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Thousands of children sent to Mexico to await outcome of asylum claims in U.S.

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The U.S. government has placed more than 21,000 people in the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) and walked them over to Juarez since January, including more than 5,000 minors, Mexican officials reported on Friday.

However, only a fraction of those remain in this Mexican border city opposite El Paso, Texas, as many Central American and Cuban migrants have given up on their asylum petitions, are now pursuing them in other cities or have attempted to cross on their own, the officials said.

On Friday, London-based Reuters reported that the U.S. has placed more than 16,000 migrant minors in the MPP program, including 500 who were less than 1 year old.

Migrant advocates have decried the MPP program because most Central American families are unfamiliar with Mexico — where they must wait months for their next appointment in U.S. immigration courts — and border cities like Juarez, Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros are notorious for their high crime rates and drug cartel activity.

Advocates cited by Reuters also raised concerns over the coming flu season and the vulnerability of Central American families on the MPP program. In Juarez, authorities this summer sent medical personnel to migrant shelters to administer more than 1,700 flu shots and are still providing a 90-day “seguro popular,” or preventive health insurance to the migrants.

As of Thursday, the Chihuahua state Migrant Assistance Center next to the Mexican side of the

Paso del Norte Bridge had recorded the arrival of 21,150 non-Mexicans from the United States. Of those 5,499 were minors ranging in age from a few months to 17 years old.

But the numbers have been dwindling, recently, said Dirving Garcia Gutierrez, coordinator of the center. "Few Central Americans are coming (to Juarez) any more. Now we're getting a lot of Mexicans" and they're not part of MPP, he said.

In fact, only 1,567 Central Americans, Cubans and citizens of countries other than Mexico remain in Juarez's shelters. On Thursday, only five foreigners — three Cubans and two Hondurans — came to the Migrant Assistance Center to sign up for appointments in El Paso to seek asylum in the United States, Garcia said. The Juarez center is managing the asylum waiting list on behalf of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Officials like Garcia say they spent the summer working seven days a week due to the continuous arrival of thousands of migrants on their way to the United States. The numbers dropped dramatically after the Mexican government deployed its new National Guard to the border with Guatemala and began enforcing its own, stringent immigration laws.

The Juarez migrant center is still teeming with people, but now it's Mexican citizens fleeing drug violence in the countryside.

Mexican migrants confound their own government

More than 100 people sit or lay on the sidewalk of a side street leading to the Paso del Norte Bridge and the promise of the American Dream.

The pavement is cold as temperatures have dropped into the 60s overnight. Mexican families that a few days ago struggled to find respite from 90-degree temperatures are now donning donated socks and jackets.

Cecilia A., a mother of two, is among them. She says her family fled the Western state of Jalisco after one of her brothers and her nephew were murdered and another brother disappeared.

"Vagrants killed my brother. My nephew was killed coming out of a party. He called us to say some people had left him next to a bridge. We went to look for him but couldn't find him. The next morning we found the body. He was beaten to death," she said as she huddled with one of her daughters on a sidewalk.

The mother of two, who asked that her full name and hometown not be used, said she is hoping to apply for asylum in the United States. When asked when she would be presenting her claim, she directed

BorderReport.Com to a man in a jacket and baseball cap who is keeping track of the list. BorderReport.Com couldn't talk to the man because he was being questioned by Juarez police at the time.

Garcia of the Migrant Assistance Center said his agency will not manage a waiting list for Mexican asylum seekers as it does for Central Americans and others. He explained intricacies in Mexican law that forbid impediments to the free travel of its citizens, including placing them on waiting lists.

The center is, however, providing whatever humanitarian assistance it can and offering to bus

the people sleeping near the Paso del Norte Bridge to Juarez shelters. On Friday, dozens of Mexicans with children and travel bags received free meals at the center, courtesy of a Protestant church.

“We saw the need since last month and got involved. We’re here Monday through Friday providing between 150 and 180 meals,” said Oliver Luna, youth leader at Centro Mundial Amor Eterno church.

Luna said he’s heard stories from the migrants about the hardships that drove them to the border. But what strikes him the most is that their own government will not help them.

“They’re on the sidewalk all day, enduring the rain and the heat, and now the cold nights are coming,” Luna said. “The government has resources, they could be helping them, too, but they are being insensible. ... That’s why people like us have to come in from the outside to help.”

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