Expanded Security Welcome Brief

Mexico

# In-country Situation

*The main risk to foreign visitors is posed by violent and opportunistic crime. Crime rates are generally higher in major urban areas. Many cities have distinct areas where organized criminal groups with links to drug cartels operate. While travelers/RCRC personnel are generally not targeted by drug cartels, they face serious risks from collateral violence during clashes between opposing cartel members, or between criminals and the security forces.*

*In response to the growing violence perpetrated by drug cartels, then-president Felipe Calderon (2006-12) deployed the military to confront the issue in 2006. Due to high levels of corruption in the police force, the newly reformed Federal Police also became a key element in the fight against drug cartels. These initiatives have failed to curb the violence, and drug trade-related murders have increased significantly since then. Several regions in Mexico, especially along the northern border region, have become extremely violent. Violent cartel-related crime has also risen along the central-west coastline.*

*While RCRC personnel face a credible risk of abduction due to their perceived wealth, they are rarely targeted in such crimes. However, short-duration 'express' kidnappings pose a risk to both foreigners and wealthy locals. RCRC personnel may also be targeted in a ‘virtual' kidnapping, which typically involves a call to a victim who is threatened and extorted for payment using deception and personal information. These incidents are most common in HIGH risk areas and some major urban centres.*

*In addition, insurgent groups motivated by economic and social issues are present in some southern areas. However, they have mostly targeted police and army outposts in rural areas, and have been largely dormant in recent years. Small bombings have occasionally targeted foreign banking institutions and US-owned businesses in the capital Mexico City, though these rarely cause injury or significant damage and appear to be staged primarily for symbolic value.*

# Population

*126,190,788 (2018, World Bank)*

**Religion**

*Christian*

**Visitor Information**

* *Travel to HIGH travel risk areas should be for essential purposes and should be arranged in close liaison with the Mexican RC. RCRC personnel should carefully plan all aspects of their itinerary and be confident in their accommodation, transport, communication and security arrangements prior to travel. Measures include only travelling with a RC vehicle and a RC driver and undertaking movement in daylight hours only. Journey plans should allow sufficient time for delays, such as a breakdown. Given the difficulties associated with arranging secure accommodation in US border areas, avoid overnight stays and arrange lodging in the US where possible.*
* *Crime poses a significant risk in Mexico and criminals are often armed; take stringent security precautions at all times. If accosted by a criminal, assume that the assailant is armed and do nothing to resist or antagonize them.*
* *Short-term ‘express' kidnapping poses a risk to foreign personnel. Kidnapping-for-ransom is a persistent problem and though foreigners are rarely targeted, personnel should maintain a low profile. Longer-term visitors should avoid establishing routines and vary the timings and routes of journeys.*
* *‘Virtual' kidnapping is a crime where-in a target typically receives a call, and is threatened and extorted for payment using deception and personal information. It is recommended that RCRC members not give out any personal information to any unknown callers. In the event of receiving such a call, targets should seek to slow the situation down: introducing delay and resistance to demands will often see the extortion attempt fade away. Additionally, targets should:*
  + *Request to speak to the victim directly;*
  + *If the caller doesn't let you speak to the victim, ask them to describe the victim or answer a question only they would know the answer to;*
  + *Listen carefully to and verify the voice of the alleged victim if they speak;*
  + *Attempt to call, text or contact the alleged victim via social media or another telephone;*
  + *Don't offer or wire money without proof of life; this alone may resolve the situation.*
  + *Inform immediately to the Security Focal Point at the Mexican Red Cross Jose Gabriel López (55)10844590 and Regional Security Coordinator Jorge E. Zequeira +507 6949 5546 / +507 6674 1584 / +507 6382 6355 / +57 313 500 3268.*
* *Occasional politically motivated unrest is a possibility. Avoid all demonstrations as a precaution.*
* *Do not travel on foot after dark, or in unfamiliar or low-income districts.*
* *Driving standards are variable. Do not self-drive; pre-arrange hire of a private vehicle and experienced local driver through your hotel or host company. Keep windows up and doors locked at all times, and do not undertake road travel outside urban centres after dark.*
* *Protesters and community self-defense groups often erect roadblocks to block passage into and out of towns and municipalities. Do not attempt to cross any roadblocks, as this may provoke a hostile reaction. Vigilante self-defense groups have fired on vehicles that fail to stop at roadblocks.*
* *Taxis are a suitable means of transport for short journeys in most urban areas, but should only be obtained through your hotel or host company. Pre-arrange a taxi for your return trip when booking your outbound journey. Avoid ‘libre' taxis due to security reasons; robberies and assaults have been reported on board these taxis. Do not use public transport; bus and rail travel are not sufficiently secure for RCRC personnel.*
* *Minimize unnecessary contact with the police, some of whom are corrupt and inefficient. In the event of being involved in a serious incident, contact your embassy or security provider for support.*
* *Vigilantly monitor your financial statements and accounts during and after travel. If your financial information was compromised, it can take several weeks before fraudulent purchases are attempted*

