



Asylum in Mexico by the Numbers

Executive Summary

Asylum Access is releasing a new dataset about applicants for asylum in Mexico. Asylum Access Mexico received the data from the Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR), Mexico's asylum agency, through a Transparency Law request. The data covers applicants for asylum who applied between January 1, 2018 and October 25, 2019. This dataset and findings expand upon COMAR's published data through [October 2019](#) and [November 2019](#) with a breakdown of how long applicants have been waiting for asylum, a demographic breakdown of applicants, and an analysis of applications in each state. See the full new dataset [here](#) and read on for initial take-aways.

There were 90,397 total applicants for asylum in Mexico in this period, including 29,631 in 2018 and more than twice as many, 60,766, in under ten months of 2019. 45% of all applicants were from Honduras, 16% from El Salvador, and 14% from Venezuela. 27.52% were children. 62% applied in Chiapas and 11.25% in Mexico City. Application numbers in Chiapas increased sharply for the first seven months of 2019, then decreased.

Of applications in this period, COMAR granted asylum to 11.3%, denied 2.7%, and had yet to consider the vast majority--70.6%. This represents at least a 63,860 person backlog, including 17,325 children. 13,089 people who applied in 2018 were still waiting in October 2019 -- 44% of total 2018 applicants. 6,230 have been waiting over a year. 3,539 children who applied in 2018, including 1,136 children under age 5, are still waiting.

Mexican law requires asylum cases be decided within 45 working days, or 90 days in exceptional circumstances; however, the data shows that tens of thousands of asylum seekers are forced to wait well beyond the legal limit. During the wait time refugees are forbidden from leaving the state in which they applied. Since most applicants are in northern or southern border states, with high rates of poverty and violence, this restriction on free movement poses a serious barrier to seeing their applications through and rebuilding their lives.

Perhaps as a consequence, 11.1% of all applications in 2018 and 2019 were marked as either abandoned or withdrawn by the applicant. The average time between application and abandonment or withdrawal for 2018 applicants was 164 days -- a wait far longer than the period in which asylum cases must be decided under Mexican law.

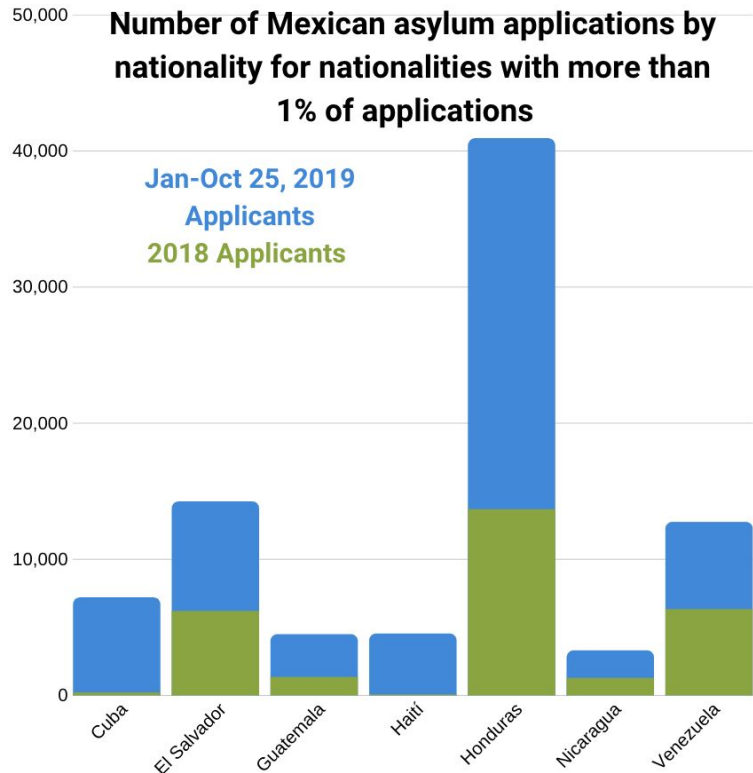


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Countries of Origin of Asylum-Seekers

This dataset includes asylum applicants from 92 countries of origin. The most common countries of origin are in Central America, though substantial numbers of applicants from Haiti, Cuba, and Venezuela also applied in this period. The 2019 increase in applications varied substantially between countries of origin. The numbers of applicants from Cuba and Haiti increased dramatically in 2019 – with 32 and 58 times as many people, respectively, in the first nearly ten months of 2019 than in all of 2018. Almost twice as many people applied from Honduras and Nicaragua in the 2019 months as in 2018.



