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OCTOBER 15, 2018

Human Rights Groups Finds More Families Separated Than Originally Reported

Written by [Aaron Reichlin-Melnick](#) in [Abuses](#), [Asylum](#), [Enforcement](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) with [0 Comments](#)



A new report alleges that the Trump administration (and partially Obama administration) may have separated thousands more families than previously reported and also details how thousands of asylum seekers have been illegally turned away at the U.S.-Mexico border.

[Amnesty International](#) released the report last Thursday which reveals that upwards of 1,000 more families than originally reported may have been separated over the past two years, possibly up to 8,000 families.

In newly released statistics, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) informed Amnesty

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Immigration Impact is a project of the American Immigration Council.

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15, 2018. Combined with 1,768 family units previously [reported separated](#) between October 2016 and February 2018, almost 8,000 family units have been separated in the last two years. As of late September, 2018, [the government identified](#) 2,654 children as having been separated from their parents. Amnesty's reporting suggests that almost triple that number of children may have been taken from their parents.

Importantly, because the government's use of the term "family unit" [can refer either to an entire family or to individual members of a family](#), it is possible that the nearly 8,000 "family units" is actually closer to 4,000 families in total. However, even that lower number would indicate that more than 1,000 more families were separated than has previously been reported.

Amnesty's report also identifies many families who were separated by the government despite legally presenting themselves at a port of entry requesting asylum. Despite the fact that it is [legal to apply for asylum](#) at a port of entry and therefore no family would have been separated for the purpose of prosecution, the report identifies multiple families who did everything lawfully and were separated regardless. One woman, Maria, had legal custody of her disabled 17-year-old son. Despite presenting CBP with that proof, her child was taken from her.

The report also reveals how the Trump administration continues to illegally deny asylum seekers access to the asylum process.

Beginning in 2016, [advocates began to report](#) that the government was illegally turning away asylum seekers at the borders. According to a lawsuit filed by the American Immigration Council in July 2017, CBP has systematically turned away asylum seekers who legally present themselves at ports of entry and ask for asylum. Through dozens of interviews with government officials and asylum seekers, Amnesty's report confirms that this practice remains ongoing.

Amnesty's researchers traveled across the U.S.-Mexico border documenting behavior at different ports of entry. In California, they witnessed hundreds of asylum seekers forced to wait weeks on the Mexican side of the border before being allowed to apply for asylum. In Arizona, asylum seekers and their children were forced to sit outside in temperatures over 100 degrees for periods as long as two weeks. In Texas, some ports of entry closed completely to asylum seekers, while others refused to process more than six or seven individuals per day.

As the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of the Inspector General [recently documented in a scathing report](#), these policies lead desperate asylum seekers to cross the border illegally; many were then arrested and subject to family separation.

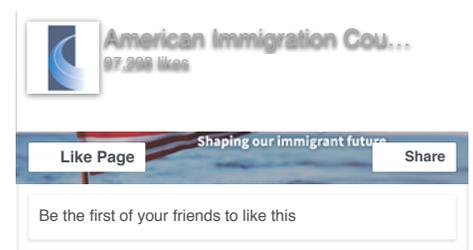
Taken together, the Amnesty report paints a picture of a government agency intent on using cruel and harsh tactics to punish and attempt to deter asylum seekers. Reports like these are critical for shedding light on the extent to which these practices have been used and to help ensure that DHS corrects course going forward.



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