# IFRC Regional Presence

***When doing Field / Operational / Mission Trips / Movement:***

* *The Mission Order System is in place for ALL movement outside of Mexico City.*
  + *Mission Orders must be signed to travel outside of Mexico City.*
* *Team members must inform their TL (Team Leader) or line manager of all field movement on a daily basis including when departing to field, arrival at destination, when departing to base and conformation upon safe arrival to base.*
* *RC/RC personnel must be met at the port.*
* *All team members must report to TL before 18:00 hrs daily to inform him/her on safe status and whereabouts of team members.*
* *Team members must inform the Security Coordinator of all proposed daily field movements and any changes or delays as they become known. The Security Coordinator and/or TL must be able to get information on the whereabouts of all RC/RC personnel at any time.*
* *Passengers other than RC/RC personnel may not be carried in IFRC vehicles, without the consent of the Security Coordinator.*
* *Emergency plans must be established in case of team members not reporting on safe return from the field.*
* *Operational movement (field travel) will be done during the day. Outside urban areas, no field movement is permitted after nightfall, only upon exception authorization of the Security Coordinator.*
* *Travel outside cities and towns must be strictly limited and be well planned and coordinated the Security Coordinator /, TL and maps must be available.*
* *All vehicles must be equipped with first aid kits and emergency food/water rations.*
* *Any abnormal activity or aggression must be immediately reported to TL and Security Coordinator.*
* *All travel must be done in roadworthy vehicle with Federation/RC markings.*
* *Team members should be with a Mexican Red Cross counterpart (if possible / feasible).*
* *Under NO circumstances must anyone conduct mission activities under Police /Military escort.*

# IFRC Country Cluster address

*There is no IFRC Country Cluster Office in Mexico. Please contact the National Society (contact information below).*

*IFRC liaison point with Mexico: Jorge E. Zequeira +507 6949 5546 / +507 6674 1584 / +507 6382 6355 / +57 313 500 3268*

# Contacts

# National Society

*Mexican National Society*

*Address: Calle Juan Luis Vives 200 Colonia Polanco*

*(5255) 10 84 45 05 /5255 10 84 45 10 /5255 10 84 45 45*

[*dirgral@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx*](mailto:dirgral@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx)

* *President - Ing. Eduardo DE AGÜERO LEDUC - (5255) 10 84 45 05 /5255 10 84 45 10 /5255 10 84 45 45 -* [*presidencia@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx*](mailto:presidencia@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx)
* *General Director - Lic José Antonio MONROY - (5255) 10 84 45 05 /5255 10 84 45 10 /5255 10 84 45 45 -* [*jamonroy@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx*](mailto:jamonroy@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx)
* ***Security Focal Point at the Mexican Red Cross - Jose Gabriel Lopez - (55)10844590***
* *Chief Medical Officer - Sr Fernando SUINAGA CÀRDENAS - (230) 670 02 76/670 12 74*

# Airport

*More than 20 Mexican cities have international airports, though the principal point of entry is Benito Juárez International Airport (*[*MEX*](http://www.aicm.com.mx/home_en.php)*) in the capital Mexico City. Other international airports include Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla Guadalajara Airport (*[*GDL*](http://www.aeropuertosgap.com.mx/es/guadalajara)*) in Guadalajara (Jalisco state), Mariano Escobedo Airport (*[*MTY*](http://www.oma.aero/en/airports/monterrey/)*) in Monterrey (Nuevo León state), Tijuana Airport (*[*TIJ*](http://www.aeropuertosgap.com.mx/es/tijuana.html)*) in Baja California state, Cancun Airport (*[*CUN*](http://www.cancun-airport.net/)*) in Quintana Roo state, and Los Cabos Airport (SJD), which serves both San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas in Baja California Sur state. Flights can be disrupted during the hurricane season between May and November. Flooding and mudslides are common during this period and may affect access routes to the airport.*

*International airports satisfy only minimum security standards. RCRC personnel do not face any significant security risks, though opportunistic crime, such as pickpocketing and bag-snatching, is common in and around airports. RCRC personnel should be on guard and keep luggage in sight at all times, especially at Benito Juárez airport, where the terminal can get crowded. It is also advisable to exercise caution when using banking and currency-exchange facilities within airport premises due to the possibility of being watched and followed by criminals.*

# Passport & Visa

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Passport Required?*** | ***Visa Required?*** | ***Return Ticket Required?*** |
| *British* | *Yes* | *No* | *Yes* |
| *Australian* | *Yes* | *No* | *Yes* |
| *Canadian* | *Yes* | *No* | *Yes* |
| *USA* | *Yes* | *No* | *Yes* |
| *Other EU* | *Yes* | *No* | *Yes* |

* ***Visas***

*Nationals referred to in the chart above and citizens of other western European countries and Japan do not require visas for stays of up to 180 days. RCRC personnel of other nationalities are required to obtain visas prior to arrival in the country. Business visitors are required to present a letter from the host company or organization. All visitors need a free Tourist Card, with the exception of stays that are less than 72 hours within border areas. Tourist Cards can be obtained from the airline on direct flights, at the port of entry or from the Mexican consulate, no more than 30 days before arrival. The card must be shown upon departure. If lost, this Tourist Card can be replaced at a cost of MXN295 (Mexican pesos), which is payable at a bank. The validity of a Tourist Card is at the discretion of the passport control official; visitors can request up to 180 days, but normally, 90 (and sometimes 60) days are granted. Applicants for Tourist Cards should have a valid passport, the address of your accommodation in Mexico, and your arrival flight information.*

*Depending on Nationality RCRC personnel need a visa or tourist card to travel – Pease consult MFA Mexico Web Site.*

*RCRC personnel are advised to carry photocopies of their passports and other documentation at all times.*

* ***Entry/Exit requirements***

*Immigration may require visitors to show evidence of funds to finance their stay and/or an onward or return ticket. Passports for certain nationals should be valid for at least six months after the date of entry; RCRC personnel should confirm this requirement with the nearest Mexican embassy/consulate prior to travel. Tourist Cards must be kept by the visitor during the entire length of stay as they will have to be presented and stamped on leaving. Visitors are required to declare on arrival amounts equivalent to or more than US$10,000, including traveller's cheques and money orders.*

