DHS releases end of fiscal year 2015 statistics

Department is better targeting its enforcement efforts to prioritize convicted criminals and threats to public safety, border security, and national security.

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released its end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 statistics which reflect the Department’s immigration enforcement efforts that prioritize convicted criminals and threats to public safety, border security, and national security.

Overall, the Department apprehended 406,595 individuals nationwide and conducted a total of 462,463 removals and returns. The U.S. Border Patrol reported 337,117 apprehensions nationwide, compared to 486,651 in FY 2014. At the same time, ICE removed or returned 235,413 individuals in FY 2015, with 86 percent of these individuals considered a “top priority” (Priority One) — those considered border security or public safety threats.

The number of convicted criminals removed from the interior continued to increase, as 91 percent of ICE’s FY 2015 interior removals and returns were individuals who were previously convicted of a crime, compared to 86 percent in FY 2014, and just 67 percent in FY 2011.

Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson made the following statement concerning these numbers:

“Last year’s removal and return statistics are characterized primarily by three things: first, last year’s removal numbers reflect this Department’s increased focus on prioritizing convicted criminals and threats to public safety, border security and national security. Second, the removal numbers were driven by the dramatic decrease in those apprehended at the border in FY 2015 – 337,117 – the second lowest apprehension number since 1972, reflecting a lower level of attempted illegal migration at our borders. Third, to improve the transparency of our efforts, for the second year in a row, we are releasing the immigration statistics of CBP and ICE together, rather than piecemeal, to provide a single, clear snapshot of our overall immigration enforcement picture.

FY 2015 was a year of transition, during which our new policies focusing on public safety were being implemented. In FY 2016 and beyond, I want to focus even more interior enforcement resources on removing convicted criminals. To that end, we are renewing and rebuilding ICE’s ties with state and local law enforcement. A year ago, we ended the controversial Secure Communities Program, and replaced it with the Priority Enforcement Program. Of the 25 largest jurisdictions that had placed restrictions on their own cooperation with ICE, 16 are now working with us again for the good of public safety.

In FY 2016, we will be challenged again by a variety of factors driving illegal migration to the U.S., mostly from Central America, and we are redoubling our border security efforts now to meet that challenge.”

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Enforcement Efforts at and between Ports of Entry

The nation’s long-term investment in border security continued to produce significant and positive results in FY 2015. Illegal migration continued to decline compared to the peak in FY 2000, when the Border Patrol reported 1.6 million apprehensions. This fiscal year, the Border Patrol reported 337,117
apprehensions nationwide, compared to 486,651 last fiscal year. This represents a 30 percent decline since last year and an almost 80 percent decline since the peak of apprehensions in FY 2000. Further, in FY 2015, Border Patrol apprehensions of Mexican nationals decreased by 18 percent from FY 2014, and apprehensions of individuals from countries other than Mexico, predominately from Central America, decreased by 88 percent.

Enforcement actions at ports of entry continued to yield important border security achievements. In FY 2015, CBP officers at ports of entry arrested 8,246 people wanted for serious crimes, including murder, rape, assault, and robbery. Officers also stopped 225,342 inadmissible individuals from entering the United States through ports of entry, an increase of 14 percent from FY 2014. Depending on the circumstances, these individuals were arrested for removal, allowed to voluntarily return to their country of origin, or allowed to withdraw their applications for admission into the United States. Inadmissibility grounds included those related to previous immigration violations, as well as criminal and national security-related reasons. As part of these efforts, CBP also identified 11,611 high-risk travelers who would have been found inadmissible had they traveled to the United States, and who were instead prevented from boarding flights destined for the United States.

In addition, CBP officers and agents played a significant counter-narcotics role in FY 2015, seizing more than 3.3 million pounds of narcotics across the country.

For a comprehensive breakdown of CBP’s FY 2015 enforcement efforts, please click here.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Interior and Border Enforcement Efforts

In FY 2015, ICE removed or returned 235,413 individuals. Of this total, 165,935 were apprehended while, or shortly after, attempting to illegally enter the United States. The remaining 69,478 were apprehended in the interior of the United States and the vast majority were convicted criminals who fell within ICE’s civil immigration enforcement priorities.

