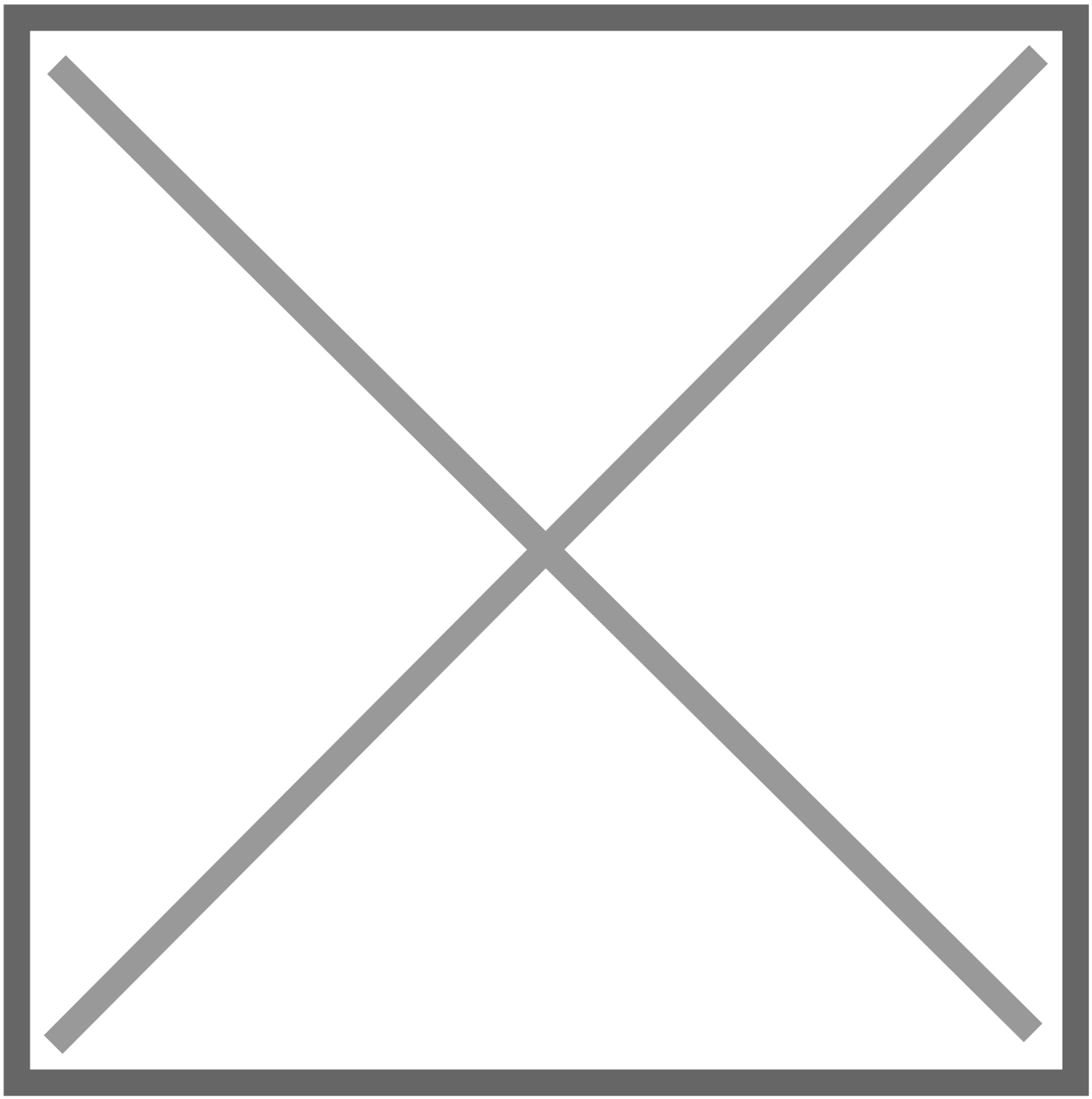
News



Honduran migrants on a deportation flight from the U.S. arrive at the Ramon Villeda Morales International Airport, in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Jan. 31, 2025. A new report documents the experiences of people who have been deported from the U.S., forced to return to their home countries, or have been trapped in third countries due to U.S. immigration policies. (OSV News/Reuters/Yoseph Amaya)

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The "externalization" of migration in the Latin American region — particularly under the Trump administration's hardline policies — is accelerating human rights violations while eroding human dignity, according to a new report.

