

# Seeking Asylum: Part 1

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# Executive Summary

The U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UC San Diego conducts and supports rigorous social science research to advance understanding of the foundations and consequences of U.S. immigration policy. In April 2019, the USIPC partnered with the San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN). The SDRRN is a coalition of human rights and service organizations, attorneys, and community leaders dedicated to aiding immigrants and their families in the San Diego border region. The SDRRN operates a shelter that provides assistance to asylum seekers and their families who have been admitted into the U.S. From October 2018 through June 2019, the SDRRN assisted approximately 7,300 asylum-seeking heads of households. While some of these individuals have sought asylum in the U.S. alone, the large majority have been families. Altogether, the SDRRN has assisted over 17,000 asylum seekers and their families. This includes 7,900 children five years or younger. The USIPC independently analyzed intake data for the universe of these individuals, focusing on intake forms administered by the SDRRN to the asylum-seeking heads of households.

## Summary of Main Findings

- The asylum seekers that the SDRRN has assisted come from 28 different countries of origin representing all regions of the world. These data thus make clear that changes to U.S. asylum policies focusing on Central Americans at the U.S.-Mexico border will, quite literally, affect asylum seekers from all regions of the world who are seeking protection from persecution
- Nearly 4 out of every 10, or 39.9%, of the asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN has assisted were seeking asylum with children 5 years or younger. Just over 3 out of every 4, or 75.5%, were seeking asylum with children 12 years or younger. A full 99.7% were seeking asylum with children 18 years or younger. Limiting access to the U.S. asylum system at the U.S.-Mexico border thus means closing off opportunities for asylum-seeking families, many with young children, from seeking protection from persecution in the U.S.
- The asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN has assisted speak 36 different primary languages
- For the asylum-seeking heads of households whose primary language is not Spanish, 87.9% were nevertheless given instructions about their immigration court dates by immigration officials on their Notice to Appear (NTA) forms in Spanish
- Of the asylum-seeking heads of households whose primary language is an indigenous Central American language, only 0.6% were given instructions about their immigration court dates by immigration officials on their Notice to Appear (NTA) forms in a language other than Spanish

# Summary of Findings:

## Conditions & Treatment in Detention

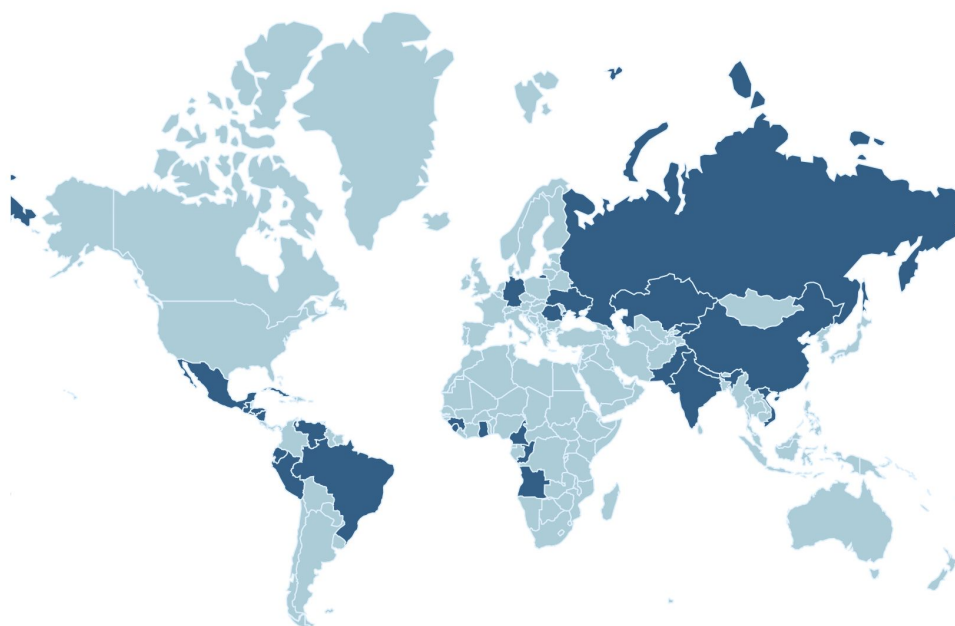
- For the asylum-seeking heads of households, the average length of time spent in immigration detention was 3.4 days
- 8.3% of the asylum-seeking heads of households reported spending 5 days or more in immigration detention
- Over 1 out of every 3, or 34.7%, of the asylum-seeking heads of households reported issues related to conditions in immigration detention, treatment in detention, or medical issues
- Conditions in detention:
  - Among those who reported issues in immigration detention, 61.8% reported issues related to food and water, including being fed frozen or spoiled food, not having enough to eat, not being given formula for infants, not being given water, and having to drink dirty water, among others
  - Among those who reported issues in immigration detention, 34.5% reported issues related to hygiene, including not being able to shower, dirty bathrooms, and not having a toothbrush or toothpaste to brush their teeth, among others
  - Among those who reported issues in immigration detention, 45.6% reported issues related to not being able to sleep, overcrowded conditions, confinement, and the temperature being too cold in la hielera
- Treatment in detention:
  - 232 asylum-seeking heads of households reported verbal abuse, including being told “go back to your fucking country” and “you’re an ape,” among other examples
  - 40 asylum-seeking heads of households reported physical abuse, including being thrown against a wall, among other examples
  - 18 asylum-seeking heads of households reported having their physical property taken, including their passports and travel documents, among other examples
  - 577 asylum-seeking heads of households reported other issues related to their treatment
- Last, 10.9% of the asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN has assisted reported medical issues in immigration detention

