

# METERING UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2021



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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 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 specified 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.

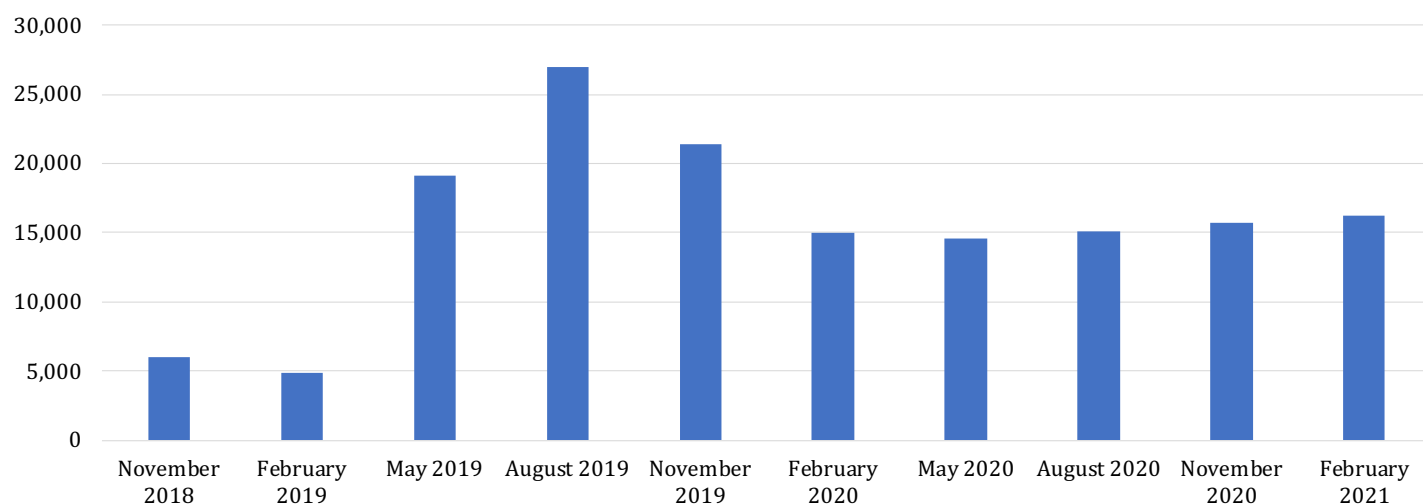
As lines of asylum seekers grew in border cities, Mexican authorities and civil society groups responded by providing humanitarian assistance and creating informal waitlists. Since November 2018, the Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas at Austin—at times 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 informal lists.

In March 2020, CBP stopped processing asylum requests at ports of entry. This was due to the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) new [regulation](#) and an order that blocked entry for individuals—including asylum seekers—seeking to enter the United States through Mexico without travel documents.<sup>1</sup> This order was extended indefinitely. This means that for the past 10 months, no asylum seeker on a waitlist has been processed at a port of entry.

On January 20, 2021, President Joe Biden became the 46th president of the United States. During his presidential campaign and since taking office, Biden has promised to restore asylum processing at the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>2</sup> However, as of February 8, 2021, CBP had not resumed asylum processing at U.S. ports of entry.

This report provides an update on metering lists, asylum seekers, and migrant shelters along the U.S.-Mexico border amid CBP's asylum processing suspension. It documents approximately 16,250 asylum seekers on waitlists in 9 Mexican border cities. This is a slight increase from [November 2020, when there were 15,690 people](#).

