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**Asylum seekers returned from Canada to US amidst COVID-19 pandemic face detention**

**Idil Atak** is an associate professor in the Department of Criminology and in the Law School of Ryerson University, Toronto. For many years, she has conducted research and published on the securitization of Canada’s refugee system and its implications for asylum seekers and irregular migrants. **Atak says the following about how the Corona pandemic is affecting migrants and refugees in Canada:**

As a response to the coronavirus pandemic, on March 20, 2020, Canada and U.S. have decided to close their common border to all but essential travel. The same day, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that asylum seekers who are crossing the border irregularly from the U.S. will be turned away when they reach Canada.

* Also read: [How are pandemics and stricter border controls affecting people on the move?](https://protectproject.w.uib.no/how-do-europes-shut-borders-affect-the-lives-of-people-on-the-move-two-protect-researchers-share-their-insights/)

The government justified the border closure by security concerns around screening people at irregular border crossings for COVID-19. The measure has been criticized by refugee advocates in a context where the US authorities declared that immigration enforcement, including detention and removal of non-citizens would continue during the pandemic. Canadian Council for Refugees, an NGO, expressed concerns that "people turned back to the US will be put in detention if they don't have status. Immigration detention in the U.S. was already a serious rights violation [and] the situation is even worse now with the pandemic putting detained people at risk."

Since January 2017, more than 54,000 third country nationals crossed irregularly the Canada-U.S. land border between ports of entry to claim asylum in Canada. The 2004 Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement requires asylum seekers to claim refugee protection in the first safe country - the US or Canada- they pass through. It leaves no option to these individuals, but to arrive irregularly in Canada since the agreement applies only to asylum claims made at official ports of entry along the land border.

**About Protect**

[Protect The Right to International Protection](http://protect-project.eu/) is an international, Horizon2020-funded research project led by Professor Hakan G. Sicakkan at the University of Bergen, Norway. The project studies international frameworks for refugee protection and consists of several experts in international law, and the refugee, - asylum, - and migration field.

**Contact our experts**

* [Idil Atak:](https://www.ryerson.ca/criminology/about-us/faculty-staff/faculty/atak-idil/) How is the pandemic affecting refugees and migrants on the US and Canadian border?
* [Theofanis Exadaktylos:](https://www.surrey.ac.uk/people/theofanis-exadaktylos) How are refugees in Greece affected by the pandemic?
* [Christine Jacbosen](https://www.uib.no/personer/Christine.M..Jacobsen): The consequences of Corona for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in France
* Jo Vearey: How is the South African lockdown affecting migrants in SA?
* [Elspeth Guild](https://www.qmul.ac.uk/law/staff/guild.html): Are Europe’s shut borders in conflict with UN’s refugee convention?
* [Frank Caestecker](https://biblio.ugent.be/person/801002037966): Pandemics and increased border control throughout history