

METERING UPDATE

AUGUST 2020



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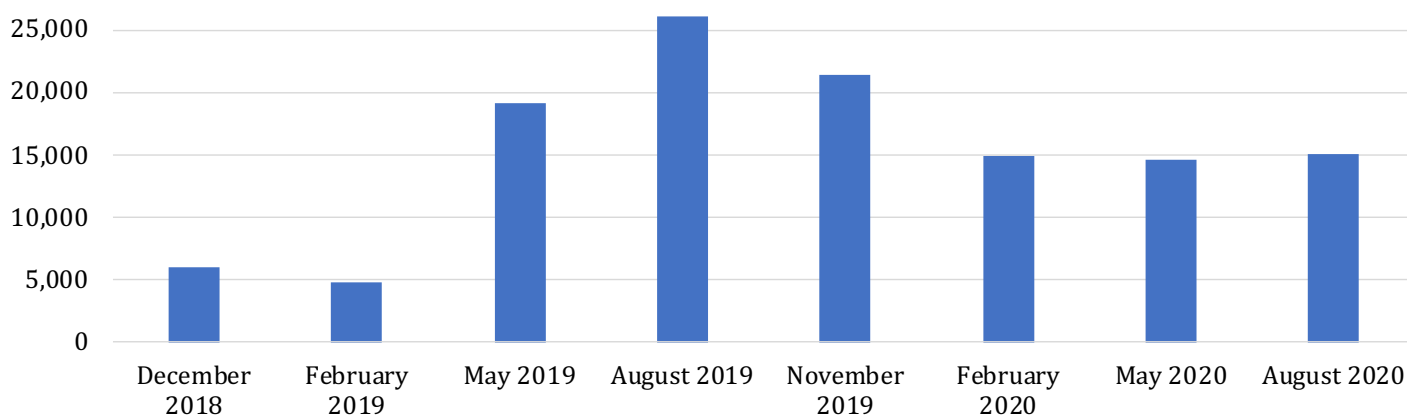
INTRODUCTION

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 specific number of asylum seekers each day, in a process that is known as metering. As lines of asylum seekers grew in border cities, Mexican authorities and civil society groups responded by providing humanitarian assistance and creating informal waitlists.

For the past five months, CBP has stopped processing asylum seekers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 20, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control issued the regulation "[Control of Communicable Diseases; Foreign Quarantine: Suspension of Introduction of Persons into United States from Designated Foreign Countries or Places for Public Health Purposes](#)."¹ That same month, on March 26, 2020, the CDC issued a 30-day order that blocked entry for individuals seeking to enter the United States through Mexico without proper travel documents, which included asylum seekers. On April 20, 2020, the CDC extended the order for an additional 30 days and on May 20, 2020, it extended the order indefinitely."²

This report provides an update on metering along the U.S.-Mexico border amid CBP's asylum processing suspension. It covers how the shutdown has affected metering lists, asylum seekers, and migrant shelters along the border.