* ***Procedures***

*Passport control at airports is normally swift and straightforward. Many (but by no means all) officials understand simple English. At customs, arriving visitors must press a button on what looks like a traffic light. If the green light lights up, you may proceed; if the red light lights up, you must have your bags checked by an official. Laptop computers should be declared as being an 'instrumento de trabajo' (equipment for work purposes).*

*People arriving on international flights, especially from Colombia, the Caribbean and Central America, may be searched for drugs. In Cancún, US Drug Enforcement Administration agents are present at all times, providing information to the Mexican police.*

# International Vaccination Certificate

# *Make sure you are up-to-date on routine vaccines before every trip. These vaccines include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, varicella (chickenpox) vaccine, polio vaccine, and your yearly flu shot.*

# Climate

*The climate varies greatly according to region, latitude and altitude. Coastal regions are hot and humid throughout the year; the highlands are more temperate. In tropical areas in the south, there is significant rainfall between June and September; hurricanes are common along coastal areas during these months. The capital Mexico City is warm in summer, but there is almost daily rainfall during the wet season and evenings can be cool. Monterrey is hot in summer and very cold in winter. Guadalajara is generally warmer than Mexico City.*

# Accommodation

*Voltage: 127 volts Frequency: 60 Hz*

*These are the most common plug types used:*

**

# Food /Drinks

*Unclean food and water can cause travelers' diarrhea and other diseases. Reduce your risk by sticking to safe food and water habits.*

##### *Don't Eat:*

* *Food served at room temperature*
* *Food from street vendors*
* *Raw or soft-cooked (runny) eggs*
* *Raw or undercooked (rare) meat or fish*
* *Unwashed or unpeeled raw fruits and vegetables*
* *Unpasteurized dairy products*
* *”Bushmeat” (monkeys, bats, or other wild game)*

##### *Don’t Drink:*

* *Tap or well water*
* *Ice made with tap or well water*
* *Drinks made with tap or well water (such as reconstituted juice)*
* *Unpasteurized milk*

# Banking and Currency

*1 USD = 20.13 MXN (Septembre 2nd)*

*The official currency is the Mexican peso (MXN). RCRC Personnel should try to carry cash in denominations no larger than the 500 MXN note, as shops and restaurants will often refuse to accept larger notes; acquiring small change can be difficult. Smaller notes are usually required for taxis and minor purchases.*

*Although some large transactions (such as property prices or major contracts) may be priced in US dollars, most commercial establishments only accept pesos. Cheques in US dollars, pounds or euros are accepted by most banks. ATMs are widely available, and many accept North American and European cards, while most business-class shops and restaurants are happy to accept internationally recognized credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard and American Express. A surcharge may be levied if paying by credit card. Theft and credit/debit card skimming is a concern. Visitors / RCRC personnel should regularly check their credit card statements. Personnel should only use ATMs located inside banks and other commercial establishments for security reasons.*

# Transport

*Prior to travel contact Security Focal Point at the Mexican Red Cross - Jose Gabriel Lopez - (55)10844590*

**The use of the safety belt is mandatory as well, speed limits must be adhered to.**

-Boat trips in your private time are on your own responsibility.

# Communications

*The telephone network is adequate. International direct dialing is available but is very expensive. TELCEL, AT&T Mexico and Movistar are the three major mobile service providers. Hotels usually provide faxing facilities.*

*Internet cafés proliferate in all urban areas; connections are normally fast.*

*The airmail postal service is adequate, but slow for business purposes. Surface mail takes between one and three weeks to reach the US and between three and six weeks to reach Europe. A faster option is to use courier services: DHL, UPS and Federal Express have offices in most cities.*

*Dialling Codes*

*Country Code 52*

*IDD Prefix (International Direct Dialling) 00*

*NDD Prefix (National Direct Dialling) 01*

*List of useful telephone numbers:*

* *Police Rescue, fire: 911*
* *Mexican Red Cross: (5255) 10 84 45 05 /5255 10 84 45 10 /5255 10 84 45 45*
* *Info service: 1200*

***Cybersecurity***

*The country's growing economy and relatively lacking cybersecurity infrastructure have made it an attractive target for criminals. Mexico registers the most cyber fraud in Latin America, recording a 40% increase between 2017 and 2018. Banks and financial institutions are most commonly targeted, though more than 90% of companies operating in Mexico experienced some form of cyberattack in 2017. Domestic cyber activist groups such as Anonymous Mexico are active and have carried out a number of attacks. Attacks from outside the country have focused on political and social issues. Organizations working with the government may be targeted in such attacks.*

*RCRC personnel are most susceptible to lower-level schemes such as ‘card skimming' through point-of-sale malware. ATMs are at times modified to steal information from the inserted bank card. Virtual extortion also remains a significant concern. Cyber espionage is mostly carried out by state actors seeking to access government information. However, corporate espionage is also a rising concern.*

*The customs authorities may request to inspect electronic devices upon arrival, particularly at major airports. Compliance with such requests is recommended. However, all data on the inspected device may be scanned, and it is possible that malware may be installed on the device during the process. If your device is inspected, you should inform to your IT department as soon as possible and avoid using the device until receipt of further guidance.*