Published [COMAR data](#) from after the date of this Transparency Law response show a total of 66,915 applicants by the end of November 2019 with updated numbers of applicants from each nationality.

Nationalities with more than 1% of applicants			
Nationality	Number, % of 2018 applicants	Number, % of 2019 applicants	Number, % All Applicants
Cuba	218, 0.74%	6,960, 11.45%	7,178, 7.94%
El Salvador	6,193, 20.90%	8,042, 13.23%	14,235, 15.75%
Guatemala	1,348, 4.55%	3,122, 5.14%	4,470, 4.95%
Haití	76, 0.26%	4,442, 7.21%	4,518, 5.00%
Honduras	13,674, 46.15%	27,240, 44.83%	40,914, 45.26%
Nicaragua	1,271, 4.29%	2,013, 3.31%	3,284, 3.63%
Venezuela	6,327, 21.35%	6,394, 10.52%	12,721, 14.07%

Age and Sex of Asylum-Seekers

27.52% of asylum applicants in 2018 and the first ten months of 2019 were children. Nearly 9% were under 5 years of age. 58% of applicants are marked as men while 42% are marked as women. The data does not include a non-binary gender option or indicate if applicants are transgender or cisgender.



Asylum Seekers 2018-2019		
Age	Number	Percent
0-4 years	7,921	8.76%
5-17 years	16,954	18.76%
18-59 years	64,397	71.24%
Over 60 years	1,125	1.24%
Sex		
Women	38,117	42.17%
Men	52,280	57.83%

Primary and Derivative Applicants

Of the total asylum-seekers, 53,218, 58.9%, are marked “TIT” or “titular” which means they are the primary applicant on the case. The remaining 37,179 are “DEP” or “dependiente,” which means they are family members of primary applicants. 1,125 applicants under the age of 18 are “titular,” which means the application is based on persecution the child faced or fears in their country of origin. Most of those are teenagers between 14 and 17. 112 are 13 or younger. These children may be traveling alone or with their families. 23,750 minors are derivative applicants, who will gain status if the family member they are traveling with is successful on their application.

State of Application of Asylum-Seekers

Chiapas, on Mexico’s southern border with Guatemala, is by far the most common state for applications, receiving over 62% of all applications in this period. The next most frequent application locations are Mexico City, with 11.25%, Tabasco with 7.50%, Veracruz with 4.33%, Baja California with 2.35%, and Nuevo Leon with 2.14%. Thus, the most frequent application states are southern border states where many migrants arrive by land, Mexico City where many arrive by plane, and northern border states where refugees may apply after being turned away from the US border.

State of Application	Asylum Applicants	Percentage of Total	State of Application	Asylum Applicants	Percentage of Total
Aguascalientes	123	0.14%	Morelos	112	0.12%
Baja California	2125	2.35%	Nayarit	39	0.04%
Baja California Sur	20	0.02%	Nuevo León	1935	2.14%
Campeche	128	0.14%	Oaxaca	897	0.99%
Chiapas	56596	62.61%	Puebla	793	0.88%
Chihuahua	297	0.33%	Querétaro	480	0.53%
Ciudad de México	10,169	11.25%	Quintana Roo	1853	2.05%
Coahuila	630	0.70%	San Luis Potosí	348	0.38%
Colima	38	0.04%	Sinaloa	89	0.10%
Culiacan	29	0.03%	Sonora	174	0.19%
Durango	17	0.02%	Tabasco	6781	7.50%
Estado de México	495	0.55%	Tamaulipas	286	0.32%
Guanajuato	235	0.26%	Tlaxcala	73	0.08%
Guerrero	18	0.02%	Veracruz	3915	4.33%
Hidalgo	210	0.23%	Yucatán	293	0.32%
Jalisco	1118	1.24%	Zacatecas	32	0.04%
Michoacán	49	0.01%	Total	90,397	100%

The number of applications in each state has varied significantly month to month. In 2019, Chiapas applications increased dramatically overall and relative to other states. In November 2018, applications spiked in Chiapas, Mexico City, and Baja California. Chiapas and Mexico City applications dropped in December 2018 and then applications in Chiapas, Mexico City, and Tabasco rose throughout 2019 before dropping off in September. Overall, Chiapas had 16,645 applications in 2018 and 39,951 in the first nearly ten months of 2019. Other southern states also saw increases: between 2018 and January-October 25, 2019 Tabasco went from 2,070 to