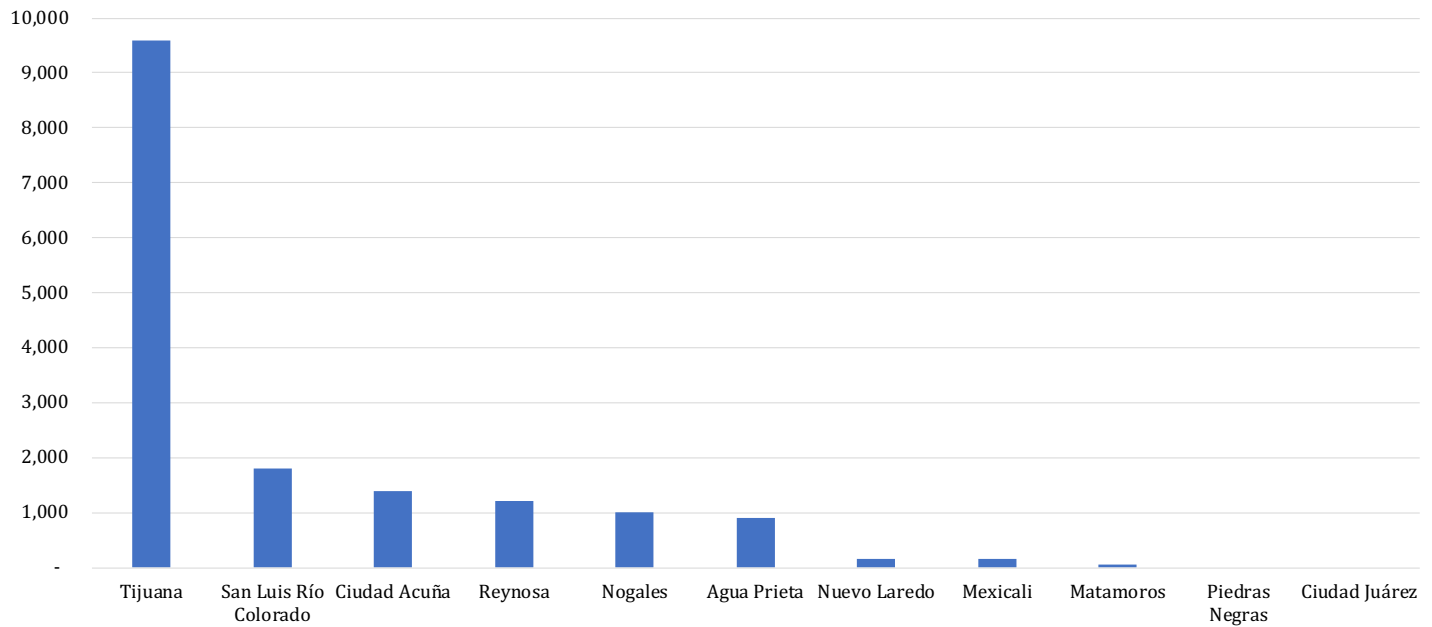
**Figure 1: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists (November 2018 - February 2021)**



*Author's elaboration. Data collected from February 1, 2021 to February 5, 2021.*

Yet, the names on these waitlists do not represent the true number of asylum seekers waiting in Mexican border cities. Since March 2020, list managers have reported that many asylum seekers on waitlists have entered the United States between ports of entry, returned to their countries of origin, or moved to other cities in Mexico's interior. In addition, small numbers of asylum seekers have continued to arrive over the past 10 months, and many of these asylum seekers did not sign up for a waitlist.

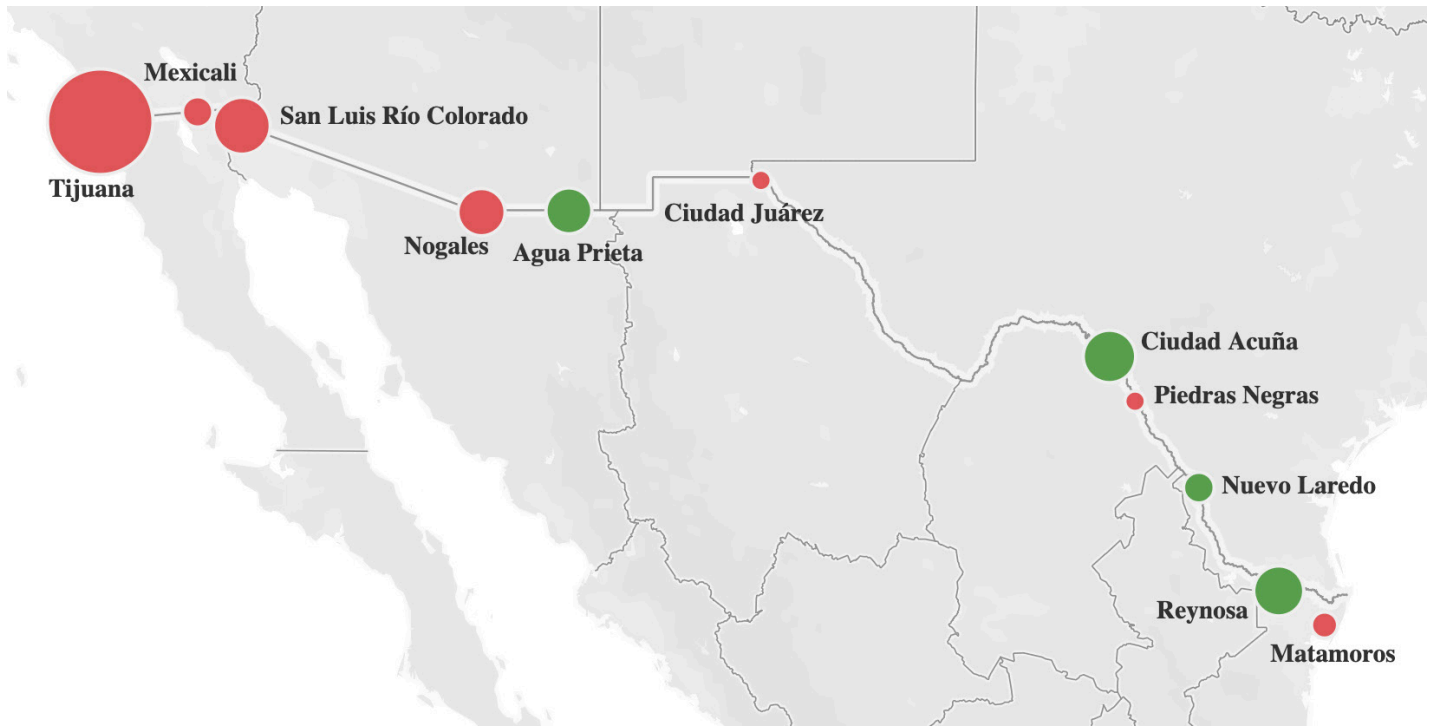
**Figure 2: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists by City (February 2021)**



