

METERING UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2020



STEPHANIE LEUTERT, SAVITRI ARVEY, AND ELLIE EZZELL

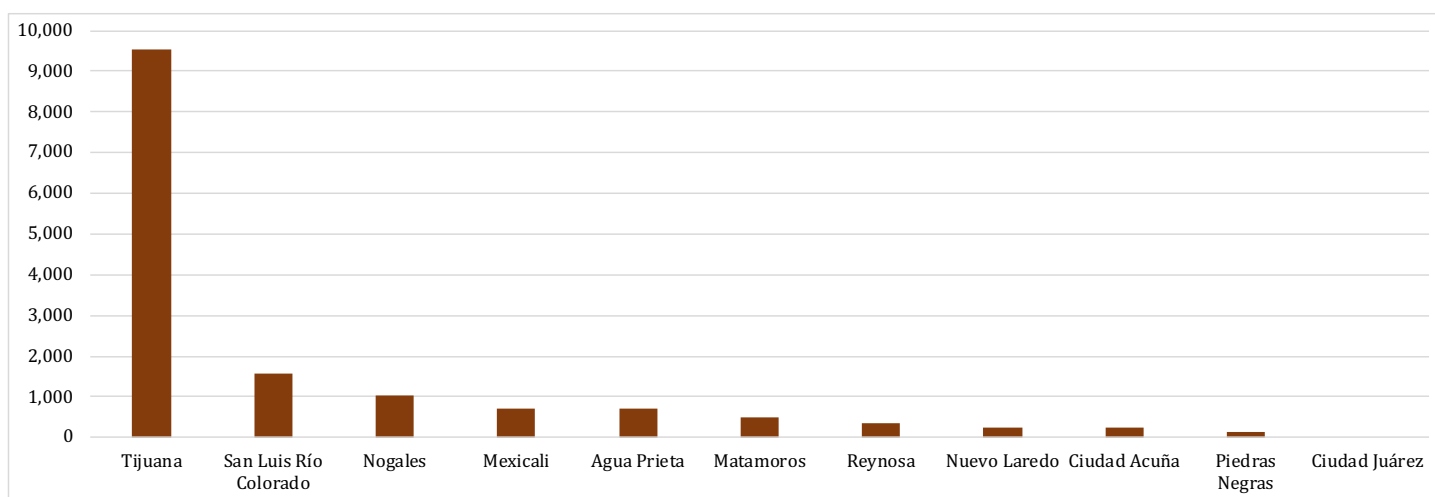
INTRODUCTION

In April 2018, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued guidance to its officers, which noted that they could be stationed at the United States' international boundary with Mexico and inform arriving asylum seekers that U.S. ports of entry were full. Arriving asylum seekers were not allowed to cross into the United States and were instead forced to wait in Mexico. Simultaneously, CBP officials accepted limited numbers of asylum seekers a day—in a process that is known as metering—often communicating directly with Mexican officials regarding these numbers. As lines of asylum seekers grew longer 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 systems in eight border cities. It found that, in December 2018, 6,000 asylum seekers were waiting along the border in Mexico and that the waitlist process varied in each Mexican border city. Since the report's publication, there have been changes in every border community. Some of these changes were documented in the [February 2019](#), [May 2019](#), [August 2019](#), and [November 2019](#) updates, which estimated that 4,800, 19,000, 26,000, and 21,400 asylum seekers, respectively, were waiting along the border.

Since November 2019, asylum seekers have continued to arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border, although in lower numbers than in previous months. This February 2020 metering update estimates that there are currently around 15,000 asylum seekers on waitlists in 11 Mexican border cities.