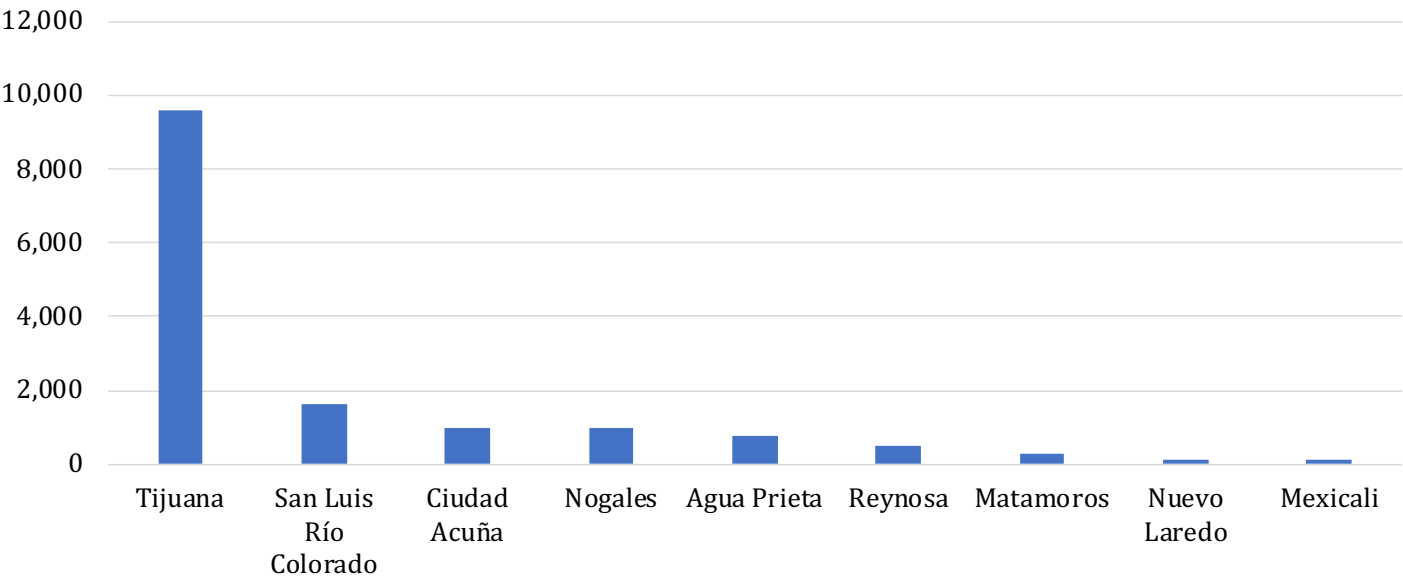
Figure 1: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists (December 2018 - August 2020)



Authors' elaboration. Data collected from December 2018 to August 2020.

In August 2020, there were approximately 15,000 asylum seekers on waitlists in 11 Mexican border cities. This is a slight increase from May 2020, when there were 14,580 asylum seekers. Yet, these numbers only reflect the asylum seekers who are on waitlists. The total number of people waiting in Mexican border cities is likely lower. List managers in multiple cities report that some individuals traveled back to their communities of origin during the pandemic, attempted to cross into the United States between ports of entry, or moved to another Mexican city to find stable work. These individuals' names are on asylum waitlists but they do not reside in border cities. However, over the past three months, smaller numbers of asylum seekers have also arrived to border cities but have been unable to get on waitlists.

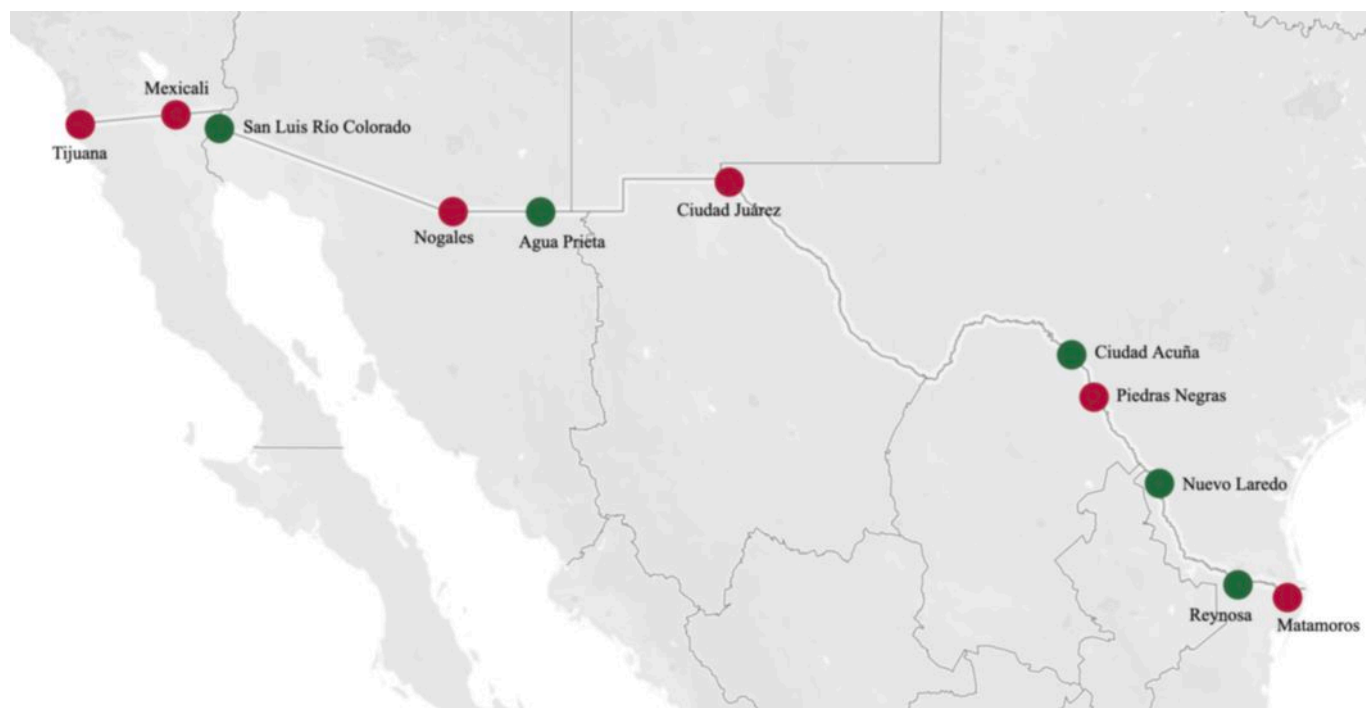
Figure 2: Number of People on Asylum Waitlists by City (August 2020)



