METERING UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2022

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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. Two months later, 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.[1]

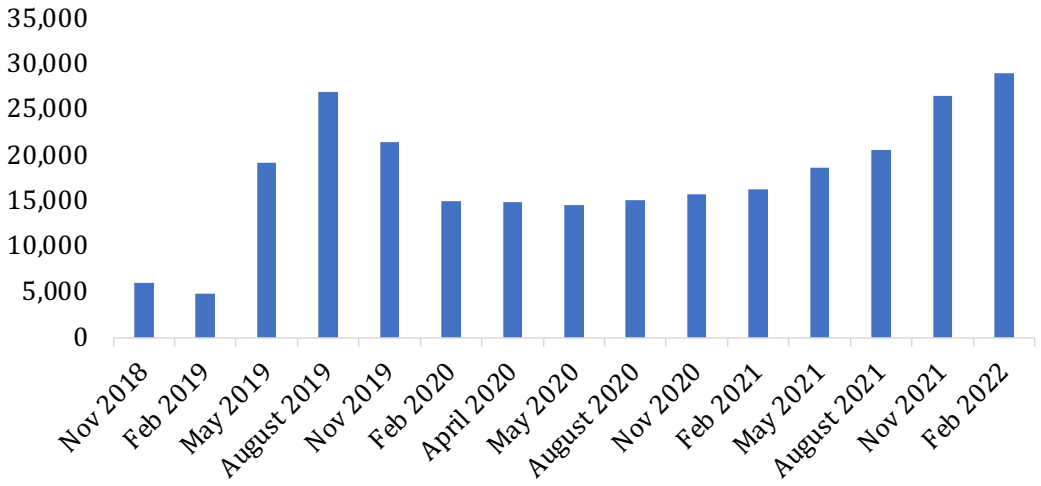
As metering spread across the border and a subsequent backlog of asylum seekers grew in Mexico's border cities, Mexican authorities and civil society groups responded by providing humanitarian assistance and creating informal waitlists. Since November 2018, the Robert Strauss Center for International 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] 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. However, in September 2021, a federal district court judge determined that metering violated provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and required officers to immediately inspect and process asylum seekers at the U.S. border. In early November 2021, CBP also rescinded several memos related to metering and issued new guidance.[5] It is still unclear if and how the guidance will differ operationally from the processes outlined in the rescinded memos.

This report provides an update on asylum waitlists, asylum seekers, and migrant shelters along the U.S.-Mexico border amid the suspension of CBP's asylum processing since June 2018 and the Title 42 exemption processes that ended in August 2021. It documents approximately 28,995 asylum seekers on waitlists in eight Mexican border cities. This is an approximately 9 percent increase from November 2021, when there were 26,505 asylum seekers on the lists. This is also the largest number of individuals on metering waitlists at the border since the Strauss Center reports began in November 2018.

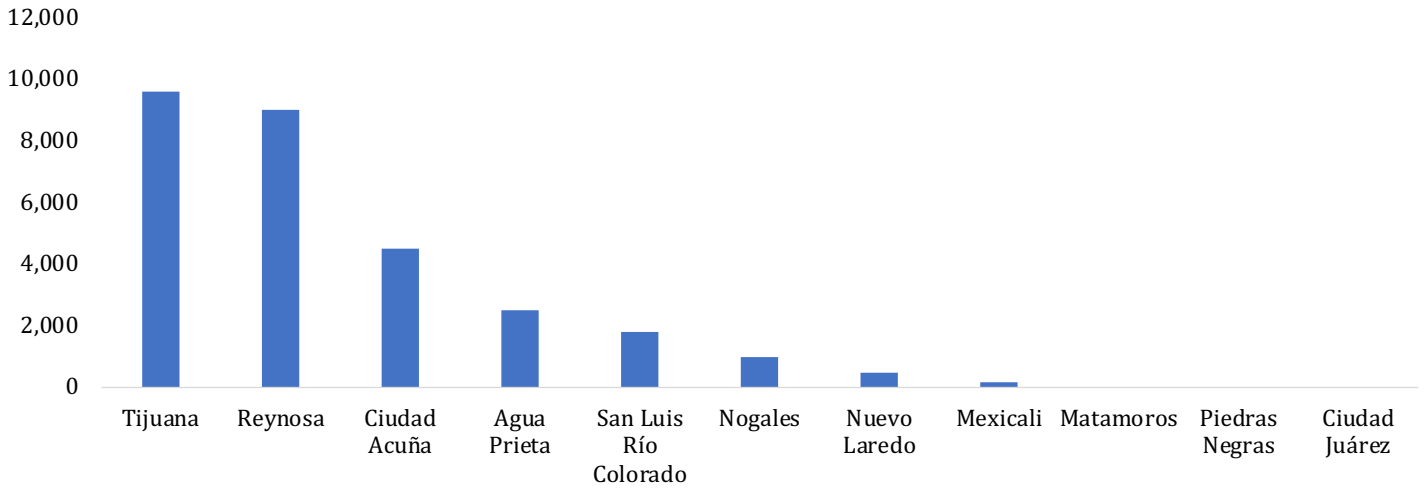
Figure 1: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists (November 2018 - February 2022)



