



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Imperialist sanctions and the crisis migrants face

written by Chris Fry
October 11, 2023



Migrants who crossed into the U.S. from Mexico pass under concertina wire along the Rio Grande river, on Sept. 21,

Millions of migrants have braved incredible hardship to find shelter and jobs in the U.S. Many have fled U.S. supported repressive regimes. Hundreds of thousands of others have left their countries that have been targeted by U.S. Imperialism's economic war of sanctions.

Crossing the U.S. border, migrants face deadly obstacles, including barbed wire fences and pontoons designed to injure and drown any who might try to swim across the Rio Grande River.

As the surge of new migrants unfolded in July and has increased daily, some have found welcoming demonstrations and assistance in communities on their arrival. But

many have faced open hostility by both politicians as well as racist vigilante groups, reinforced by the Trumpist Republican Party, with assenting silence from the leadership of the Democratic Party. Cities like New York and Chicago face a growing humanitarian crisis as they try to care for growing migrant populations.

The U.S. corporate media here universally blames “mismanagement” and “corruption” by the socialist Venezuelan government for that country’s economic crisis. But a [paper](#) by distinguished Professor Francisco Rodríguez at the Center for Economic and Policy Research exposes this as a lie designed to hide the cruelty of the Imperialist sanctions:

Each round of sanctions (2017 financial, 2019 primary oil, and 2020 secondary oil) was followed by a decline in Venezuelan oil production, which, as measured by independent agencies, had been stable for an eight-year period starting in 2008.

The resulting decline in oil exports severely circumscribed the ability of a traditionally import dependent economy to buy imports of food as well as intermediate and capital goods for its agricultural sector, driving the economy into a major humanitarian crisis. Total imports fell by 91 percent, while food imports declined by 78 percent. The decline in the economy’s capacity to import made it impossible to maintain past levels of essential goods. Even if Venezuela were importing only food today (i.e., if it had decided to reduce to zero all other imports, including other essentials as well as capital and intermediate goods for its oil industry) it would not be able to pay for more than four-fifths of the food it imported in 2012.

Venezuela’s deep deterioration in indicators of health, nutrition, and food security occurred alongside the largest economic collapse, outside of wartime, since 1950.

By contributing to lowering the country's oil production, sanctions also contributed to lowering per capita income and living standards and are a key driver of the country's health crisis, including its increase in child and adult mortality.

Most of the Venezuelan migrants have been forced to traverse the infamous "Darién Gap", a strip of land on the border between Colombia and Panama. PBS reported that 400,000 people, mostly from Venezuela, have already passed through this trail already this year, including many children. There is no count on how many failed to survive this journey.

On the website [truthout.org](https://www.truthout.org), Amy Goodman [interviewed](#) leftist Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who described this dangerous journey:

Three years ago, nobody was going through the Darién Gap. This year, it might end up being as many as half a million. And given the flow, which is 3,000 persons a day, next year could be a total of 1 million people going through the Darién Gap. After going through the Darién Gap, the figure is doubled, going through Central America and Mexico. And then, about 2 million people reach the United States each year trying to get in.

It's an exodus. It's an exodus that Colombia was not familiar with before. And it goes through the most inhospitable jungle worldwide. Not even the old guerrilla forces in Colombia had used that region as part of their geography, because it is just so inhospitable. Recall the difficulties that engineering faced when it came to building the Panama Canal, so many workers who died at that time. Well, here it's even worse, because this is a jungle which is very biodiverse but at the same time is very inhospitable for human beings, and so no one would go through there. And now we're approaching a million people, most of them children, older people, women.

In that same interview, President Petro put the blame for this mass migration squarely on the harsh economic sanctions imposed by the U.S., particularly by the Trump regime and stepped up by the Biden administration:

That is to say, the blockade against Venezuela has had a boomerang-type response, now hitting the very United States, which are the ones who decided to impose the blockade. So, knocking at their door is the population that they drove into poverty.

