

POLICY BRIEF

Contentious Responses to Asylum Externalization and Entrapment: The case of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua

By: Isabel Gil-Everaert

STATEMENT OF ISSUE

U.S. border and asylum policies including metering, Migrant Protection Protocols (MPPs), Title 42, and CBP One have forced thousands of asylum seekers to wait for extended periods in northern Mexican border cities. Ciudad Juárez became a major waiting site beginning in 2018, rapidly receiving migrants from many countries. The sudden increase strained shelters, services, and local institutions, revealing limited government preparedness and placing civil society at the forefront of the response. This response involved, among other things, an intersectoral alliance which proved to be key in shaping the responses and articulating strategies for the contingency.

KEY FINDINGS

- Mobility dynamics in Ciudad Juárez changed rapidly beginning in 2018, when large groups of asylum seekers from Cuba, Central America, Venezuela, and elsewhere as well as internally displaced population from Mexico arrived, including three out of every ten of the 70,000 people returned to Mexico under MPP.
- Local authorities were unprepared, prompting civil society, religious groups, and volunteers to lead the first humanitarian response.
- In less than two years, the city's shelter capacity expanded from 2 shelters to more than 23 by 2020, providing space for roughly 3,000 people, mostly in churches, temples, and improvised facilities.
- As the U.S. government increased its efforts to control the border, lines and time to cross the border got longer. This materialized into serious disruptions of the Juárez -El Paso maquila sector's binational just-in-time production chains.
- Private industry leaders, academics, civil society organizations, and government officials formed *Iniciativa Juárez*, a coalition aimed at coordinating local responses that attracted federal and international support.
- While U.S. policies such as metering, MPP, and Title 42 applied across the entire border, Juárez's responses were shaped by local conditions, existing civic networks, and prior experiences with community led crisis management.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote early coordination among government, civil society, private sector, and academic actors to clearly define emerging mobility challenges.
- Recognize the value of multisector collaboration, such as partnerships in Juárez, to address humanitarian needs and economic pressures.
- Support flexible, trust-based cooperation mechanisms that allow rapid adaptation when migration patterns change.
- Build on existing civic networks, skills, and past community responses, which proved essential for effective action in Juárez.
- Incorporate local context into migration governance, acknowledging differences in civic capacity, economic conditions, and coordination networks across border cities.
- Promote time-tiered responses: a short-term humanitarian strategy (shelter, food, security and basic health services); a medium-term institutional response (emergent regularization programs, networks of attention and support), and a long-term agenda focused on integration, settlement and solution of potential conflicts with local communities.