

Mexico publishes guide to assist border crossers

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MEXICO CITY - The Mexican government is giving out a colorful new comic book with advice for migrants, but immigration-control advocates worry that some of the tips may encourage illegal border crossers.

The 32-page book, *The Guide for the Mexican Migrant*, was published in December by Mexico's Foreign Ministry. Using simple language, the book offers safety information for border crossers, a primer on their legal rights and advice on living unobtrusively in the United States.

Dramatic drawings show undocumented immigrants wading into a river, running from the U.S. Border Patrol and crouching near a hole in a border fence. On other pages, they hike through a desert with rock formations reminiscent of Arizona and are caught by a stern-faced Border Patrol agent.

"This guide is intended to give you some practical advice that could be of use if you have made the difficult decision to seek new work opportunities outside your country," the book says.

But immigration-control groups questioned some of the guide's advice.

"This is more than just a wink and a nod," said Rick Oltman, Western field director for the Federation for American Immigration Reform. "This is so transparent, this is the Mexican government trying to protect its most valuable export, which is illegal migrants."

Book distribution

The book is being distributed as a free supplement to *El Libro Vaquero*, a popular cowboy comic book, in five Mexican states that send many migrants to the United States: Zacatecas, Michoacán, Puebla, Oaxaca and Jalisco. The government plans to print 1.5 million copies.

The book comes with a yellow disclaimer saying it does not promote undocumented immigration, and it repeatedly warns against crossing illegally. But it gives no information about the steps for seeking a U.S. visa.

Instead, it offers frank safety tips. In the section on crossing rivers, it notes, "Thick clothing increases your weight when wet, and this makes it difficult to swim or float."

On crossing the desert, it says, "Try to walk during times when the heat is not as intense" and says migrants should follow power lines or train tracks if they get lost.

The book warns migrants that they may have to walk for days to reach towns or roads in the desert and that they will not be able to carry enough water or food.

But it also shows a woman adding salt to a water bottle and advises, "Salt water helps you retain your body's liquids. Although you'll feel thirstier, if you drink water with salt the risk of dehydration is much lower."

Mexican authorities say they're just trying to keep migrants safe.

"We are not inviting them to cross, but we're doing everything we can to save lives," said Elizabeth García Mejía, chief coordinator for the Nogales, Sonora, section of Mexico's Grupo Beta migrant protection service.

Carlos Flores Vizcarra, Mexican consul general of Phoenix, said he had not seen the guide until a reporter showed it to him.

He said the guide appeared to be only the latest attempt by the Mexican government to warn migrants about the dangers of crossing the border without proper documentation.

The reality, however, is that many migrants will try to do so anyway, he said.

"This is nothing new. It's a way to put it in very simple terms so people will understand the risks," Flores Vizcarra said. "The intention is out of concern for human rights. People are doing it anyway. We cannot ignore that there is a very big migration between our two countries, and people who are coming to work need to understand the risks."

Mixed messages

Some migrants from Mexico who have crossed the border illegally in the past said the guide seems to send a mixed message.

"On the one hand they seem to be saying, 'Don't cross,' but on the other hand they are saying, 'Cross,'" Humberto Morales, 22, an undocumented immigrant from Oaxaca working as a day laborer in Phoenix, said after looking at a copy.

He doubts the guide will keep many people in Mexico from crossing illegally, but he said it could help save lives.

"We have lots of programs like this in Mexico, but people keep crossing," Morales said.

No official at the Foreign Ministry headquarters in Mexico City would agree to an interview about the comic book, despite repeated requests through the ministry's media relations office.

The book's pictures are drawn to match the style of *El Libro Vaquero*. They portray the migrants as strong and healthy men and women, wading into a river or walking through the desert.

One section of the book urges caution when dealing with immigrant smugglers, known as *coyotes* or *polleros*. It shows migrants climbing into the back of a tractor-trailer, a possible reference to the 19 migrants who died in Texas after being sealed in a tractor-trailer in May 2003.

On getting caught

Another section warns migrants not to lie to U.S. authorities or use false identification, and it gives instructions on what to do if caught by the Border Patrol.

"Don't throw stones or objects at the officer or patrol vehicles because this is considered a provocation," it says. "Raise your hands slowly so they see you are unarmed."

A picture shows a group of migrants running from a Border Patrol sport utility vehicle, though the text urges them not to flee.

"It's better to be detained a few hours and repatriated to Mexico than to get lost in the desert," it says.