# Introduction

In April 2019, the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UC San Diego partnered with the San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN). The SDRRN is a coalition of human rights and service organizations, attorneys, and community leaders dedicated to aiding immigrants and their families in the San Diego border region. The SDRRN operates a shelter that provides assistance to asylum seekers and their families who have been admitted into the U.S. From October 2018 through June 2019, the SDRRN assisted approximately 7,300 asylum-seeking heads of households.<sup>1</sup> While some of these individuals have sought asylum in the U.S. alone, the large majority have been families. Altogether, the SDRRN has assisted over **17,000** asylum seekers and their families.<sup>2</sup> This includes 7,900 children five years or younger. The USIPC independently analyzed intake data for the universe of these individuals, focusing on intake forms administered by the SDRRN to the asylum-seeking heads of households.

## Countries of Origin

The asylum seekers and their families that the SDRRN has assisted come from **twenty-eight** different countries from all regions in the world. The majority come the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala (48.3%), Honduras (30.2%), and El Salvador (8.3%). Other countries include Haiti (4.7%), Mexico (3.6%), Vietnam (1.4%), and India (0.9%). See Appendix Table 1 for a full list of countries.



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<sup>1</sup> The USIPC reviewed 7,358 total intakes.

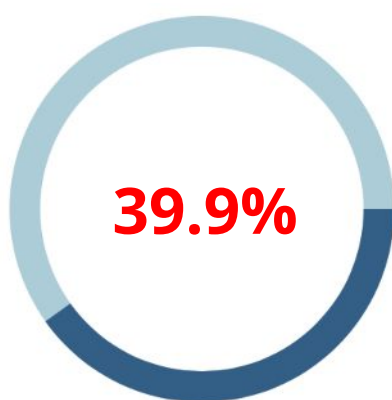
<sup>2</sup> This understates the work of the SDRRN, as data on the number of family members accompanying the asylum-seeking heads of households is unavailable for 88 cases.

## Age

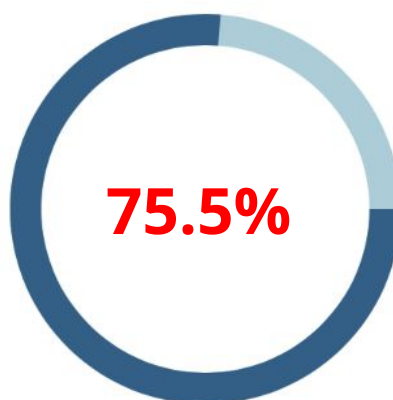
The asylum-seeking heads of households assisted by the SDRRN span all age groups. The average age of the asylum-seeking heads of households was 33.1 years and the median age was 32 years. Table 3 shows the distribution of the asylum-seeking heads of households assisted by the SDRRN by age group. The figures below show the percentage of the asylum-seeking heads of households who are seeking asylum with children 5 years or younger, 12 years or younger, and 18 years or younger.