In addition, the cancellation of U.S. humanitarian and development funding has worsened the situation, researchers found.

"How Cruel Migration Policies Hurt People" was released March 5 by the American Friends Service Committee — which has a century-long history of working on behalf of migrants — in collaboration with a number of migrant advocacy organizations, including the Jesuit Service for Migrants in Costa Rica and similar groups in Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador, as well as the Washington-based Refugees International.

"Externalized migration" takes place when a country essentially outsources its border and migration control to other nations, the report explained.

The report noted that three key practices constitute externalized migration across Latin America: preventing migrants from reaching the destination country, partly or fully shifting asylum procedures to third countries and expelling individuals to nations not their countries of origin.

Collectively, "these measures aim to discourage migration toward the northern part of the Americas and to place barriers on regular entry from other borders," said the report, citing 2025 agreements between the U.S. and governments in Central and South America on accepting third-country deportations from the U.S.

More than 2 million foreign nationals had left the U.S. as of Oct. 27, 2025 — some 527,000 through forcible deportation, and another 1.6 million through "self-deportation" amid fears of expulsion, said the report, citing U.S. Department of Homeland Security data.

Amid "reverse migration" flows and "the weakening of protection and asylum systems," hundreds of thousands have experienced "increased violence" — even as they had fled "countries affected by sociopolitical conflict, war, genocide, state collapse, and displacement driven by the climate crisis," the report said.

Many are now left stranded between nations, it added.

Presenting the human cost at stake was a key aim of the report, said Marcia Aguiluz, AFSC's regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean, in a press release accompanying the document.

Behind the statistics, the report — which draws on 364 interviews conducted between June and August 2025 across multiple countries in the region — "traces the stories, lived realities and policies which deeply impact millions of people," said Aguiluz.

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The data showed most interviewed had left their countries of origin due to precarious economic and employment circumstances, as well as widespread violence, including gang threats and gender-based violence.

The report highlighted the violence and cruelty often experienced during detention and deportation.

Intimidation, threats, humiliation, overcrowding, discrimination and racism, sexual and gender-based violence, and family separation were among the human rights violations described by those interviewed by researchers — with the U.S. as "the

country where most of these acts occurred," said the report.

Of the 169 who had been deported from the U.S., 38 said they had been denied or had limited access to food, water and basic hygiene items, while 25 reported being held in "ice boxes," or cold rooms.

A 37-year-old Venezuelan, named in the report by the pseudonym Jose, described his transfer in shackles from detention in El Paso to McAllen, Texas.

"When you are a migrant, you are not allowed to speak because they beat you," he said, recounting how "three Americans, about two meters tall, beat a Venezuelan man in front of me."

"I ate and slept on the floor," he added.

"These testimonies add to the cases of abuse documented by human rights organizations inside detention centers in the country," said the report, citing a 2025 Human Rights Watch report on abusive practices at three Florida immigration detention centers.

The report's authors noted that such practices flout international obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the American Convention on Human Rights; the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture; and other instruments.

"More importantly, these actions are inhumane and harm the dignity of people," said the report.

Yet such abuses and suffering are taking place amid the erosion of the post-Second World War international system that affirmed — as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees stated — "all human beings, without distinction, should enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms."

Report authors issued several calls to action, urging states to end the externalization of migration, comply with existing international and human rights obligations, and increase funding to support both people on the move and migration systems "centered on their rights and wellbeing."

In addition, the report stressed the need for states and civil society to "tackle the root causes of forced migration," while developing "inclusive and humane policies" that prioritize human dignity.

Human rights monitoring bodies were encouraged by the report authors to both document and denounce discriminatory migration policies.

The report also exhorted society as a whole to "recognize the inherent dignity of all human beings," counter cruel and discriminatory policies, and "reconnect with the empathy and solidarity that define us as human."