

# METERING UPDATE

MAY 2019



**ROBERT STRAUSS CENTER**  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2018, CBP officers began to be stationed at the United States' international boundary with Mexico to tell arriving asylum seekers that U.S. ports of entry were full and that they needed to wait their turn in Mexico. Simultaneously, these CBP officials accepted limited numbers of asylum seekers a day—in a process known as metering—often communicating directly with Mexican officials regarding these numbers. As lines of asylum seekers grew in border cities, Mexican authorities and civil society groups responded by providing humanitarian assistance and creating informal waitlists.

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 across the U.S.-Mexico border and described the waitlist structures in eight border areas.

Since the report's publication, there have been changes in every border community. Some of these changes were documented in [a February 2019 update](#). However, since then, asylum seekers have continued to arrive at the border, Mexican responses have evolved, and U.S. policy has continued to shift.

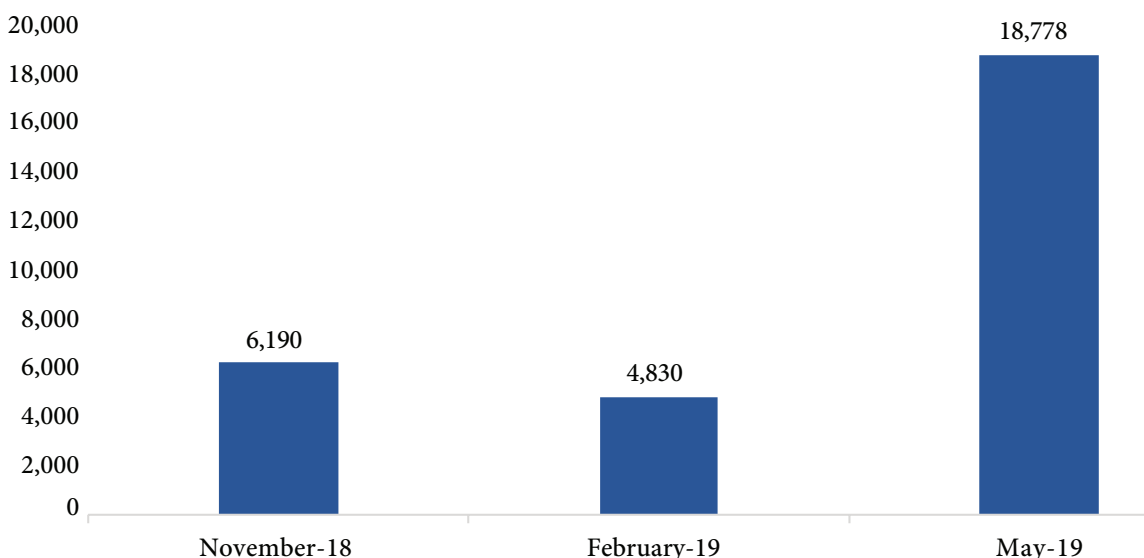
These more recent changes include five additional border cities with asylum waitlists or lines of waiting asylum seekers, longer wait times along the entire border, closed waitlists in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, and widespread shortages in housing and resources among shelters and civil society organizations. Additionally, due to the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP), U.S. authorities have begun to return some asylum seekers to Mexican cities, including in Tijuana, Mexicali, and Ciudad Juárez.

This update estimates that there are currently more than 18,700 asylum seekers on waitlists in Mexican border cities or waiting to get on these waitlists. This is an increase from the 6,000 that were documented in November 2018, after a Honduran migrant caravan arrived in Tijuana, Baja California, and the 5,000 in February 2019, after another Honduran migrant caravan arrived in Piedras Negras, Coahuila.

