

Fact Sheet: Border Patrol Processing Coordinators

In April of 2021, the first group of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) processing coordinators were deployed along the Southwest border. The new role — the [first brand new position](#) at CBP since 2003 — is designed for civilian workers who are able to assist CBP enforcement personnel in caring for and processing arriving migrants. As of September, the agency has trained and graduated five coordinator classes, and 160 coordinators are currently at work in CBP facilities along the border.

With additional congressional funding and support, CBP plans to grow the processing coordinator corps to 1,200 over the next three years and to increasingly rely on the new workers to handle administrative tasks, freeing up Border Patrol agents to secure the border.

What are the responsibilities of processing coordinators?

The new Border Patrol processing coordinators undergo a 36-day training and are hired for 14-month stints, with the possibility of extending to up to four years. The coordinators are responsible for the [following duties](#):

- Receiving migrants after they are apprehended, storing and tracking their personal property, and providing for their security and well-being while they are detained in CBP custody.
- Drafting and maintaining administrative paperwork related to the processing of migrants in CBP custody, including reports concerning the transportation and deportation of detained migrants.
- Logging information about detained migrants into CBP information systems, including the status of welfare checks and conditions in custody.
- Transporting detained migrants to immigration court proceedings and medical facilities.

The coordinators serve an explicitly civilian function. They are trained to “bring a humanitarian approach to the care of people in custody.” They are *not* involved in any law enforcement duties, and they do not participate in surveilling the border or apprehending undocumented migrants.

But the coordinators are also quite limited even in their administrative responsibilities. Due in part to statutory and regulatory requirements, they do not have the authority to screen and process arriving migrants by themselves. There are [numerous forms](#) that border officials are required to fill out when they take a migrant into custody, many of which can form the basis of a claim for asylum or other form of protection under U.S. law. As part of this process, CBP agents are required to ask migrants if they fear harm or persecution should they be returned to their home countries. Processing coordinators

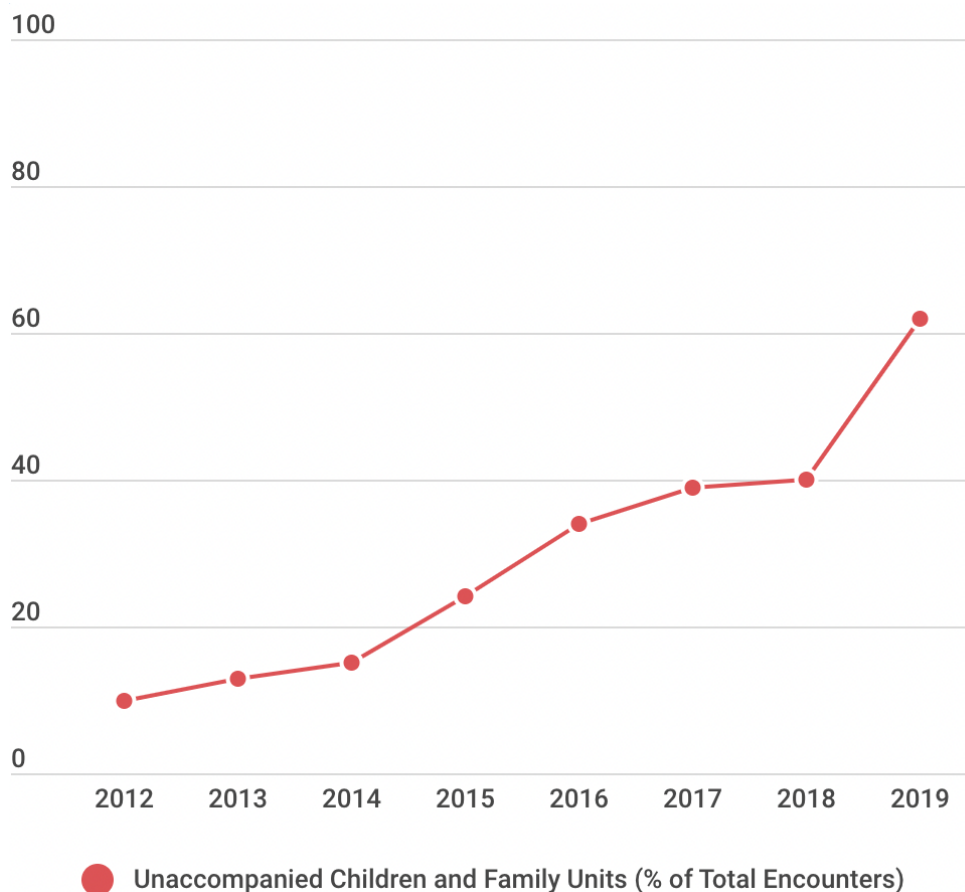
are not provided the authority to conduct these interviews or to collect the information necessary to fill out these forms.

Why are processing coordinators needed at the border?

The role of processing coordinator was first [conceived of](#) in 2014, when the changing demographics of migrant arrivals resulted in a [border crisis](#).

For years, most unauthorized border crossers were single adults from Mexico seeking economic opportunity. But over the past 10 years, there has been a marked increase in migrants from Central America arriving at the border to seek protection, including growing numbers of family units and minors. In 2019 and 2021, CBP apprehended record numbers of asylum-seeking families and unaccompanied children (UCs).

Chart: Combined Encounters of Family Units and UCs



This demographic shift has had a major impact on border operations and placed CBP agents under significant stress. During periods of influx, agents trained only for an enforcement mission have been compelled to spend long hours caring for children and families and processing arriving asylum seekers.

According to a 2021 Office of Inspector General [report](#), Border Patrol agents are often unable to respond to surveillance alerts “because they were assigned to other duties unrelated to physically patrolling the border.” The duties referenced included “processing detainees” and “transporting detainees for medical treatment.” All along the border regions, border agents spend [approximately 40%](#) of their time on administrative tasks. In some sectors, more than [60%](#) of the Border Patrol workforce is being used to process detained migrants.

For these reasons, the idea of using civilian workers to ease the workload on border agents has gained significant support from a variety of different groups. The new processing coordinator role received [bipartisan support](#) in Congress and has been lauded by both [immigration advocacy groups](#) and Border Patrol agents. Brandon Judd, president of a union representing many of the agents, [said](#) that “this is a very, very good program....It’s a program that will allow us to get more agents in the field.”

What impact have processing coordinators already had on border procedures?

Processing coordinators have already made a positive impact at the border. In September 2021, Sector Chief Brian Hastings [said](#) that even the first few classes of processing coordinators are “gradually enabling some Border Patrol agents in the Rio Grande Valley Sector to resume law enforcement duties.” CBP [concluded](#) the coordinators have made an “early impact on operations.”

However, with only about 13% of the intended workforce in place, it is too soon to measure the ultimate effectiveness of the program. And because processing coordinators do not have the authority to conduct many administrative functions related to migrant intake and screening, further reforms may be necessary to fully achieve CBP’s intended goals for the position – providing improved humanitarian care to arriving asylum seekers and freeing up agents to work on front line enforcement duties.

Conclusion

The new CBP processing coordinator corps will play a critical role in providing more humane and appropriate care to vulnerable migrants at the border. It will allow border agents to spend more time on the front line. But the new position is also inherently limited, and processing coordinators do not have the expertise nor the authority to handle migrant intake and processing on their own.

The new position could serve as the first step in a broader reimagining of border intake procedures. Both [Congress](#) and [the Biden administration](#) have considered further reforms to allow additional agencies and personnel to be involved in the initial intake and processing of vulnerable migrants. Such reforms could expedite intake proceedings while allowing even more border agents to focus on patrolling the border.