

METERING UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2020



STEPHANIE LEUTERT AND SAVITRI ARVEY



INTRODUCTION

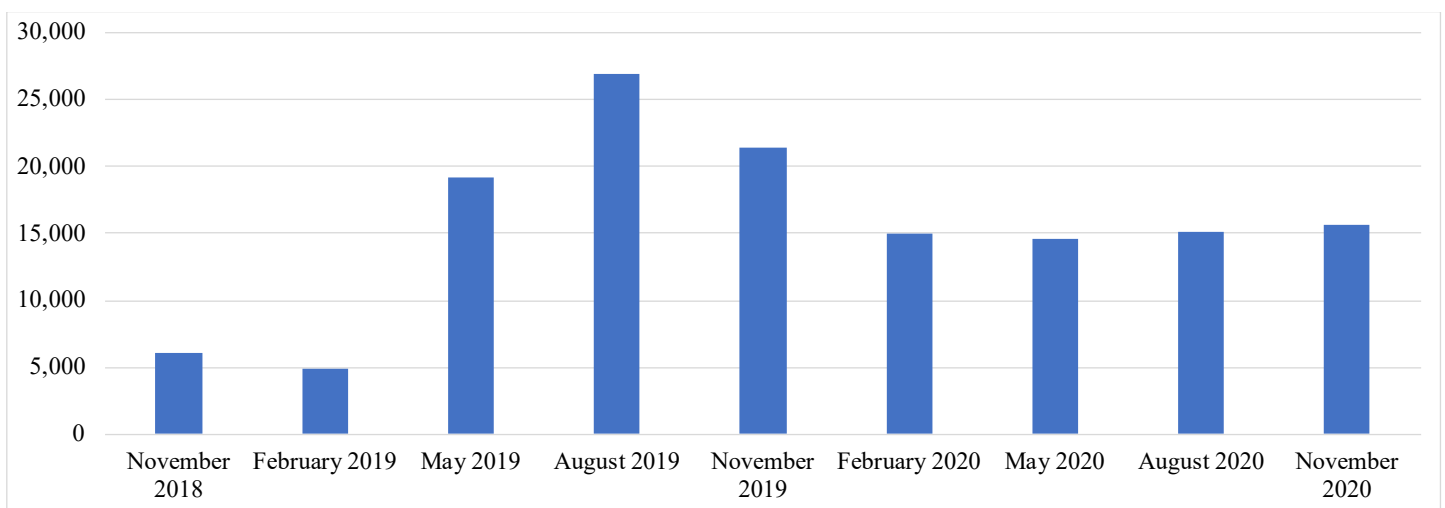
In April 2018, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) leadership issued guidance that allowed officers to limit asylum seekers’ access to ports of entry. This guidance permitted CBP officers to be stationed at the United States’ international boundary with Mexico and inform arriving asylum seekers that U.S. ports of entry were full. Simultaneously, CBP officers also began accepting a specific number of asylum seekers each day, in a process that is known as metering. In June 2018, then-DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen [signed a memorandum that authorized port directors to begin metering](#) at all U.S. ports of entry.

As lines of asylum seekers grew in 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—has documented these lists.

In March 2020, CBP stopped processing asylum seekers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This change is due to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control’s (CDC) [March 2020 regulation that suspended entry of certain individuals](#) into the United States.¹ That same month, on March 26, 2020, the CDC issued a 30-day order that blocked entry for individuals—including asylum seekers—seeking to enter the United States through Mexico without proper travel documents. This order has been extended indefinitely.

This report provides an update on metering along the U.S.-Mexico border amid CBP’s asylum processing suspension. It documents approximately 15,690 asylum seekers on waitlists in 9 Mexican border cities.

