

COVID-19: Economic and Humanitarian Impacts of the U.S.-Mexico Partial Border Closure

On March 26, the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies in partnership with Alianza UCMX and the UCSF Institute for Global Health Sciences hosted the second webinar on managing the COVID-19 pandemic. This document summarizes the key takeaways of our meeting. In the coming days we will announce the topics for our third webinar on Friday, April 3rd at 10 am PDT, 11am in CDMX.

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US-Mexico Partial Border Closure

- Border closure to non-essential travel was a joint decision negotiated by Mexico and the United States.
- Non-essential travel includes leisure and tourism.
- The partial border closure began on March 20th at 9:00 pm and will be in effect for 30 days.
- Both countries have also implemented *unilateral* measures.
- The San Diego-Tijuana region has robust institutional mechanisms in place to facilitate dialogue across different levels of government and jurisdictions.
- Mexico's Consulate in San Diego continues to work on emergency cases and offer protection 24/7.

Economic Impacts

- Commercial traffic continues to operate, and supply chains have not been disrupted.
- Non-U.S. citizens who work in cross-border supply chains continue to cross the border.
- Customs offices on both sides of the border are operating with normal office hours.
- Northbound traffic (Mexico-U.S.) has decreased by 70 percent including cars and pedestrians, compared to weekends before the partial border closure went into effect.
- The Calibaja economic region represents 23 percent of Mexico's GDP.
- An extended partial border closure could cost San Ysidro \$8 million dollars per day during the high season.
- Restricted travel from Mexico could cost San Diego up to 10 percent of its tourism revenue.
- An economic recession in Mexico and the Northern Triangle in Central America will exacerbate the incentives to migrate. Both Mexico and the U.S. may face an increase in migrant flows, although this may be mitigated by travel restrictions and shelter-in-place policies.

Humanitarian Impacts

- COVID-19 has allowed the Trump administration to expand its anti-immigration agenda by suspending the asylum process and using expedited removals (deportations without hearings).
- Closure of the border to asylum seekers has "exported" the challenges of preventing the spread of COVID-19 to Mexican border cities.
- Approximately 20,000 people are waiting for their asylum hearing along the U.S.-Mexico border.
- Suspending asylum hearings has increased health risks for migrant populations.
- Social distancing is impossible to implement in migrant shelters.
- Restricted access to shelters has increased informal encampments along the U.S.-Mexico border which increase health risks for the population, including contagion.
- Migrants have very limited access to health services on both sides of the border.