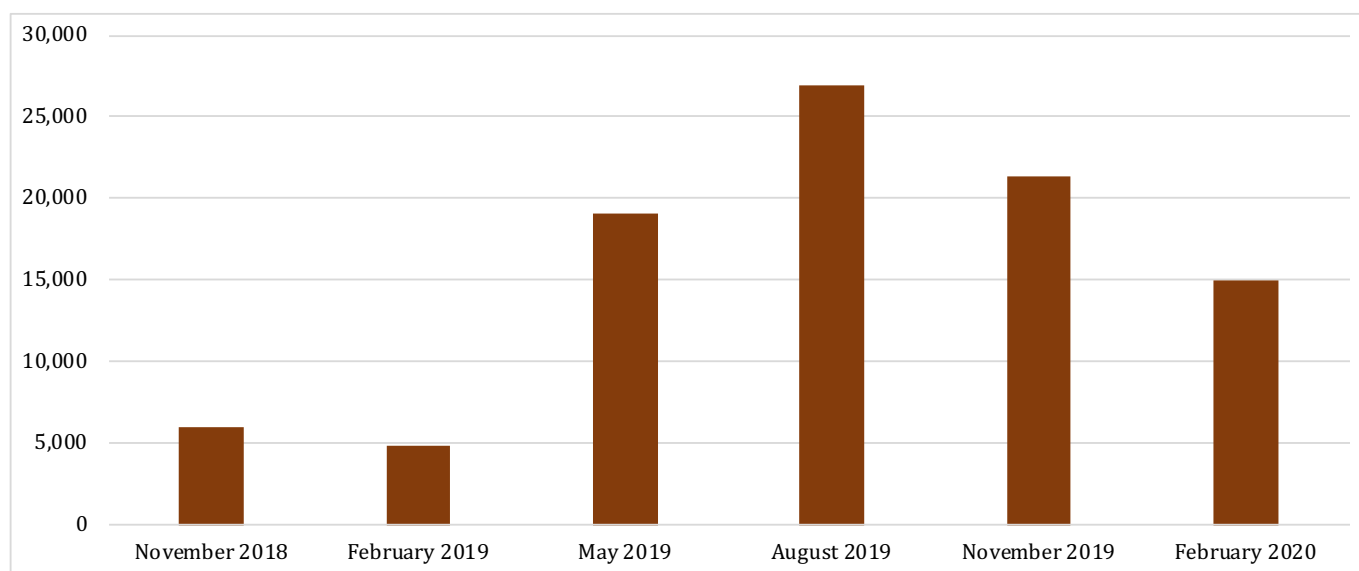
Figure 1: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists (February 2020)



Authors' elaboration. Data collected from February 7, 2020 to February 17, 2020.

This represents a 30 percent decrease since November 2019 in the total number of people on asylum waitlists. Additionally, the current waitlist totals may overstate the number of people who are still waiting in Mexican border cities, as some people may have returned to their countries of origin, moved to another port of entry, or attempted to enter the United States undetected. In Agua Prieta, asylum seekers can also sign up for the waitlist from other areas within Mexico.

Figure 2: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists (November 2018 - February 2020)



Authors' elaboration. Data collected from February 7, 2020 to February 17, 2020.

This downward shift appears to be in large part due to the Trump administration's steps to reduce the number of asylum seekers arriving at the border. In particular, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) have returned all non-Mexican, Spanish speaking asylum seekers and Brazilians to Mexico, after registering their asylum cases in the United States. MPP began in January 2019 in San Diego, but has since spread across the entire border, with individuals being returned to Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros. Since MPP's expansion, the total number of asylum seekers arriving at the border has decreased and this overall drop has been reflected in the waitlists.

Additional U.S. and Mexican policies have contributed to this decrease. The United States has continued to implement the third-country transit asylum bar, which blocks anyone arriving in the United States from seeking asylum if they traveled first through another country. In October 2019, CBP rolled out the the Humanitarian Asylum Review Process (HARP) and the Prompt Asylum Claim Review (PACR) in El Paso and then expanded the programs to the Rio Grande Valley in December 2019. Both programs expedite the asylum determination process for Mexicans (HARP) and non-Mexicans (PACR).