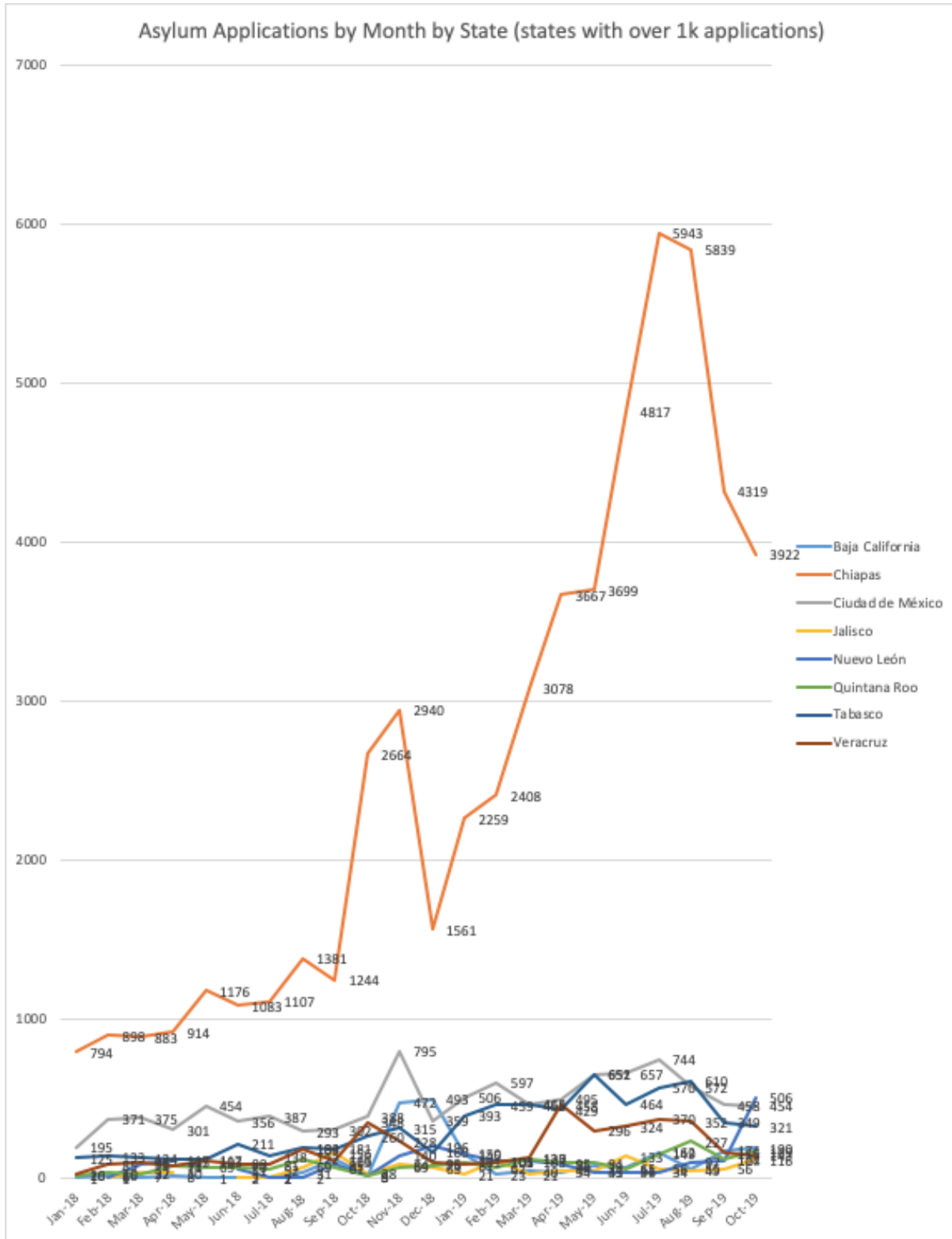


4,711 applications, Veracruz from 1508 to 2,407 and Oaxaca from 158 to 739. Mexico City had a significant but smaller increase: 4,576 in 2018 to 5,593 before October 25 in 2019.