Author's elaboration. Data collected from November 2018 to February 2022.

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. Additional individuals on the lists were processed into the United States under the previous Title 42 exemption processes.

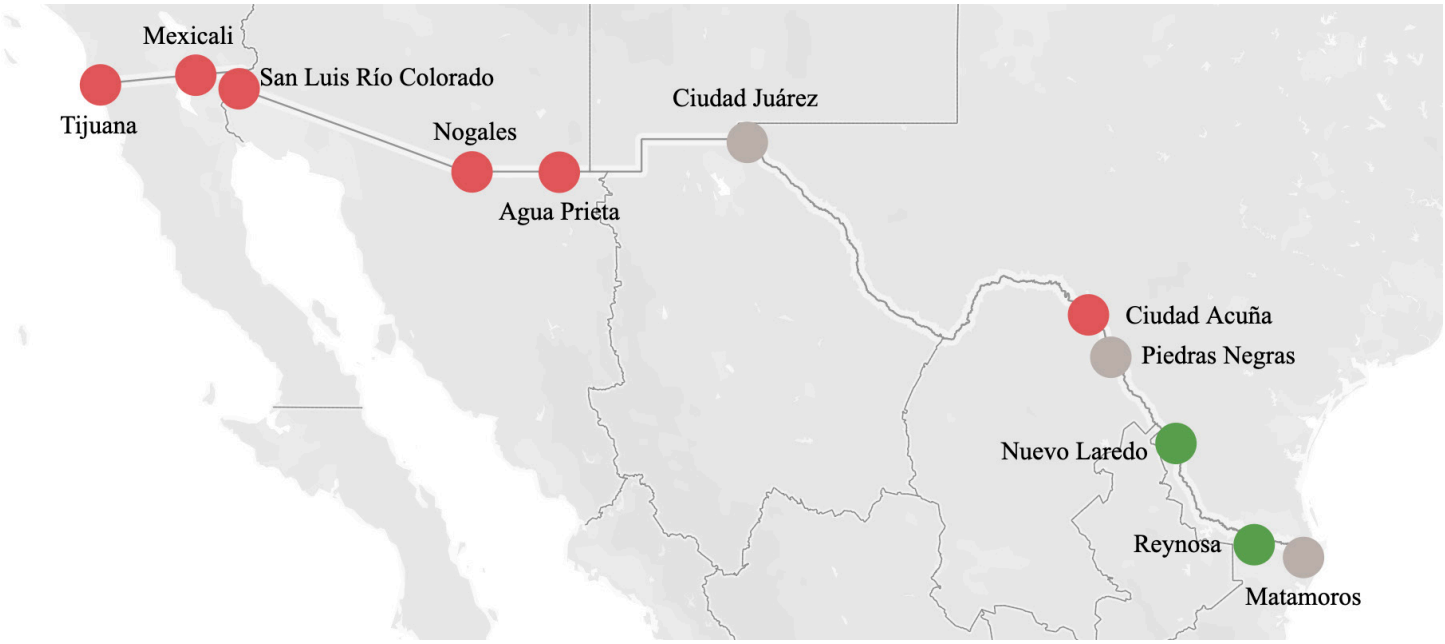
Figure 2: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists by City (February 2022)



Author's elaboration. Data collected from February 1, 2022 to February 4, 2022.