*Advice*

*Before travel:*

* *Only bring devices that you require for travel. Ensure any such device is updated with the latest software versions and relevant security patches are installed.*
* *Make a pre-travel backup of any information and store it at home.*
* *Consult with your RCRCs IT and security departments for any company-specific requirements and procedures.*

*During travel:*

* *Remain vigilant and observe for any obvious signs of tampering when using point-of-sale systems that are external or unmonitored such as at a fuel station or street-facing ATM.*
* *Avoid using public Wi-Fi networks at airports or transport hubs. These networks are always insecure and, in some instances, created and controlled by cybercriminal groups. Instead, a virtual private network (VPN) service may be used to increase mobile security.*
* *Commercial ‘charging stations' at airports can be used to extract data from your device or to upload malware to it. Avoid such public stations and use your personal charging equipment.*

# SECURITY MANAGEMENT

***General situation***

*Several major drug gangs operate in****Baja California****, including the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), Sinaloa Cartel and remnants of the Arellano Felix Cartel (also known as Tijuana Cartel). Their operations are concentrated near the US border and residual violence has increased in the largest city Tijuana and the state capital Mexicali. RCRC personnel should seek accommodation on the US side of the border to reduce their risk exposure.*

*In****Chihuahua****state, the homicide rate increased significantly in 2016-17, following a decline between 2011 and 2015. The security environment in Chihuahua city and Ciudad Juarez, on the US border, remains particularly poor. Violent crime is becoming increasingly problematic in the southern part of the state, as well as in the Sierra Mountains.*

***Colima****is located between Michoacán and Jalisco states, where cartel-related violence is a significant problem. Cartels such as La Familia Michoacána and the CJNG have advanced into Colima and residual clashes between local self-defense and drug traffickers are common in border areas. The state has also experienced a recent increase in violent crime, especially in Tecoman municipality.*

***Guanajuato****state has experienced a notable increase in violent crime since 2017. The violence is largely due to turf battles between the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel and the CJNG for the control of government-owned oil pipelines from which they siphon fuel. Rural areas of the state as well as the Industrial Belt cities of Celaya, Salamanca, and Silao are areas of particular concern. Petty and opportunistic crime however remains the principle risk for travelers to the cities of Guanajuato and San Miguel de Allende.*

***Guerrero****remains a hotbed of violent crime, especially in the popular resort city of Acapulco, currently one of the most violent cities in the country. While most incidents take place in lower-income areas, shoot-outs have previously occurred in upscale locations. The presence of numerous competing drug cartels in the area contributes to the high levels of crime, and can pose a direct threat to RCRC personnel, who risk being caught in crossfire. Further complicating the security landscape has been the emergence of local self-defense groups, some of which are believed to have been co-opted by criminal gangs against their rivals.*

*Since 2012 there have been numerous cartel-related shoot-outs in public places and highways in****Jalisco****, along with frequent roadblocks set up by criminal gangs aimed at preventing the security forces from reaching the crime sites. The areas near the border with Michoacán and Zacatecas, where shootings involving rival cartel members and attacks on local police forces tend to occur more frequently, are of most concern.*

*In recent years, the CJNG has dominated many zones of the state, free of government or police influence. Violent crime is less of an issue in the state capital Guadalajara, though carjackings have recently increased. RCRC personnel should maintain heightened awareness as petty and opportunistic crime remains a concern in Guadalajara.*

***Mexico state****is experiencing continued high rates of violent crime in several municipalities, especially those located to the immediate east of the capital Mexico City. The areas most affected by rising violence include Valle de Chalco, Ecatepec and Nezahualcóyotl. In addition, an increase in drug-related violence has been reported in the Toluca Valley, where several cartels are reportedly engaged in a fight over a key drug trafficking route in central Mexico.*

*While those visiting on legitimate business are unlikely to be targeted in drug-related violence, RCRC personnel and expatriates’ risk being caught up in the crossfire during shoot-outs between cartel members, as well as between gangs and the security forces. In addition, attacks staged by drug cartels have also become increasingly bold, sometimes involving high-grade explosives and car bombs.*

*Although such incidents have so far been sporadic, the use of such tactics may grow, indicating the potential for mass casualty incidents involving innocent bystanders in the future. 'Narco-blockades' – in which streets or even entire neighborhoods are blocked by drug traffickers so they can carry out attacks uninterrupted by the security forces – also have the potential to disrupt traffic on major thoroughfares.*

***Michoacan****experiences persistent violence related to the rivalry between several drug cartels operating in the region. The state is considered a key drug smuggling route in central Mexico, and local drug trafficking gangs will continue to engage in clashes in public areas, posing incidental risks to bystanders. Corruption within the local police is also a concern and local self-defense groups have also emerged, especially in the north-western region. Overland travel is not safe throughout the state and RCRC personnel are advised to use air travel to reach major cities such as Morelia or Lazaro Cardenas.*

***Morelos****suffers one of the highest kidnap and extortion rates in the country. Businesses operating in the region, including in the state capital Cuernavaca, are increasingly targeted by kidnap rings. Due to the entrenched influence of organized crime on the state's security forces, and the slow progress in reforming the local police, crime is expected to continue posing a significant risk to RCRC personnel throughout Morelos.*

***Sinaloa****is home to one of the most dominant drug cartels in Mexico – the Sinaloa Federation. The state capital Culiacan is known for its high murder rates, and travel in the rural areas of the country, especially off toll roads, is unsafe. The rate of carjackings in the state has recently increased.*

