



Chaos, Cruelty, & Illegality: The Trump Administration's Record on Asylum

The Trump administration's record on asylum is one of destruction, disorder, and blatant violations of refugee laws enacted by Congress. Its policies punish people seeking protection, separate children from their parents, and turn the system created by Congress to protect refugees from persecution into one that delivers them back to danger. While the list of illegal policies that must be undone is [long](#), they include policies that:

- Separated over [5,500](#) families as part of the administration's draconian "zero tolerance" policy. Years later, at least [545](#) children remain separated from their parents, with two-thirds of parents believed to have been deported to Central America.
- Delivered tens of thousands of asylum seekers and migrants to life-threatening dangers like kidnapping, rape, and murder under the administration's "Migrant Protection Protocols," resulting in [1,314](#) reports of violent attacks, including 318 kidnappings or attempted kidnappings of children, and countless unreported attacks. Thousands were stranded in a squalid refugee camp near the border, [for the first time in U.S. history](#), where they endured frequent flooding, insect infestations, and feces washed up from the river.
- Misused public health authority over the [objections](#) of senior experts at the CDC to [expel children and asylum seekers to danger](#) despite repeated [objections](#) from many of the nation's leading public health experts who condemned the administration's actions. Refugees expelled in violation of U.S. and international law include [prominent Nicaraguan dissidents](#) sent directly into the hands of the government that had persecuted and tortured them. One activist [frantically ate](#) his five-page declaration which listed his torturers so that the Nicaraguan police wouldn't find it.
- Imposed an [illegal](#) transit ban to [deny asylum](#) to hundreds of refugees, including persecuted pro-democracy advocates, torture survivors, and people targeted due to their sexual or gender identities, as well as to block asylum seekers granted refugee protection from reuniting with their children and spouses.
- Refused to release asylum seekers and immigrants from detention facilities, despite the [legal authority](#) and [repeated pleas](#) from epidemiologists and former ICE officials to do so. This led to the [preventable spread](#) of COVID-19 in detention facilities and the infection and death of asylum seekers and immigrants. Other [abysmal confinement conditions](#) in ICE detention have included allegations of [forcible sterilizations](#) of Cameroonian women and the use of [torture](#) to coerce asylum seekers' deportations.
- Put unqualified, "acting" officials in [leadership](#) and [legal](#) positions, leading to [illegal policies](#) issued by illegal officials, which one federal court [called](#) "crashing the same car into a gate, hoping that someday it might break through."
- [Blocked](#) asylum seekers from requesting protection at the U.S. border by reducing processing capacity at ports of entry in [violation](#) of U.S. refugee law, subjecting asylum seekers to long wait times in dangerous border regions and leading to life-threatening [border crossing attempts](#) between ports of entry.
- Summarily delivered [hundreds](#) of asylum seekers to Guatemala—a country that is [not safe](#) for refugees—without permitting them to apply for asylum in the United States, in violation of U.S. and international refugee law. The administration has finalized [similar agreements](#) with El Salvador and Honduras.