Data collected from August 13, 2020 to August 19, 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. 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 August 13, 2020 to August 19, 2020.

Most migrant shelters also remain closed and guests must follow strict quarantine measures. However, since May 2020, some shelters have started accepting a limited number of new arrivals or permitting people 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.

In line with pandemic-related travel advisories, this August 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: August 2020

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	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 list at the Gateway Bridge</i>	Closed	300 people (80 families) <i>August 17, 2020</i>	6 months	<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>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, the actual number of families within the encampment is now less than half of that number. However, once CBP begins asylum processing again, some of these asylum seekers plan to return to the camp and retake their place on the list.</p> <p>The organization Global Response Management (GRM) is providing medical care to waiting asylum seekers. As of August 17, 2020, GRM reported that 53 people in the Matamoros tent encampment had tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies.</p> <p>The Casa del Migrante shelter in Matamoros also continues to implement a strict quarantine and has not allowed new individuals to stay at the shelter. The shelter has not reported any cases of COVID-19, which they attribute to their strict quarantine.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	Recent Changes
Reynosa, Tamaulipas <i>Senda de Vida migrant shelter</i>	Open	480 people <i>August 15, 2020</i>	5 to 6 months	<p>The Senda de Vida shelter maintains the asylum waitlist in Reynosa. In response to the pandemic, the shelter initially stopped allowing new arrivals to stay at the shelter and created two waitlists. The first list was for individuals who had signed up before the shelter's quarantine began and were staying at the shelter and the second list was for individuals who had signed up after the quarantine began and were not staying at the shelter.</p> <p>Currently, the shelter reports that they are working with Mexico's Secretary of Health to create protocols that will allow them to accept new entrants into the shelter. These measures include constructing small individual houses, where new guests could quarantine for 14 days before joining the rest of the shelter's community. The shelter has also combined the two lists into a single asylum waitlist.</p> <p>This single list has 480 individuals. Approximately 40 percent are from Haiti, 30 percent are from various African countries, 20 percent are from Mexico, and 10 percent are from Central American countries.</p> <p>Additionally, the shelter reports that they continue to receive visits from Doctors Without Borders and have not had a single case of COVID-19, which they credit to their strict quarantine. The shelter has been relying on donations and reports needing supplies for children and infants.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	Recent Changes
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas <i>Network of six migrant shelters managing six separate lists (one per shelter)</i>	Open	~150 people <i>August 17, 2020</i>	6 months	<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 as few as 6 people on the list and others as many as 50 people. Many of the asylum seekers are Mexican families.</p> <p>List managers report that many asylum seekers have given up and left the shelters. Some asylum seekers have traveled to Monterrey, Nuevo León to work during the pandemic.</p>
Piedras Negras, Coahuila <i>Municipal government</i>	Closed	0 <i>August 17, 2020</i>	N/A	<p>The asylum waitlist in Piedras Negras remains closed. However, asylum seekers continue to contact the Piedras Negras municipal government regarding the waitlist and the status of CBP's asylum processing.</p> <p>The city's shelters remain closed for overnight stays. However, they allow people to shower, change clothes, and eat.</p>
Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila <i>Civil Protection (Protección Civil): individuals & families</i>	Open	~1,000 people (400 individuals) (200 families) <i>August 14, 2020</i>	6 months	<p>There are close to 1,000 asylum seekers on the waitlists in Ciudad Acuña. Cubans and Venezuelans continue to make up a large number of individuals on the waitlists. There have not been many reported COVID-19 cases among asylum seekers in Ciudad Acuña.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <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 Estatad de Poblaci3n, COESPO)</i>	Closed	0 <i>August 17, 2020</i>	N/A	<p>The asylum waitlist in Ciudad Juárez remains closed.</p> <p>Asylum seekers continue to arrive at the Paso del Norte international bridge to request information regarding the asylum waitlist or the process to request asylum in the United States.</p> <p>The number of asylum seekers from southern Mexico has increased in recent weeks.⁴ There are also asylum seekers from Cuba and Central American countries.</p> <p>Ciudad Juárez now has two “filter” spaces for asylum seekers.⁵ These locations accept individuals who are new arrivals to the city, people who have been expelled or deported from the United States, and anyone else who needs accommodations. People stay here to quarantine before being released to the city’s shelters for a longer-term stay.</p> <p>Since June 22, 2020, COESPO and Mexico’s Secretary of Labor and Welfare have employed 70 migrants and asylum seekers through the “Emergency Temporary Labor Plan” (Plan Emergente de Ocupaci3n Temporal, PEOT).⁶ For three months, the plan will pay these individuals to work within the city’s shelters to provide humanitarian assistance and contribute to minimizing the spread of COVID-19.</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	Recent Changes
Agua Prieta, Sonora <i>CAME migrant shelter</i>	Open	800 people <i>August 13, 2020</i>	6 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Agua Prieta continues to be open, and asylum seekers can sign up by phone. Eighty percent of the asylum seekers on the waitlist are Mexican, and the remaining 20 percent are primarily from Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Cuba.</p> <p>There are 21 individuals—six families—within the shelter who have remained there since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020.</p>
Nogales, Sonora <i>Municipal government</i>	Closed	990 people <i>August 19, 2020</i>	10 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Nogales has been closed since March 2020.</p> <p>On August 22, 2020, asylum seekers in the city will undertake a march to raise awareness regarding their inability to register on the waitlist.</p> <p>From March through July 2020, the Kino Border Initiative Aid Center in Nogales, Sonora reported that it had received 363 individuals who reported that violence or persecution was the driving force behind their migration. These individuals included people who had just arrived to the city and also people who had been expelled from the United States. Of this number, 104 were Mexican, 89 were Honduran, and 63 were Guatemalan.⁷</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	Recent Changes
San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora <i>Casa del Migrante La Divina Providencia</i>	Open	1,623 people <i>August 17, 2020</i>	9 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in San Luis Río Colorado remains open. Asylum seekers—mainly from Cuba—continue to sign up for the list, mostly by phone but also in person. Sixty-seven percent of the asylum seekers on the waitlist are from Mexico, 28 percent are Cuban, and 4 percent are from Central American countries.</p> <p>The Casa del Migrante la Divina Providencia is not accepting new entrants into the shelter. Many asylum seekers rent rooms in the city and work in hardware stores, construction, taco shops, agriculture packaging, and car washes.</p>
Mexicali, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta</i>	Closed	~150 people <i>August 14, 2020</i>	10 to 11 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Mexicali remains closed and the number of individuals on the list hasn't changed since March.</p> <p>A small number of asylum seekers have continued to arrive to Mexicali during the pandemic. Many of these individuals have attempted to regularize their immigration status in Mexico, to be able to legally find work while waiting to seek asylum in the United States. As of August 2020, most asylum seekers have been able to find work with essential businesses.</p> <p>Shelters such as Alfa y Omega and Hotel Migrante remain open to new entrants. There have been few reported COVID-19 cases among the city's migrant population.⁸</p>

