

Asylum seekers waiting in Mexico hit by delays to U.S. entry

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Asylum seekers stand inside a migrant encampment in Matamoros, Mexic. (Photo: Daniel Becerril/Reuters)

El Paso, February 23 (RHC)-- The United States has abruptly cancelled plans to bring asylum seekers into Texas at two ports of entry, dashing the hopes of hundreds who have been waiting for months in Mexico under a Trump-era policy President Joe Biden promised to unwind.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement on Monday that “given current operational considerations,” it could no longer say when it would begin bringing in migrants through ports in Brownsville and El Paso, Texas.

The department said last week it would start accepting asylum seekers with active cases at those locations on Monday and Friday, respectively. Texas is recovering from a winter storm that knocked out power and water services across the state.

A DHS spokeswoman did not give a specific reason for the delay but said the agency would begin to use those locations once international partners implemented certain measures to ensure security, health and adequate processing systems.

Biden pledged to roll back the Trump-era programme, known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which forced more than 65,000 mostly Central American asylum seekers back across the border pending US immigration court hearings.

Most returned home but some stayed in Mexico in sometimes squalid or dangerous conditions, vulnerable to kidnapping and other violence. The Biden administration has said it will first seek to deal with about 25,000 people with active cases and the United Nations has set up a website for people to register.

“We are really confused because we don’t see any change. We are just looking for help,” said Josue Cornejo, a migrant from Honduras who has been stuck in a makeshift camp in Matamoros, Mexico, across the border from Brownsville, for more than a year. “They aren’t telling us anything,” he said in a video message.

The effort to reverse the program started slowly on Friday at a port of entry in San Ysidro, California, where so far 50 asylum seekers have been processed, according to Democratic Representative Nanette Barragan who visited the border.

In recent days, several hundred migrants have amassed across the border in Tijuana, many of them not in the MPP program but hoping to be allowed to enter the United States. The migrants include some families with small children and people setting up tents.

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