



Current Issue:

TURN BACKS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

What is an asylum seeker and the asylum process?

Protections for people fleeing violence and persecution have been written into domestic law and included in treaties signed by the U.S. government. People can ask for these protections (known as asylum) anywhere along the U.S. border, or even after entering the U.S. One way that they seek protection is by turning themselves in to Customs and Border Protection at a port of entry—a site where other individuals enter with valid visas or passports. For many decades, people who turned themselves in at the port of entry were immediately detained by Customs and Border Protection and then entered into the asylum process in the U.S. Just like a hospital emergency room immediately collects the

information of people who arrive there to initiate timely care, so too the urgency and legal weight of an asylum claim means that a person would be brought into the U.S. and either held in detention or released to U.S. communities to await the outcome of their asylum case.

What is a turn back?

For the last year, Customs and Border Protection has systematically turned back people fleeing violence at dozens of ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border. They claim that there isn't time or space to process them, although the data show that in almost every port of entry Customs and Border Protection has been detaining fewer individuals than in previous years. Internal documents from Customs and

Border Protection show that the U.S. government in fact uses turn backs to discourage people from seeking asylum.

What impact does this have?

Since Customs and Border Protection only allows a few families a day to seek asylum at the port, moms, dads, and children are stranded in northern Mexico for weeks or months. Only after a long, challenging wait in limbo are they processed by Customs and Border Protection and

ABOVE: Santo Domingo Ingenio, Oaxaca/ Mexico - Nov. 8, 2018: Honduran women and children fleeing poverty and gang violence in the second caravan to the U.S. sit in a dump truck taking them to their next stop. | McAllen, TX/U.S. - Dec. 12, 2018: Sister Norma Pimental, director of the Catholic Charities' Humanitarian Respite Center, speaks with a young Central American woman seeking asylum and her family.



ABOVE: Matias Romero, Oaxaca / Mexico - Nov. 10, 2018: A Salvadoran woman fleeing poverty and gang violence in the third caravan to the U.S. registers with the local Catholic diocese at a sports field.

start the asylum process in the U.S. In the meantime, they stay in overcrowded shelters and tote their belongings back and forth, sometimes miles each day through hot sun or cold rain, just to receive food at a soup kitchen. Children and their parents struggle through sickness without a stable place to stay to recover, or the warmth of their families' homes. Families are also at risk of robbery, assault, and other dangers because of their lack of a safe, stable place to stay, and isolation from community connections. They struggle through sheer exhaustion and deep despair because they live in limbo for so long, trying to persist in their pursuit of legal entry to the United States. The shelters were once better able to provide support, legal resources, and even psychological accompaniment, but their resources have been stretched thin because so many people who used to move on quickly are instead stranded.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask your Representative or Senator to:

- Conduct unannounced inspections of holding cells at ports of entry to see with their own eyes whether they are truly at capacity or not.
- Require that for Customs and Border Protection to receive money to operate, they must process a certain number of asylum seekers every day.
- Require that Customs and Border Protection report to Congress how many officers on each shift they are assigning to processing asylum seekers and how many people per day those officers do process.