

Immigration

Abrupt end to border app that brought nearly 1 million to US strands many in Mexico

They came from Haiti, Venezuela and around the world, pulling small rolling suitcases crammed with clothing and stuffed animals to occupy their children. They clutched cellphones showing that after months of waiting they had appointments — finally — to legally enter the United States.

Now outside a series of north Mexico border crossings where mazes of concrete barriers and thick fencing eventually spill into the United States, hope and excitement evaporated into despair and disbelief moments after President Donald Trump took office. U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced Monday that the CBP One app that worked as recently as that morning would no longer be used to admit migrants after facilitating entry for nearly 1 million people since January 2023.

Tens of thousands of appointments that were scheduled into February were canceled, applicants were told.

That was it. There was no way to appeal, and no one to talk to.

In Tijuana, where 400 people were admitted daily on the app at a border crossing with San Diego, Maria Mercado had to work up the courage to check her phone.

Tears ran down her cheeks after she finally looked. Her family's appointment was for 1 p.m., four hours too late.

"We don't know what we are going to do," she said, standing with her family within view of the United States.

She left Colombia decades ago after it was overrun by drug cartel violence, heading to Ecuador. When cartels besieged her new homeland, the family fled again, in June, this time to Mexico, hoping to reach the U.S.

"I'm not asking the world for anything — only God. I'm asking God to please let us get in," she said.

Immigrants around her hugged or cried quietly. Many stared ahead blankly, not knowing what do. A nearby sign urged people to get the CBP One app. "This will facilitate your processing," it said.

CBP One has been wildly popular, especially with Venezuelans, Cubans, Haitians and Mexicans. Now, they were stranded at the U.S. border or deeper in Mexico.

Jairol Polo, 38, tried getting an appointment for six months from Mexico City before snagging one for Wednesday in Matamoros, across from Brownsville, Texas. The Cuban man flew Monday from Mexico's capital to learn at the Matamoros-Brownsville border crossing that his appointment was canceled.

"Imagine how we feel," he said dejectedly while smoking a cigarette.

People with morning appointments got through on schedule. Andrum Roman, a 28-year-old Venezuelan, was in the last group to cross the border with the CBP One in Ciudad Juarez, across from El Paso, Texas.

“We are a little safer now because we are here,” he said just before handing over his documents to U.S. authorities. “But you still don’t know what’s going to happen,” he said.

Another Venezuelan, Rober Caruzi, entered El Paso right behind him. “I reached the border twice and I was returned twice, but I didn’t lose hope,” he said.

By afternoon, the app was down.

CBP One is effectively a lottery system that give appointments to 1,450 people a day at one of eight border crossings. People enter the U.S. on immigration “parole,” a presidential authority that former President Joe Biden used more than any other president since it was introduced in 1952.

Its demise follows Trump’s campaign promises, and will please its critics, who see it as an overly generous magnet attracting people to Mexico’s border with the United States.

Despite a glitchy launch in January 2023, it quickly became a critical piece of the Biden administration’s border strategy to expand legal pathways while cracking down on asylum for people who enter illegally. Supporters say it brought order amid the tumult of illegal crossings.