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**Graph 1: Estimated Total Number of Asylum Seekers Waiting in Mexican Border Cities**

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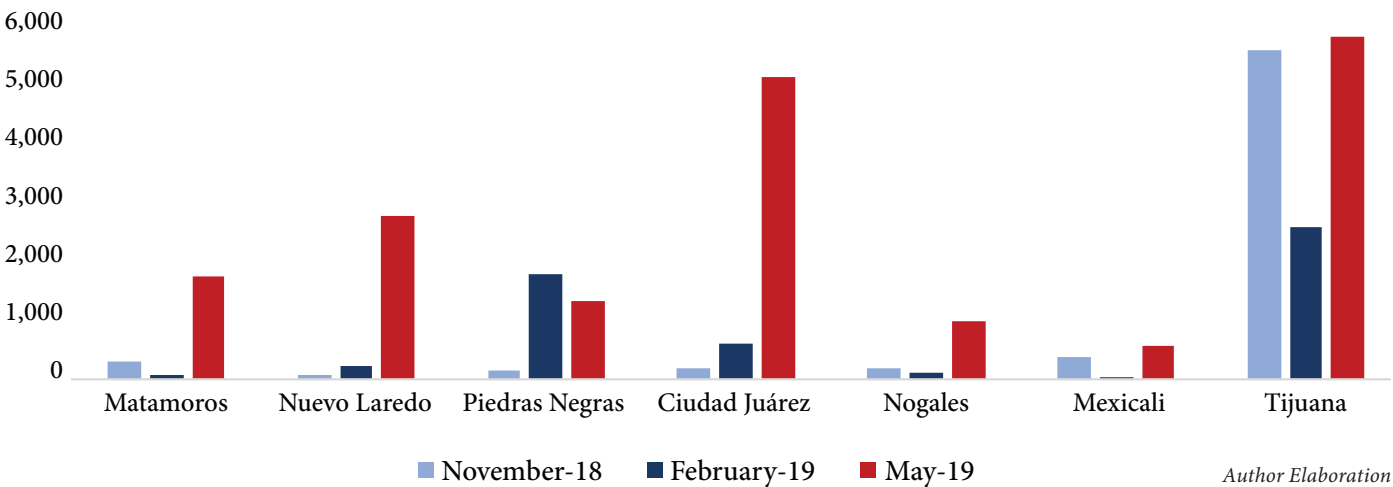


*Author Elaboration*



The increase in the number of asylum seekers has strained shelters across the border, which have the combined capacity for around 4,000 individuals. As a result, asylum seekers are renting hotel rooms and apartments or sleeping on the streets, increasing their risks for predation by organized crime or other opportunistic actors. These factors have pushed some asylum seekers to cross into the United States between ports of entry, which has fostered confusion regarding wait times as individuals do not show up for their turns.

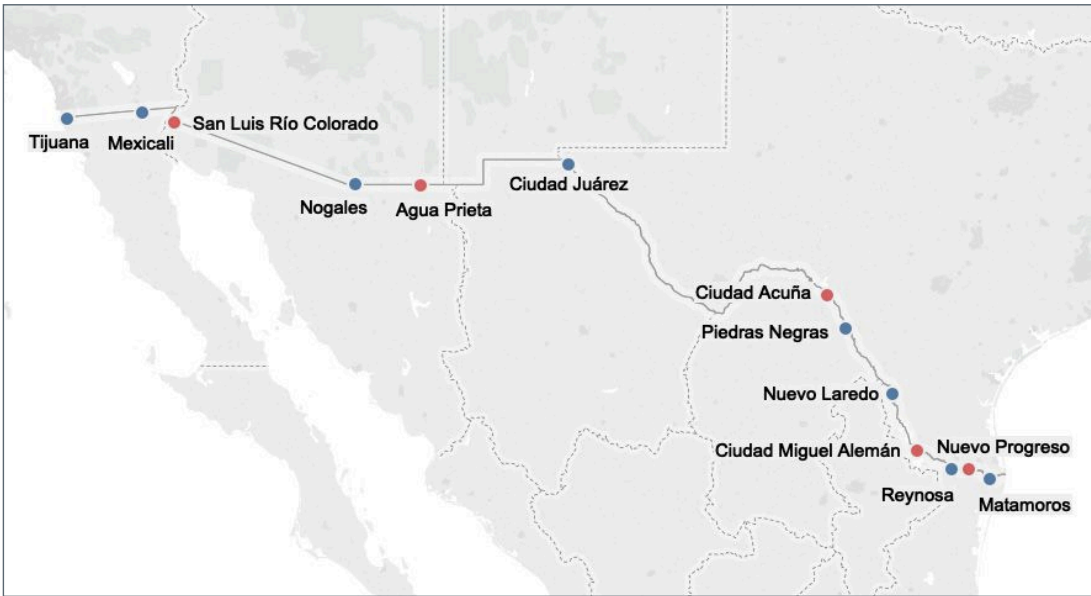
**Graph 2: Estimated Number of Asylum Seekers Waiting in Each Mexican Border City**



