



## Groups urge Biden to hire more immigration judges and fight drug cartels

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*Analysts, advocates suggest multi-pronged solution to migrant "challenge" at southern border; remotely applying for asylum is one option*

A Cuban migrant family is apprehended by the National Guard before crossing the Rio Bravo on the border with the U.S. in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, Mexico, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. The number of people apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border has increased since Jan. with migrant families crossing from Ciudad Juarez and turning themselves over to Border Patrol. (AP Photo/Christian Chavez)

EL PASO, Texas ([Border Report](#)) – Several groups are calling on Joe Biden to invest more federal dollars to deal with the migrant surge on the southern border.

That money should be used to immediately hire more immigration judges and shore up border infrastructure. That includes expanding temporary holding facilities and child shelters, as well as modernizing border security through technology. That, in turn, will free border agents to deal with this or future challenges, participants in a Border Solutions Roundtable said this week.

The groups are also calling on Biden to involve the governments of Mexico and Northern Triangle countries of Central America in addressing internal crises that make so many people leave their homes and seek and end to persecution — or a better way of life — in the United States.

“I really think solutions have to begin south of the border,” said Danilo Zak, senior policy and advocacy associate at the National Immigration Forum. “That [...] really represents the only path toward an ideal scenario where children, families and other migrants are safe and secure in their own country (with) no need to flee or migrate irregularly in the first place.”

Analysts and advocates say the U.S. should help Central American nations address the root causes of migration — like insecurity and poverty — and provide a reliable structure for people there to apply for asylum remotely, without putting their lives and those of their children in jeopardy by making a dangerous trip through Mexico.

“We should do more to combat cartels and smugglers. Part of that is engaging in a more effective messaging campaign to dispel some of the fiction sold by these cartels to desperate migrants,” Zak said. “And that’s not just ‘don’t come,’ but to inform them about asylum laws and the immigration system to dispel misinformation by the smugglers.”

But while that happens, the Biden administration must make immediate changes to the way it deals with the thousands of family units and single adults that are showing up at the border, they say.

“The problem with the border right now is not that so many people want to come here, but solely that people are coming illegally and when they do come Border Patrol treats them inhumanely by caging them or dumping them in destitute and dangerous cities in Mexico,” said David J. Bier, senior policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based public policy research organization.

Bier suggests the federal government apply the same standard to would-be refugees today as it did to Cuban emigres who showed up to ports of entry prior to 2017.

“The government should grant asylum immediately at the border to as many applicants as possible. It should grant the rest parole status and admit them to pursue their applications,” Bier said. “This would end the illegality and inhumane treatment. Perhaps more people would come but if they crossed legally this wouldn’t be a problem any more than the millions of legal crossers that we (process) each week.”

Bier says refugee admission policies are behind the steep rise in unaccompanied minors coming across the border.

“We will accept 100 percent of them but only if they cross illegally. If they seek asylum at ports of entry, nearly all will be refused entry. This approach means that nearly all kids are being forced into the hands of smugglers,” he says. “If they are with their parents, in many cases they’re expelled to Mexico. So, many parents are sending their kids alone and trying to sneak in behind them, leading to repeated attempts over and over by parents to reunite with their kids.”

The migrants wouldn’t have to resort to smugglers if, for instance, they’re given Temporary Protected Status on account of hurricanes that struck the Northern Triangle late last year and devastated communities and farms.

And Biden should boost the H2-B visa cap for temporary workers, he said, because despite the pandemic millions of job openings exist in certain industries.

Monica Weisberg-Stewart, chair of the Texas Border Coalition, said border security issues must also be addressed or else the Mexican drug cartels will “continue to exploit women and children, smuggle drugs and inflict pain on our American way of life.”

She said immigration reform, better equipped and staffed ports of entry and new asylum laws are a must.

“Asylum laws need to be updated. The children traveling alone needs to be addressed. We believe keeping Title 42 on the border is essential given what is happening at the border currently,” she said. Title 42 is a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention order allowing federal officials to immediately expel unauthorized migrants to prevent cross-border spread of COVID-19.

More immigration judges are needed to deal with the surge and Biden should engage border leaders and residents before making decisions that affect them, she said.

“We are right here on the border. Our mayors are dealing with these issues every day,” Weisberg-Stewart said.

She added border agents need to be allowed to do their jobs because “there’s a lot of mixed messages.”