

U.S. ramps up immigration arrests mostly at Mexican border



Migrants are detained by a US Border Patrol agent after crossing the Rio Bravo river to turn themselves in to request asylum in El Paso, Texas, US, on March 30, 2022. (Reuters photo)

El Paso, January 1 (RHC)-- Immigration arrests nearly doubled in 2022 compared to 2021 as border authorities apprehended more migrants and courts blocked efforts by U.S. President Joe Biden to more narrowly target detentions to focus on serious criminals.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested nearly 143,000 immigrants in the 2022 fiscal year, which ended September 30, close to double the number in 2021, according to data released on Friday. Around two-thirds of those arrests were of people with only immigration violations, the data showed. Most were migrants apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border with no criminal convictions or charges pending and who were transferred to ICE, officials said on a call with reporters.

At the same time, the ICE deported around 72,000 migrants to more than 150 countries around the world and aided Border Patrol agents in expelling many more from the United States under pandemic-era restrictions known as Title 42.

Deportation, under a statute known as Title 8, is a more formal and drawn-out process that can lead to long bars on US re-entry as compared to expulsions that can take just hours under Title 42, a policy that has been in place since the beginning of the COVID pandemic in March 2020.

U.S. Border Patrol agents apprehended a record 2.2 million migrants at the southwest border in the 2022 fiscal year. Close to half of those arrested were rapidly expelled under the Title 42 policy. Those not expelled are either released into the country to pursue immigration claims or detained by ICE.

More Nicaraguans than any other nationality are currently detained, according to the ICE report, as migrants from that country are crossing with increasing frequency. Generally, Mexico only accepts the expulsion of some nationalities, mostly Mexicans and Central Americans and more recently Venezuelans, under Title 42.

In 2022, overall the agency held an average of 22,600 people in custody with another 321,000 enrolled in an "alternatives to detention" program, which requires released migrants to check in with ICE.

After Biden, a Democrat, took office in January 2021 his administration issued ICE guidelines to prioritize the arrest of more serious offenders and de-emphasize enforcement against non-criminals in contrast to the hardline immigration stance of former President Donald Trump, a Republican.

But Republican states challenged those guidelines and court rulings in favor of Texas and Louisiana halted them. In November, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on the case and a decision is expected by the end of June next year.

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