Metering & Asylum Waitlists: August 2020 (continued)

Port of Entry <i>List Administrator</i>	Waitlist Status	# of Asylum Seekers on List <i>Date Recorded</i>	Estimated Time on Waitlist (Maximum)	Recent Changes
Tijuana, Baja California <i>Grupo Beta / Support from asylum seekers</i>	Closed	9,600 people <i>August 14, 2020</i>	10 to 11 months	<p>The asylum waitlist in Tijuana remains closed and the number of individuals on the list hasn't changed since March 2020.</p> <p>On June 29, 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) opened a "filter hotel" in Tijuana to support the migrant population without access to a shelter during the pandemic.⁹ Hotel guests have included individuals seeking asylum in the United States.¹⁰</p> <p>At the end of July 2020, Casa del Migrante reopened its doors to allow 30 people at a time to stay at the shelter. Several other shelters have also started accepting new entrants.¹¹ Asylum seekers have also been able to find work again in Tijuana, as restaurants, car washes, and other businesses have reopened over the past month.</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. Additionally, U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced in its “Notification of Temporary Travel Restrictions Applicable to Land Ports of Entry and Ferries Service Between the United States and Mexico” that it would be limiting processing at its port of entry to certain groups of travelers. It does not include asylum seekers as one of these groups.
3. Special thanks to B. Gómez for collecting information on the asylum waitlist in Matamoros.
4. Fabiola Martínez, “Flujo de migrantes hacia Ciudad Juárez se incrementa: OIM,” *La Jornada*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/estados/2020/08/13/flujo-de-migrantes-hacia-ciudad-juarez-se-incrementa-oim-3754.html>.
5. Mallory Falk, “In Ciudad Juárez, a new ‘filter hotel’ offers migrants a safe space to quarantine,” *PRI The World*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-06-18/ciudad-ju-rez-new-filter-hotel-offers-migrants-safe-space-quarantine>; Favia Lucero, “Hotel filtro para migrCantes busca prevenir contagios de COVID-19,” *YoCiudadano*, May 19, 2020, <https://yociudadano.com.mx/noticias/hotel-filtro-para-migrantes-busca-prevenir-contagios-de-covid-19/>.
6. “Dan trabajo temporal a 70 personas migrantes,” *YoCiudadano*, July 21, 2020, <https://yociudadano.com.mx/noticias/dan-trabajo-temporal-a-70-personas-migrantes/>.
7. Information provided by the Kino Border Initiative.
8. Luis Carlos Rodríguez González, “Covid no detiene al Hotel de los Migrantes,” *Última Hora*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.contrareplica.mx/nota-Covid-no-detiene-al-Hotel-de-los-Migrantes20204817>.
9. Ariadna Ortega, “Hoteles filtro, un plan para dar a migrantes un lugar seguro ante el COVID-19,” *Expansión Política*, July 11, 2020, <https://politica.expansion.mx/mexico/2020/07/11/hoteles-filtro-un-plan-para-dar-a-migrantes-un-lugar-seguro-ante-el-covid-19>.
10. Alejandra Crail, “Hotel Tijuana: El Filtro de Migrantes Ante el Coronavirus,” *EmeEquis*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.m-x.com.mx/entrevistas/hotel-tijuana-el-filtro-de-migrantes-ante-el-coronavirus>.
11. “Casa del Migrante Opera Desde Hace 3 Semanas; Escasea Ayuda,” *Uniradio Informa*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.uniradioinforma.com/noticias/tijuana/609344/casa-del-migrante-opera-desde-hace-3-semanas-escasea-ayuda.html>.