For context, Mexico [mostly](#) stopped issuing [travel permits](#) for migrants to continue north [in early 2019](#). In June 2019, Mexico deployed [20,000 National Guard troops](#) to the northern and southern borders to block free movement of migrants, under pressure from the US administration to stop asylum-seekers from reaching the US border. These National Guard troops, in coordination with immigration agents, blocked migrants from leaving the southern states. Arrests and deportations of migrants increased drastically. In June 2019, Mexico [deported](#) 21,912 people, 180 percent more than in May 2018. Apprehensions of migrants in June and July 2019 [more than tripled](#) over the same period in 2018. Human rights organizations, including Asylum Access Mexico, have reported that many migrants have been deported without the opportunity to claim asylum or after being told that they are ineligible for asylum because they have been in the country for more than 30-days (a bar that is frequently waived for applicants with lawyers). It is possible that the reduction in travel permits caused some of the increase in applications in Chiapas relative to other states in early 2019 and the increase in detention and deportation after the National Guard deportation caused the decrease in overall monthly applications after July 2019. The data is not sufficient to prove causation, however.

There have been increases in applications in some northern border states, where asylum-seekers are being turned back from the US border, but overall lower numbers compared to the number of asylum-seekers living in those states. The US has returned around [60,000](#) asylum-seekers to Mexico's northern border states to wait for their US court dates under a policy starting in [January 2019](#). As of August 2019, another [26,000 people](#) were waiting on "metering" lists, started in mid-2018, to be able to present themselves at the US border.

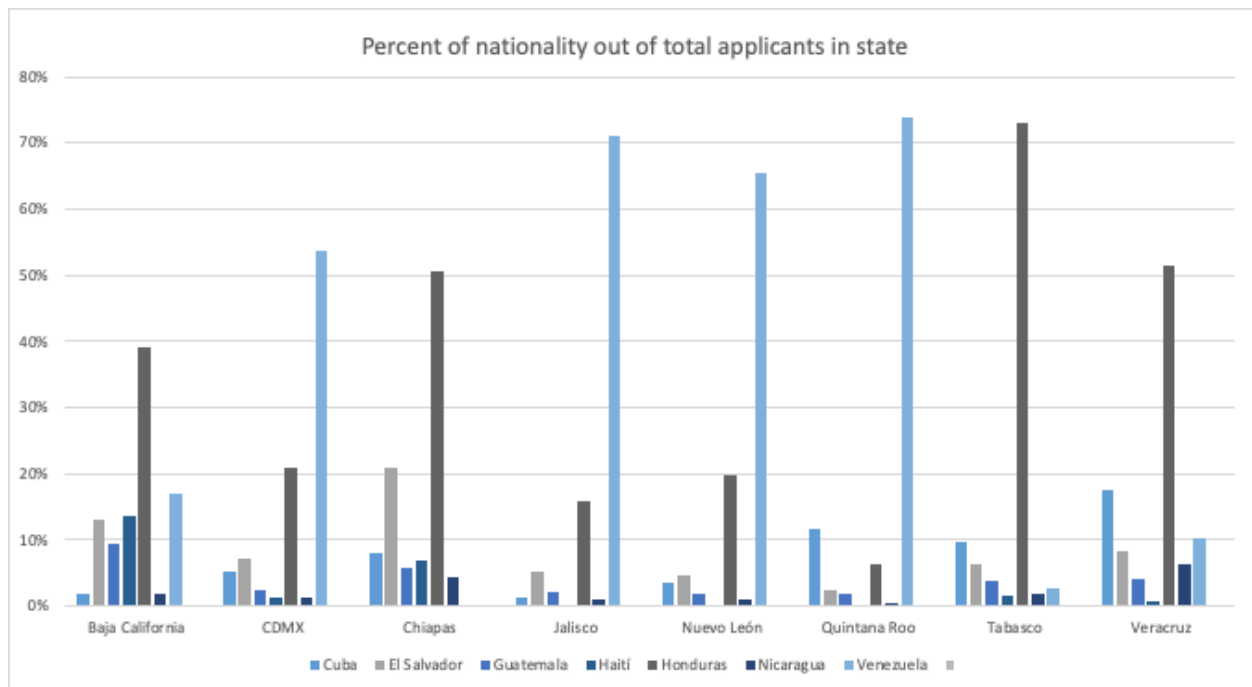
Tamaulipas had 115 applications in all of 2018 and 171 in the first nearly ten months of 2019, despite hosting a significant population of asylum seekers turned back from the US. This may be due to the dire security situation in Tamaulipas. In Nuevo Leon, there were 682 applicants in 2018 and 1,253 in 2019. By contrast, Baja California had 1,159 applicants in 2018 and 966 in nearly 10 months of 2019. Chihuahua had just 33 applications in 2018 and 264 in 2019. Coahuila had 203 in 2018 and 427 in 2019. Sonora had 55 in 2018 and 119 in 2019.