*In****Tabasco****, fuel theft remains a concern as criminal syndicates ‘milk' oil pipelines for financial benefit. Such incidents often result in clashes between criminals and state and federal police officers. Kidnapping is a concern that primarily affects local nationals, but nevertheless remains a relevant security concern for RCRC personnel throughout the state.*

*In****Tamaulipas****state, violent crime and high rates of kidnapping are endemic. Cartel-related shoot-outs continue to take place in the border towns of Matamoros and Reynosa, while Nuevo Laredo has seen a spike in violent crime, car jackings and robberies. A sharp increase has led to the state's kidnapping rates being one of the highest in Mexico. There is a heightened risk of carjacking and illegal checkpoints on the roads leading north to San Fernando and west to Ciudad Victoria. As such, road travel in Tamaulipas is not recommended. However, public gunfights and so-called 'narco-blockades' have become less frequent since 2012.*

***Veracruz****is subject to ongoing violence between organized criminal factions, including the CJNG and Los Zetas. The state serves as a primary drug-trafficking corridor, increasing the potential exposure of RCRC personnel to residual violence. Homicide and kidnapping rates in Veracruz have steadily increased as cartels battle for control* over favorable routes, prompting turf wars.

# Risk Assessment

Security incidents can occur anywhere and at any time. Therefore, RCRC personnel must never let down their guard, and must always keep a high security awareness both individually and collectively. All visitors are responsible for their own security and must take all possible measures to minimize or avoid potential risks. Always share security information with your colleagues and IFRC Country Cluster Office (in this case IFRC does not have Country Office, but please contact the Regional Security Coordinator / Liaison with Northern Cluster Jorge E. Zequeira *+507 6949 5546 / +507 6674 1584 / +507 6382 6355 / +57 313 500 3268).*

# Main risks to visitors in Mexico

## CRIME

* ***Opportunistic crime/petty theft***

*Street crimes such as pickpocketing and mugging pose a significant risk to foreign business visitors, particularly in urban areas. Crowded squares, transport terminals, the metro and buses are favored targets for pickpockets and bag-snatchers, who often work in teams. Criminals may stake out hotel lobbies and restaurants to grab bags or phones from distracted patrons. Robbers particularly target foreigners who appear to be rich, lost and/or drunk, as well as unaccompanied women. There have been reports of bar patrons being drugged and subsequently robbed; RCRC personnel shouldn’t drink while on mission. In case a person orders drinks at the bar, their preparation should be observed, and then not leave them unattended. There have also been occasional reports of the use of substandard or tainted alcohol by some bars, including in more upscale resorts. If possible, people should request a brand name or higher quality alcohol while ordering a drink, and only accept food and drinks from staff members in official venue uniforms.*

* ***Sexual assault***

*Female travellers are vulnerable to sexual assault, especially in resorts and deserted beaches. Most of these incidents take place at night or in the early morning and are often perpetrated by taxi drivers or hotel employees. Women should not travel alone after dark.*

* ***Fraud***

*RCRC personnel should be aware of the risk of card-skimming. RCRC Personnel should avoid withdrawing money from ATMs and if do so in extreme emergency, check if any suspicious devices are attached to the machine. Criminals also target users of ATMs; personnel should only use ATMs during normal business hours and at indoor commercial establishments, rather than machines that are accessible from the street. Both legitimate and imposter police officers have scammed tourists by extorting payments through the imposition of false fines or soliciting bribes.*

* ***Road banditry***

*All RCRC passengers in vehicles, both front and rear, must wear seatbelts.*

*Army units patrol highways across the country to prevent carjacking, robbery and kidnapping. Bandits and criminal groups pose a danger to RCRC personnel on isolated highways, particularly at night and, most often, in rural areas. Illegal roadblocks are more common in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas states. Auto thieves primarily target dark-coloured trucks and sports utility vehicles (SUVs). More sophisticated criminals may divert trucks to steal cargo. Armed criminals occasionally hold up buses, trucks, taxi passengers and private cars, and incidents can lead to short-term abductions. Many major highway routes consist of a toll road highway as well as an adjacent non-toll road that runs parallel to it. When possible, RCRC personnel should use the toll road as these are safer and more efficient, often bypassing towns or outlying ‘colonia' neighbourhoods.*

*Overland travel is dangerous, highlighting the need to travel in a RC vehicle with a trusted driver during daylight hours. In particular, RCRC personnel visitors should avoid the coastal road (Highway 200) between Acapulco (Guerrero) and Puerto Escondido (Oaxaca state); Highway 37 from Uruapan to Playa Azul (both Michoacán state); Highway 51 from Zitácuaro to Huétamo (both Michoacán); Route 180 from Mérida (Yucatán state) to Campeche state; rural highways in Oaxaca and Chiapas states; and Highway 186 from Chetumal (Quintana Roo state) to Villahermosa (Tabasco state). Criminals posing as police officers have been reported imposing fines or arresting motorists in order to rob or physically assault them.*

*RCRC personnel should also avoid Highway 40 connecting Reynosa (Tamaulipas state) with Monterrey (Nuevo Leon state) and roads connecting Matamoros and Reynosa with Ciudad Victoria (Tamaulipas). There have been kidnappings on the highway near San Fernando. RCRC personnel should also exercise heightened caution in the area known as the ‘Guanajuato Triangle,' roadways and rural areas connecting the cities of Celaya, Irapuato, Leon, Los Aposeos and Salamanca (all Guanajuato state). Increased activity related to fuel theft by criminal organizations along state-owned pipelines in the area has led to a sharp spike in violence since 2017.*

