

METERING UPDATE

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INTRODUCTION

Since early 2016, U.S. officials in cities such as San Diego and Calexico began “metering” individuals arriving to the U.S.-Mexico border to seek protection—turning them back and asking them to wait in Mexico for a period of time. While this practice was created in response to large numbers of Haitian migrants arriving at specific ports of entry along the border, this past summer, CBP officials expanded metering to ports of entry in every border state.

At this time, CBP officers began to be stationed at the international boundary between the United States and Mexico, telling asylum seekers that U.S. ports of entry were full and that they needed to wait their turn in Mexico. As lines of asylum seekers grew in border cities, Mexican authorities and civil society groups responded by providing humanitarian assistance and creating informal waiting lists.

In December 2018, the Robert Strauss Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the Center for U.S-Mexican Studies (USMEX) at the University of California San Diego, and the Migration Policy Centre published a report documenting these practices. This report highlighted how metering had spread along the U.S.-Mexico border and the various waiting list structures in eight border areas.

Since the report’s publication, the movement of asylum seekers and U.S. policy has continued to shift. The large numbers of asylum seekers who arrived in Tijuana with the migrant caravan have now almost all been processed. Yet in January 2019, the Trump administration began implementing the Migration Protection Protocol at the San Ysidro Port of Entry in San Diego to return asylum seekers from Central America back to Mexico for the duration of their asylum cases in the United States. Meanwhile, in early February, an estimated 2,000 asylum seekers arrived in Piedras Negras, Coahuila to seek asylum at the Eagle Pass port of entry.

This update aims to highlight changes over the past two months in the numbers of asylum seekers waiting in each Mexican border city and the current CBP processing times.

Map 1: Ports of Entry



Author elaboration

Metering & Waitlists: February 2019

POE	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Changes from December
Matamoros, Tamaulipas (Gateway Bridge)	< 30	10 days to 2 months	0 to 10 people per day	Migrants are no longer allowed to stay in the Grupo Beta shelter next to the bridge. Instead they must wait in the migrant shelter. Additionally, migration officials no longer provide transportation from the shelters to the bridge for those migrants whose turn it is. Instead, migration officials call the shelter when it is a migrant's turn, and the shelter provides transportation. There are allegations that this has increased wait times, and some migrants fear that they are not being notified. When it is their turn, the migrants must wait on the bridge itself, instead of the shelter that was previously used. Civil society reports that migrants are exposed to cold weather conditions.
Matamoros, Tamaulipas (B&M Bridge)	< 20	2 to 10 days	0 to 10 people per day	A new list organized by INM officers has been implemented for this bridge. Whereas before, migrants reserved their place on this bridge with their physical presence, now they sign up with a migration official. Civil society reports that Cubans predominantly use this bridge. There are allegations that Central Americans continue to be removed from this bridge and are told to sign up for the Gateway bridge list and wait at the migrant shelter.
Reynosa, Tamaulipas	N/A	N/A	N/A	INM officers (often lacking full uniforms) are apprehending Central Americans at the Reynosa international bridge and entering them into deportation proceedings. There are allegations that asylum seekers are only allowed onto the international bridge after paying Mexican migration officials.
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas	< 200	~ 6 to 8 weeks	1 to 2 people per day	Over the last few months, the number of asylum seekers has increased. Africans now make up a smaller percent of total, with an increased number of asylum seekers from Cuba and other countries in Latin America.

The numbers shift every day and should be interpreted as a general range rather than an exact figure.

Metering & Waitlists: February 2019 Continued

POE	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Changes from December
Piedras Negras, Coahuila	~ 120 (late January); ~ 1,600 more people arrived in early February	~ 1 to 2 weeks (late January); ~ 5 to 6 months (early February)	0 to 15 people per day	In the beginning of 2019, a new municipal government assumed the responsibility of running the migrant list, taking over from the old municipal government. During the first week of February, an estimated 2,000 asylum seekers arrived to Piedras Negras. The municipal government converted an old factory into temporary housing to receive the group, but will likely be phasing out the response in the coming days.
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua	< 550	~3 to 5 days	0 to 65 people per day	An increasing number of asylum seekers appear to be crossing between ports of entry near El Paso. From July 2018 to December 2018, the total number of families entering the El Paso and Big Bend sectors increased by 266 percent. During this time frame, the number of families entering through ports of entry went up by only 14 percent, compared to a 414 percent increase for families crossing between ports of entry. ¹
Nogales, Sonora	~ 80 to 100	~ 7 to 10 days	5 to 10 families per day	While the majority of asylum seekers continue to hail from Central America's Northern Triangle, since November, Nogales has seen an influx of migrants from Nicaragua. They travel directly to Nogales. Processing times have also sped up in recent months and NGOs and local activists believe that this has to do with the mass releases in Tucson.
Mexicali, Baja California	~ 40	~ 6 to 7 days	6 people per day	
Tijuana, Baja California	~ 2,300	~ 1.5 months	20 to 80 people per day	Many migrants on the waitlist have abandoned the process due to the long wait times and choose to either cross between POEs to request asylum, stay in Tijuana permanently, or return to their country of origin. This requires the list administrators to read off numerous names until all of the slots allotted by CBP for the day are filled.

¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "Southwest Border Migration FY2019," accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>.