

*U.S. immigration advocates blast
cruel Biden policies on asylum*

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Biden has reversed many of the restrictive policies of his Republican predecessor, but kept an order allowing US authorities to expel back to Mexico those migrants caught crossing the border [File: Go Nakamura/Reuters]?

Washington, August 14 (RHC)-- Immigration advocates are criticising U.S. President Joe Biden's asylum policies, saying expulsions of migrants at the United States-Mexico border and other deterrent measures were "cruel, unlawful and ineffective."

In a letter to Biden and top officials on Friday, more than 100 organisations urged the Democratic president to restore the ability of all migrants to claim asylum in the US and eschew any new policies that limit asylum access.

Promising a more humane immigration approach, Biden has reversed many of the restrictive policies of his Republican predecessor, former President Donald Trump. But the Democratic president has kept an order known as Title 42, one of Trump's most limiting measures, which allows US authorities to expel migrants caught crossing the border back to Mexico.

Border arrests have risen to 20-year highs in recent months, fueling Republican criticism that Biden's decision to roll back some Trump restrictions has encouraged more people to cross into the United States.

At the same time, some Democrats have pressed Biden to end Title 42 and advocates for asylum seekers say the administration's actions contradict what Biden promised. The administration has said the expulsions are necessary to keep US detention centres from becoming overwhelmed during the coronavirus pandemic, which they argued would create a risk for government workers, migrants and the public.

White House spokesperson Vedant Patel said the administration deferred to health experts on decisions related to Title 42, which was issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The groups urged Biden not to adopt any policies that force migrants to wait in Mexico for the resolution of their U.S. cases, which they said "would unquestionably put individuals in danger and violate U.S. asylum law."

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said on Thursday that the US would expand an online asylum registration system in the hopes asylum seekers will apply remotely, adding that more changes would be announced in the coming days. Mayorkas did not say which asylum seekers would be eligible to use the online system.

Last week, the government began flying some Central American and Mexican migrants arrested at the U.S.-Mexico border to southern Mexico in an effort to deter crossers.

In the letter to Biden, the groups said they were "gravely concerned" about the flights and reports that migrants were then bused to a remote part of Guatemala. Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the Los Angeles-based National Immigration Law Center, said the flights signalled the Biden administration was taking a more restrictive stance.

She said it appeared Biden is focusing only on arrests and deportation and not on the rights of the asylum seekers. "That absolutely contradicts what the Biden administration said they were going to do," she said.

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