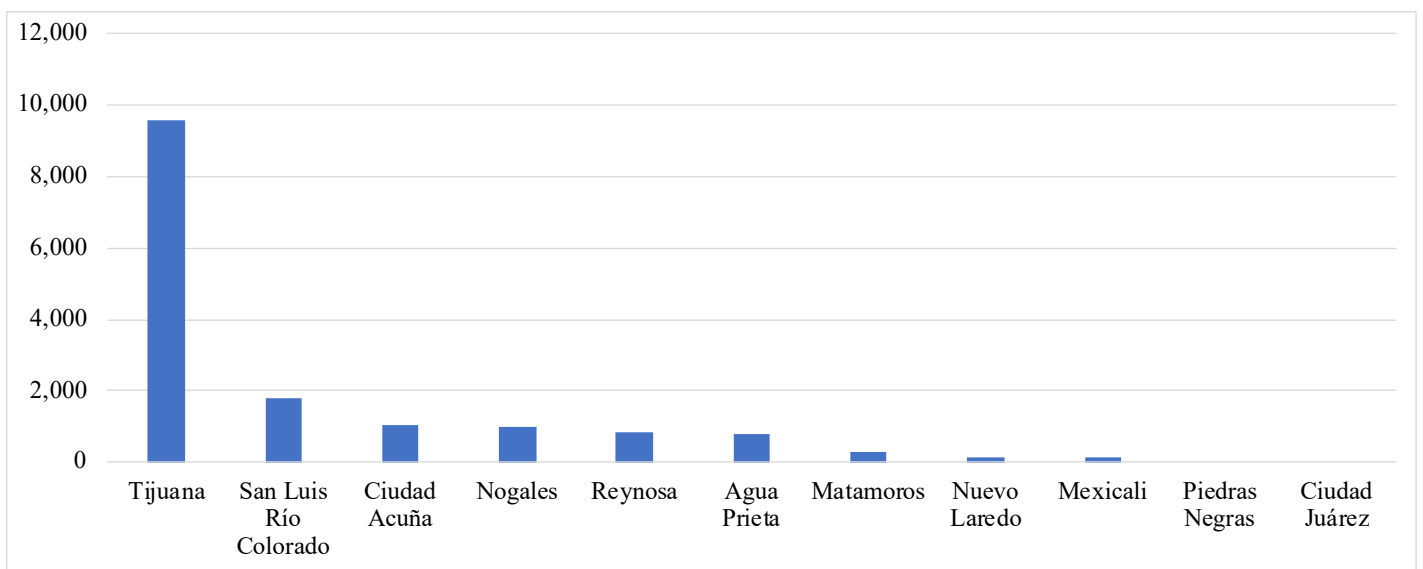
Figure 1: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists (December 2018 - November 2020)



Data collected from November 17, 2020, to November 20, 2020

However, more than ever, the names on the waitlists are not a true proxy for the total number of asylum seekers waiting in border cities. Civil society organizations report that many asylum seekers have entered the United States between ports of entry, returned to their countries of origin, or moved to other areas in Mexico. For example, in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, there are approximately 300 Mexicans on the asylum waitlist but fewer than 80 Mexican asylum seekers are currently living in the camp. Even more dramatically, in Ciudad Acuña, there are more than 1,000 asylum seekers on the city’s two waitlists but only around 200 people in the city.