Nationalities of Applicants Within Each State

There is substantial variation in the predominant asylum applicant nationalities between states. Overall, as seen above, 45% of applicants between Jan 1, 2018 and Oct 25, 2019 were from Honduras, 16% from El Salvador, and 14% from Venezuela. However, in Chiapas, 51% of applicants are from Honduras, 21% are from El Salvador, and no other state represents more than 10% of applications. By contrast, in Quintana Roo, Jalisco, and Nuevo Leon, 74%, 71%, and 66%, respectively, of applicants are from Venezuela. In Mexico City, 54% of applications are from Venezuelans and 21% are from Hondurans. More than half of all Venezuelan applicants apply in Mexico City.

These variations are likely explained by how applicants enter the country. Central Americans are more likely to enter at the southern border and apply in Chiapas whereas Venezuelans are more likely to fly into Mexico City. In Baja California, where many applicants likely planned initially to apply for asylum in the US, there is a more varied applicant pool with 39% from Honduras, 17% from Venezuela, 14% from Haiti, and 13% from El Salvador.



Number of applicants of each nationality in state, most frequent states and nationalities								
Nationality/ State of Application	Baja Californ ia	CDMX	Chiapa s	Jalisco	Nuevo León	Quintan a Roo	Tabasc o	Veracru z
Cuba	37	515	4491	13	70	214	657	684
El Salvador	275	707	11853	58	90	45	438	330
Guatemala	201	237	3344	24	35	34	255	155
Haití	291	127	3925	1	1	1	111	27
Honduras	829	2022	28693	177	381	119	4957	2010
Nicaragua	39	129	2524	12	22	7	125	248
Venezuela	359	5226	138	793	1269	1367	176	396
Total Applicants	2125	9711	56596	1118	1935	1853	6781	3915

Asylum Grant and Denial Rates

During the period of January 1 2018-October 25, 2019, 10,300 people, 11.3%, were granted asylum. 2,458, 2.7%, were denied. These groups include many applicants who applied before the relevant data period, so cannot be compared with the rest of the data in this report. [COMAR has published data](#) on the percentage of applications that were successful (positivo), received a form of complementary protection (PC), or were denied (negativo) for the top five most frequent countries of origin in this time period. Applicants who are not found to qualify for asylum may received complementary protection that allows them to stay in Mexico if they have a well-founded fear of torture or their life is in danger in their country of origin.

For applicants between January 1, 2018 and October 25, 2019 who have received a determination on their asylum claim, 3,434, or 53% have received a positive determination. 32%, or 2,052 have received some form of complementary protection. 15%, or 972 people, have received a negative determination.

Of the Venezuelan applicants who have received a decision, nearly 100% were granted asylum from 2018 to 2019. Only 2 out of 741 Venezuelan applicants have received a negative determination. Cuba and Guatemala have the highest rates of asylum denials, with 79% and 37%

negative determinations, respectively. 86% of applicants from El Salvador and 83% from Honduras received either asylum or complementary protection. When looking just at 2018 applicants, who are more likely to have results and therefore may be more representative, the high rates of success for Venezuelans and denial for Guatemalans hold steady. In 2018, applicants from El Salvador and Honduras were less likely to receive asylum and more likely to receive complementary protection than in 2019.

The disparities in asylum results between nationalities are likely explained by COMAR’s application of the Cartagena Declaration to applicants from Honduras, El Salvador, and Venezuela. Mexican law recognizes asylum in accordance with the Cartagena Declaration for people who fled their country of origin because their life, safety, or freedom was threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflict, massive human rights violations, or other circumstances that have gravely disturbed public order. The Mexican government has indicated to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) that it will apply the Cartagena Definition to all Honduran, El Salvadoran, and Venezuelan asylum seekers. This implies *prima facie* recognition that these countries are plagued by generalized violence and/or massive human rights violations. Therefore, an asylum seeker from these countries only needs to show (1) they are from the country (2) they left due to violence or human rights violations; and (3) they are not excluded for committing a serious crime or human rights violation in their country of origin.

