

U.S. to pay nearly \$1 million to families separated at border

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The administration of President Joe Biden has been under pressure to fulfill his campaign promise to overturn the anti-immigration legacy of his predecessor Donald Trump [Daniel Becerril/Reuters]

Washington, October 29 (RHC)-- The Biden administration is reportedly negotiating a plan to offer \$450,000 per person to migrant families who were separated at the United States' southern border as part of the "zero tolerance" policy of predecessor Donald Trump.

Citing people familiar with the matter, the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday that Homeland Security, the Departments of Justice, as well as Health and Human Services are considering paying what could be close to \$1m per family in settlements – since most of the families separated were made up of one parent and one child.

The move, according to the report, is part of an effort to settle lawsuits on behalf of parents and children who were separated after crossing the US-Mexico border to seek asylum. According to the WSJ, the families – 940 so far – allege that parents and children are suffering from long-lasting emotional distress, trauma and psychological harm, due to being separated, for years in many cases.

The development also comes amid rising pressure on Joe Biden to fulfil his campaign promise to overhaul the immigration system and overturn Trump’s anti-immigration legacy. The Trump administration, which made restricting immigration a primary goal of his presidency, imposed the so-called zero tolerance policy along the border in April 2018 to deter undocumented migrants from crossing into the US.

Under the policy — which made crossing the border a criminal offence — adults were prosecuted and put in expulsion proceedings. Children, including infants, were held in temporary detention centers and then flown or bussed to other locations in the United States. Many were placed with foster families.

The policy drew widespread outrage and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the Trump administration over the policy. It said more than 5,500 families were separated by the “cruel” policy.

The Trump administration abandoned the practice in June 2018. But rights groups say the separations began before the policy was officially announced and continued after it was terminated.

The ACLU says hundreds of families remain separated. The group said the Trump administration did not keep full records of information and contact details for parents, making it a difficult task to locate them.

Shortly after taking office, the Biden administration announced a task force that is charged with uniting families who are still separated. It is unclear exactly how many families remain apart.

The Biden administration has also been facing growing criticism from immigration advocates who say he has not done enough to reverse Trump’s legacy. Despite criticising the zero tolerance policy as “unjust,” the Biden administration continues to rely on Title 42, another Trump-era policy that allows for the immediate deportation of asylum seekers at the border, without the chance to apply. The rule cites the need to protect the country from the further spread of the coronavirus.

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