Since March 2020, many of the asylum waitlists closed to new entrants and the number of asylum seekers on some lists has remained frozen. For example, Tijuana's waitlist has 9,600 registrants (approximately 33 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 two years 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 asylum waitlists that are closed to new entries; and gray circles indicate cities where waitlists have been completely dissolved.

Figure 3: Mexican Border Cities By List Status (February 2022)



Author's elaboration. Data collected from February 1, 2022 to February 4, 2022.

Asylum waitlists remain open in only two cities: Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo. Since November 2021, approximately 2,200 asylum seekers have signed up on the Reynosa list, along with another 350 people in Ciudad Acuña before that city's lists closed in January 2022. In contrast, Nuevo Laredo saw an approximately 28 percent decrease in the number of individuals waiting on its shelters' lists. While some asylum seekers have only been waiting a few months, others have been waiting for one year or more.

Asylum seekers—both on and off waitlists—continue to face unstable living conditions and security risks in Mexican border cities. Many shelters are full, and some shelters continue to operate at a reduced capacity. In Piedras Negras, the shelters remain closed altogether due to municipal level COVID-19 restrictions. Along the border, a number of individuals are renting rooms, staying in hotels, and living on the streets or in encampments where they face poor hygiene and heightened insecurity. An estimated 1,500 to 2,400 people reside in a tent camp in Reynosa.

Certain groups of asylum seekers 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 in Mexican border cities. Parents have also reported difficulties finding childcare that would enable them to work and earn a salary, and additional challenges with enrolling their children in local schools.

The February 2022 metering update draws on phone and WhatsApp interviews with asylum seekers, government officials, and civil society organizations on both sides of the border from February 1, 2022 through February 4, 2022. It also relies on local news articles to fill in any gaps.

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2022

Mexican City *List Administrator*	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List *Date Recorded*	Recent Changes
Matamoros, Tamaulipas *N/A*	Closed	0 people *February 1, 2022*	There are no asylum waitlists in Matamoros. Currently, shelters in the city are open but they require a negative COVID test for entry. The NGO Global Response Management provides these rapid COVID-19 tests to individuals arriving in Matamoros. Some individuals are also renting rooms or staying in hotels. Civil society members have estimated that there could be 1,000 to 2,000 people waiting in the city.[6] These groups report that most migrants who are residing in the city's shelters have been there for two months or more. The majority of people arriving in Matamoros are from Mexico (Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Chiapas), Honduras, and Haiti, with smaller numbers of people arriving from Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba. While there are no asylum waitlists in Matamoros, a non-profit group operating in the city keeps a list for humanitarian parole.
Reynosa, Tamaulipas *Senda de Vida migrant shelter*	Open	~9,000 people *February 2, 2022*	The Senda de Vida migrant shelter continues to manage a waitlist for asylum seekers in Reynosa. The list remains open. Approximately 2,200 migrants have registered their names on the list since November 2021. The shelters in Reynosa are open but are at or past capacity. The Senda de Vida shelter hosts approximately 1,100 residents. Some individuals in the city are also renting rooms and others are living on the street. The majority of people on the waitlist are from Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. An estimated 1,500 to 2,400 individuals continue to live in the tent encampment at the Plaza de las Americas next to the Hidalgo port of entry. Many of these individuals are Central Americans who were expelled from the United States through Title 42, but encampment residents also include

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2022 (continued)

Mexican City *List Administrator*	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List *Date Recorded*	Recent Changes
Reynosa, Tamaulipas ***(continued)***			new arrivals to the city. In January 2022, these residents created their own documentation of the most vulnerable individuals living in the camp. In January 2022, the municipal government also approved the construction of a new shelter, which will house many of the most vulnerable migrants in Reynosa, including most—if not all—of the encampment residents. The shelter is estimated to be completed by the end of February 2022.[7] While migrants continue to arrive in Reynosa, an estimated 70 to 150 people are also returned to Reynosa through Title 42 expulsions each day, including families with minors.
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas *Network of migrant shelters managing separate lists (one per shelter)*	Open	~460 people *February 1, 2022*	In Nuevo Laredo, migrant shelters manage separate lists. Some of these lists function differently than in other cities, as the individuals need to be staying within the shelter to be on the list. Two shelters also reported that they have shelter registries instead of asylum waitlists, but that these lists could be turned into asylum waitlists if the United States restarted asylum processing. Currently, there are a combined 460 people on the city's waitlists and the two shelter registries. This is a decrease of 128 people since November 2021 as the number of arrivals to Nuevo Laredo has decreased in recent months. This decrease is due to both the ongoing security situation in the city and the increasing tendency of migrants to wait in Mexican interior cities, such as Monterrey. Some of the city's shelters are sparsely occupied. Although, individuals also rent rooms or stay in hotels. Migrants do not sleep on the street or in encampments, given Nuevo Laredo's security situation. The majority of migrants arriving in Nuevo Laredo are from Mexico (primarily from Guerrero), followed by individuals from Honduras and El Salvador. Since November 2021, there has been an uptick in Venezuelan arrivals, along with small but consistent numbers of people from Cuba, Haiti, and Angola.