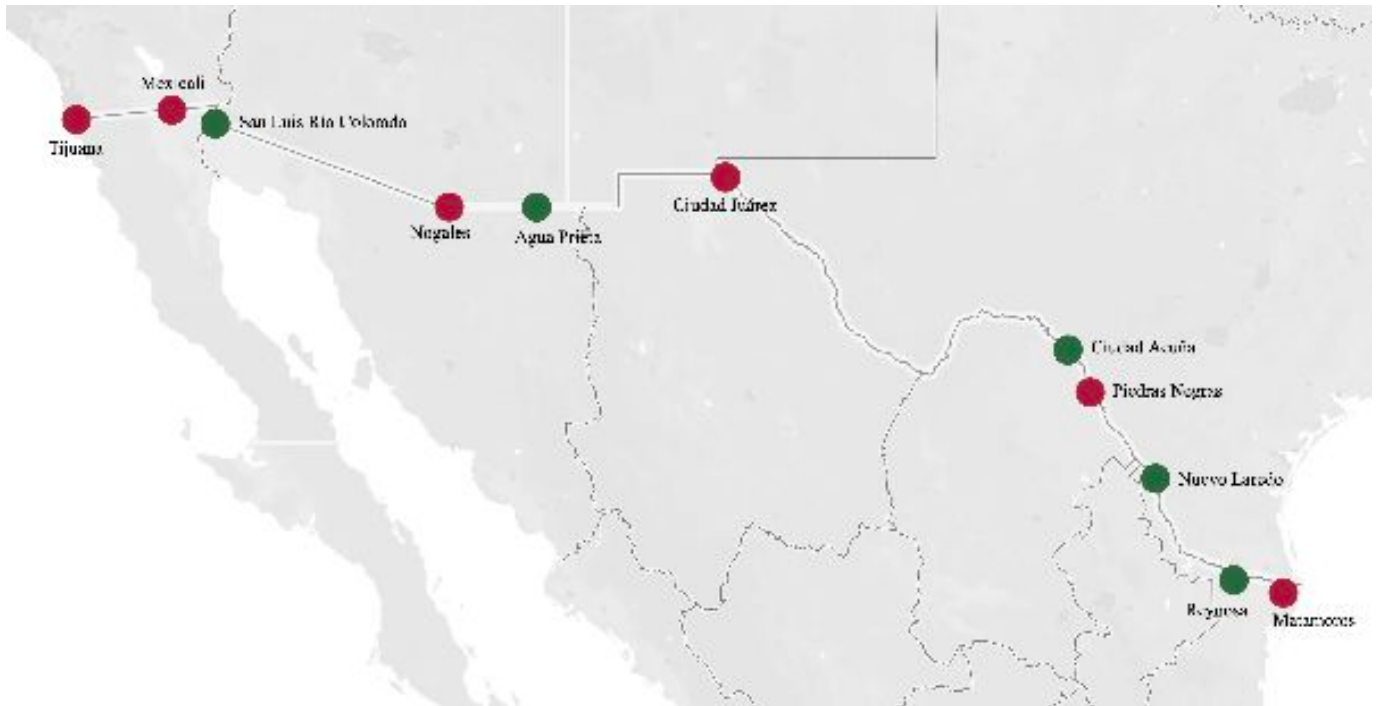
Figure 2: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists by City (November 2020)



Data collected from November 17, 2020, to November 20, 2020

In late March 2020, many asylum waitlists closed to new entrants and the number of asylum seekers on these lists has remained frozen ever since. Currently, the majority of asylum waitlists continue to be closed along the border. Only the waitlists in Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Acuña, Agua Prieta, and San Luis Río Colorado are currently open. Asylum seekers in Agua Prieta and San Luis Río Colorado can also sign up by phone. Figure 3 shows the status of asylum waitlists by Mexican border city. Green circles indicate cities where asylum waitlists are open and red circles indicate cities where asylum waitlists are closed.

Figure 3: Mexican Border Cities By List Status



Data collected from November 17, 2020, to November 20, 2020

Some migrant shelters also remain closed and guests must follow strict quarantine measures. However, since May 2020, many shelters have started accepting a limited number of new arrivals or permitting migrants to shower or eat in the shelter but not stay overnight. In Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana, state agencies, international organizations, and civil society organizations have also worked together to set up filter hotels that allow asylum seekers to quarantine for two weeks before accessing other migrant shelters within the two cities.

Due to travel advisories related to the spread of COVID-19, this November 2020 metering update was put together without any field visits. Instead, it 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: November 2020

<p>Mexican City</p> <p><i>List Administrator</i></p>	<p>Waitlist Status</p>	<p># of Asylum Seekers on List</p> <p><i>Date Recorded</i></p>	<p>Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)</p>	<p>Recent Changes</p>
<p>Matamoros, Tamaulipas</p> <p><i>National Migration Institute (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM) and the Casa del Migrante:</i></p> <p><i>Non-Mexican list at the Gateway Bridge</i></p> <p><i>Asylum Seekers: Mexican lists at the Gateway Bridge</i></p>	<p>Closed²</p>	<p>300 people (80 families)</p> <p><i>November 18, 2020</i></p>	<p>9 months</p>	<p>A group of Mexican asylum seekers continues to wait in the Matamoros tent camp. These asylum seekers are primarily from the Mexican states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca.</p> <p>Since March 2020, the list managers have frozen the waitlist and have not removed anyone, regardless of whether or not the person is physically present in the camp. This is important, since many of the Mexican asylum seekers have returned to their communities or have rented hotel rooms and apartments in Matamoros to wait out the pandemic.</p> <p>While there are 80 families on the list, estimates suggest that less than 20 families (between 60 and 75 people) remain in the encampment. However, once CBP begins asylum processing again, some of these asylum seekers may return to the camp and retake their place on the list.</p> <p>Currently, the Matamoros tent camp is closed to everyone except residents and INM officials. Journalists must obtain a permit to enter the camp.</p> <p>The Casa del Migrante in Matamoros has reopened its doors to new migrants who follow COVID-19 protocols. The shelter continues to host mostly individuals from MPP.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: November 2020 (continued)

