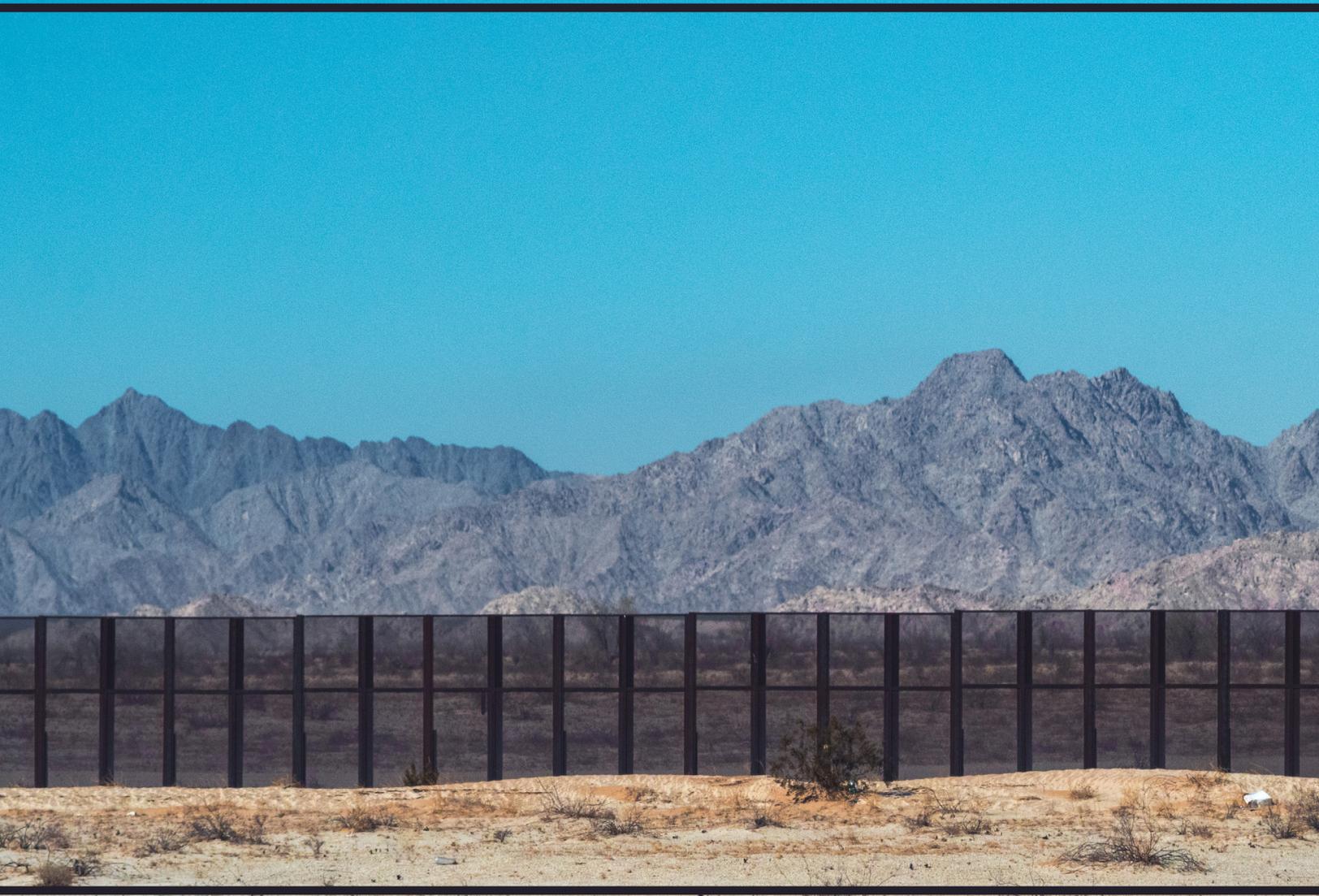


METERING UPDATE

AUGUST 2021



BY SAVITRI ARVEY AND CAITLYN YATES



INTRODUCTION

In April 2018, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) leadership issued guidance that allowed officers to limit asylum seekers' access to ports of entry. This guidance permitted CBP officers stationed at the United States' international boundary with Mexico to inform arriving asylum seekers that U.S. ports of entry were full. Simultaneously, CBP officers also began accepting a specified number of asylum seekers each day, in a process that is known as metering.¹