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2022 (continued)

Mexican City *List Administrator*	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List *Date Recorded*	Recent Changes
Piedras Negras, Coahuila *N/A*	Closed	0 people *February 1, 2022 and February 3, 2022*	The asylum waitlist in Piedras Negras has been closed since March 2020 and no one remains on the waitlist. All shelters in the city are closed due to the municipal government's COVID-19 guidelines. Despite the new mayor's campaign promises to re-open migrant shelters, there is currently no timeline for the shelters to open. Asylum seekers in the city are living on the street, staying in abandoned houses, or renting rooms. Shelters continue to distribute between 100 and 200 meals per day to migrants. Approximately 200 individuals arrive in the city each week, with the majority from Honduras or Mexico and smaller numbers of people from Haiti, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Guatemala. On January 2, 2022, a group of between 100 to 400 mostly Central American asylum seekers entered International Bridge 2 in Piedras Negras to demand access to asylum in the United States. In response, CBP temporarily shut down the bridge.[8]
Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila *Civil Protection (Protección Civil): individuals & families*	Closed	4,497 people Individuals: 1,125 *Families: ~3,372 people traveling in families (843 families)* *February 3, 2022*	Civil Protection maintains two lists in Ciudad Acuña: one for families and one for individuals. The lists closed on January 18, 2022, and are no longer accepting new people. When the lists closed, they included approximately 4,497 people. This is an increase of around 350 people (73 individuals and 69 families) since November 2021. In January 2022, Civil Protection noted that people were still arriving in the city from Haiti, Cuba, and Central American countries. However, they noted that the number of arrivals was lower than at the end of 2021.[9]

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2022 (continued)

Mexican City *List Administrator*	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List *Date Recorded*	Recent Changes
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua *N/A*	Closed	0 people *February 3, 2022*	The asylum waitlist in Ciudad Juárez is closed and no one remains on the list. As of January 19, 2022, COESPO estimated that there were around 3,000 people staying in the city's shelters, and that these shelters were near capacity. The agency estimated that about 30 percent of the migrants in Ciudad Juárez stay at shelters, which would mean a total of approximately 9,000 to 10,000 migrants in the city.[10] Currently, Haitians and Mexicans from the country's southern states are among the most common nationalities arriving in the city.[11]
Agua Prieta, Sonora *CAME migrant shelter*	Closed	2,500 people *February 3, 2022*	The asylum waitlist was closed in August 2021, and 2,500 names remain on the list. The list manager reports that some individuals on the list remain in Agua Prieta while others are waiting in other Mexican cities. Most individuals on the list are from Mexico, and primarily from the state of Guerrero. Migrants continue to arrive in Agua Prieta, though the number of arrivals has decreased in recent months. The shelters remain open and are not at capacity. Migrants are mostly from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico, with fewer individuals from Honduras. The majority of migrants in Agua Prieta are individuals who were returned under Title 42. Local organizations estimate that between 150 and 200 migrants are expelled to Agua Prieta each day. Many of them quickly leave the city for other nearby towns in Sonora.