**Table 2: Age Distribution of Asylum-Seeking Heads of Households**

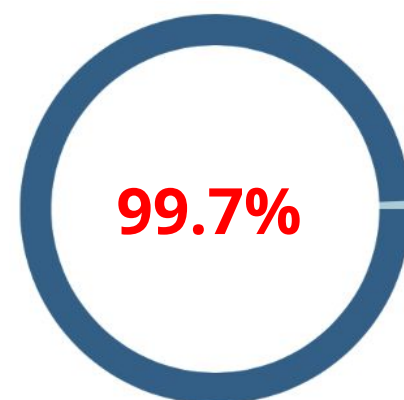
Age Group	%	Cumulative %
18-24	14.6%	14.6%
25-34	46.1%	60.7%
35-44	29.7%	90.4%
45-54	8.2%	98.65
55 and older	1.4%	100%



39.9% of the asylum-seeking families that the SDRRN assisted were traveling with children **5 years or younger**



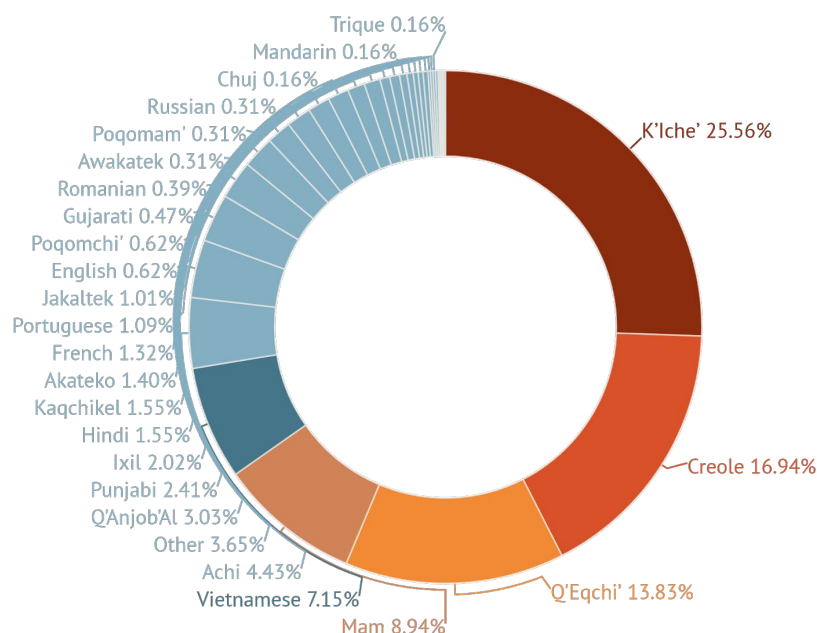
75.5% of the asylum-seeking families that the SDRRN assisted were traveling with children **12 years or younger**



99.7% of the asylum-seeking families that the SDRRN assisted were traveling with children **18 years or younger**

# Languages

The asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN has assisted speak **thirty-six** distinct primary languages. 79.8% speak Spanish as their primary language. However, this means that a full 20.2%, which translates into just over 1 out of every 5, speak a primary language other than Spanish.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> For a complete list of primary languages, see Appendix Table 2.

# Language Access

Upon release, asylum seekers are given detailed instructions by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). For example, on a form called the “Notice to Appear” (NTA), asylum seekers are given instructions about when they are required to appear for “check ins” with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), as well as where the ICE offices are located. The NTAs also include important information about when they are required to appear in immigration court, as well as the address of the immigration court.

On the NTA, DHS officials indicate the language that the asylum seeker was given these instructions in. For the asylum-seeking heads of households whose primary language is not Spanish, 87.9% were nevertheless given instructions in Spanish. For each of the non-Spanish primary languages spoken among the asylum-seeking heads of households assisted by the SDRRN, the table below shows the percentage of NTAs where instructions were given in Spanish, the percentage of NTAs where instructions were given in English, and the percentage of NTAs where instructions were given in the primary language of the individual.

**Table 3: Language Access<sup>5</sup>**

	Table 3: Language Access <sup>5</sup>			
	Language	% NTAs in Spanish	% NTAs in English	% NTAs in Primary Language
<div> <b>0.6%</b> <p>Of the asylum-seeking heads of households whose primary language is an indigenous Central American language, 0.6% were given instructions in a language other than Spanish<sup>4</sup></p> </div>	Achi	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Akateco	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Awakatek	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Bengali	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
	Chuj	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Creole	71.0%	2.9%	26.1%
	French	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Gujarati	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%
	Hindi	47.4%	42.1%	10.5%
	Ixil	96.2%	0.0%	3.4%
	Jakaltek	92.3%	0.0%	7.7%
	Kaqchikel	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	K'iche'	99.4%	0.0%	0.6%
	Mam	99.1%	0.9%	0.0%
	Mandarin	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Nepali	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Pashto	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
	Poqomam'	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Poqomchi'	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Portuguese	81.8%	9.1%	9.1%
	Punjabi	20.0%	36.7%	43.3%
	Q'anjob'al	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Q'eqchi'	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Romanian	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%
	Upsantek	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Vietnamese	40.7%	16.5%	42.9%

<sup>4</sup> This includes one person who was given instructions in English and four others who were given instructions in an unknown language (on the NTA, it states “CHANGE HERE” in the language field).

