

HAITIAN DIASPORA

Haitians in Tapachula: Long wait fuels desperation, sometimes new caravans | Part 2



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“Haitians in Tapachula” is a series that takes an in-depth look at Haitians in Tapachula, a city in southern Mexico about 20 miles north of the Guatemala-Mexico border. Many Haitians who make it here spent years in Brazil and Chile before continuing toward North America in the ongoing search for better lives. In Tapachula, which serves as a migration waystation, many contemplate how to proceed.

This is the second installment in the series. Read the first installment [here](#).





Asylum seekers wait for NMI to allow people into the Tapachula offices for processing on Apr. 8, 2022.

TAPACHULA, Mexico — Jean, a father of two, sells chicken kebabs in the market area of town. The Haitian asylum seeker, who has been in Tapachula for six months, waiting for his documents, earns about \$11. It supports Jean, his wife, and two children.

“We go through so much calamity to survive,” said the 40-year-old, who asked that his full name not be used to protect his immigration case.

In interviews with dozens of Haitians in Tapachula, many said the long wait for immigration processing turns into suffering for those who remain in the city. The lack of jobs, even for asylum seekers in the city for months, plus the frustration with the lengthy migration process, causes them to suffer day to day.

The conditions have also fueled tensions among certain groups of asylum seekers.

In Ciudad Hidalgo, Wyinna Jean, 25, has been waiting for hours in line at the NMI office. She has been in Tapachula for eight months.

“They are choosing Venezuelans, Cubans, but they leave Haitians under the sun,” said 25-year-old Wyinna Jean, who has been in Tapachula for eight months. “We’re not treated well. They only assist whites. Toward Black migrants there’s a bit of racism.”

Other nationalities have raised similar accusations of favoritism. According to *[El Heraldo de Chiapas](#)* publication, a conflict between Latin American and African asylum seekers erupted in March after the former complained that immigration authorities only served African asylum seekers..

Throughout March, demonstrations against perceived [favoritism](#) joined other [protests](#), including one where a group of asylum seekers [sewed](#) their lips shut. Another protest evolved into [a riot](#) where asylum

seekers vandalized the INM office in Tapachula.

Meanwhile, earning a living is difficult. Daily earnings for many jobs that Haitians perform fall between \$8 and \$16, depending on the job. Monthly rents start in the \$100 to \$130 range for a 1-bedroom apartment, according to many Haitians.

Between the long wait, apparent discrimination and lack of employment, many Haitians contemplate leaving.

“Many people are suffering a lot here without jobs, without money,” said Jean Remy Cetoute, a 30-year-old French and English teacher who relocated from Brazil. In other Mexican cities, he added, “They could have more opportunities to get a job.”

Frustration fuels new or attempted departures

So strong is the desire to leave Tapachula for other Mexican cities with better economic opportunities that some band together and head out without the appropriate papers. Migration activists have helped organize caravans of asylum seekers that try to reach Mexico’s capital and pressure the NMI to accelerate the migration process.

“We’re leaving Tapachula because there’s no help for migrants,” said Luis García Villagrán of the Center of Human Dignification, just before an April 1 caravan left Tapachula. “Migrants are not being helped. There’s persecution, there’s extortion of migrants everywhere.”

The Center of Human Dignification, or *Centro de la Dignificación Humana* in Spanish, has organized some of the caravans leaving from Tapachula.

In 2021, caravans made up of diverse nationalities attempted or **threatened** to make the 600-mile journey from Tapachula to the country’s capital, Mexico City. But more often than not, **NMI** dissolves these caravans.

The practice began in **2018**, when thousands of Central American asylum seekers escaping violence or poverty left from Honduras towards the U.S.-Mexico Border. Often, asylum seekers choose caravans for the protection a large number can provide and to pressure immigration authorities to pay attention to asylum seekers.

However, some see it differently. In 2018, then-**president Trump**, who considered the caravans an

invasion of the U.S., commented heavily on the event. In 2019, under pressure from the Trump administration, Mexico's president Andrés Manuel López Obrador tightened immigration control by using the newly created National Guard.



Latino-American asylum seekers participate in a Caravan that left Tapachula, Mexico on Apr 1, 2022. No Haitians participated in this caravan.

Since then, various clashes between caravan members and the National Guard have been reported by various media outlets.

On April 1, a caravan with around 400 people was partly dissolved two hours after it left Tapachula during a confrontation with Mexico's National Guard at the first immigration checkpoint. On April 15, a caravan was dissolved after a negotiation with INM secured humanitarian visas for participants.

For some, staying is only option

No Haitians were aboard either of these caravans.

“Haitians used to like caravans, not anymore,” said William Eugene, as he observed the first caravan move through Tapachula in April. “Now Haitians believe in papers. It’s safer.”

Like Eugene, many Haitians said they don’t want to risk going on a caravan, for fear of violence or jeopardizing their immigration process. Instead, they opt to wait and continue the regulatory process for the possibility of a stable job and bringing family from Haiti.

“The most important thing is family,” said Meril Richemond. “I want to stay in Mexico and make my life here.”

Most Haitians say they want to leave Tapachula and mention Tijuana or Mexicali, in Baja, Calif., which border the United States, as possible destinations. But the lack of money has also made it difficult for some Haitians to afford to leave.

“I see myself like a free prisoner,” said Pierre Jean, on a hot afternoon outside the COMAR offices in Tapachula.

Jean, 37, has been in Tapachula for 10 months. The married father said although he has the Visitors ID for Humanitarian Reasons that allows him to move to other cities, he can’t because of the lack of funding.

“Leaving [the city] costs money,” said Pierre. “When the money from work comes in, it’s time to pay rent.”

Editor’s Note: The Haitian Times intentionally refers to Haitians migrating by land or sea as asylum seekers or refugees, instead of migrants, to reflect the reality of their journey.

Read the next installment, Haitians in Tapachula – Part 3, about how asylum seekers who chose to stay manage the long wait in town.