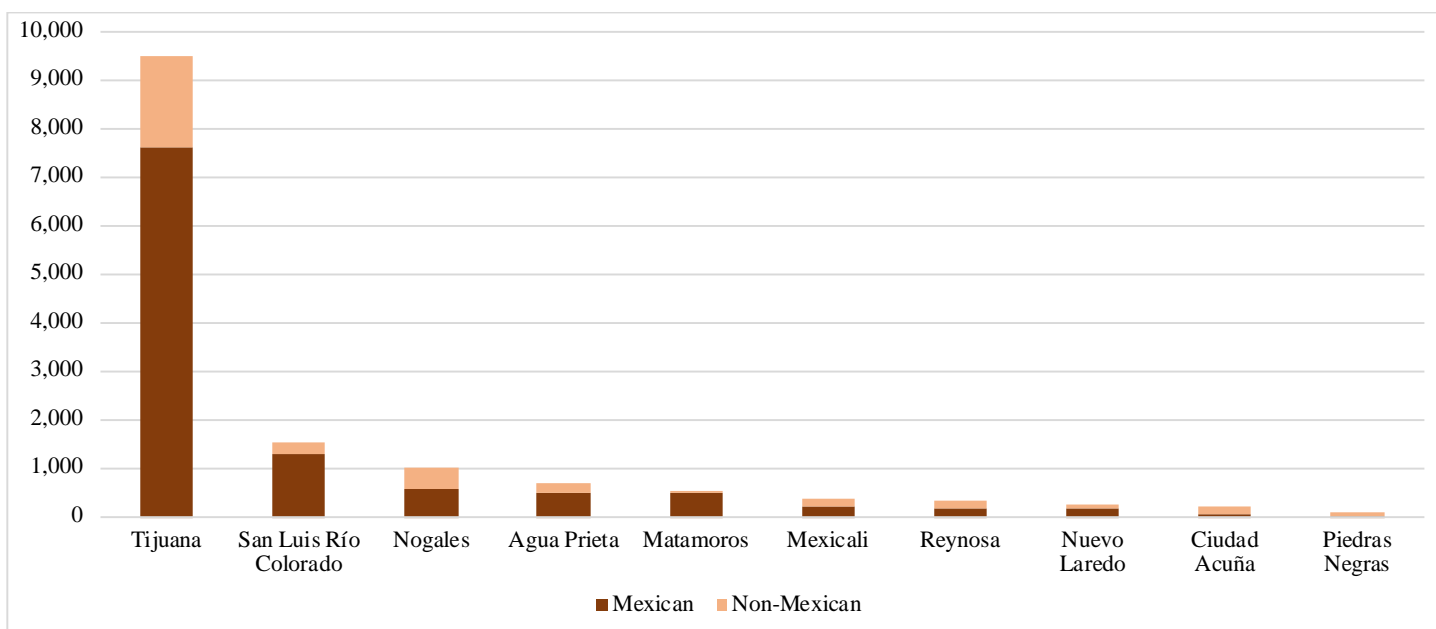
The United States has also developed Asylum Cooperation Agreements (ACAs) with Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, whereby asylum seekers can be sent back to those countries to seek asylum. So far, only the ACA

with Guatemala has been implemented, with CBP sending more than 600 Honduran and Salvadoran asylum seekers to Guatemala City and forcing them to make their asylum claims within the country.¹ These U.S. border programs may have contributed to the longer waitlists in cities along the California and Arizona border, where these programs are not being uniformly implemented.

Similarly, it remains difficult for asylum seekers to even reach the U.S.-Mexico border. Since November 2019, Mexico has continued to crack down on transit migration. In January 2020, Mexican National Guard members blocked a Central American migrant caravan that attempted to cross from Guatemala into the country near Tapachula, Chiapas. Mexican migration officials promised jobs in Mexico to the caravan members, but eventually they were provided only with the options of applying for refugee status in Mexico or being deported back to their countries of origin.