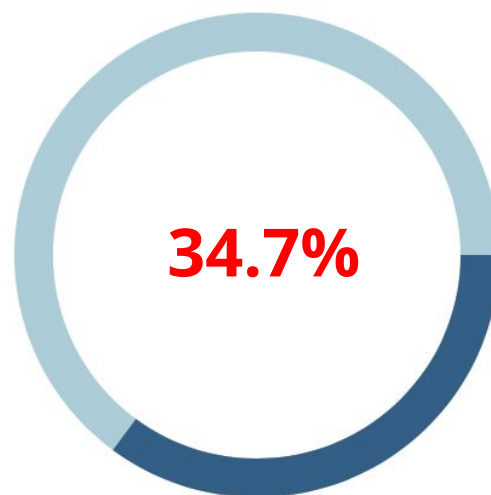
<sup>5</sup> In the NTAs examined by the USIPC the language indicated stated “CHANGE HERE.” We gave the Department of Homeland Security the benefit of the doubt that they gave instructions in the person's primary language.



# Conditions in Detention

The average length of time spent in immigration detention among the asylum-seeking heads of households assisted by the SDRRN was 3.4 days. The median length of time spent in immigration detention was 3 days. 10.3% of the asylum-seeking heads of households spent a day or less in immigration detention, however, a similar percentage, 8.3%, spent 5 days or more in immigration detention.

Over 1 out of every 3 of the asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN assisted, 34.7%, reported issues related to conditions in immigration detention, their treatment while in detention, or medical issues. This likely understates the true percentage, as the first priority of the SDRRN was to provide needed services to the asylum-seeking families who entered into the care of the shelter. Moreover, issues that arose in immigration detention may also be under-reported given concerns among asylum seekers that raising these issues may negatively affect their asylum case.



## Conditions

31.0% of the asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN assisted reported issues related to conditions in immigration detention.

- Among those who reported issues in immigration detention, 61.8% reported issues related to food and water, including being fed frozen food, being fed spoiled food, not having enough to eat, not being given formula for infants, not being given water, and having to drink dirty water, among others
- Among those who reported issues in immigration detention, 34.5% reported issues related to hygiene, including not being able to shower, dirty bathrooms, and not having a toothbrush or toothpaste to brush their teeth, among others
- Among those who reported issues in immigration detention, 45.6% reported issues related to not being able to sleep, overcrowded conditions, confinement, and the temperature being too cold in the la hielera
- Among those who reported issues in immigration detention, 27.1% reported other issues related to conditions in immigration detention

## Treatment

11.8% of the asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN assisted reported some form of mistreatment in immigration detention.

- 232 asylum-seeking heads of households reported verbal abuse, including being told to “go back to your fucking country” and “you’re an ape,” among other examples
- 40 asylum-seeking heads of households reported physical abuse, including being thrown against a wall, among other examples
- 18 asylum-seeking heads of households reported having their property taken, including their passports and travel documents, among other examples
- 545 asylum-seeking heads of households reported other issues related to their treatment