Seven pages are devoted to migrants' legal rights after they are detained and another four to living peacefully in the United States.

"Avoid attracting attention, at least while you are arranging your stay or documents to live in the United States," it says. "The best formula is to not alter your routine of going from work to home."

The Arizona Republic faxed copies of the guide to the U.S. Border Patrol, FAIR and two groups that support stronger controls on immigration.

A Border Patrol spokesman said he does not think the book encourages illegal crossers.

"If they've already gone ahead and made that decision to cross illegally . . . then anything that helps protect lives is worth it," said Andy Adame, spokesman for the Border Patrol's Tucson sector.

Beyond protection

But the immigration-control groups said some of the advice goes beyond protecting migrants and, instead, encourages them.

"A lot of it is disclaimers, but then there's this part about if you're going to cross the desert, do it when the sun isn't so hot," said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Washington-based Center for Immigration Studies. "It's a mixed message."

Said John Vincent, editor of a newsletter published by Virginia-based Americans for Immigration Control: "It really looks like the Mexican government is encouraging illegal immigration. It shows the contempt that the Mexican government has for our laws."

The Mexican government produces a similar book aimed at Central American immigrants who try to enter Mexico illegally. The book covers much of the same information about legal rights and repeats many of the warnings. It even shows a group of migrants struggling to breathe inside a truck.

But that book doesn't give the same kind of safety tips on crossing the border or advise immigrants on how to live peacefully in Mexico.

Reporter Daniel Gonzalez contributed to this article.

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GUÍA DEL MIGRANTE MEXICANO



Audio

(Para escuchar las pistas, descargar archivos Windows Media; haga click con el boton derecho, guardar destino como.)

Pista 1: [Consulados de México](#)

Pista 2: [Servicios de los Consulados de México](#)

Pista 3: [Derechos de los Migrantes](#)

Guia dell Migrante Mexicano

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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Introduction

Dear Conational;

This guide pretends to provide you with some useful and practical advices, in case you have taken the difficult decision to search for new labor opportunities outside your country.

The safe way to get into another country is firs table, obtaining your passport, which is issued by the Delegations of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs and the visa that you would request to the Embassy or Consulate of the country you want to travel to.

However, in the practice, we see several cases of Mexican that intent to cross the Northern Border without the necessary documentation, through high risk areas which mean they have to affront danger, specially in the desert or rivers with hard and not always noticing water currents.

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With the reading of this guide, you will know some basic facts of the legal consequences of your staying in the United States of America without the proper legal documentation, as well as the right you are entitled in that country, once you are in it regardless of your migratory condition. Be aware that always exist mechanisms for you to enter legally in the United States of America.

In the case you would have problems or affront difficulties, remember that there are 45 Mexican Consulates in that country, which information you also can find in this publication.

Identify your consulate and get in touch with them.

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Dangers to Cross Through High Risk Zones

Crossing the river could be very dangerous, especially if you cross alone and its night. Heavy clothing increases its weight and makes swimming and floating difficult.

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If you cross through the desert, try to do it during the time of the day the heat is less intense.

The roads and towns are very far away, so it will take you several days to find paths and you won't be able to carry any food and water for so long, also you can get lost.

Salty water would help to keep fluids in your body. Even though it will make you thirstier, if you drink water with salt will help to keep you from dehydration.

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Be aware of the "POLLEROS", "COLLOTES" OR "PATEROS"

They can full you full you assurance you that they will cross you in a few hours through the mountains or the desert that is not true!

They can put your life in risk making you cross rivers, risky channels, desert zones, railroad tracks or high-speed highways. That has caused the death of hundred of people.

If you decide to use the help of "Polleros", "Coyote", or "Pateros" to cross the border, keep in mind the following percussions:

Don't loose him from your sight, remember he is the only one who knows the area and is the only one who can take you from there.

Don't trust anyone who offers you to take you to the other side and ask you to drive a vehicle or to take a package for him.

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Normally, these packages contain drugs or other illegal substances, for this reason many persons has ended up in jail.

If you transport other persons, you can be confused with a "Pollero" or "Coyote", and you can be accused for the crime of human traffic or stealing a vehicle.

Don't trust you minor children to strangers that offer you to take them to the United States.

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Do not use fake documents, or that belong to another person, neither declare false citizenship.

If you intent to cross the border with fake documents or if they belong to another person, keep in mind the following:

Using fake documents or another person's documents is a federal crime in the United States, so you can be persecuted and be sentenced to jail, as well if you declare false name or if you say you are a U.S citizen and you are not.