Yet as U.S. and Mexican policies have become more restrictive for non-Mexican asylum seekers, there continue to be a high number of Mexican asylum seekers waiting at the U.S.-Mexico border. This February 2020 update counted more than 11,360 Mexicans on the asylum waitlists, making up 76 percent of everyone currently on the lists. This is approximately the same absolute number of Mexican asylum seekers as reported in November 2019. However, during this period, Mexican asylum seekers went from 52 percent to 76 percent of the total waitlist population, as the number of asylum seekers from other nationalities declined. These Mexican asylum seekers are predominantly from the states of Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Chiapas.

Figure 3: Mexican Asylum Seekers Waiting on Waitlists (February 2020)



Authors' elaboration. Data collected from February 7, 2020 to February 17, 2020.

This February 2020 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 asylum seekers, government officials, and representatives from civil society organizations on both sides of the border.

Figure 4: Mexican Border Cities Covered in the February 2020 Update



Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Matamoros, Tamaulipas <i>National Migration Institute (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INM) and the Casa del Migrante: Non-Mexican list at the Gateway Bridge</i> <i>Asylum Seekers: Mexican lists at the Gateway Bridge</i>	505 □ 500 <i>Mexicans</i> 5 <i>Non- Mexicans</i> February 15, 2020	5 to 8 weeks <i>Mexicans</i> 2 days to 1 week <i>Non- Mexicans</i>	10 to 15 people per day <i>Gateway Bridge</i>	<p>There are two list systems in Matamoros divided by nationality.</p> <p>Mexican asylum seekers run the longest list at the Gateway Bridge. All of these asylum seekers live in the tent encampment next to the Rio Grande in a section designated for Mexicans. There are two Mexican asylum seeker representatives who run the waitlist. Every day, CBP tells INM how many individuals they will process. INM then tells that number to the Mexican list managers, who alert the next families in line.</p> <p>As of February 15, 2020, there were 156 families on the Mexican list, with the majority from Guerrero, Michoacán, and Oaxaca. The family size ranges from two to eight people.</p> <p>There are very few non-Mexican individuals arriving in Matamoros to seek asylum. When these non-Mexican asylum seekers do arrive in the city, INM sends them to the Casa del Migrante shelter to wait until it is their turn to cross. INM then alerts the shelter when CBP will accept the asylum seekers. They generally cross into the United States after waiting for several days at the shelter. Currently, there are a small number of asylum seekers from Congo waiting in the shelter.</p> <p>In mid to late January 2020, Mexican migration officials sent the Mexican asylum seekers at the B&M Bridge to the Gateway Bridge. There are no longer any asylum seekers waiting at the B&M Bridge.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas	0 <i>February 16, 2020</i>	N/A	N/A	There are no asylum seekers in Nuevo Progreso. Private security officials remain stationed at the turnstiles at the entrance to the international bridge.
Reynosa, Tamaulipas <i>Senda de Vida migrant shelter</i>	350 <i>February 12, 2020</i>	6 weeks	10 people per day	<p>The Senda de Vida migrant shelter maintains the list in Reynosa. Asylum seekers who arrive in the city must register their information with shelter staff. The shelter staff contact CBP daily regarding the number of asylum seekers that they will process on that day.</p> <p>Senda de Vida reported that more than 50 percent of the waiting asylum seekers are from Mexico. Africans make up the second largest group, followed by Central Americans and Cubans. In late January 2020, Senda de Vida reported that there were many asylum seekers from Cameroon, Congo, and Guinea, along with Haiti and Russia.²</p>
Ciudad Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas	0 <i>February 16, 2020</i>	N/A	N/A	There are no asylum seekers waiting in Ciudad Miguel Alemán.