* ***Drug-related violence***

*Severe violence has displaced at least 380,000 people in Mexico between 2009 and 2018; some estimates put this figure closer to 1.1 million. Frequent clashes between rival cartels, or between armed criminal gangs and the security forces, have led to escalating violence along the northern border region, but in other areas as well. Cities such as Ciudad Juárez, Matamoros, Monterrey, Saltillo, Torreon, Reynosa and Veracruz have become infamous for frequent shoot-outs and violent crime associated with the cartels. These pose significant incidental risks to anyone in the vicinity.*

*The areas most affected by drug-related violence are the north-eastern border region (Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas), the Comarca Lagunera area (comprising parts of Durango and Coahuila), the state of Mexico, Tamaulipas and Veracruz, and states along the central Pacific coast in a region colloquially known as Tierra Caliente (Colima, Sinaloa, Jalisco, Guerrero, Michoacán). Criminal groups have been known to block highways as well as city streets to prevent the police from responding to clashes between cartels. These often take place in the northern states, as well as on the highway parallel to the border connecting the major cities of the frontera chica (small frontier), which include Matamoros, Reynosa, Ciudad Miguel Alemán, Rio Bravo (Tamaulipas), Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras (Coahuila) and Ciudad Juárez. SUVs are highly sought after by cartels for this purpose.*

## Kidnapping

*Mexico has one of the highest rates of abduction in the world. The majority of victims are local nationals, taken for the purpose of extorting a ransom payment, or to coerce someone else to take a certain action. However, foreigners have been targeted, with a few cases being fatal. RCRC personnel and expatriates should take specific precautions, including varying daily routines, and refrain from sharing itinerary and accommodation details with acquaintances or strangers, or from discussing business or financial affairs in public spaces.*

*Express kidnapping poses a higher risk to foreigners than kidnap-for-ransom, particularly in urban centres including the capital Mexico City, Guadalajara (Jalisco state) and Monterrey (Nuevo Leon state). In this type of attack, thieves cooperate with, or pose as, taxi drivers, forcing their passenger to withdraw cash (usually limited amounts) from ATMs. Express kidnappers are known to operate in upmarket locations, especially near banks and expensive restaurants, and to select victims whose appearance suggests that they are wealthy.*

*‘Virtual' kidnapping is also a concern. These incidents typically involve a call to a victim who is threatened and extorted for payment using deception and personal information. Sometimes a small piece of initial information like a first name or company name is used to intimidate a victim into revealing further compromising personal details with the ultimate goal of extorting or controlling the victim. To reduce the risk of this type of extortion, personnel should maintain a low profile, never provide personal information or talk about company affiliation or their exact location, including hotel room number, with any unknown callers. In the event of receiving such a call, RCRC personnel are advised to immediately hang up and dial the Security Focal point of the National Society Jose Gabriel López (55)10844590), the Security Regional Coordinator and International SOS Assistance Centre.*

## Terrorism

*The risk of international terrorism is low and is unlikely to affect RCRC personnel. There is a persistent, low risk that Islamic extremists belonging to or inspired by a transnational organization might attempt to enter the US via Mexico, or perpetrate an attack targeting US or European interests in the country. However, the threat is mitigated by the significant security presence in border cities and absence of communities that could be vulnerable to radicalization, and there is no known evidence to suggest that Islamist extremists are seeking to expand their activity or presence in Mexico.*

*There is also a low but latent risk from small militant groups that are based in the southern states, specifically Chiapas. While there have not been any recent reports of notable activity by such groups, they have not officially disarmed or committed to any formal peace accord. These organizations have previously targeted domestic infrastructure in an attempt to promote their political views, but do not usually attack foreign businesses.*

## Social Unrest

*Mexico is relatively stable politically, though large-scale protests and demonstrations over a variety of grievances occur frequently in urban centres, especially in the capital Mexico City, as well as the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Michoacán and Oaxaca. Protests can be either peaceful or involve clashes with police. The Mexican constitution prohibits foreigners from participating in political activities.*

*Protests over corruption are frequent in Mexico. The most prominent and frequent of these protests revolves around the disappearance of 43 students in Guerrero in 2014. These protests began in 2014 and focus on perceived corruption with the government's investigation into these disappearances. Fuel price hikes announced in January 2017 prompted protests, often involving roadblocks, across the country. Most recently, teachers' and workers' unions called for national demonstrations and roadblocks in early 2018, disrupting travel throughout many regions of Mexico, including the capital Mexico City, Oaxaca City (Oaxaca state), Villahermosa (Tabasco state), and some municipalities in Chiapas state. In July 2019, the Tabasco state legislature approved a controversial measure that will punish protesters who block access to businesses and public works projects with lengthy prison sentences. Strict enforcement of this measure, or the adoption of similar laws by other states, is likely to face strong opposition from the public and civil society groups.*

*State and municipal elections take place throughout the year. Protests by groups that are dissatisfied with election results can lead to localized violence for months after voting. Political violence also occurs sporadically in the states of Chiapas, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. Traffic may be disrupted in towns and state capitals and there are often clashes between protesters and the police. However, local political disputes are unlikely to affect personnel directly, provided that they avoid street gatherings.*

*'Celebratory gunfire' is not uncommon during major holidays and public festivals such as New Year celebrations (31 December – 1 January) and Independence Day (15 September).*

## Conflict

*Mexico is not involved in any conflict with any foreign powers or neighbours; however, military and police units continue to wage armed conflict and operations against drug cartels in the northern border region of Mexico, as well as other states with high levels of organized criminal activity.*

## Political Situation

*Mexico is a federal republic with power formally divided between the executive, legislative and judicial branches. However, the executive branch typically has the strongest voice. The president is elected for a single six-year term, commonly referred to as the 'sexenio'. Congress is bicameral and is comprised of a 128-seat Senate (upper house) and a 500-seat Chamber of Deputies (lower house). The three main parties in Mexico have traditionally been the National Action Party (PAN), the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), though the recently-formed National Regeneration Movement (Morena) party currently holds the executive branch and claims a plurality of representatives in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. Executive power was monopolized by the PRI for more than 70 years until the election of PAN leader Vicente Fox in 2000.  
  