This update aims to highlight changes over the past three months across 13 Mexican border cities. It looks at changes in the asylum waitlist process, the number of asylum seekers waiting in each border city, and current CBP processing levels. The update draws on interviews with government officials, representatives from civil society organizations, and members of the public on both sides of the border.

**Map 1: Mexican Border Cities with Waiting Asylum Seekers**

Cities marked by blue dots were recorded in previous reports. Cities marked by red dots are being included for the first time.



## Metering & Waitlists: May 2019

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<b>Matamoros, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>National Migration Institute (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM)</i>	1,525 (Gateway Bridge)  43 (B&M Bridge)  May 8, 2019	2 to 3 months	0 to 10 per day	<p>As of May 8, 2019, there are two waitlists in Matamoros: one waitlist for the Gateway Bridge and another for the B&amp;M Bridge.</p> <p>The Gateway Bridge list is now posted publicly so that asylum seekers waiting at this bridge can know their place in line. The 50 or so asylum seekers who are first in line wait on the bridge. The others stay at shelters, which are over capacity, or in apartments and hotels.</p> <p>Previously, Mexican migration officials would periodically limit civil society's access to asylum seekers. However, over the past six months, civil society in Matamoros has developed a much stronger relationship with Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM). Civil society coordinates with them, intervenes on behalf of migrants, and directs complaints to them. Instances of corruption and extortion of migrants are reportedly down.</p> <p>The B&amp;M Bridge list is maintained by an INM official and is not public. Everyone on the list waits at the bridge.</p>
<b>Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>Asylum seekers</i>	~90  May 10, 2019	1.5 to 2 months	0 to 2 per day	<p>In mid-April 2019, a group of roughly 70 asylum seekers began camping out on Las Flores International Bridge.<sup>1</sup> These asylum seekers have since started their own waitlist. U.S. authorities have taken pictures of this waitlist to keep track of who is next in line.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>The majority of the asylum seekers are Cuban and Honduran. Nuevo Progreso—a town with around 10,000 residents—has no migrant shelter.</p>
<b>Reynosa, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>Senda de Vida Migrant Shelter</i>	~500  May 9, 2019	1 to 2 months	0 to 25 per day	<p>In February 2019, the Senda de Vida Migrant Shelter created a waitlist for asylum seekers who were on the bridge. Asylum seekers are no longer allowed to wait on the bridge and are directed instead to the Senda de Vida shelter. CBP notifies INM regarding how many people they will take each day and INM notifies the shelter.</p> <p>The Senda de Vida shelter has 300 beds and is at full capacity. It has turned away asylum seekers after they have placed their name on the list given insufficient capacity to house and feed them.</p>

## Metering & Waitlists: May 2019, continued

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<b>Ciudad Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>National Migration Institute (INM)</i>	25 to 40  <i>May 14, 2019</i>	7 to 10 days	0 to 8 per day	<p>In February 2019, a group of Cubans arrived at the international bridge. Civil Protection periodically provides blankets and food to the asylum seekers on the bridge and offered to convert a fire station six kilometers away from border into a shelter.<sup>3</sup> However, the asylum seekers refused to leave the bridge.</p> <p>In late April 2019, there was no list and conflicts arose over allegations that CBP wasn't following the order in which asylum seekers had arrived. By mid-May, the National Migration Institute had created a waiting list. Ciudad Miguel Alemán has a population of around 20,000 and does not have a migrant shelter.</p>
<b>Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>National Migration Institute (INM)</i>	~2,500 waiting in Nuevo Laredo  (It is unclear the number that are officially on the INM waitlist)  <i>May 9, 2019</i>	1.5 to 2.5 months  The Nuevo Laredo municipal president recently said it was 4 to 10 months. <sup>4</sup>		<p>Nuevo Laredo's shelters—with space for only 200 migrants—are full, and there have been reports of scarce food and resources. Hundreds of asylum seekers are living in hotels or on the street. These asylum seekers come from a range of countries, including Cuba, Central America, Angola, Congo, Cameroon, Eritrea, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Russia, and Nepal. In April, CBP ran simulation tests along the border to prepare for situations where migrants might arrive to the ports of entry in large groups.<sup>5</sup></p>
<b>Piedras Negras, Coahuila</b>  <i>Municipal government</i>	<360 on the list. <sup>6</sup>  1,200 waiting in Piedras Negras.  <i>May 8, 2019</i>	1 to 1.5 months	5 to 7 per day	<p>In mid-April 2019, the municipal government closed the waitlist. The waitlist is scheduled to reopen on June 1, 2019. The majority of the asylum seekers in Piedras Negras are from Honduras. The main shelter is full and facing shortages of basic goods.</p>