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas <i>Network of six migrant shelters managing six separate lists (one per shelter)</i>	~250 <i>February 11, 2020</i>	4 to 8 weeks	10 people per shelter per week	<p>There are two recognized migrant shelters in Nuevo Laredo (Casa Nazareth and the AMAR shelter) that work with INM, and another four shelters—the Municipal Shelter, Barrios de Cristo, Oradel, and Voz de Cristo—that also have lists. These latter four shelters also provide services to non-asylum seeking populations, including members of Nuevo Laredo’s homeless community. Each day, one of these six shelters sends asylum seekers to INM, where they are then sent to CBP.</p> <p>In total, there are around 250 asylum seekers on lists in Nuevo Laredo. The majority (150 to 200) are Mexican families. There are also a smaller number of asylum seekers from African countries. The shelters report that CBP receives about 10 people per day. Wait times vary by shelter, but the average wait is between 5 to 8 weeks.</p>
Piedras Negras, Coahuila <i>Municipal government</i>	120 <i>February 10, 2020</i>	15 days	6 to 8 people per day	<p>A representative from the Piedras Negras municipal government runs the asylum waitlist.</p> <p>As of February 10, 2020, there were 120 people on the list. Venezuelans made up the largest nationality (~50 people), compared to Mexicans (30 people), Brazilians (25 to 30 people), and Hondurans (20 people).</p> <p>The number of asylum seekers arriving to Piedras Negras has declined in recent months. The municipal government attributed the decline to MPP’s roll out.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila <i>Civil Protection (Protección Civil): individuals & families</i>	244 □ 119 individuals 45 families (~125 people) <i>February 7, 2020</i>	3 to 4 months	1 to 2 individuals per week 1 to 2 families per week	<p>There are two lists in Ciudad Acuña: the individual list and the family list. Civil Protection runs both lists, a shift from November 2019, when Grupo Beta ran the list for families.</p> <p>On December 3, 2019, Civil Protection created new lists for the individuals who were waiting in the city. Currently both lists continue to be open.</p> <p>As of February 7, 2020, there were 119 individuals on the list. These included 94 Cubans, 9 Venezuelans, 5 Mexicans, 4 Haitians, 3 Hondurans, 1 Colombian, 1 Nicaraguan, 1 Guatemalan, and 1 Salvadoran.</p> <p>There were 45 families registered on the family list. Sixteen families are Mexican, 11 families are Venezuelan, 10 families are Cuban, 6 families are Honduran, and there is 1 family from El Salvador and 1 family from Haiti. Some families are only two people and other families have up to six members.</p> <p>The families and individuals can stay in one of two shelters in the city or can rent rooms while they wait.</p> <p>In December 2019, a large number of African asylum seekers arrived in Ciudad Acuña. However, they did not stay in the city, and decided to leave after becoming frustrated with the long wait time.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua <i>State Population Council (Consejo Estatal de Población, COESPO)</i>	~10 <i>February 17, 2020</i>	1 to 2 days	10 to 20 people per day	<p>COESPO runs the list in Ciudad Juárez. Arriving asylum seekers register in a database and then receive updates about the waitlist through a closed Facebook group. Over the past three months, separate lists for Mexican asylum seekers waiting on the three bridges in the city were incorporated into the COESPO list, due to security concerns of waiting near the bridges, the disorganization of the bridge lists, and general mistrust of the process.</p> <p>However, since November 2019, all Mexican asylum seekers have left Ciudad Juárez. COESPO believes that many Mexican asylum seekers may have traveled to other border cities, particularly to those where HARP has not yet been implemented.</p> <p>Currently, groups of 5 to 30 asylum seekers sporadically arrive in Ciudad Juárez to register on the list. They normally wait only one or two days before being processed by U.S. authorities. CBP accepts 10 to 20 individuals per day (0 to 10 in the morning and 0 to 10 in the evening).</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Agua Prieta, Sonora <i>CAME migrant shelter</i>	700 <i>February 11, 2020</i>	3 to 4 months	1 family per day	<p>The CAME migrant shelter runs the list in Agua Prieta, Sonora. As of February 11, 2020, there were 700 individuals on the list, including 500 Mexicans, mostly from Guerrero, Michoacán, and Guanajuato.</p> <p>Asylum seekers can add their name to the list by sending their contact information to the CAME shelter staff. Asylum seekers do not have to be physically present at the border to sign up for the list.</p> <p>Civil society organizations report that asylum seekers are scared to travel to Agua Prieta because organized crime controls the city's bus stations.</p>