Following a highly contentious election in July 2006, the Federal Electoral Tribunal, the highest electoral body in the country, formally recognized PAN candidate Felipe Calderón as president-elect. Despite a campaign of civil resistance headed by the leftist candidate Manuel López Obrador, which was aimed at forcing a complete, manual recount of the ballots, the tribunal upheld Calderón's narrow victory. PRI's Enrique Pena Nieto was elected president in 2012, while current president* ***Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office in December 2018****.*

*Relations with the US have been fraught since the election of US President Donald Trump in November 2016, as he frequently uses coercive tactics to induce favorable behavior from Mexico. This includes the threat of tariffs and border closures. However* ***the most contentious issue has proven to be the migration crisis caused from people coming from Central America (El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala), Cuba and Haiti, seeking passage to the US border*** *in order to claim asylum status in the US. The US government has pressured Mexico to take strong measures to secure their northern and southern borders. The newly-formed National Guard, which was meant to deter cartel violence, has instead been sent to the frontlines of the migration crisis, both at the border and within the interior of the country. This issue is liable to spark protests at border crossings, and low-level clashes at immigration facilities in Mexico.*

## Corruption

*Corruption is rampant in Mexico and often affects the efficient functioning of the government. The main forms of corruption – judicial, administrative and police corruption – persist throughout Mexico and are often linked to the drug cartels.*

*Entrenched corruption in federal, state, and local police departments is of particular concern for RCRC personnel. Dissatisfied by low salaries and inadequate incentives, most police officers give in to lucrative bribes; there have been reports of police officers stopping travellers on the pretext of committing a minor offence or violating traffic rules, only to negotiate an arbitrary fine with the driver. Such scams are most prevalent in the states of México, Tamaulipas and Querétaro and foreign travellers are often targeted, as they are perceived to be rich and carry large amounts of cash. Criminals often force the police into compliance by threatening to kill their family members. Always remember to use correctly the RCRC emblems while on mission.*

## Natural Disasters

*Mexico is prone to hurricanes on both its Pacific and Atlantic coasts, with most activity occurring between May and November.*

*Flash floods and mudslides are common during hurricane season, especially in mountainous areas, immediately following spells of heavy rain.*

*Mexico lies in seismically active zone and is subject to regular earthquakes and tremors, though they are rarely strong enough to be felt. Most recently, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake on 19 September 2017 struck Puebla state, killing at least 370 people and destroying several buildings. The temblor also affected the nearby capital Mexico City and Morelos state.*

*The country has several active volcanoes; two of the most notable are Popocatépetl, located 43 miles (70km) south-east of Mexico City and Volcán de Colima, located around 100 miles (162km) south of Guadalajara.*

## Humanitarian women

*Violence against women is endemic in many parts of the country, though foreign businesswomen are unlikely to fall victim to this type of crime. The risk of assault affects independent, low-budget tourists more than business travellers or RCRC women, but the risk still exists.*

*The risk is greatest in isolated rural areas of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Tabasco and Veracruz states, where a lacking and corrupt security force presence means that criminals can often act with impunity. Several attacks in recent years have taken place on quiet or deserted beaches, even at upscale resorts. The risk while travelling in these areas can be reduced by keeping to main roads in private cars or premier-class buses, and avoiding walking alone after dark.*

*In the border cities, especially Ciudad Juarez, female visitors should be extremely vigilant and should only move about the cities when accompanied, preferably by Mexican Red Cross members.*

**IFRC Security Phases**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The Federation operates a four-colour phase system to distinguish the security situation. | | |
| **White phase** | Normal | No major security concerns |
| **Yellow phase** | Heightened tension | Some security concerns, heightened security awareness initiated |
| **Orange phase** | Emergency situation | Access to beneficiaries limited, risk to RCRC personnel severe, tight security management needed |
| **Red phase** | Relocation / hibernation | Conditions do not allow work, risk to RCRC personnel extreme |

All RC Personnel must know the current security phase classification and it’s implication on the way of working and living in their area of operation or area that will be visited.

All personnel are to comply with any restrictions put in place by the senior field manager in accordance with the current situation and designated phase level.

