

Hundreds already deported from the US under Biden despite executive orders

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Despite pledging to reverse the Trump administration's anti-immigrant policies, President Joe Biden has overseen the deportation of hundreds of immigrants and refugees since assuming office on January 20. Last week saw Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deport 15 people to Jamaica on Thursday and 269 people to Guatemala and Honduras on Friday. More deportation flights are scheduled for next Monday.

After a much hyped 100-day moratorium on deportations was announced by the White House a federal judge in Texas ruled on January 26 that it could not be enforced. The ruling, however, did not require the government to actually schedule them. The judge was appointed by President Donald Trump and approved a challenge brought by the state's attorney general, Ken Paxton, who drafted a lawsuit challenging the 2020 presidential election results on behalf of Trump.

"Within 6 days of Biden's inauguration, Texas has HALTED his illegal deportation freeze," Paxton tweeted following the decision. "*This* was a seditious left-wing insurrection. And my team and I stopped it."

US District Judge Drew Tipton granted the temporary restraining order against enforcing the 100-day moratorium that went into effect on January 22. Tipton said the Biden administration had violated the federal Administrative Procedure Act and did not make clear why a pause in deportations was necessary.

On Friday, Tipton said he would extend his order until February 23. The Biden Justice Department has not issued an appeal to Tipton or a federal court to block the order.

It is unclear how many deported immigrants fell under new guidelines given to the Department of Homeland Security and its agencies that took effect Monday.

In El Paso, Texas, officials deported a woman who witnessed the 2019 massacre at a Walmart which left 23 people dead. According to her lawyer, she had agreed to be a witness against the shooter and met with the local

district attorney's office.

Rosa, who was only identified by her first name for fear of her life in Juarez, Mexico, a city rife with gangs and violence, was pulled over last Wednesday for a broken brake light and was detained based on previous traffic warrants. She was then handed over to ICE and deported before she could reach her attorney.

ICE had issued a detainer, a means by which immigrants are detained for immigration violations on the same day they are arrested. The district attorney's office in El Paso confirmed that they had given Rosa's attorneys the needed documents to request a US visa for crime victims, but in a statement also said that Rosa "is not a victim of the Walmart shooting case."

Honduran officials also confirmed that 131 people landed on Friday on a deportation flight from the US. A flight that landed in Guatemala had 138 people arrive on Friday, with another 30 people expected to arrive the following Monday, according to officials there.

President Biden signed three executive orders on Tuesday that he claimed would create a more "fair, orderly, humane" immigration system. Biden also declared a task force that would supposedly reunite migrant children separated from their families for crossing the US-Mexico border.

Biden's choice for homeland security secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, the first Latino to head the repressive agency, was also confirmed by the Senate this week.

"There's a lot of talk, with good reason, about the number of executive orders that I've signed. I'm not making new law—I'm eliminating bad policy," said Biden when speaking to reporters in the Oval Office as he signed the three orders.

Biden called the separation of children at the border a "moral and national shame." It should be noted that this policy was upheld for all eight years of the previous

Obama-Biden administration, which deported and broke up more immigrant families than any other administration in US history. Shocking images of children held behind fences were taken in 2014, when Biden was vice president.

The changes contained in Biden's order are thoroughly cosmetic, intended to do away with the most politically embarrassing aspects of the last administration's anti-immigrant policies while still retaining, and in some cases expanding, the government's vast deportation machine.

The task force for separated children will not enforce anything but merely provide recommendations on how to reunite families and issue a report within 120 days and every 60 days thereafter on its progress.

A statement from American Civil Liberties Union attorney Lee Galernt to NPR said, "What we need now is an immediate commitment to specific remedies, including reunification in the U.S., permanent legal status and restitution for all of the 5,500-plus families separated by the Trump administration."

He added, "Anything short of that will be extremely troubling given that the U.S. government engaged in deliberate child abuse."

Biden's second order rescinded the Migrant Protection Protocols program, or the "Remain in Mexico" program, as dubbed by Trump. The protocol condemned migrants and refugees to stay in Mexico while their asylum cases played out in the US indefinitely, essentially denying them sanctuary.

The exact details of Biden's plan and how it will assist migrants stuck in squalid camps at the border was unclear. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters to lower their expectations of immediate immigration reform, saying: "That's going to take some time. It's not going to happen overnight."

Immigrant advocates have expressed disappointment with Biden's new executive orders, including Linda Rivas, an immigrant attorney and director of the Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, who represents people caught up in the "Remain in Mexico" program.

She told CNN how she has been trying to console her clients over the last week, including a Honduran mother who was raped while waiting in Mexico under Trump's policy and is now worried about her 11-year-old son. Rivas explained the current situation for asylum seekers: "Definitely a loss of hope. The trauma they are enduring is unimaginable."

The third order requires a "top-to-bottom review of recent regulations, policies and guidance that have set up

barriers to our legal immigration system." This included revoking Trump's "public charge" rule, which prevented immigrants from getting a green card, or permanent residence, if they had or were even just likely to receive public assistance, such as housing subsidies.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration has made clear it will be expanding the number of detained immigrant children held in camps along the US-Mexico border by reopening a facility in Carizzo Springs, Texas, designed to hold upwards of 700 children and perhaps more if needed.

The camp will jail unaccompanied children over age 13 who are medically cleared from COVID-19 quarantine, according to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the agency under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) which is responsible for immigrant children.

Currently, there are some 4,730 children held by the ORR. The agency has been also dealing with COVID-19 infections among children and staff, with a total of 1,748 confirmed cases among children. According to the agency, more than 21,000 coronavirus tests have been given and the "majority" of infected have recovered and been moved from quarantine.

The Department of Homeland Security under Biden is also poised to expand its processing capacity with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) building soft-sided structures in Donna, Texas, near the Rio Grande Valley, because a nearby processing center is being closed for renovation.

The continued deportations and expansion of detention camps under Biden make a mockery of those who claimed a Democratic administration would reverse Trump's anti-immigrant policies and provide humane and immediate sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers. Only the most superficial changes have been announced, and hardly enforced at that, while much of the same policies have been kept.



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