*Author's elaboration. Data collected from February 1, 2021 to February 5, 2021.*

In late March 2020, many asylum waitlists closed to new entrants and the number of asylum seekers on these lists has remained frozen. 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. The circle sizes vary depending on the number of asylum seekers on each waitlist.

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

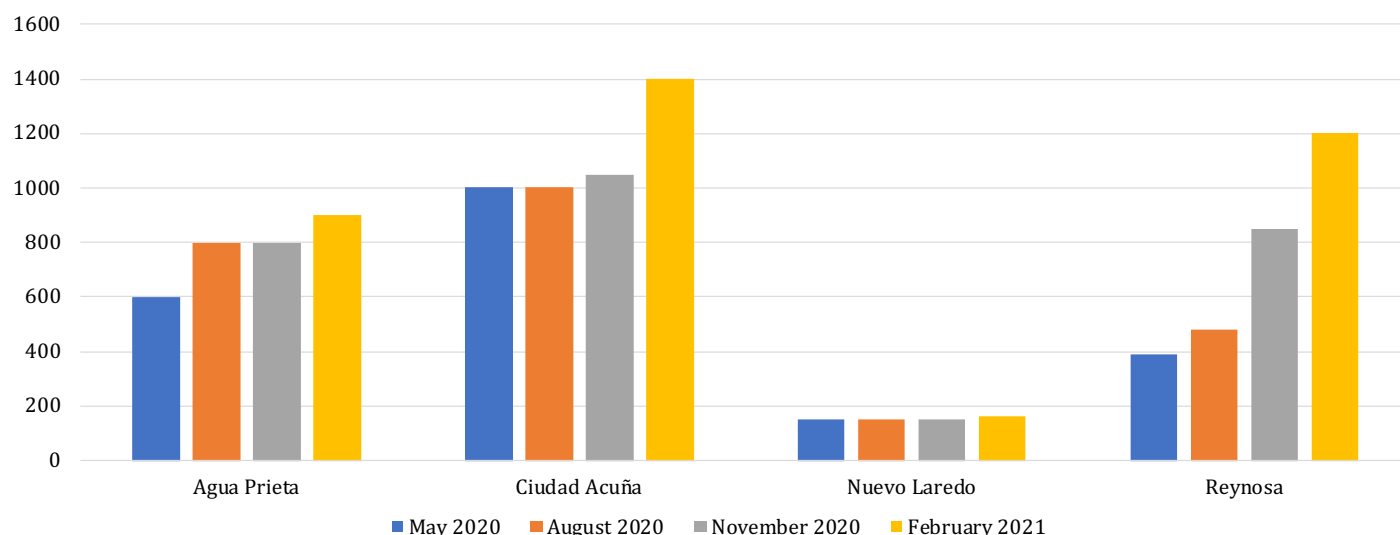


*Author's elaboration. Data collected from February 1, 2021 to February 5, 2021.*

The majority of asylum waitlists continue to be closed along the border. In cities with closed waitlists, such as Tijuana and Nogales, asylum seekers have expressed anxiety about their spot being respected when asylum processing is resumed. The only waitlists currently open are in Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Acuña, and Agua Prieta. Approximately 800 asylum seekers have signed up on these four lists since November 2020.