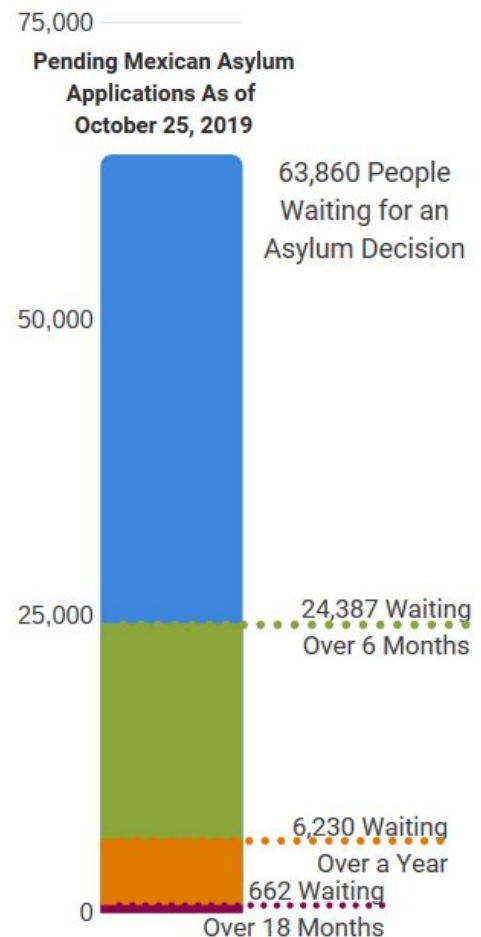
Result by nationality 2018-Oct 25, 2019 for countries with over 1% of total applicants with results								
Nationality	Negative	% Neg	Compl. Prot.	% CP	Positive	% Pos.	Total results	% results
Cuba	53	79%	0	0%	14	21%	67	1%
El Salvador	253	14%	820	44%	790	42%	1863	29%
Guatemala	134	37%	115	32%	112	31%	361	6%
Honduras	512	17%	936	32%	1499	51%	2947	46%
Nicaragua	11	3%	207	59%	135	38%	353	6%
Venezuela	2	0%	0	0%	739	100%	741	12%
All Nationalities	974	15%	2087	33%	3309	52%	6370	100%

Result by nationality of 2018 applicants for countries with over 1% of total applicants with results								
Nationality	Negative	% Neg	Compl. Prot.	% CP	Positive	% Pos.	Total results	% results
El Salvador	210	16%	649	51%	414	33%	1273	34%
Guatemala	64	36%	63	35%	53	29%	180	5%
Honduras	378	24%	801	51%	390	25%	1569	42%
Nicaragua	4	2%	131	70%	51	27%	186	5%
Venezuela	1	0%		0%	457	100%	458	12%
All Nationalities	664	18%	1648	45%	1381	37%	3693	100%

The Asylum Backlog: Pending Applications

As of the issuance of this data, 63,860 people were waiting for a decision on their asylum claims from 2018 or 2019, or 70.6% of applicants. Any still pending applications from before 2018 were not included in the data. 13,089 people who applied in 2018 were still waiting as of October 25, 2019, including 6,230 who have been waiting for more than a year and 662 who have been waiting for over 18 months so far.

Thus, 44% of the 29,631 applicants from 2018 were still waiting for asylum decisions after 10 or more months. This is a substantial departure from the 45 days allowed by Mexican law or the 90 days allowed under extraordinary circumstances. Asylum applicants are not allowed to leave the state of application while they wait for a decision. Thus, long wait times extend the time applicants are stuck in dangerous border states, with few opportunities to join the formal economy, and unable to rebuild their lives in the state of their choice.





Pending Applications by Age and Gender

17,325 children are waiting for asylum decisions in Mexico. 3,539 children applied in 2018, including 1,136 children under age 5. These children have been in limbo for over 10 months.