<p>Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i></p>	<p>Waitlist Status</p>	<p># of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i></p>	<p>Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)</p>	<p>Recent Changes</p>
<p>Reynosa, Tamaulipas <i>Senda de Vida migrant shelter</i></p>	<p>Open</p>	<p>850 people <i>November 18, 2020</i></p>	<p>8 to 9 months</p>	<p>The Senda de Vida shelter runs a list for asylum seekers. The list is open and asylum seekers continue to arrive.</p> <p>Not all of the people on the list are waiting at the shelter. Some of the asylum seekers are renting houses and some are working in other cities, such as Monterrey, to wait until CBP begins processing people at ports of entry.</p> <p>Currently, the majority of the asylum seekers on the list are from Haiti (~500 people), followed in descending order by asylum seekers from African countries (particularly, Cameroon, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo), Mexico, Cuba, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.</p>
<p>Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas <i>Network of six migrant shelters managing six separate lists (one per shelter)</i></p>	<p>Open</p>	<p>~150 people <i>November 17, 2020</i></p>	<p>6 months</p>	<p>A network of six migrant shelters manages the waitlists in Nuevo Laredo. The number of waiting asylum seekers varies by shelter, with some reporting around 30 people on the list and others as many as 70 people. Many of the asylum seekers are Mexican families.</p> <p>Many of the asylum seekers who waited for months on waitlists have now left the city. One asylum-seeking family waited for more than 8 months in Nuevo Laredo but finally moved to another part of Mexico. However, these asylum seekers have been replaced on the lists by new arrivals to the city.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: November 2020 (continued)

<p>Mexican City</p> <p><i>List Administrator</i></p>	<p>Waitlist Status</p>	<p># of Asylum Seekers on List</p> <p><i>Date Recorded</i></p>	<p>Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)</p>	<p>Recent Changes</p>
<p>Piedras Negras, Coahuila</p> <p><i>Municipal government</i></p>	<p>Closed</p>	<p>0</p> <p><i>November 18, 2020</i></p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The shelters in Piedras Negras remain closed. Migrants stay in crowded apartments or sleep on the street, which is a concern as the weather gets colder.</p> <p>The Piedras Negras municipal government has received calls from Brazilian, Venezuelan, Cuban, and Mexican asylum seekers, who reported hearing about the U.S. presidential election results and expressed interest in traveling to the U.S.-Mexico border to request asylum.</p>
<p>Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila</p> <p><i>Civil Protection (Protección Civil): individuals & families</i></p>	<p>Open</p>	<p>1,050 people</p> <p>(450 individuals)</p> <p>(200 families)</p> <p><i>November 19, 2020</i></p>	<p>9 months</p>	<p>Civil Protection in Ciudad Acuña continues to run two lists for asylum seekers: individuals and families. The lists remain open and individuals arriving in the city can add their names.</p> <p>Civil Protection notes that while the lists have more than 1,050 names, there are far fewer people in the city. Since the pandemic began in March, Civil Protection has not removed any names from the lists, but they know that some asylum seekers have crossed irregularly between ports of entry or have traveled to other parts of the border.</p> <p>In August 2020, Civil Protection ran a census and found that there were 200 asylum seekers living in the city.³</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: November 2020 (continued)