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2022 (continued)

Mexican City *List Administrator*	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List *Date Recorded*	Recent Changes
Nogales, Sonora *Municipal government*	Closed	990 people *February 3, 2022*	The asylum waitlist in Nogales has remained closed since March 2020 and has not been updated. Asylum seekers continue to arrive in the city, mostly from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, with smaller numbers from Haiti and Nicaragua. Currently, there are an estimated 200 to 300 asylum-seeking families residing in Nogales.[12]
San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora *Casa del Migrante La Divina Providencia*	Closed	1,798 people *February 2, 2022*	The asylum waitlist in San Luis Rio Colorado is closed with approximately 1,798 names on the list. Local civil society reports that asylum seekers continue to arrive in the city. These asylum seekers are principally from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Cuba, and Mexico. The Casa del Migrante La Divina is operating at a 50 percent overnight capacity. However, the shelter is operating at full capacity for daily activities, such as providing meals, clothing, and daytime stays.
Mexicali, Baja California *Grupo Beta*	Closed	150 people *November 9, 2021*	The asylum waitlist in Mexicali remains closed since March 2020 and 150 asylum seekers are on the list. Most of the individuals remain in Mexicali, where they are waiting to request asylum. Mexicali's shelters remain open but are at or past capacity. Some shelters require a negative COVID-19 test to enter while others do not. Since December 2021, most migrants arriving to Mexicali are from Haiti. Local shelters estimate that at least 3,000 Haitians are currently in Mexicali. The municipal government has responded by opening at least three temporary shelters in gymnasiums to house Haitian migrants from the cold.[13] In addition, migrants from Mexico (mainly Guerrero and Michoacan), Honduras, and Guatemala continue to arrive in Mexicali.

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2022 (continued)

Mexican City *List Administrator*	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List *Date Recorded*	Recent Changes
Tijuana, Baja California *Grupo Beta / Support from asylum seekers*	Closed	9,600 people *November 9, 2021*	The asylum waitlist in Tijuana has remained closed since March 2020 and approximately 9,600 names are on the list. During the early morning of Sunday, February 6, the Mexican National Guard, army, and police dismantled the El Chaparral tent camp near the San Ysidro port of entry. At the time, there were 381 individuals in the encampment, including 86 families, 24 single mothers, 33 men, and three members of the LGBTQ+ community.[14] Most were from Mexico, particularly from the states of Guerrero and Michoacán, and Central American countries. The residents were transferred to three local shelters.[15] In December 2021, large numbers of Haitians began arriving in the city. The city of Tijuana opened temporary shelters for them, but these shelters have now shut down.

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

ENDNOTES

1 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-diseas-es-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." "Executive Order on Creating a Comprehensive Regional Framework to Address the Causes of Migration, to Manage Migration Throughout North and Central America, and to Provide Safe and Orderly Processing of Asylum Seekers at the United States Border", February 2, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/02/executive-order-creating-a-comprehensive-regional-framework-to-address-the-causes-of-migration-to-manage-migration-through-out-north-and-central-america-and-to-provide-safe-and-orderly-processing/.
5 U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "Guidance for Management and Processing of Undocumented Noncitizens at Southwest Border Land Ports of Entry," November 1, 2021, https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Nov/CBP-mgmt-processing-non-citizens-swb-lpoes-signed-Memo-11.1.2021-508.pdf.
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7 Dolores Cerda, "Rehabilitarán acceso al nuevo albergue para migrantes," *Notigape*, January 14, 2022, https://www.notigape.com/rehabilitaran-acceso-al-nuevo-albergue-para-migrantes/244380.
8 Cierran paso fronterizo en Piedras Negras por intento de cruce masivo," *Milenio*, January 3, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNO0mqgAFTs.
9 "Siguen llegando migrantes a Ciudad Acuña," *El Siglo*, January 1, 2022, https://www.elsiglo.mx/noticia/2049887.siguen-llegan-do-migrantes-a-ciudad-acuna.html.
10 Julian Resendiz, "Juarez shelter stops taking in migrants due to overcrowding, COVID-19 concerns," *Border Report*, January 19, 2022, https://www.borderreport.com/hot-topics/migrant-centers/juarez-shelter-stops-taking-in-migrants-due-to-overcrowding-covid-19-concerns/.
11 Ibid.
12 Estimate provided by the Kino Border Initiative.
13 Jesusa Cervantes, "Ya hay mas de mil haitianos en albergues de Mexicali," *Proceso*, December 20, 2021, https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/2021/12/20/ya-hay-mas-de-mil-haitianos-en-albergues-de-mexicali-277822.html.
14 Jorge Lebrija, "Mexican authorities evict Tijuana migrant camp near border," *Associated Press*, February 6, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/mexico-caribbean-central-america-4dd9e7b72de27200acf92b2c854f5f7d.
15 Ibid.