Demographics of Asylum-Seekers Waiting for a Decision			
Age	Applied In 2018	Applied in 2019	Percentage of total pending
0-4	1136	4511	8.84%
5-17	2403	9275	18.29%
18-59	9381	36474	71.81%
60+	169	511	1.06%
Gender			
Men	7919	29207	58.13%
Women	5170	21564	41.86%

Abandoned or Withdrawn Applications

11.1% of all applications in 2018 and 2019 were marked as either abandoned or withdrawn. Abandonment occurs when an asylum seeker does not appear for a check-in at a COMAR office. Withdrawal occurs when an asylum seeker affirmatively tells COMAR they will not be continuing the application. The average time between application and abandonment or withdrawal for 2018 applicants who ended their applications was 164 days. Since short periods will be over-represented in the 2019 data, given 2019 applicants have been waiting shorter times overall, the 2018 average is likely more representative. Either way, the average applicant who abandons or withdraws an application has been waiting longer than the 45 or 90 days allowed by law for COMAR to make a decision. The average time between application and abandonment or withdrawal was higher in Mexico City and lower in the southern states.

Abandonos

If an asylum applicant does not come to the COMAR office for a weekly check-in or COMAR otherwise decides that they have left the state, then their application is marked “abandoned.” This dataset includes dates of abandonment for asylum applicants who applied in 2018 or 2019 and had their applications marked as abandoned. 9,549 applications from this time period have been marked as abandoned – 10.6% of total applications. The average number of days between

application and abandonment is 149 days. It was higher in Mexico City and lower in the southern states. The average for 2018 applications is 171 days.

Abandonments by state for states with over 50 abandonments		
State	Average of Time between application & abandonment	Number of applicants marked abandoned
Mexico City	196	322
Chiapas	56	8,452
Oaxaca	74	91
Quintana Roo	79	62
Veracruz	72	518

For the most frequent countries of origin, average abandonment time after a 2018 application was higher than average for Colombia and Venezuela and lower for Central American countries.

2018 abandonments by applicant nationality for nationalities with over 20 abandonments		
Nationality	Average of Time between application & abandonment	Number of applicants marked abandoned
Colombia	201	26
Cuba	91	72
El Salvador	65	1,291
Guatemala	66	378
Honduras	66	3,241
Nicaragua	67	244
Venezuela	183	189

Desistimientos

If an applicant affirmatively tells COMAR that they want to stop their asylum application, they are marked “desistimiento” or withdrawn. The dataset includes 532 total applications from



2018-Oct 25, 2019 that were marked withdrawn, or 0.5% of all applications. The average number of days between application in 2018 and withdrawal was 63 days in 2018 and 54 days overall. This also varied by state and nationality, though the low overall number of withdrawals means patterns in this data are less meaningful. In 2018, the average number of days between application and withdrawal was 35 in Chiapas (349 people) and 195 in Mexico City (54 people).

Applications by Application Office or Detention Center

Asylum Access Mexico's Transparency Law request also asked for a breakdown of the office or detention center where each asylum-seeker applied during the time period. Unfortunately, this portion of the dataset does not include all of the applicants. It is unclear why only 18,646 applicants are represented in this tab. At least 2,631 applicants in 2018-Oct 25, 2019 applied in "estaciones migratoria," the name used for migration detention. Given the tens of thousands of migrant apprehensions of migrants in Mexico in this time period – [over 31,000 in June 2019](#) alone – the real number is likely much higher.

Conclusion

The asylum seeking population changed significantly over the course of the past two years and COMAR has struggled to keep up. The number of asylum applications increased substantially in 2019 due to pressures in sending countries and changes in US asylum policy. Notably, there were more than 50 times as many applications by Haitians in the first ten months of 2019 than in all of 2018 and more than 30 times as many from Cubans, while Central American applications also increased and Venezuelan refugees continued to arrive steadily.

Over 70% of the 90,397 asylum applicants between January 1, 2018 and October 25, 2019 were still waiting for a decision at the end of the period. Over 6,000 people have been waiting for more than a year. The substantial increase in applications in 2019 suggests that those applicants will have to wait even longer. The 62% of applicants who applied in Chiapas must survive that wait time in a state with few job prospects. Perhaps this explains why over 11% of applicants have abandoned or withdrawn their applications. 2018 applicants who gave up their applications waited an average 164 days first.

COMAR's funding and numbers of trained staff have not increased proportionally. Asylum Access Mexico's experience shows that the quality of COMAR decisions has suffered along with the speed of decisions, due to this overload. Mexico can alleviate this pressure if it removes the requirement that asylum-seekers wait in the state of application for the entire pendency of their application, restarts issuance of humanitarian visas for asylum-seekers to travel north, and stops the deployment of the National Guard to impede the freedom of movement of migrants. These changes will help ensure an efficient asylum process for all applicants.