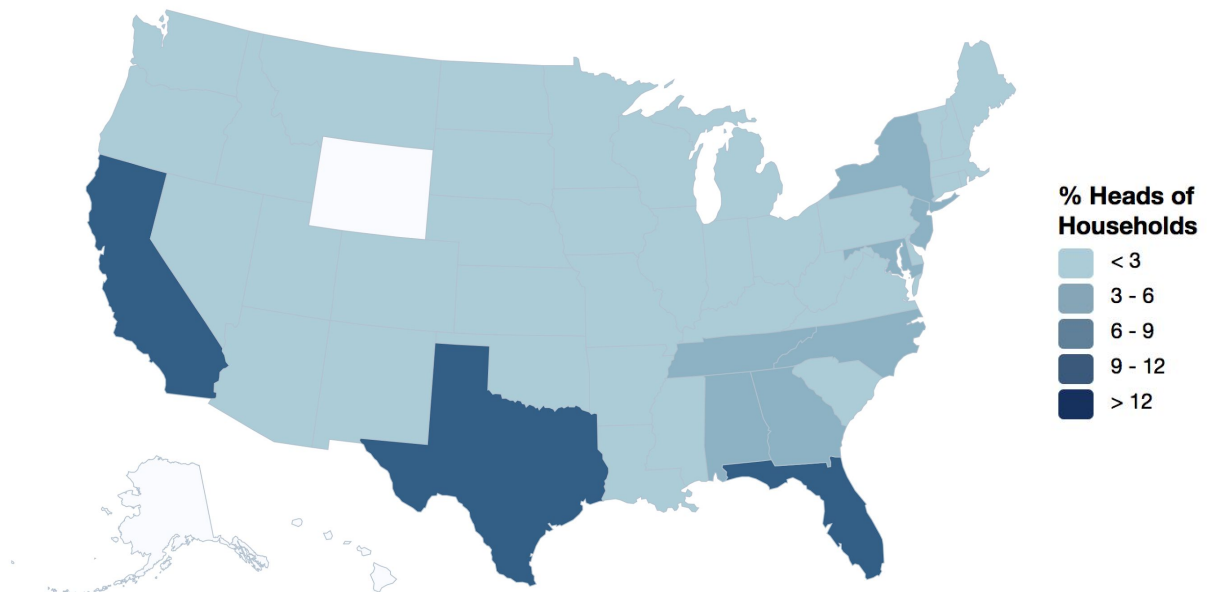


## Medical

10.9% of the asylum-seeking heads of households that the SDRRN assisted reported medical issues in immigration detention.

# Destination

The asylum seekers that the SDRRN has assisted have family members and friends in **forty-nine** different states and territories in the U.S.



**Table 4: Destination States and U.S. Territories**

State/ U.S. Territory	% Heads of Households	State/ U.S. Territory	% Heads of Households
California	15.1%	Arizona	0.8%
Texas	14.3%	District of Columbia	0.8%
Florida	12.7%	Minnesota	0.7%
New York	5.3%	Rhode Island	0.7%
New Jersey	4.6%	Kansas	0.7%
Tennessee	4.5%	Connecticut	0.6%
Maryland	3.9%	Iowa	0.6%
North Carolina	3.6%	Michigan	0.5%
Georgia	3.5%	Oregon	0.5%
Alabama	3.0%	Nevada	0.4%
Virginia	2.4%	Mississippi	0.4%
Louisiana	2.3%	Utah	0.4%
Pennsylvania	2.2%	Wisconsin	0.3%
Massachusetts	1.9%	South Dakota	0.2%
Ohio	1.7%	New Mexico	0.2%
South Carolina	1.3%	Idaho	0.1%
Illinois	1.3%	Delaware	0.1%
Colorado	1.2%	North Dakota	0.09%
Kentucky	1.2%	Maine	0.03%
Washington	1.1%	Montana	0.02%
Arkansas	1.0%	New Hampshire	0.02%
Indiana	1.0%	Virgin Islands	0.02%
Missouri	0.9%	Vermont	0.02%
Oklahoma	0.9%	West Virginia	0.02%
Nebraska	0.9%		

# Appendix

**Appendix Table 1: Countries of Origin**

Country	% Heads of Households	Country	% Heads of Households
Guatemala	48.3%	Congo, Democratic Republic	0.1%
Honduras	30.2%	Ghana	0.1%
El Salvador	8.3%	China	0.03%
Haiti	4.7%	Germany	0.03%
Mexico	3.6%	Guinea	0.03%
Vietnam	1.4%	Kyrgyzstan	0.03%
India	0.9%	Peru	0.03%
Nicaragua	0.8%	Sierra Leone	0.03%
Ecuador	0.8%	Angola	0.02%
Cuba	0.2%	Kazakhstan	0.02%
Brazil	0.2%	Nepal	0.02%
Cameroon	0.1%	Pakistan	0.02%
Venezuela	0.1%	Russia	0.02%
Romania	0.1%	Ukraine	0.02%

# Appendix

**Appendix Table 2: Languages**

Primary Language	% Heads of Households	Primary Language	% Heads of Households
Spanish	79.8%	English	0.1%
K'iche'	5.2%	Poqomchi'	0.1%
Creole	3.4%	Guajarati	0.1%
Q'Eeqchi'	2.8%	Romanian	0.1%
Mam	1.8%	Awakatek	0.1%
Vietnamese	1.4%	Poqomam'	0.1%
Achi	0.9%	Russian	0.1%
Other	0.7%	Chuj	0.03%
Q'Anjob'Al	0.6%	Mandarin	0.03%
Punjabi	0.5%	Trique	0.03%
Ixil	0.4%	Uspantek	0.03%
Hindi	0.3%	Bengali	0.02%
Kaqchikel	0.3%	Lingala	0.02%
Akateko	0.3%	Mute/Deaf	0.02%
French	0.3%	Nepali	0.02%
Portuguese	0.2%	Pashto	0.02%
Jakaltek	0.2%	Tzotzil	0.02%



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