

ASYLUM AND MIGRATION & 4 OTHERS

CBP confirms expedited removal pilot program

BY IAN KULLGREN | 10/29/2019 03:10 PM EDT



El Paso has previously served as a testing ground for new immigration policies, including the since-abandoned “zero tolerance” policy that separated children from parents. | Paul Ratje/AFP/Getty Images

U.S. Customs and Border Protection on Tuesday acknowledged the existence of a test program aimed at hastening deportation of asylum seekers.

The pilot program in El Paso, Texas, [first reported last week by The Washington Post](#), fast-tracks the asylum process so that migrants get a decision in 10 days or less rather than months or years under the current system.

Speaking to reporters at the border, CBP officials provided few details about the program — reportedly called Prompt Asylum Claim Review — but acknowledged that it seeks to speed up the

adjudication of claims. Officials said that several dozen migrants have been processed under the pilot program so far “but we expect that number to expand.”

“We’re modestly getting out the gate as far as the numbers and folks we’re putting through these expedited processes,” Deputy CBP Commissioner Robert Perez said. “In the end, it’s really simple — it’s about effectuating an efficient, and bringing integrity to, an immigration outcome for those who would seek a claim to stay in the country.”

Migrants under the pilot program are reportedly taken to a 1,500-bed facility near El Paso and are given one day to call family or an attorney. They are then given an interview with an asylum officer to determine whether they have a credible fear of returning to their home country.

Immigrant attorneys and advocates have criticized the so-called PACR program, saying that it makes it harder — in some cases impossible — for migrants to get legal representation before they’re deported. Several attorneys told reporters Monday that their clients were kept in detention for several days with limited contact to the outside world.

“The facts, as we understand them, indicate that border patrol is fast-tracking deportations while holding migrants nearly wholly incommunicado at one of their notorious black-hole detention facilities,” said Shaw Drake, a policy attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union Border Rights Center.

Linda Rivas, executive director of Las Americas Advocacy Center in El Paso, said she was not allowed to speak to her clients in person and that border patrol would not confirm whether they were part of the expedited pilot program. She later found out that one of them had been deported the same day.

“PACR completely undermines our role as legal advocates,” Rivas said. “None of the nonprofits on the ground have been told by CBP that this is something that they’re doing, nor have we been asked to collaborate or even talk about access to counsel.”

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Perez said that immigration judges will ultimately make asylum decisions and that migrants won’t be detained by border patrol longer than the customary three days.

“Our objective is to, to the best extent possible, to keep people within 72 hours,” Perez said.

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