The current phase in Mexicois **Yellow**

**GENERAL CONDUCT**

# Local Customs/Traditional Law

## Rule of Law

While the government retains fairly effective control over many parts of the country, its role is *diminished to non-existent in certain rural districts and peripheral urban areas. These areas are known for the presence of drug cartels, local caciques (political bosses who are especially prominent in Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guerrero states), guardias blancas (the private armies of landowners) and armed self-defense groups.*

*These vigilante militias formed, particularly in south-western states, in response to the continuing presence of drug cartels and high levels of drug-related crime, highlighting the government's inability to guarantee public security Vigilante groups have been set up in several states, including Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Jalisco, Morelos, Veracruz, Chihuahua and México. These groups often erect roadblocks, and may open fire on vehicles that do not stop.*

*The judiciary generally lacks efficiency and is marred by corruption and the infiltration of organized crime and drug cartels. The country has several police/security agencies. Increased funding, training from the government and US co-operation initiatives have helped modernize these agencies in recent years. This is especially true for the federal police force, which has a strength of approximately 40,000 and is the main law enforcement body. President Lopez Obrador has overseen the creation and deployment of the National Guard, a new security force which combines federal police, Army and Navy officers into a single contingent which in theory will increase professionalism and decrease corruption. However, the force is not without controversy; some federal police are protesting the initiative, claiming that they are not being given equal consideration for promotion opportunities, amongst other complaints.*

*Law enforcement agencies continue to struggle with corruption, hampering their ability to combat the drug cartels. They are also frequently targeted in attacks by such groups. Furthermore, rivalries between the federal and state police forces have affected operational efficiency. The government started using military units for anti-narcotics operations in 2006; however, this change has not reduced the overall level of violence. Members should minimize contact with law enforcement officers due to police corruption; instead, RCRC personnel should seek advice with Security’s focal points for assistance in dealing with the local police, and to ensure that crimes are registered properly.*

# Personal Documents

*RCRC personnel are advised to carry photocopies of their passports and other documentation at all times.*

# Cameras

*Never take pictures of military, police or security people. Always ask before taking pictures of people or places, even for professional purposes, if in doubt - Do Not Take pictures and put away your camera.*

# MEDICAL EMERGENCY

*In case of any emergency, please contact immediately the Northern Cluster Liaison, and Regional Security Coordinator Jorge E. Zequeira +507 6949 5546 / +507 6674 1584 / +507 6382 6355 / +57 313 500 3268; Chief Medical Officer - Sr Fernando Suinaga Cárdenas - (230) 670 02 76/670 12 74 or directly to Hannele Haggman, Senior Health Officer, Tel. +41 (0)22 730 4417, Fax +41 (0)22 730 4958, Mob. +41 (0)79 217 3319, Email* [*staff.health@ifrc.org*](mailto:staff.health@ifrc.org)*, Skype staff.health.officer.ifrc*

# Hospitals

*In case of severe illness or injury, IFRC recommends the following Hospitals / Doctors:*

* *Name: The American British Cowdray Medical Centre Santa Fe Campus - Address:* [*Av.Carlos*](http://Av.Carlos) *Graff Fernández 154, Cuajimalpa de Morelos, Tlaxcala, Mexico Tel : General inquiries : (+52) 55 1103 1600 / Emergencies: (+52) 55 1103 1666*
* *Name: The American British Cowdray Medical Centre Observatorio Campus - Address: Av. Sur 136 116, Álvaro Obregón, Las Americas, Mexico DF - Tel: General inquiries: (+52) 55 5230 8000 / Emergencies: (+52) 55 5230 8161*
* *Name: Hospital Medica Sur - Address: Puente de Piedra 150, Toriello Guerra, México, D.F. - Tel: General inquiries : 55 5424 7200 / Emergencies: 01 800 999 8743*

**PEP kits**

*Contact the National Society is the Security Focal Point - Jose Gabriel Lopez - (55)10844590*

# *Critical Incident Management*

*In the event of a Critical Incident (an incident that threatens or has impacted on the safety/security of IFRC personnel, assets or operations to the extent that there is significant disruption or incapacity to operate) the Country Cluster Critical /Regional Incident Management Plan will be put into effect.*

*At the field level any staff members involved in a critical incident will have the responsibility to Immediately detection and provide a first response to an imminent or actual crisis incident. Reporting of the incident to the Security Focal Point Jose Gabriel Lopez - (55)10844590 and Regional Security Coordinator Jorge E. Zequeira +507 6949 5546 / +507 6674 1584 / +507 6382 6355 / +57 313 500 3268, then supporting the Country Cluster CIMT /Regional CIMT if and as capable. Immediate life-saving decisions and actions as and where possible. Local management of the critical incident; liaising with the authorities, especially local law enforcement; gathering information about and assessing risks and transmitting findings to the CIMT at appropriate level as per normal security incident reporting.*

*At the local level any visitor to Mexico must first and foremost try to:*

*a. Ensure the wellbeing of those directly affected by the critical incident – self included;*

*b. Prevent further harm to other IFRC staff;*

*c. Ensure as far as possible, programme continuity;*

*d. Limit damage to IFRC assets and reputation.*

*In case of a critical incident in Mexico it is recommended that you contact in country who may be in measure to provide local support:*

* *President - Ing. Eduardo DE AGÜERO LEDUC - (5255) 10 84 45 05 /5255 10 84 45 10 /5255 10 84 45 45 -* [*presidencia@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx*](mailto:presidencia@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx)
* *General Director - Lic José Antonio MONROY - (5255) 10 84 45 05 /5255 10 84 45 10 /5255 10 84 45 45 -* [*jamonroy@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx*](mailto:jamonroy@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx)
* ***Security Focal Point at the Mexican Red Cross - Jose Gabriel Lopez - (55)10844590***

*As soon as safely possible take contact with Regional Security Coordinator Jorge E. Zequeira +507 6949 5546 / +507 6674 1584 / +507 6382 6355 / +57 313 500 3268. If needed or pertinent, please feel free also to contact Geneva Security Unit Manager Lars Tangen - Mob: +41 79 217 3371 or Senior Security Officers: Julian Harris - Mob: +41 79 251 8015 and Karl Julisson - Mob: +41 79 308 9842.*

**HAVE A SAFE STAY!!!**