Venezuela is a rich country. They have an endless amount of oil and gas, and Venezuela's population was relatively stable, whatever the regime, whether it was under Chávez or what they call el Punto Fijo [this refers to the U.S.-supported military dictatorships that ruled Venezuela until 1958]. But with the blockade, the standard of living of these persons collapsed. They basically totally threw off the equilibrium that the majority of Venezuelans were accustomed to. Many of them have left, and now what they want is to make it to the United States. How can one partially reduce the exodus? Well, lift the blockade against Venezuela.

In a September 30 Associated Press [report](#), Mexican President López Obrador echoed President Petro's words. He gave this issue a "continental" Latin American perspective:

He called for a U.S. program "to remove blockades and stop harassing independent and free countries, an integrated plan for cooperation so the Venezuelans, Cubans, Nicaraguans and Ecuadorans, Guatemalans and Hondurans wouldn't be forced to emigrate."

The Mexican president also contrasted the U.S. spending on the Ukraine proxy war with how much is spent to assist the people in Latin America:

López Obrador said the United States should spend some of the money sent to Ukraine on economic development in Latin America.

“They (the U.S.) don’t do anything,” he said. “It’s more, a lot more, what they authorize for the war in Ukraine than what they give to help with poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Of course, with the termination of the pandemic student loan deferral and child care assistance programs, Obrador’s words could also apply to the working-class youth and oppressed communities in the U.S.

Attack on migrants: Used to enrich big business while buttressing vile racism.

Wall Street uses sanctions against poor countries to place the people and their leaders under neo-colonial rule. And it exploits the cheap migrant labor while at the same time uses its right-wing minions, along with the fascist repression by ICE and the Border Patrol, to attack migrants, to terrorize them into submission and acceptance of starvation wages.

On October 1, the New York Times published an [article](#) titled: “Why can’t we stop illegal immigration? Because it works.” As the article points out, it certainly works for the bosses:

Migrants dream of America because they are an entrenched part of our economy. This is nothing new; America’s economy has always relied upon a mass of disempowered, foreign-born laborers, whether it was enslaved Africans picking cotton, Chinese building railroads, Irish digging coal, Italians sewing garments or Mexicans harvesting fruit. Even today, some sectors in the U.S. economy seem almost reserved for workers who have been deliberately kept vulnerable.

When Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, establishing a minimum wage, they excluded most farmworkers and domestic workers from its protections. These workers were largely excluded again when Congress passed the Occupational Health and Safety Act in 1970.

“These spaces that were once filled by slaves are now filled by immigrants,” Anita Sinha, a professor of law at American University told me. “They are exploitative by design.”

Migrant children are especially targeted for super exploitation:

Recent Times investigations by Hannah Dreier found unaccompanied minors packing Cheerios, washing hotel sheets and sanitizing chicken-processing plants. The United States has laws banning these and other abusive labor practices, but many companies have found a workaround: staffing agencies.

“They’re all designed to skirt litigations,” Kevin Herrera, the legal director of Raise the Floor Alliance, in Chicago, once explained to me. Many of these agencies specialize in hiring people who will suffer any number of degrading or dangerous conditions because they are desperate for work.

Labor must stand up for migrants!

In this “Summer (and now Fall) of strikes”, labor must intervene on behalf of migrant workers! They are not “illegals” as described by the racist right-wing media and Trumpist politicians. They are our working-class sisters and brothers and their children. Right now, they could be used by the bosses to attack our growing union movement. We cannot allow that to happen!

We must join with our migrant sisters and brothers to demand:

- An end to all U.S. economic sanctions, particularly those directed at

countries in the “Global South”.

- Immediate amnesty for all migrants entering the country, with social services enabled to offer care for their families.
- An end to all child labor.
- An end to all current “exceptions” for labor laws regarding pay, health and safety, and so on that are designed to exclude migrant workers.

All of this is necessary for successful union organizing drives among migrant workers, which would be of great benefit to our whole class here. And it would greatly help the workers and poor farmers around the world.

Source: [Fighting Words](#)