Nogales, Sonora <i>Municipal government</i>	1,041 <i>February 13, 2020</i>	4 to 5 months <i>Mexicans</i> 2 to 3 months <i>Non-Mexicans</i>	0 to 10 people per day	<p>In November 2019, the list management changed from Municipal Civil Protection to the Municipal Office of the President. Currently, CBP notifies INM regarding how many people it will accept each day. INM then notifies the Municipal Office of the President, who calls the asylum seekers' cell phones to let them know that they should present themselves at the Nogales port of entry.</p> <p>As of February 13, 2020, there were 1,041 asylum seekers on the list: 761 adults and 280 minors. Fifty-four percent of the asylum seekers were Mexican and 33 percent were Cuban.</p> <p>In January 2020, the list manager removed more than 1,000 names from the list. The asylum seekers' names were removed if they did not confirm their physical presence in Nogales. Before this elimination</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Nogales, Sonora (continued)				<p>process, there were 2,246 people on the list. Asylum seekers on the list must confirm their continued presence in Nogales once a month.</p> <p>The wait time in Nogales varies by nationality (Central American or Mexican) or demographic group (family or single adult). All of these groups are being called at different rates. The longest wait time is for Mexican families and is four to five months.</p> <p>On January 2, 2020, when CBP began returning individuals to Nogales under MPP, INM claimed that CBP began to request different nationalities on specific days: Central Americans, Venezuelans, or Cubans from Monday through Thursday and Mexicans over the weekend. CBP in Tucson denies that they differentiate their requests by nationality.</p>
San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora <i>Casa del Migrante</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>La Divina Providencia</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	1,560 <i>February 11, 2020</i>	4 to 5 months	0 to 7 people per day	<p>The Casa del Migrante “La Divina Providencia” runs the asylum waitlist in San Luis Río Colorado. As of February 11, 2020, there were 1,560 asylum seekers on the list, with 1,320 asylum seekers from Mexico.</p> <p>The number of asylum seekers arriving in San Luis Río Colorado has remained constant over the past three months.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: February 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Wait Time	CBP Processing #s	Recent Changes
Mexicali, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta</i>	400 <i>February 17, 2020</i>	4 to 5 months	0 to 10 people per day	Grupo Beta runs the waitlist in Mexicali. Roughly 60 percent of the asylum seekers on the list are Mexican.
Tijuana, Baja California³ <i>Grupo Beta / Support from asylum seekers</i>	9,520 <i>February 17, 2020</i>	5 to 6 months	0 to 30 people per day	Over the past three weeks, CBP has been accepting fewer asylum seekers. Every day at least 30 new individuals register for the list. Roughly 80 percent of individuals on the list are Mexican.

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

ENDNOTES

- 1 Reynaldo Leños, “More Than 600 Asylum Seekers Have Been Sent to Guatemala Under Trump Policy,” Texas Public Radio, February 18, 2020, <https://www.tpr.org/post/more-600-asylum-seekers-have-been-sent-guatemala-under-trump-policy>.
- 2 Yenni García, “Senda de vida requiere apoyo,” Metro Noticias, January 23, 2020, <https://www.metronoticias.com.mx/nota.pl?id=322118>; Rosalía Quintá, “Exigen en Reynosa que gobiernos atiendan el fenómeno migratorio,” Hoy Tamaulipas, January 24, 2020, <https://www.hoytamaulipas.net/notas/408536/Exigen-en-Reynosa-que-gobiernos-atien-dan-el-fenomeno-migratorio.html>.
- 3 The data provided for the asylum waitlist in Tijuana was collected by a team of Al Otro Lado volunteers during daily visits to the Chaparral port of entry. Estimates of demographics were provided by Grupo Beta.