

U.S.-Mexico border crossing arrests reach record highs

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El Paso, October 21 (RHC)-- U.S. authorities reportedly detained 1.7 million migrants trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border this fiscal year – marking an all-time high and highlighting the deepening political and humanitarian challenges the Biden administration is facing on immigration.

The figures apply for the 2021 fiscal year, which began last October, and were first reported by the Washington Post, and later confirmed by the Reuters news agency.

The numbers emerged amid increasing pressure on the administration of President Joe Biden over his handling of the growing number of migrants fleeing political instability, poverty and climate change making their way to the U.S.'s southern border with Mexico.

Earlier in his administration, which began in January, Biden reversed many of the hardline anti-immigration policies of his predecessor, Donald Trump. He promised to put in place what he called a more “humane” approach to immigration policy.

In a stark example of the developments at the border, last month, nearly 15,000 mostly Haitian asylum seekers crossed the Rio Grande River from Mexico and set up a makeshift camp under an international bridge in Del Rio, Texas hoping to claim asylum.

The Biden administration responded by emptying out the camp and expelling nearly 8,000 – according to a count by rights groups – to Haiti, a nation devastated by political crises and natural disasters.

Thousands were released into the U.S. immigration system to await hearings. Thousands of others, fearing deportation, returned to Mexico.

Immigration advocates, as well as Democratic leaders, have slammed Biden for the swift expulsions of many of those migrants back to Haiti, a country they said is rife with dangers and is not equipped to handle deportees.

The administration also launched an investigation into the tactics at the border, after videos and pictures circulated showing patrol agents on horseback using whip-like reins in Del Rio to push back Haitians along the river bank.

Most of the Haitians were returned under “Title 42,” a healthcare restriction used by Trump that Biden has kept in place. The policy was implemented in March 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in an effort to curb COVID infections and allows most migrants to be quickly expelled without a chance to seek asylum.

Rights groups have said the measure is not based on science and denies migrants the right to seek protection, in violation of U.S. and international laws. Title 42 involves quick expulsions and not deportations, meaning U.S. officials do not retain records of those sent back. Many of the arrests this fiscal year are believed to be repeat crossings, with some people expelled to Mexico turning around and trying again.

Meanwhile, a federal court has ordered the Biden administration to reinstate another Trump-era policy known as the Migrant Protection Protocols, or Remain in Mexico, a program that forced thousands of asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for U.S. immigration court hearings.

The administration said it is taking steps to restart the program in November, pending agreement from Mexico. The policy was highly problematic as it forced asylum seekers including children to wait for months and even years in dangerous border towns in Mexico where many were subjected to violent assaults, rape and other crimes.



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