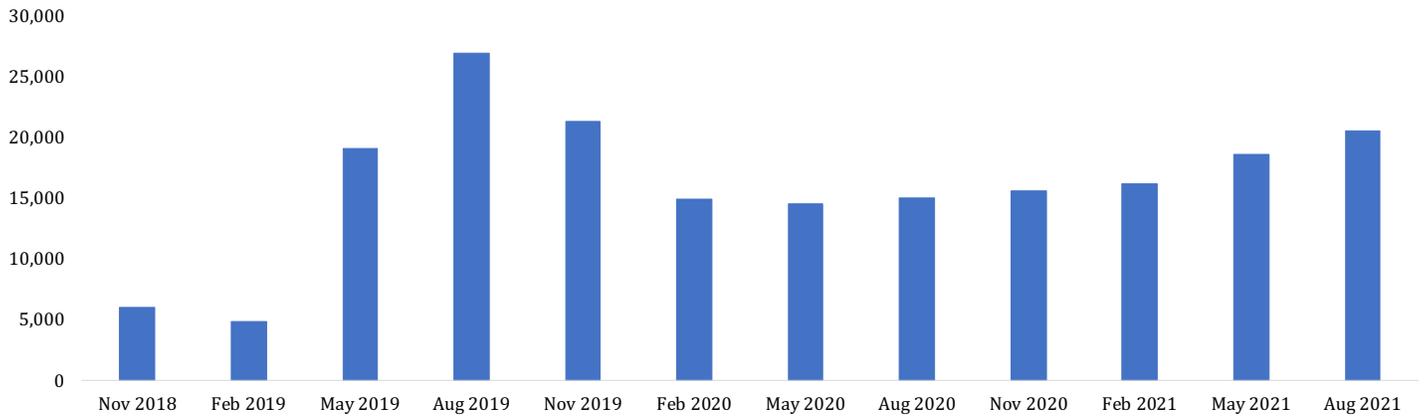
As metering spread across the border, a subsequent backlog of asylum seekers grew in Mexico's border cities. Mexican authorities and civil society groups responded by providing humanitarian assistance and creating informal waitlists. Since November 2018, the Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas at Austin—at times in collaboration with the Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies at the University of California San Diego and the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute—has documented these informal lists through quarterly updates.

As the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, CBP stopped processing asylum requests at ports of entry altogether. This change took place via a Center for Disease Control's (CDC) regulation based on Title 42 authority and an order that blocked entry for individuals—including asylum seekers—attempting to enter the United States through Mexico without valid travel documents.² The use of Title 42 to restrict asylum seeker processing continues to be controversial and questioned by public health experts.³

Since taking office, President Joe Biden has promised to restore asylum processing at the U.S.-Mexico border.⁴ However, Title 42 and the order that blocks entry for individuals without travel documents remain in place, which prevents the resumption of asylum processing at ports of entry.⁵ In late March 2021, in response to litigation by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) regarding the enforcement of Title 42 on families, the Biden administration began permitting humanitarian organizations to refer cases of particularly vulnerable asylum seekers to be exempted from Title 42 and processed at ports of entry.⁶ Since then, the Biden administration has also supported a separate, parallel Title 42 exemption process made up of a consortium of NGOs to make similar referrals based on vulnerability.⁷ Both Title 42 exemption processes will conclude in August 2021. While there has been no systematic attempt to incorporate individuals from the asylum waitlists into these processes, a small number of individuals on asylum waitlists were processed into the United States under these exemptions.

This report provides an update on asylum waitlists, asylum seekers, and migrant shelters along the U.S.-Mexico border amid CBP's asylum processing suspension and the Title 42 exemption processes. It documents approximately 20,600 asylum seekers on waitlists in eight Mexican border cities. This is an approximately 10 percent increase from May 2021, when there were 18,680 asylum seekers on the lists.