## Metering & Waitlists: May 2019, continued

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<b>Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila</b>  <i>Municipal Civil Protection (individuals)/ Grupo Beta (families)</i>	~755  (525 individuals / 230 family members)  May 9, 2019	Individuals: 2.5 months;  Families: 4 months	4 individuals per day; 1 family per week	<p>On November 29, 2018, Grupo Beta created the first list for asylum seekers arriving in Ciudad Acuña. There are now two waitlists, one run by Grupo Beta for families and another run by the Municipal Civil Protection for single adults. Both agencies communicate directly with CBP.</p> <p>In mid-April 2019, the single adults camped out on the bridge and refused to leave. In response, Grupo Beta stopped managing the list for single adults (and continued managing a list just for families). As a result, single adult asylum seekers created their own list, and kept waiting on the bridge. The Municipal Civil Protection eventually took control of the list for single adults. The agency provides two shelters for the migrant families, which are now at full capacity. The individuals instead have had to pay for hotels. Currently, 90 percent of the single adults are Cuban. As of May 9, 2019, the lists are now closed and asylum seekers are being asked to go to different border crossings.<sup>7</sup></p> <p>According to Ciudad Acuña's Municipal Civil Protection, the influx of asylum seekers to the city was due to a rumor that CBP was processing 20 people per day in Del Rio, Texas.</p>
<b>Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua</b>  <i>State Population Council (Consejo Estatad de Población, COESPO)</i>	4,600  May 6, 2019	4 months	20 to 50 per day	<p>At the end of March 2019, the State Population Council (COESPO) took over waitlist management from the Casa de Migrante due to reports of cloned bracelets (which had migrant's waitlist numbers), and rumors that some asylum seekers had sold their bracelets to people who wanted to skip the line.</p> <p>Currently, COESPO is managing the list through a closed Facebook group that is updated twice a day. In this Facebook group, asylum seekers can check how many people CBP is accepting.<sup>8</sup> COESPO has reported that between 40 and 150 asylum seekers register on the list each day, and that the majority of the asylum seekers are Cuban.</p> <p>However, around 30 percent of asylum seekers do not show up when their number is called and Ciudad Juárez authorities believe that these individuals cross between ports of entry.</p> <p>Ciudad Juárez shelters are at full capacity, leaving thousands of people on their own for accommodations.</p>