**Figure 4: Number of People on Open Asylum Waitlists (May 2020 - February 2021)**



*Author's elaboration. Data collected from May 2020 to February 2021.*

Asylum seekers on waitlists continue to face unstable living conditions in Mexican border cities. The majority have been renting shared rooms. Many have struggled to keep steady jobs and pay for their rent during the pandemic. Some shelters remain closed due to COVID-19 precautions. Others are accepting a limited number of guests or providing migrants with meals but not overnight accommodations. In January 2021, many shelters across the border noted a slight uptick in the number of arriving migrants, compared to 2020.

Certain groups of asylum seekers on waitlists continue to experience additional challenges. Civil society organizations report that Black and LGBTQ asylum seekers have faced discrimination by local authorities. In addition, asylum seekers without documentation for their stay in Mexico—including pregnant women—have been denied access to healthcare. Non-Spanish speaking asylum seekers have also struggled to access information about the evolving pandemic guidelines.

Due to travel advisories related to the spread of COVID-19, this February 2021 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: February 2021

Mexican City <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	Recent Changes
<b>Matamoros, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>Asylum Seekers: Mexican lists at the Gateway Bridge</i>	Closed	50 to 60 people  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	12 months	<p>Asylum seekers in the Matamoros encampment manage a waitlist for Mexican asylum seekers.</p> <p>The waitlist is closed to new entrants. Over the last three months, the Mexican list managers removed the names of everyone who was not physically present in the camp. Many of these Mexican asylum seekers had returned to their home communities to wait out the pandemic.</p> <p>During the past few weeks, a number of migrants have arrived at the camp, and pushed the total number to approximately 1,000 migrants. The camp is officially closed to everyone except residents and INM officials.</p> <p>The Casa de Migrante shelter in Matamoros has also noted a slight recent increase in migrant arrivals.</p>
<b>Reynosa, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>Senda de Vida migrant shelter</i>	Open	1,200 people  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	11 to 12 months	<p>The Senda de Vida migrant shelter manages a waitlist for asylum seekers in Reynosa. The list remains open and 350 asylum seekers have signed up since November. Asylum seekers on the list are primarily from Haiti, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and several African countries.</p> <p>Approximately 150 asylum seekers are currently staying at the shelter.<sup>3</sup> Others on the list are renting rooms in the city or have traveled to Monterrey or elsewhere to wait.</p>

## Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2021 (continued)

<b>Mexican City</b> <i>List Administrator</i>	<b>Waitlist Status</b>	<b># of Asylum Seekers on List</b> <i>Date Recorded</i>	<b>Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)</b>	<b>Recent Changes</b>
<b>Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas</b>  <i>Network of six migrant shelters managing six separate lists (one per shelter)</i>	Open	~160 people  <i>February 2, 2021</i>	9 months	A network of six migrant shelters in Nuevo Laredo manage six separate waitlists. Since November, the shelters report that few migrants have arrived at these shelters.
<b>Piedras Negras, Coahuila</b>  <i>Municipal government</i>	Closed	0  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	N/A	<p>The asylum waitlist in Piedras Negras has been closed since March 2020.</p> <p>All shelters in the city remain closed. In December 2020, the municipal government enacted COVID-19 regulations that prohibit shelters and churches from providing meals to asylum seekers in the city. Shelters are only allowed to provide groceries for asylum seekers who are renting rooms. City officials have fined shelter staff and church pastors who violated these rules.</p> <p>Over the past three weeks, roughly 50 migrants have arrived in the city per day. Many have slept on the streets or in abandoned buildings amid cold weather. Mexican authorities have patrolled the streets, detaining migrants without documentation and sending them to the Saltillo detention center. They have then deported them to their countries of origin.</p>



## Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2021 (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
<b>Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila</b>  <i>Civil Protection (Protección Civil): individuals &amp; families</i>	Open	1,400 people  (550 individuals)  (325 families)  <i>February 5, 2021</i>	12 months	Civil Protection runs two lists in Ciudad Acuña: one for individuals and one for families. The lists are open and, since November, 350 people have added their names.  Many asylum seekers on the list are staying in rented apartments in the city or have left to wait elsewhere.
<b>Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua</b>  <i>State Population Council (Consejo Estatal de Población, COESPO)</i>	Closed	0  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	N/A	The asylum waitlist in Ciudad Juárez remains closed.  Over the past few weeks, an increasing number of migrants have arrived at the city's shelters. <sup>4</sup> The filter hotel—that provides migrants with a space to quarantine for two weeks before accessing other shelters—is currently at full capacity. New arrivals are staying at another filter shelter: the Espiritu Santo Church.
<b>Agua Prieta, Sonora</b>  <i>CAME migrant shelter</i>	Open	900 people  <i>February 2, 2021</i>	12 months	The CAME migrant shelter manages a waitlist in Agua Prieta. The list manager continues to accept new entrants by phone, yet discourages asylum seekers from signing up due to the COVID-19 border restrictions. Over the last three months, the list manager has added 100 asylum seekers.

## Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2021 (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
<b>Nogales, Sonora</b>  <i>Municipal government</i>	Closed	990 people  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	16 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Nogales remains closed.</p> <p>A representative of Sonora's Anticorruption System Citizen Participation Committee, (<i>Comité de Participación Ciudadana del Sistema Estatal Anticorrupción de Sonora</i>), submitted an official request for a copy of the list several months ago. The municipal government did not provide a response. This has caused unrest among the asylum seekers on the list, who worry that they may have been waiting in vain.</p> <p>From November 2020 through January 2021, the Kino Border Initiative Aid Center in Nogales reported that it had received 147 individuals who reported that violence or persecution was the driving force behind their migration.<sup>5</sup></p>
<b>San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora</b>  <i>Casa del Migrante La Divina Providencia</i>	Closed	1,798 people  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	15 months	<p>In mid-November 2020, the Casa del Migrante La Divina Providencia closed the waitlist to new entrants, due to the list's growing length and uncertainty surrounding when asylum processing would resume.</p> <p>The shelter staff receives daily calls and WhatsApp messages from asylum seekers—including from Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela and other countries—who are located in different Mexican cities and want to sign up for the list.</p> <p>On January 21, 2021, the day after President Biden's inauguration, several dozen asylum seekers arrived at the port of entry to request asylum. CBP officials turned them away.</p>

## Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2021 (continued)

<b>Mexican City</b> <i>List Administrator</i>	<b>Waitlist Status</b>	<b># of Asylum Seekers on List</b> <i>Date Recorded</i>	<b>Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)</b>	<b>Recent Changes</b>
<b>Mexicali, Baja California</b>  <i>Grupo Beta</i>	Closed	150 people  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	16 to 17 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Mexicali has remained closed since March 2020.</p> <p>The city currently has low shelter capacity, as three of the main shelters closed during fall 2020.</p>
<b>Tijuana, Baja California</b>  <i>Grupo Beta / Support from asylum seekers</i>	Closed	9,600 people  <i>February 1, 2021</i>	16 to 17 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Tijuana has remained closed since March 2020.</p> <p>INM officials recently told civil society organizations in Tijuana that they don't know if the waitlist will be valid when ports of entry re-open for asylum processing or if they will establish a new processing mechanism.</p> <p>In January, shelters in Tijuana reported an increase in the number of arriving migrants, compared to previous months.</p> <p>The #DefendAsylum campaign in Tijuana/ San Diego —made up of migrants and civil society organizations from the region— organized a press conference and other actions to call for the end of metering and other border policies.<sup>6</sup></p>

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

## 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. On February 2, 2021, President Biden signed an [executive order](#) on regional migration and asylum processing that stated that Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, and the CDC would soon begin steps to resume asylum processing at the border, “consistent with public health and safety and capacity constraints.”
3. Astrid Blanco, “Migrantes esperan ansias reformas migratorias propuestas por Biden,” Notigape, January 21, 2021, <https://www.notigape.com/migrantes-esperan-ansias-reformas-migratorias-propuestas-por-biden/227217>.
4. Paola Gamboa, “Con Triunfo de Biden Repunta Llegada de Migrantes a Ciudad Juárez,” El Heraldo de Chihuahua, February 3, 2021, <https://www.elheraldodechihuahua.com.mx/local/juarez/con-triunfo-de-biden-repunta-llegada-de-migrantes-a-ciudad-juarez-frontera-chihuahua-joe-biden-estados-unidos-sueno-americano-6320219.html>.
5. Information provided by the Kino Border Initiative.
6. The #DefendAsylum campaign in Tijuana/San Diego is made up of various migrant persons and civil society organizations from the region, including (but not limited to) Espacio Migrante, la Casa del Migrante de Tijuana, Pueblo Sin Fronteras, American Friends Service Committee, the University of San Diego, Haitian Bridge Alliance, Al Otro Lado, Border Angels, Borderclick, Border Line Crisis Center, and more. <https://www.espaciomigrante.org/defendasylum>.