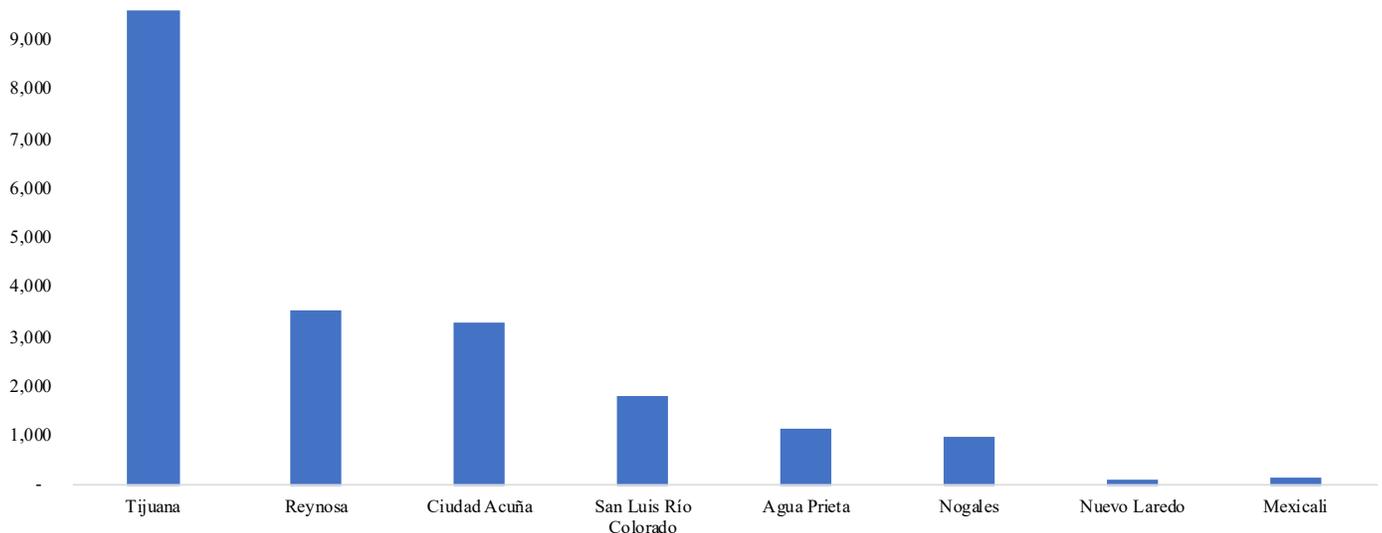
Figure 1: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists (November 2018 - August 2021)



Author's elaboration. Data collected from November 2018 to August 2021.

The number of individuals on asylum waitlists should not be taken as the definitive number of asylum seekers at the border. While list managers report that some of these asylum seekers continue to wait in Mexican border cities for their turn to request asylum at a port of entry, other individuals have entered the United States between ports of entry, been deported to their countries of origin, or moved to other cities in Mexico's interior. A small number of others on the lists have also been processed into the U.S. under the Title 42 exemption processes.

