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Honduran Women at the U.S Border Are Caught in a Cycle of Violence

[“Now that they know I have escaped, if I return, I am dead.”](#)

Gender violence has been strongly [associated](#) with migration flows of women from Honduras. Honduras has one of the [highest rates of femicide](#) in the world, and the vulnerability of women to gender-based violence does not end for those who attempt to migrate to the United States. Smugglers and even border authorities have been [linked](#) to violence against migrant women. While tackling gender-based violence in Honduras would be a huge undertaking, the United States has a responsibility to protect women at the border fleeing that violence.

In Honduras, gender-based violence is [rooted](#) in cultural norms, political instability, and gang violence. It is normalized, and is not seen as a real issue given the [machista](#) culture. Human and drug trafficking are some of the most notable causes for violence against women, as tens of thousands of gang members [exist](#) in Honduras. The drug trade has been linked to high rates of femicides, [peaking](#) at over 600 in 2013. [Gang initiations](#) may involve the raping or killing of women and girls. Domestic violence is also rampant in the country.

The [COVID-19 pandemic](#) worsened women’s ability to escape abuse by keeping them at home with their abusers for longer, and empowered gang members to exert more control over their communities. Structural inequalities such as housing and jobs were made less and less available for women during the pandemic as well.

Crimes against women also do not get reported due to the fact that many women do not have the resources to do so, or face threats and intimidation. Corruption has taken over the Honduran state, and [connected](#) it to gang and drug violence. There is a [95% impunity rate](#) for gender-based crimes. The discrepancy between laws put in place to combat gender violence and actual implementation and enforcement of those laws [exacerbates](#) the violence that women face in Honduras.

The United States has a troubled history with migrant women escaping gender-based violence. Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions was known for [his rulings](#) that women facing violence in their home countries were not qualified for asylum. There have been a number of groundbreaking cases in which women were able to claim asylum due to threat of violence. In the case of [Fatin v. I.N.S.](#), it was found that feminism as a political opinion could provide women the right to asylum.

However, asylum laws as they stand do not necessarily protect women experiencing harm based on their gender, and many are turned away at the border. Membership in a “particular social group” more often than not [excludes](#) women as a category. As well, it must be [shown](#) that this violence against women was a result of cultural norms, and that the home country is unable to unwilling to help solve the problem. In Honduras, there is a deeply entrenched culture of violence and abuse towards women, and the high impunity rates for these crimes demonstrate a clear lack of protection for women.

For Honduran women, gender-based violence is not a private crime or an unfortunate reality. They face very real threats to their safety both at home and in their communities. And above all else, many at the United States border have a demonstrated fear for their lives if they are forced to return to Honduras. Allowing more protection on the basis of gender-based violence could change the lives of so many Honduran migrants.