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Venezuelan migrants, expelled from the U.S., eat at the U.S.-Mexico border in Ciudad Juarez,

Venezuelan migrants, expelled from the U.S., eat at the U.S.-Mexico border in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Oct. 16, 2022. They were sent back to Mexico under Title 42 as part of a new policy to curb the number of illegal crossings. (CNS photo/Jose Luis Gonzalez, Reuters)



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Catholics working with migrants have mobilized to assist Venezuelans who are arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border in record numbers but are being expelled back to Mexico under pandemic-era health restrictions.

The Mexican branches of Jesuit Migration Service and Jesuit Refugee Service, along with the Hope Border Institute, also expressed sorrow over a decision by the United States and Mexico to expel Venezuelans irregularly crossing the U.S.-Mexico border under Title 42, saying it leaves migrants unprotected and violates their right to seek asylum.

One official of Jesuit Migration Service said some expelled Venezuelans arrive back in Mexico confused and with little information.

In a statement Oct. 13, the three organizations said. "The expansion of Title 42 to cover Venezuelans is an abuse of a public health order to dissuade those who are asylum-seekers or need protection without any legal or moral basis." The statement

was issued in the border city of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas.

"We urge the governments of both countries to act immediately, allocate all human, economic and adequate infrastructure resources to guarantee their accommodation, clear information and legal advice about their migratory situation, as well as food services and psychological first aid."

The organizations said they had worked with some 330 Venezuelans being returned.

María Elena Hernández, coordinator in Ciudad Juárez for Jesuit Migration Service, said Oct. 14 they were working with an additional 150 Venezuelans, who arrived "in a state of terrible desolation, with little information and very confused."

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Hernández said the returned Venezuelans were given a document from Mexican immigration officials; it tells them to abandon the country within 15 days via the country's southern border with Guatemala and Belize.

"But this document does not provide them an immigration status that allows them to travel safely through Mexico," Hernández said. "They're left in an unprotected state, and many of them do not have a passport or other identification, and they cannot attend their consulates because some of them have been persecuted politically" by the Venezuelan government.

The Oct. 12 decision to return Venezuelans to Mexico comes as Venezuelans arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border in record numbers.

The Washington Office on Latin America, a human rights think tank, said in an analysis that 153,905 Venezuelans -- the second-highest of any nationality after Mexico -- had been detained at the U.S. southwestern border between October 2021 and August 2022.

More than 6 million Venezuelans have fled the South American country over the past decade as the economy collapsed and political freedoms eroded. Most of the migrants relocated to other South American countries but have started heading northward as the welcome wears out.

Mexico imposed visa requirements on Venezuelans in January 2021, prompting many migrants to risk the Darien Gap, a thick jungle between Colombia and Panama; it has no roads and is notorious for bandits. Panama's immigration service reported 48,204 people, mostly Venezuelans, passed through the Darien Gap in September, a 10-fold increase from January.

The U.S. government separately announced a program to allow 24,000 Venezuelans into the United States provided they have a sponsor and pass health and security screenings. The program excludes Venezuelans who entered Mexico or Panama irregularly or hold permanent residency in a country other than Venezuela.