

# Trump administration expands program to make asylum seekers wait in Mexico

The Trump administration this week added a new location to a Department of Homeland Security program that turns away asylum seekers who arrive at official crossing points at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) was implemented Monday in a new location — Eagle Pass, Texas — where Central American families, as well as Congolese, Angolans, and Haitians, have constituted the largest groups of asylum seekers arriving over the past six months.

It is the sixth crossing point, or port of entry, on the southern border where DHS has opted to turn away people since implementing its “Remain in Mexico” policy in January. Other border crossings already returning migrants to Mexico are San Diego, California; Calexico, California; El Paso, Texas; Laredo, Texas; and Brownsville, Texas.

“The President is using every tool available to address the humanitarian crisis at the border to include domestic policy changes and fostering collaboration with our neighbors in the region. The Migrant Protection Protocols has been a key component to the success we have had addressing the crisis,” acting DHS Secretary Kevin McAleenan said in a statement. “I am grateful to the government of Mexico for their partnership, including accepting MPP returns at Eagle Pass.”

Under the program, citizens of countries other than Mexico who have passed through Mexico but not sought asylum there are not allowed into the U.S. to claim asylum but must wait in Mexico until a federal immigration judge can hear the case.

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As of earlier this month, approximately 50,000 people had been blocked from entering the United States at legal points, Reuters reported. U.S. Customs and

Border Protection officials have referred illegal crossers to apply at these ports of entry instead of the often unfenced land between them. DHS has described its Remain in Mexico policy as a response to the surge of asylum seekers coming to the southern border over the past 12 months.

The number of people illegally crossing declined drastically over the summer, while the rate of asylum seekers presenting at border crossings remains consistent at around 10,000 to 12,000 monthly. In addition to the returns, CBP officers working at crossing points are hearing limited numbers of asylum claims per day, meaning migrants seeking to make asylum claims may have to wait days or weeks to make the initial credible fear of return claim.

Human Rights First, an organization tracking migrant-related issues, reported earlier this month more than 340 public reports in Mexico of crimes committed against asylum seekers who were returned from the U.S.-Mexico border.

“The Trump Administration is delivering men, women, and children seeking refuge from Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and other countries to some of the most dangerous areas of Mexico,” the group said in the report. “Instead of briefly passing through these dangerous regions to reach the U.S. border to request refugee protection, tens of thousands of asylum seekers are now stranded in peril for months.”

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