

**NEWS**

## **ICE Shuts Down Program for Asylum-Seekers**

With the family case management program scheduled to close on June 20, more asylum-seekers and refugees face harsh conditions in detention centers.

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A migrant waits for a bus to Atlanta after being released from a detention center in McAllen, Texas on May 9, 2017. (CARLOS BARRIA / REUTERS)

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will soon close a family case management program for asylum-seekers that, as of April 19, housed more than 630 families. According to Sarah Rodriguez, an ICE spokesperson, the program caters to “special populations, such as pregnant women, nursing mothers, [and] families with very young children.” It is currently considered the least-restrictive alternative for asylum-seekers who come to the U.S. illegally. The more common scenario is for immigrants and refugees to be held in prison-like detention centers as they wait for their cases to be heard in the immigration court system.

In 2014, the Obama administration chose to expand the number of detention facilities in response to the Central American Refugee Crisis, which prompted tens of thousands of women and children to seek asylum in the U.S. These large-scale

detention rates continue today, with around 400,000 immigrants being held in detention facilities each year—around 80 times the amount held in 1994.

Many human rights groups have called for an end to detention centers altogether, arguing that long-term confinement can have severe psychological effects on detainees. The independent advocacy group Human Rights First has implored the U.S. government to consider alternative systems that do not “exacerbate the trauma asylum seekers face and impede access to legal counsel.” With this in mind, a federal judge ruled in 2015 that detention centers without child-care facilities could not detain children for more than 20 days—a verdict that has largely been ignored by ICE. In some cases, women and children have spent up to 16 months in detention.

The United States’ family case management program provides a more relaxed alternative to detention facilities, functioning less like a prison and more like a counseling center. As part of the program, social workers connect asylum-seekers to legal representation, guide them through the court system, and help them receive housing and healthcare, as well as schooling for their children. Asylum-seekers must also have demonstrated that they legitimately fear returning to their country of origin in order to qualify.

Since January 2016, the program has served asylum-seekers in numerous cities across the U.S., including Chicago, Miami, New York, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. According to a letter signed by Ann Schlarb, the senior vice president of The GEO Group—the prison company that runs the case management program—99 percent of the program’s participants “successfully attended their court appearances and ICE check-ins.” Schlarb even noted that “families have thrived” under the relaxed conditions.

With the program scheduled to close on June 20, future asylum-seekers who aren’t held in detention centers are likely to end up in “intensive supervision” programs—a cost-effective alternative to family case management. The AP writes that case management programs cost around \$36 a day for one family, while intensive supervision programs cost between \$5 and \$7 for each individual. “By discontinuing [family case management], ICE will save more than \$12 million a year—money which can be utilized for other programs which more effectively allow ICE to discharge its enforcement and removal responsibilities,” Rodriguez

said in a statement. The trade-off, however, is that asylum-seekers will have access to fewer resources and will likely be forced to wear uncomfortable ankle monitors.

With the Trump administration heavily focused on deporting unauthorized immigrants, intensive supervision programs also offer a more successful record of deportation. While the case management program has deported just 15 of its participant families, intensive supervision programs have deported around 2,200 individuals over the same time period. With this track record and budgetary savings in mind, the Trump administration has allotted around \$57 million of its 2018 budget for intensive supervision programs. The budget also calls for another \$1.5 billion for detaining and deporting unauthorized immigrants.

While detention has long been the government's preferred policy, experts still question the decision to shut down a more humane alternative. According to Michelle Brané, the director of the Migrant Rights and Justice program at the Women's Refugee Commission, the decision to close the family case management program is unwarranted. "This is a clear attempt to punish mothers who are trying to save their children's lives by seeking protection in the United States," Brané told the AP. "I think it's crazy they are shutting down a program that is so incredibly successful."

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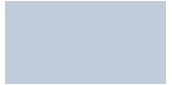
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