald Trump. It aimed at persuading asylum seekers to not travel to the U.S. border.

Under the policy, migrants without legal documentation to enter the U.S. were returned to Mexico to wait for their immigration case. President Joe Biden ended the policy when he took office. But a court order forced his administration to return to it last December.

The number of asylum seekers returned to Mexico under Biden has so far been fairly small. But American officials have also expelled migrants more than 1.5 million times without a chance to claim asylum since March 2020. It is happening under the pandemic restrictions of the public health law used by both administrations.

The policies have increased pressure on Mexican border cities. And they have increased pressure on the limited spaces available in the shelter.

I'm Jill Robbins.

*Alicia Fernández reported this story for The Associated Press. Gregory Stachel adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**decent** – *adj.* good enough but not the best: adequate or acceptable

**harmonious** – *adj.* not experiencing disagreement or fighting

**coop** – *n.* a cage or small building in which chickens or other small animals are kept

**moment** – *n.* a very short period of time

**expense** – *n.* an amount of money that must be spent especially regularly to pay for something

**organic** – *adj.* grown or made without the use of artificial chemicals

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