Denia’s Story

January 29, 2020 — Denia is a 24-year-old, single mother of two from Honduras. She first migrated to the United States in 2013, but after becoming the victim of a kidnapping in Tampico, Tamaulipas, Mexico, she decided to return to Honduras. A few years after returning to her hometown, Denia suffered one of the most traumatic events of her life. She was raped by several gang members who then threatened to kill her parents and her child if she reported the crime to the police. “Gangs and narcotraffickers are untouchable. They also pay off the police, so you can’t reach the police either,” she says.

"Sacar adelante a mi familia.* This was what motivated me to keep going."

Denia had few options available to her in Honduras. With a job that paid only 5,000 Honduran lempiras (approximately $200 USD) per month, she couldn’t pay for basic expenses. Three of her friends had been killed after they refused to help the gangs distribute drugs. The gangs threatened to rape her again if she also refused to assist them. To escape the violence and provide a better life for herself and her family, Denia decided to join one of the caravans heading toward the United States along with her oldest son. Paid guides led them from place to place. At one point, she and her son boarded a truck along with 100 other people riding to Puebla. The heat inside the truck was almost unbearable. “My son was crying and crying. I wanted to get off, but I was also afraid to return home alone,” says Denia, “Sacar adelante a mi familia. This was what motivated me to keep going.”

After a month of traveling, Denia and her son reached Ciudad Juarez, across the border from El Paso, Texas. Once inside the Customs and Border Patrol facility, Denia thought...
she would be able to enter the United States. Instead she was dealt another devastating blow — she would not be permitted to enter, but instead be returned to Ciudad Juarez to await the outcome of her asylum case. “They told us that the president made a deal with Mexico. They said there were shelters in Mexico … and we would be safe,” Denia says.

Denia was never able to explain how she was once kidnapped in Mexico and feared returning there. Instead, at 4:30AM the next day, she and her son were roused from their sleep and driven across the border to Ciudad Juarez where they were told to return to El Paso in 2 months time for their first asylum hearing.

Life in the shelter has been difficult. Rumors that those who ventured outside the shelter were kidnapped has made Denia afraid to go outside. Her son refuses to eat the food and as a result is sick with a fever. The sight of her son suffering in the shelter has pushed Denia to consider returning to Honduras. She knows she will face incredible risks if she returns, but if something happens to her, she reasons, at least her body will be in Honduras where her family can provide her with a proper funeral and burial. “It’s too bad they changed the laws in the United States,” she laments. “We arrived too late.”

*Sacar adelante a mi familia* is a Spanish idiom that, roughly translated, means a better future for my family.
Discussion Questions:

1. Has this story or other resources on this website taught you something new about the Remain in Mexico policy? If so, what?
2. How has hearing the story of an asylum seeker subject to Remain in Mexico impacted your views of this policy in particular or US asylum policy overall?
3. Seeking asylum in the United States is a very complicated process. In what ways has Remain in Mexico further complicated this process?
4. What are the greatest needs of those subject to Remain in Mexico?
5. How can your Jesuit community respond to some of these needs? How can you be in greater solidarity with those subject to Remain in Mexico?