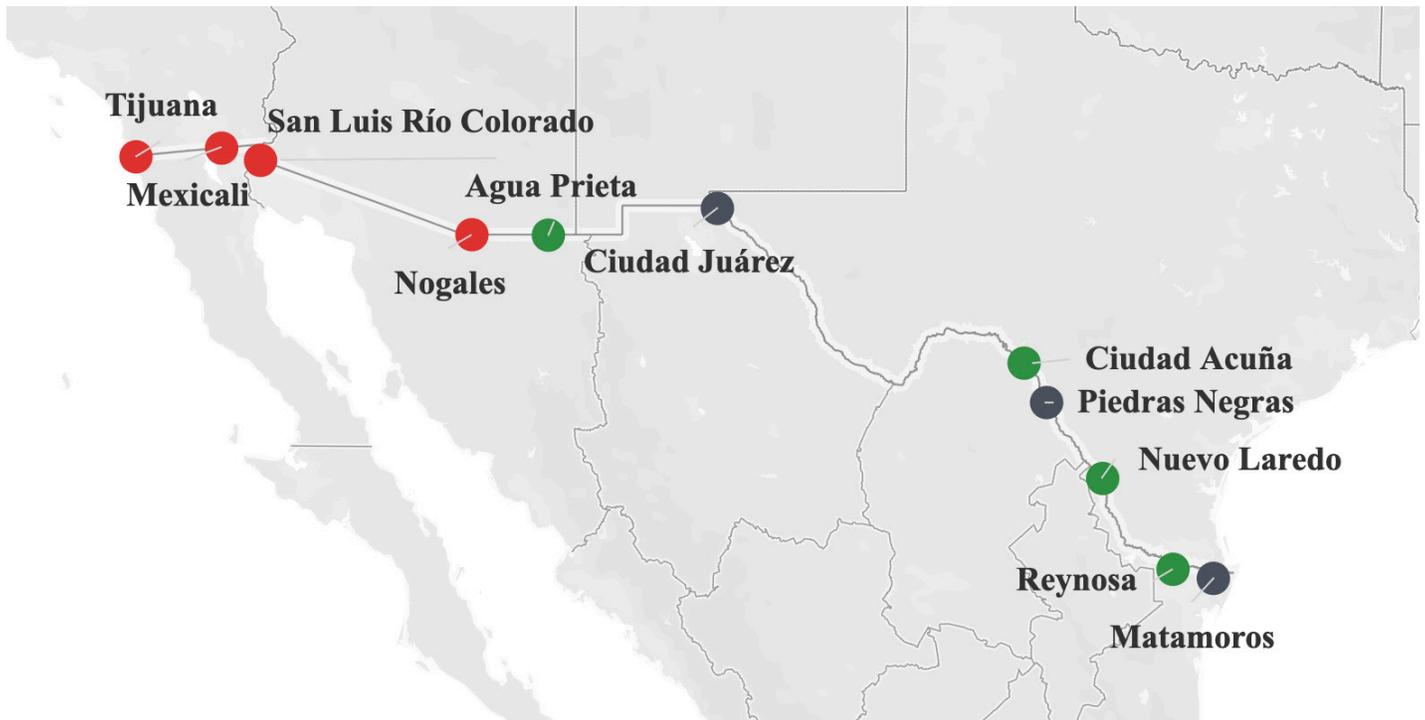
Figure 2: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists by City (August 2021)



Author's elaboration. Data collected from July 26, 2021 to August 1 2021.

Additionally, in March 2020, most of the asylum waitlists closed to new entrants and the number of asylum seekers on these lists has remained frozen. For example, Tijuana’s waitlist has 9,600 registrants (approximately 40 percent of all individuals on asylum waitlists), and this number has remained unchanged since March 2020. Further, many asylum seekers who have arrived at the border over the past year have been unable to sign up on a waitlist, since many remain closed. Figure 3 shows the status of asylum waitlists by Mexican border city. Green circles indicate cities where asylum waitlists are open; red circles indicate cities with names on the asylum waitlists that are closed to new entries; and grey circles indicate cities where waitlists have been dissolved after no names remained.

Figure 3: Mexican Border Cities By List Status (August 2021)



Author’s elaboration. Data collected from July 26, 2021 to August 1, 2021.

Asylum waitlists remain open in Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Acuña, and Agua Prieta. Since May 2021, approximately 1,920 asylum seekers have signed up on these four lists. While some asylum seekers have only been waiting a few months, others have been waiting for up to almost two years. While the number of names on most of the lists (open or closed) have remained the same or increased, the number of names on the list in Nuevo Laredo decreased from approximately 250 in May 2021 to approximately 100 in August 2021 as a result of individuals being processed off the list through the Title 42 exemption processes.

Asylum seekers—both on and off waitlists—continue to face unstable living conditions and security risks in Mexican border cities.⁸ Many shelters are full, since some shelters are operating at a reduced capacity, while others remain closed altogether due to COVID-19 restrictions. This is happening while arrivals have increased in the past few months, including through Title 42 expulsions back into Mexico. A number of individuals are

renting rooms, staying in motels, and living on the streets or in encampments where they face poor hygiene and heightened insecurity. Approximately 2,000 individuals are estimated to be living in the El Chaparral tent camp in Tijuana, and an estimated 3,600 people reside in a tent camp in Reynosa.