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	Recent Changes
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua <i>State Population Council (Consejo Estatal de Población, COESPO)</i>	Closed	0 <i>November 18, 2020</i>	N/A	<p>The asylum waitlist in Ciudad Juárez remains closed. Asylum seekers continue to arrive in the city, where they stay in shelters or rent apartments.</p> <p>Some asylum seekers have decided to cross the border irregularly and others have returned home to their country of origin.</p>
Agua Prieta, Sonora <i>CAME migrant shelter</i>	Open	800 people <i>November 18, 2020</i>	9 months	<p>The CAME migrant shelter runs a list for asylum seekers. The shelter allows asylum seekers to sign up over the phone. There are only 22 individuals currently residing in the shelter. The vast majority of the asylum seekers on the CAME shelter's list are not living in the city.</p>
Nogales, Sonora <i>Municipal government</i>	Closed	990 people <i>November 19, 2020</i>	13 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Nogales has been closed since March 2020. Since then, the number of individuals on the list has not changed.</p> <p>According to the list manager, many of the asylum seekers on the list have left the city. If the list opens up again, it would be necessary to update it.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: November 2020 (continued)

<p>Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i></p>	<p>Waitlist Status</p>	<p># of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i></p>	<p>Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)</p>	<p>Recent Changes</p>
<p>San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora <i>Casa del Migrante La Divina Providencia</i></p>	<p>Open</p>	<p>1,798 people <i>November 17, 2020</i></p>	<p>12 months</p>	<p>The asylum waitlist in San Luis Río Colorado remains open.</p> <p>Currently, there are 1,119 Mexicans, 584 Cubans, and 36 Hondurans on the list. The remaining 54 asylum seekers are from a range of other countries.</p> <p>Asylum seekers can sign up for the waitlist by phone and do not have to be physically present in San Luis Río Colorado. This means that many asylum seekers are waiting in Tijuana, Mexicali, or other cities that have more job opportunities and accommodations. There are only 12 individuals on the list staying in the shelter.</p> <p>Since the U.S. elections, the shelter has received an increase in the number of calls from asylum seekers who want to sign up for the list. These asylum seekers are primarily from Mexico and Cuba.</p> <p>After the <i>Associated Press</i> announced that Vice President Joe Biden was the expected winner of the U.S. presidential election, a group of 20 asylum seekers from Cuba, Honduras, and Mexico gathered at the U.S.-Mexico border wall to celebrate the results.⁴</p>
<p>Mexicali, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta</i></p>	<p>Closed</p>	<p>150 people <i>November 19, 2020</i></p>	<p>13 to 14 months</p>	<p>The asylum waitlist in Mexicali remains closed and the number of individuals on the list has not changed since March.</p> <p>Three of the city's main shelters closed down this year due to a lack of funding from the federal government.⁵</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: November 2020 (continued)

<p>Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i></p>	<p>Waitlist Status</p>	<p># of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i></p>	<p>Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)</p>	<p>Recent Changes</p>
<p>Tijuana, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta / Support from asylum seekers</i></p>	<p>Closed</p>	<p>9,600 people <i>November 19, 2020</i></p>	<p>13 to 14 months</p>	<p>The asylum waitlist in Tijuana remains closed and the number of individuals on the list has not changed since March 2020.</p> <p>On October 21, 2020, asylum seekers marched in a binational “Defend Asylum” protest in Tijuana and San Diego. The protest was focused on the treatment of asylum seekers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Protesters’ demands included the restoration of the U.S. asylum system.⁶</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 This 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.
- 2 Special thanks to B. Gómez for collecting information on the asylum waitlist in Matamoros.
- 3 Alma Proa, “Son 200 migrantes que esperan asilo,” Zócalo, August 17, 2020, https://www.zocalo.com.mx/new_site/articulo/son-200-migrantes-que-esperan-asilo.
- 4 Luis Carlos Bravo, “Desde el muro fronterizo de SLRC migrantes dan adiós a Trump,” La Voz de la Frontera, November 10, 2020, <https://www.lavozdelafrontera.com.mx/local/desde-el-muro-fronterizo-de-slrc-migrantes-dan-adios-a-trump-6001487.html>.
- 5 Alejandro Domínguez, “Albergues de migrantes también se ven afectados por falta de apoyo federal,” La Voz de la Frontera, October 29, 2020, <https://www.lavozdelafrontera.com.mx/local/albergues-de-migrantes-tambien-se-ven-afectados-por-falta-de-apoyo-federal-5951152.html>.
- 6 Max Rivlin-Nadler, “Binational Protestors Converge On The Border To Demand Restoration Of Asylum,” KPBS News, October 21, 2020, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2020/oct/21/binational-protestors-converge-border-asylum/>.