



## **81 children separated at border since Trump's executive order on dividing families**

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Since the Trump administration announced it would end its practice of separating undocumented families in June under its "zero tolerance" immigration policy, 81 children have been separated from family members after being apprehended at the southern border, according to Department of Homeland Security numbers released Thursday.

DHS says the separations occurred due to criminal activity or gang affiliation by the adults, or hospitalization. At least 20 adults were separated because of prosecution for "other reasons" that were unclear from the data.

Of the separations, which span from June 21 through November 30, there were 81 children and 76 adults separated from their family members.

In a statement released Thursday, DHS spokeswoman Katie Waldman said, "As we have already said -- and the numbers show: separations are rare. While there was a brief increase during zero tolerance as more adults were prosecuted, the numbers have returned to their prior levels. However, the numbers we have recently compiled show unequivocally that smugglers, human traffickers, and nefarious actors are attempting to use hundreds of children to exploit our immigration laws in hopes of gaining entry to the United States."

DHS provided no evidence to support the allegation that children were being used to gain entry to the US.

Children are still separated if the adult is not the parent or legal guardian, the child's safety is at risk, there is an urgent medical reason or serious criminal activity by the adult, Waldman said in the statement.

The new numbers are in stark contrast to the number of children separated during the two months earlier this year when the administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy was in full effect.

Under that controversial policy, more than 2,000 children were separated from their parents at the border from April 19 to May 31, after then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions ordered federal prosecutors to pursue criminal charges against all migrants who crossed the border unlawfully.

After intense public pressure and backlash, President Donald Trump signed an executive order on June 20 reversing course on the family separations, which had led to the major increase in such divided families at the border.

Not only did the family separations practice cause widespread outrage, it has also led to an ongoing legal battle to reunify the separated children. Last week, the federal judge in California who ordered the US government to reunite families and has slammed the government for not having an effective system for tracking the children, suggested in court that he might eventually consider ordering the government to create a better database system.

It's unclear what the prior levels of family separation were before fiscal year 2017, DHS says, because records of family separations were not tracked.

"There were some instances of parents being separated from their children" in the past, David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said previously to CNN. "But no administration has institutionalized the practice of family separation on such a scale, as intentionally and as broadly as the Trump administration attempted."

However, late last month, Trump tweeted that he "had the exact same policy as the Obama Administration" on family separation. He repeated the claim the next day, telling reporters on the South Lawn of the White House, "Obama had a separation policy. We all had the same policy ... but people don't like to talk about that."

While there has been a drop in separations since the President's executive order stating that it is administration policy to "maintain family unity," a lack of earlier data prevents a side-by-side comparison with past administrations.

In fiscal year 2017, which began under the Obama administration, the Border Patrol separated 1,065 family members out of 75,622 family apprehensions -- 46 for fraud and 1,019 for medical or security concerns, the DHS reported.

The 2017 data was compiled by manually checking each case file and is not available in a more detailed breakdown, according to a DHS official.

Additionally, there was no tracking of family separations before 2017, according to DHS.

From October 2017 through February 2018, 703 family members were separated out of about 31,100 family apprehensions -- of those, 191 were because of fraud and 512 were for medical or security concerns, according to DHS-provided data.

These numbers provided by DHS are not broken down by adults and children.

Information from April through June 20 was not provided because of ongoing litigation, according to the DHS official. The data for March 2018 was never calculated.