Certain groups of asylum seekers on waitlists continue to experience additional challenges. Civil society organizations report that Black, LGBTQ and Indigenous asylum seekers have faced targeted discrimination by local authorities while waiting in Mexican border cities. In addition, asylum seekers without documentation in Mexico have faced differing levels of access to vaccines across border cities. Non-Spanish speaking asylum seekers have also struggled to access information about the evolving pandemic guidelines.⁹

The August 2021 metering update draws on phone and WhatsApp interviews with asylum seekers, government officials, and civil society organizations on both sides of the border. It also relies on local news articles to fill in any gaps.

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2021

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Maximum Estimated Time on Waitlist	Recent Changes
Matamoros, Tamaulipas <i>N/A</i>	Closed	0 people <i>July 26, 2021</i>	N/A	<p>There are no asylum waitlists in Matamoros, and no one remains on the list.</p> <p>Currently, shelters are open, and individuals are permitted to enter with a negative COVID-19 test. However, all shelters are currently at capacity and recently arrived individuals are renting rooms or staying in motels.¹⁰</p> <p>Around 200 individuals are estimated to arrive each week. The majority of these individuals are Mexican, Haitian, and Honduran, although there are also fewer numbers of Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and Cubans.</p>
Reynosa, Tamaulipas <i>Senda de Vida migrant shelter</i>	Open	3,529 people <i>July 27, 2021</i>	18 to 19 months	<p>The Senda de Vida migrant shelter continues to manage a waitlist for asylum seekers in Reynosa. The list remains open.</p> <p>Since May, approximately 1,150 individuals have signed up. The list manager reports that some individuals on the list may have entered the U.S. through the Title 42 exemption process.</p> <p>The shelters in Reynosa remain open but are at capacity. Many individuals are renting rooms and living on the street. An estimated 3,600 people live in the Plaza de las Americas encampment.¹¹ The majority of individuals arriving in Reynosa are from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico, but there is also a growing number of Haitians.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2021 (continued)

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Maximum Estimated Time on Waitlist	Recent Changes
Reynosa, Tamaulipas <i>(continued)</i>				<p>In June, Senda de Vida had a COVID-19 outbreak.¹² The migrant encampment also had an outbreak. Those who tested positive were moved to a housing facility to quarantine.¹³</p> <p>In mid-July, the Reynosa Municipal Government sent a notice to Senda de Vida that stated that the shelter was operating in a flood zone and would be demolished within five days. As of July 23, the shelter has been issued a 30-day extension to continue operations, while it finds an alternative site.¹⁴</p>
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas <i>Network of six migrant shelters managing six separate lists (one per shelter)</i>	Open	~100 people <i>July 29, 2021</i>	19 months	<p>The asylum waitlists in Nuevo Laredo remain open and a network of six migrant shelters manage six separate waitlists.</p> <p>Currently, there are an estimated 100 people on the city’s waitlists. This is a decrease of about 150 people since May as some asylum seekers on the lists have been processed into the United States through the Title 42 exemption processes.</p> <p>The city’s shelters are all at capacity. As a result, many individuals are renting rooms or staying in motels and some are living in Monterrey.</p> <p>The most common nationalities for asylum seekers arriving in Nuevo Laredo are Honduras and Guatemala followed by Mexico, Venezuela, and Cuba.</p>
Piedras Negras, Coahuila <i>N/A</i>	Closed	0 people <i>July 26, 2021</i>	N/A	<p>The asylum waitlist in Piedras Negras has been closed since March 2020 and no one remains on the waitlist.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2021 (continued)

