

**“ THERE IS  
A TARGET  
ON US ”**

**The Impact of Anti-Black  
Racism on African Migrants  
at Mexico’s Southern Border**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **“There is a Target on Us” - The Impact of Anti-Black Racism on African Migrants at Mexico’s Southern Border. Executive Summary**

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**El Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, A.C.** (“Institute for Women in Migration” or “IMUMI”) is a Mexican NGO that advocates for women migrants and their families within the region of Mexico, the U.S., and Central America. IMUMI addresses issues important to migrant women through legal strategies, research, communication, and advocacy. IMUMI collaborates with other civil society organizations, academic institutions, and governments to advocate for gender-specific migration and human rights policies.

**The Black Alliance for Just Immigration** (“BAJI”) is a racial justice and migrant rights organization which engages in legal representation, advocacy, community organizing, education, and cross-cultural alliance-building in order to end the racism, criminalization, and economic disenfranchisement of African American and Black immigrant communities. BAJI was founded in Oakland, CA by veteran civil rights activists and clergy who were concerned about a wave of unjust immigration enforcement laws. BAJI subsequently expanded its mission to include advocacy on behalf of all Black immigrants and refugees, and today has offices and/or staff members in New York, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Oakland, CA; Atlanta, GA; Miami, FL; Washington, DC; Minneapolis, MN; and Houston, TX.

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# The Impact of Anti-Black Racism on African Migrants at Mexico's Southern Border

*"There is a Target on Us" - The Impact of Anti-Black Racism on African Migrants at Mexico's Southern Border* comes at an important moment and centers the stories of people of African descent migrating through Mexico. As this Report goes to press, the world grapples with the intersections of draconian family separation and detention policies, dramatic disregard of refugee and migration rights, a stunning lack of compassion for people fleeing violence and conflict, and a global pandemic that has shown dramatic racial disparities and devastated Black and Brown communities internationally.

This Report offers specific stories that highlight resilience, even in the face of racial discrimination and violence. This includes the Assembly of African Migrants, a source of safety and mutual support for people navigating the life-threatening risks in migration. In addition, this Report offers context for the journeys that test local and national commitments to human rights and international treaty obligations and which, in many cases, are found quite wanting. This Report also offers a fresh and timely analysis of how intersecting policies, procedures, and practices have increasingly eviscerated the rights to freedom of movement and migration rights, including the meaningful right to seek asylum and sovereign obligations under the Refugee Convention and associated domestic law in relevant countries.

As importantly, this work highlights how racial bias creates widespread discrimination, racial violence, and diminished access to the resources that do exist for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. As the authors indicate herein, this is particularly true for people of African descent, who face violence and disparagement from the state, with a particular focus here on the United States and Mexico, and non-state actors fail to have the ability to turn to the relevant state authorities for recourse from racial violence from non-state actors.

**Dominique Day**  
Chair, UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“We passed through rivers and great hardship to arrive here and look at how they welcome us - with hate and racism.”

*-Adamo, a Cameroonian migrant in Tapachula*

Each year, Africans continue to flee their countries of origin in order to find safety and survival. As immigration to Europe has become more difficult, particularly since the continent began externalizing its immigration policy in 2015, many Africans have been forced to take an alternative route - flying to South America and making the harrowing journey through jungles and rivers to reach Mexico and travel onward to the United States or Canada. This has led to an increase in African migration into Mexico, including from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ghana, and Somalia, over the same period.

Since 2019, the current U.S. and Mexican Administrations have been working together to externalize U.S. immigration enforcement into Mexican territory. This resulted in thousands of African migrants being stranded in the southern Mexican city of Tapachula from mid 2019 on. It was difficult or impossible for Mexico to deport them back to their countries of origin, yet immigration officials would not permit them to travel freely to the Mexico-U.S. border. In Tapachula, African migrants congregated around the main immigration detention center, *Siglo XXI*.

They organized and formed the Assembly of African Migrants, outlined their demands in a written statement, and protested their treatment. This movement shed light on the particular experiences of African, Caribbean, and other Black migrants in Mexico. The Assembly raised the issue of the anti-Black discrimination that migrants face in their interactions with Mexican immigration officials, other government officials, and citizens, as well as when looking for work or accessing services like education or health care. In the course of its work providing immigration and other support to Black migrants, BAJI, a signatory to the Assembly's written statement, travelled to Tapachula ten times in 2019 and interviewed 20 migrants about their experiences of anti-Black discrimination in Mexico.

The Authors of this Report situate those interviews, and African migration to Mexico in general, within a broader discourse of anti-Black racism in the country. In particular, the Report:

- Provides an overview of how discrimination on the bases of race and skin color impacts Afro-Mexicans, Black migrants, and other peoples of African descent;
- Describes the recent migration of Africans to and through Mexico, including the causes of migration out of Africa and through Latin America;
- Highlights how African migration through Mexico has been impeded by the current Mexican Administration's restrictive immigration enforcement; and
- Outlines the findings from BAJI's interviews and additional interviews that the Authors conducted with a leader of the Assembly as well as service providers, including about the intersectional discrimination faced by African women in Mexico.

In conclusion, the Authors make the following recommendations to address and improve the situation in Tapachula:

### **Recommendations for the Mexican government and its agencies, including the INM and COMAR**

1. Ensure the non-detention of migrant children and families.
2. Provide migrants that have been released from detention with housing and other humanitarian support.
3. Provide immigration officials, police, and other state actors interacting with migrants with anti-Black racism, gender discrimination, and cultural competency training.
4. Provide anti-Black racism, gender discrimination, and cultural competency training to service providers, including in educational institutions and public hospitals.
5. Immigration officials must provide necessary translation/interpretation to ensure that migrants understand the Mexican immigration process, and Mexico's *Instituto Nacional de Migración* must not pressure migrants to accept any particular immigration outcome.
6. The National Guard must not carry out any immigration enforcement function.
7. The internal complaint processes of Mexico's *Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (CONAPRED)*, *Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH)*, and the INM must provide an effective response to discrimination complaints by Black migrants.
8. The Mexican government must accept the outstanding request of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to visit Mexico.

### **Recommendations for international organizations and civil society organizations operating in Tapachula**

9. Organizations should engage in public education and awareness-raising efforts.

The Authors also hope that this Report will initiate a conversation about what further steps must be taken. African migrants rarely form part of the narrative of migration through Latin America, or in Mexican society in general. This Report is a partial response to that failure of public discourse and policy analysis, and points to the need to address that void in a systemic way. The current context in Mexico -like the current global anti-Black racism movement- demands and creates an opening for this work.