Do not lie to border agents.

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If you are arrested

Do not off resistance.

Don't be aggressive or insult the officer.

Don't throw stones or any object to the agent or patrol vehicle, this could be considered as a provocation to the officers.

If the officers feel you are aggressive with them, could be they will use their staying to keep you under control.

Lift you hands slowly, so they can see you are not armed.

Don't carry with you an object that can be considered as a weapon as:

Flashlights, screwdrivers, blades, knife, or stones.

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Don't run or try to escape

Don't hide in dangerous places

Don't cross hi-speed highways

It's better to be arrested for a few hours and be sent back to Mexico than get lost in the desert.

IF YOU GET ARRESTED, YOU HAVE RIGHTS

Give you real name.

If you are a minor with the company of an adult, tell the authorities, so you won't be separated.

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Your rights are:

To know where are you

To be allow to get in contact with the nearest Mexican General Consulate and ask for their support.

Don't issue any statement or sign any document without the guidance of a defense lawyer or a representative from the Mexican Consulate.
Get medical assistance if you are wounded or if you are not in good health,
To be respected and be treated with dignity, regardless your migratory condition.
To have a safe transportation.
To be provided by food and water any time you need.
You are obligated to provide information regarding your migratory status.
Not to be beating or insulted
Not to be incommunicado
In case they take your belongings away, request a document, so you can recover them at the moment you are liberated.

It is very important that you report any violation to any of these rights to your defense lawyer or to the Mexican Consulate Representative or to the closest branch of the Delegation of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in the Mexican Territory.

If you want more information, and you live in Texas, United States or Ciudad Acuna, Coahuila, turn the radio station la "Ponderosa" AM 1570.

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In CASE YOU GET ARRESTED

If you already have been sentenced for any felony or you are being persecuted in a criminal process and you are in jail, you have the following rights:

Not to be discriminated for the authorities, either police, judicial or correctional systems.
To receive visits from you consulate officers and your family.
To receive the correct legal advice without condition or obstruction.

If you are being persecuted but you are not sentenced yet, ask your defense lawyer or the Mexican Consulate Representative about the meaning of "Guilty Agreement".

Do not plead guilty without your lawyer advice and to find the possibilities of winning your case.

It is very important that you know the laws of the State that you live, since the laws can be different in each state.

Make a note of the following information:

If a legal permanent resident is arrested more than two times for DUI can be deported.
If you drink, don't drive, since you don't have documents you can be arrested and deported.

Do not drive without a driver's license.
Respect the traffic rules and use the seat belt.

Do not drive without car insurance and never drive an unknown vehicle.

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Don't allow people that you don't know to ride in your car.

If you make a traffic violation and the police stop you, put your hands on the wheel and do not get out of the car.

Try to be unnoticed, unless until you address your legal status and get the necessary documents to live in the United States.

The best way is do not change your routine from work to your home.

Avoid noisy parties, the neighbors can get upset and call the police, and you can get arrested.

Avoid being involved in fights.

If you go to a bar or a nightclub and a fight starts, try to get out of there, because in the confusion you can be arrested even though you had nothing to do with it.

Avoid family and domestic violence, it is a crime in the United States as is in Mexico as well.

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Domestic violence is not only physical, could be verbal and mistreatment.

If you are accused for domestic violence against your children, your wife, your mate or any other person that lives with you, you can be sentenced and go to jail.

Also the Child Protective Services can take your children away from you.

Do not carry fire guns, knife, or any other kind of weapons or object that can be dangerous. Be aware that a lot of Mexican have died or are in jail because of that.

If the police searches your house or apartment don't resist, but they would need a pertaining court order to do it. It is better to cooperate and communicate with the closest Mexican Consulate.

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CONSULATES

The Secretary of Foreign Affairs has 45 consulate representatives in the United States and its Southern Border, which their function is to assist you.

Remember, if you have been arrested or if you are serving a sentence, you have the right to contact the closest Mexican Consulate. Always carry you Guide of Consular Protection with you.

Come close to your consulate, come close to Mexico Paisano!

Direccion General de Proteccion y Asumtos Consulares
(General Direction of Protection and Consular Affairs)

“This guide of Consular Protection does not encourage the crossing of Mexican without the required documentation by the government of the United States, its purpose is to make known the risks that it implicates and to inform about the immigrants’ rights regardless their legal residence.”