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Maximum Estimated Time on Waitlist	Recent Changes
Piedras Negras, Coahuila <i>(continued)</i>				<p>All shelters in the city remain closed due to the municipal government’s COVID-19 guidelines. Since the shelters are closed, the majority of asylum seekers in the city are living on the street, staying in abandoned houses, or renting rooms. Shelters are distributing approximately 150 meals to migrants each day.</p> <p>Approximately 350 to 400 individuals arrive in the city each week, the majority of whom are Honduran or Mexican.</p>
Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila <i>Civil Protection (Protección Civil): individuals & families</i>	Open	<p>3,289 people</p> <p>925 individuals</p> <p>2,364 people traveling in families</p> <p><i>July 28, 2021</i></p>	18 months	<p>Civil Protection runs two lists in Ciudad Acuña: one for families and one for individuals. The lists remain open and, since May, more than 760 people have signed up.</p> <p>The municipal government provided three sports complexes to be used as shelters for families, and they each have the capacity for 100 people. Currently, there are 260 in the three shelters.</p> <p>There are also about 200 people, including many families, who are sleeping in a public plaza, and others are renting rooms. Many have arrived from Piedras Negras or cities in the neighboring state of Tamaulipas.</p> <p>Every day, approximately 100 people arrive in the city. Many of them cross the river and turn themselves in to U.S. authorities. They are from Haiti, Venezuela, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, and some are from Brazil and Belize.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2021 (continued)

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Maximum Estimated Time on Waitlist	Recent Changes
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua <i>N/A</i>	Closed	0 people <i>July 28, 2021</i>	N/A	<p>The asylum waitlist in Ciudad Juárez remains closed and no one remains on the list.</p> <p>There are approximately 2,500 individuals staying in the city’s migrant shelters, including the new shelter that was created in the Kiko Romero gymnasium. This, though, does not represent the full migrant population in the city. A large number of individuals are renting rooms in apartments or hotels.</p>
Agua Prieta, Sonora <i>CAME migrant shelter</i>	Open	1,100 to 1,200 people <i>July 28, 2021</i>	21 months	<p>The CAME migrant shelter manages the open waitlist in Agua Prieta. Since May 2021, between 100 to 200 names have been added to the list. The majority of the people on the list are Mexican.</p> <p>The list manager continues to accept new entrants by phone but discourages asylum seekers from signing up due to the COVID-19 border restrictions. The list manager has referred people to Nogales, where Title 42 exemption processes have taken place.</p>
Nogales, Sonora <i>Municipal government</i>	Closed	990 people <i>July 28, 2021</i>	22 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Nogales has remained closed since March 2020.</p> <p>Some of the people on the list have entered the U.S. through the Title 42 exemption process. The Florence Project referred 253 people to the process that reported being displaced at the border since before March 2020.</p> <p>The number of people arriving at Kino Border Institute has nearly tripled over the past month. KBI has seen significant numbers of Mexicans arriving from small towns in Guerrero due to organized crime. The Don Bosco shelter is currently hosting nearly 400 individuals.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2021 (continued)

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Maximum Estimated Time on Waitlist	Recent Changes
San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora <i>Casa del Migrante La Divina Providencia</i>	Closed	1,798 people <i>July 27, 2021</i>	21 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in San Luis Río Colorado is closed with approximately 1,798 names on the list. The Casa del Migrante La Divina Providencia has been closed since November 2020.</p> <p>Many of the Central American and Mexican asylum seekers on the list have gone to live in Mexico’s interior and continue to call the shelter for updates. Most of the Cubans and Venezuelans on the list have left Mexico.</p> <p>Due to extreme heat, the San Luis Río Colorado Fire Department and the Department of Public Safety opened cooling centers in July which will also operate as migrant shelters.¹⁵</p>
Mexicali, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta</i>	Closed	150 people <i>July 26, 2021</i>	22 to 23 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Mexicali has remained closed since March 2020 and approximately 150 asylum seekers have been on the list since that time.</p> <p>As of June, shelters in Mexicali were permitted to re-open, though each shelter restricts the number of new entrants and some require a negative COVID-19 test. In early July, the Refugio del Migrante shelter burned down, displacing 200 individuals who had been living there.¹⁶</p> <p>Recently arrived individuals are staying in shelters, since capacity remains, and most are from Guatemala, Honduras, or Mexico.</p>

