

# *Nearly 1,000 migrant families still separated by Trump-era policy*

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Washington, February 5 (RHC)-- Years after a widely criticised United States policy known as “family separation” forcibly took refugee and migrant children away from their families at the US southern border, nearly 1,000 have yet to be returned.

Officials said that a task force created under President Joe Biden has reunited about 689 children with their families. Another 2,176 children were reconnected with their relatives before the task force’s creation, due in part to legal action by groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

However, out of an estimated 3,881 children taken from their families between 2017 and 2021, a total of 998 remain separated as of February 1, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a fact sheet on Thursday.

But officials expressed optimism the number would continue to decline as the task force uses governmental records and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to locate fractured families.

“The number of new families identified continues to increase, as families come forward and identify themselves,” the DHS said in its statement. Of the 998 children who have yet to return to their families, 148 are “in the process of reunification”, the fact sheet said. Another 183 families “have been informed of the opportunity to reunify” through an NGO.

In a meeting with reporters on Thursday, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas recounted meeting a mother who was separated from her 13-year-old daughter under the policy, then reunited years later when she was 16. Mayorkas said the daughter “still could not understand how her mother would let her be separated. She didn’t understand the force behind the separation.”

Some families split apart by the separation policy have been connected with mental health resources, DHS officials said. But under the Biden administration, the U.S. Justice Department has argued that victims of the policy are not entitled to restitution.

The family separation policy was initiated under former Republican President Donald Trump as part of a crackdown on unauthorised crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border. It was one of several controversial immigration policies enacted under the Trump administration, including an executive order to ban people from various Muslims-majority countries from travelling to the United States.

Biden called the family separations a “human tragedy” and was highly critical of Trump’s hardline positions on immigration during his campaign for the presidency. Biden defeated Trump in the 2020 election and began his term in January 2021.

Shortly after entering office, Biden reversed several key Trump policies, including the executive order critics had dubbed the “Muslim ban”. In February 2021, Biden also created the Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families to address the separation policy. Thursday’s statistics mark the task force’s second anniversary.

However, Biden has come under fire from migrant and refugee rights groups as well as members of his own party for keeping some of his predecessor’s immigration policies in place. One of the most high-profile is Title 42, a Trump-era policy that allowed the government to turn back asylum-seekers in the name of combatting COVID-19.

Immigrant rights groups have denounced the policy for infringing on asylum seekers’ right to due process, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has declared the policy “no longer necessary.”

The Biden administration initially tried to end the programme but Republican politicians pressed for Title 42 to remain in place, pursuing the matter in court. In December, the Supreme Court upheld the policy and is set to hear arguments over it this month.

Under pressure from Republicans, as the number of border crossings surged, the Biden administration announced a plan in January to immediately turn away asylum-seekers from Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua who arrived at the border – similar to a policy already in place for Venezuelans.

Instead, the administration said it would accept up to 30,000 people per month from those four countries through an application system that requires background checks and US-based sponsorship for each asylum seeker.

While the Biden administration maintains it “continues to prepare for the end of the Title 42”, critics of the new policy say it amounts to an expansion of Trump’s programme, with its automatic expulsions and rigid requirements.

In a press release, the ACLU said Biden’s decision “further ties his administration to the poisonous anti-immigrant policies of the Trump era instead of restoring fair access to asylum protections”.

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