## Metering & Waitlists: May 2019, continued

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<b>Agua Prieta, Sonora</b>  <i>CAME Migrant Shelter</i>	440  <i>May 13, 2019</i>	1.5 months	0 to 5 per day	<p>In mid-March 2019, Grupo Beta created a waitlist when 60 asylum seekers arrived in Agua Prieta in a single weekend. Two weeks later, they passed the waitlist to the Center for Migration Attention (Centro de Atención para Migrantes, CAME), due to constant threats from criminal groups. During the past month, CAME has managed the waitlist and received 18 threats from criminal groups.</p> <p>The CAME shelter has room for 44 people but is currently housing 110 migrants and asylum seekers. The Agua Prieta municipal government also runs a shelter—Casa de la Mujer Migrante—that can provide lodging to 60 people. The remaining asylum seekers rent hotel rooms. An American church group supports CAME in some shelter operations and also accompanies asylum seekers to the ports of entry to help protect them from organized crime.</p> <p>Outside the Agua Prieta port of entry, there is an improvised shelter where the five individuals at the top of the waitlist stay until it is their turn. This shelter consists of blankets tied to the border wall. There is a nearby building with a bathroom, water, and a shower. Every afternoon, a Christian group provides food to these waiting asylum seekers.</p>
<b>Nogales, Sonora</b>  <i>Private individual</i>	~900  <i>May 10, 2019</i>	2.5 months	2 to 3 families per day	<p>Brenda Nieblas, a private individual, runs the list in Nogales. Her family runs migrant shelters in Nogales. Asylum seekers arriving in the city are first redirected to the Red Cross for medical care. They then contact Nieblas, who adds them to the waitlist and assigns them to a shelter. Nieblas notifies them directly when it is their turn.<sup>9</sup></p>
<b>San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora</b>  <i>Grupo Beta</i>	470  <i>May 9, 2019</i>	4 to 6 months	0 to 7 per day	<p>In January 2019, a group of asylum seekers began camping out on the international bridge. In response, Grupo Beta began managing a waitlist.</p> <p>There is no migrant shelter in San Luis Colorado that offers overnight accommodations. Instead, asylum seekers either rent rooms or go to other cities to wait their turn. Asylum seekers are told to call Grupo Beta directly to check if their number is coming up on the list.</p>



## Metering & Waitlists: May 2019, continued

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
<b>Mexicali, Baja California</b>  <i>Grupo Beta</i>	~500  <i>May 9, 2019</i>	2 months	0 to 20 per day	
<b>Tijuana, Baja California</b>  <i>Grupo Beta / Asylum seekers</i>	5,230  <i>May 13, 2019</i>	2 months	20 to 80 per day	Every day, between 40 and 180 asylum seekers add themselves to the waiting list. Over the past several months, the times when asylum seekers can add themselves to the waitlist has decreased from four hours to two. <sup>10</sup> A volunteer has created a website for the list (elnumerodelalista.com) so that asylum seekers can track the waitlist numbers without having to travel daily to the port of entry, where the latest number is posted.

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

## END NOTES

- 1 "Migrantes Pernocan en Nuevo Progreso en Inmediaciones del Puente Las Flores," *Despertar de Tamaulipas*, April 26, 2018, <http://www.despertartetamaulipas.com/sitio/?q=node/79783>.
- 2 "Migrantes Se Aduenan del Cruce Internacional en Nuevo Progreso," *Despertar de Tamaulipas*, May 10, 2019, <https://despertartetamaulipas.com/sitio/?q=node/80519>.
- 3 "Migrantes piden asilo político en puentes internacionales," *Manifiesto Tamaulipas*, April 25, 2019, <https://manifiestotamaulipas.com/?p=5335>.
- 4 "No hay espacio para más migrantes en Nuevo Laredo, México," *Periódico Cubano*, April 26, 2019, <https://www.periodicocubano.com/no-hay-espacio-para-mis-migrantes-en-nuevo-laredo-mexico/>.
- 5 Ricardo Hernández, "Se preparan contra estampida de migrantes en cruces fronterizos," *Milenio*, April 23, 2019, <https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/cierran-puente-internacional-tras-simulacro>.
- 6 Elliot Spagat, Nomaan Merchant, and Patricio Espinoza, "For thousands of asylum seekers, all they can do is wait," *Associated Press*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/ed788f5b4269407381d79e588b6c1dc2>.
- 7 Modesto Chavez Ramirez, "Cierran registro de migrantes en Ciudad Acuña," *Contra Punto*, May 8, 2019, <https://www.contrapunto.red/cierran-registro-de-migrantes-en-ciudad-acuna/>.
- 8 Elliot Spagat, Nomaan Merchant, and Patricio Espinoza, "For thousands of asylum seekers, all they can do is wait," *Associated Press*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/ed788f5b4269407381d79e588b6c1dc2>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Kate Morrissey, "Back story: A closer look at the asylum line at the San Diego border," *San Diego Union Tribune*, April 28, 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/immigration/story/2019-04-25/back-story-a-closer-look-at-the-asylum-line-at-the-san-diego-border>.