

# Department of Homeland Security to Begin Pilot Program for Voluntary Interior Repatriation of Mexican Nationals

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In an effort to reduce the cycle of illegal border crossing and the violence associated with human smuggling, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security today announced an bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico establishing principles for a voluntary repatriation program. Under this interior repatriation pilot program, Mexican nationals will be given the option of returning to their place of origin when apprehended for illegal entry.

Beginning in July, illegal Mexican migrants may volunteer for the program, returning home via charter aircraft from Tucson, Arizona to either Mexico City or Guadalajara. Bus transportation will then be provided to their final destination.

"The goal of this program is to save lives by safely returning Mexican nationals to their homes, away from the dangers of the Arizona-Sonora desert where smugglers and the harsh summer climate contribute to the deaths and injuries of illegal border crossers," said Homeland Security Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security, Asa Hutchinson. "This is a well coordinated, crucial step that serves as another milestone in the Arizona Border Control (ABC) Initiative and highlights our continued efforts to save lives on the border."

The Mexican government will support these life-saving efforts by increasing its consular presence in Arizona. It will be administered by officers of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The U.S. consul in Nogales, Mexico, will coordinate repatriation requirements with the Mexican consul in Nogales, Arizona.

The key elements of the agreements are:

- The program will observe the applicable laws of both countries as well as international conventions and will ensure that Mexican nationals will be repatriated in a safe, humane and dignified manner.
- The program is available only to Mexican nationals. Migrants charged with a crime (other than illegal entry) are not eligible for the program.
- A migrant who expresses his or her willingness to be repatriated to their place of origin in the interior of Mexico to CBP officers or ICE agents will be referred to the Mexican Consul.
- The Mexican Consul will interview the person and confirm that he or she wants to be returned home to the interior of Mexico.
- Those migrants who decline repatriation to their place of origin in the interior of Mexico will be repatriated to the northern border of Mexico through regular means.
- Department of Homeland Security officers will not handcuff nor restrain Mexican nationals repatriated under this program unless exceptional safety conditions warrant it in an individual case.
- The program will be limited to the Arizona – Sonora region.
- The program will end no later than September 30. At its conclusion, the two governments will evaluate the repatriation program and recommend future plans.