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Maximum Estimated Time on Waitlist	Recent Changes
Tijuana, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta / Support from asylum seekers</i>	Closed	9,600 people <i>July 30, 2021</i>	22 to 23 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Tijuana has remained closed since March 2020 and approximately 9,600 names are on the list. A small number of these individuals have been processed into the U.S. through the Title 42 exemption processes.</p> <p>Individuals waiting to request asylum continue to live in the El Chaparral tent camp near the San Ysidro port of entry. As of early July, an estimated 2,000 migrants resided in the camp.¹⁷ Also in early July, the heads of INM and Mexico’s Secretary of the Interior visited the camp and met with the governor of Baja California to discuss plans to move individuals from the camp.¹⁸ Mexican authorities have offered encampment residents the chance to move to the federal shelter, “Centro Integrador Migrante Carmen Serdán”, which currently houses roughly 500 individuals.¹⁹</p> <p>In June, Baja California health officials announced a plan to vaccinate migrants.²⁰ So far, at least 1,300 Pfizer vaccines have been earmarked for migrants.²¹ In the last few weeks, there have also been chickenpox outbreaks in the encampment and in several shelters.²²</p>

**The numbers should be interpreted as a general range rather than an exact figure.*

ENDNOTES

- 1 In June 2018, then-DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen signed a memo that authorized port directors to begin metering at all U.S. ports of entry. This memorandum also informed port directors that processing individuals without travel documents—including asylum seekers—was not a priority, and that CBP personnel should instead focus on narcotics interdiction and stopping currency smuggling. Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, “CBP Has Taken Steps to Limit Processing of Undocumented Aliens at Ports of Entry”, October 27, 2020, <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2020-10/OIG-21-02-Oct20.pdf>.
- 2 The order also allows Border Patrol agents to immediately expel all apprehended individuals, including asylum seekers, to the nearest Mexican city or to their home countries. Department of Health and Human Services, “Control of Communicable Diseases; Foreign Quarantine: Suspension of Introduction of Persons Into United States From Designated Foreign Countries or Places for Public Health Purposes,” March 24, 2020, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/24/2020-06238/control-of-communicable-diseases-foreign-quarantine-suspension-of-introduction-of-persons-into>.
- 3 “July 2021 Letter to HHS Secretary Becerra and CDC Director Walensky on the Title 42 Order,” July 1, 2021, <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/program-forced-migration-and-health/july-2021-letter-hhs-secretary-becerra-and-cdc-director-walensky-title-42-order>.
- 4 On February 2, 2021, President Biden signed an executive order on regional migration and asylum processing that stated that DHS, HHS, and the CDC would soon begin steps to resume asylum processing at the border, “consistent with public health and safety and capacity constraints.”
- 5 On August 2, the CDC extended [Title 42 restrictions](#), citing surging COVID-19 cases.
- 6 The ACLU Title 42 exemption process allowed up to 55 families to enter each day. This process will end in mid-August. The second Title 42 exemption process is hosted by a consortium of organizations along the border and allows up to 250 people per day to enter the United States if they are deemed to be particularly vulnerable individuals. This process is set to expire on August 31, 2021. Jihan Abdalla, “Rights groups decry ‘flawed’ US asylum exemptions process,” Aljazeera, June 17, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/17/rights-groups-decry-flawed-us-asylum-exemptions-process>.
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- 8 By June 2021, Human Rights First had tracked at least 3,250 violent crimes committed against migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border since President Biden took office in January 2021. Human Rights First, “Update: Grave Dangers Continue for Asylum Seekers Blocked In, Expelled to Mexico by Biden Administration,” June 22, 2021, <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/update-grave-dangers-continue-asylum-seekers-blocked-expelled-mexico-biden-administration>.
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- 14 “Dan suspensión provisional a demolición de albergue migrante en Reynosa,” El Universal, July 23, 2021, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/dan-suspension-provisional-demolicion-de-albergue-migrante-en-reynosa>.
- 15 Christian Galeno, “San Luis Rio Colorado Opens Temporary Cooling Centers Doubling as Shelters,” KYMA, June 17, 2021, <https://kyma.com/news/2021/06/17/san-luis-rio-colorado-opens-temporary-cooling-centers-doubling-as-shelters/>.
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