98 percent of ICE’s FY 2015 removals and returns fell into one or more of ICE’s civil immigration enforcement priorities, with 86 percent falling in Priority 1 and 8 percent in Priority 2. In addition, ICE’s interior enforcement activities led to an increase in the percentage of interior removals that were convicted criminals, growing from 82 percent in FY 2013 to 91 percent in FY 2015. These numbers clearly illustrate the agency’s continued commitment to focus on the removal of convicted criminals and others posing a threat to public safety in the interior of the United States.[1] and the removal of individuals apprehended while attempting to unlawfully enter the United States.

The Department’s civil immigration enforcement priorities impact how ICE conducts removals, as they underscore a heightened focus on the greatest threats to national security, public safety, and border security. Rather than expending limited resources on individuals charged or convicted of traffic and other minor offenses, ICE instead focused its resources on those who pose a threat to public safety and on recent unlawful entrants.

Refining Civil Immigration Enforcement Priorities

In FY 2015, ICE prioritized its limited resources by refining its focus to our most serious threats to national security, border security, and public safety, as directed by Secretary Johnson in his November 20, 2014 Memorandum entitled Policies for the Apprehension, Detention and Removal of Undocumented Immigrants.

Although the revised civil immigration enforcement priorities were only effective for the final three quarters of FY 2015, ICE’s removal statistics demonstrate strong alignment with the revised priorities. For example, 86 percent of all individuals ICE removed in FY 2015 were in “Priority One” (recent unlawful border entrants, convicted felons and aggravated felons). Additionally, 59 percent of total ICE removals were convicted criminals, and of those, 81 percent fell within Priority One.

The nature and scope of ICE’s civil immigration enforcement is further impacted by a number of factors, explained more fully below. These include: 1) the level of cooperation from state and local law enforcement partners; 2) the level of illegal migration; and 3) changing migrant demographics. As the new enforcement priorities become even more engrained, ICE expects continued heightened focus on priority individuals and those that represent threats to public safety and security.

Level of Cooperation from State and Local Law Enforcement Partners

A significant factor impacting removal operations has been the number of state and local law enforcement jurisdictions limiting or declining cooperation with ICE. When law enforcement agencies decline to
transfer custody of removable convicted criminals and public safety threats to ICE, the agency must expend additional resources to locate and arrest these individuals at-large.

To address this problem, on November 20, 2014, Secretary Johnson announced the creation of the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) as part of the President’s immigration accountability executive actions. Implemented in July 2015, PEP is designed to be flexible, allowing ICE to tailor the program to fit the needs of each jurisdiction and achieve mutually law enforcement goals. PEP improves the process of transferring those most dangerous from state and local custody by enabling ICE to take custody of priority individuals without damaging trust with local communities.

Throughout 2015, DHS and ICE conducted a nationwide effort to implement PEP and promote collaboration, reaching out to thousands of local law enforcement agencies and government officials, The agency’s Field Office Directors have briefed the program to over 2,000 law enforcement jurisdictions. Of note, 16 of the top 25 jurisdictions with the largest number of previously declined detainers are now participating in PEP, representing 47 percent of previously declined detainers. Most law enforcement agencies are now cooperating via PEP. On December 22, the City of Philadelphia announced it has agreed to work with us again, and ICE is continuing its outreach to other jurisdictions.

As ICE continues to strengthen and improve relationships with state and local law enforcement partners, more jurisdictions will participate in PEP, increasing the number of convicted criminals transferred to ICE for removal.

**Decreased Illegal Migration and CBP Apprehensions**

Historically, a large number of ICE’s removals have been based on CBP’s significant border apprehensions. However, with the exception of one year, apprehensions along the southwest border – a key measure of illegal border crossings – are at their lowest level in more than 40 years. In FY 2015, the total number of U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions was approximately 337,117, a decrease of 30 percent from FY 2014. The lower number of CBP apprehensions resulted in a decrease in the number of overall ICE intakes, falling from 263,340 intakes in FY 2014 to 193,951 intakes in FY 2015.

**Changing Migrant Demographics**

Changing migrant demographics over the last few years have also impacted ICE removal operations. In FY 2014, the number of Central Americans apprehended at the southwest border significantly increased. Although the numbers of apprehensions for this population dropped in FY 2015 in comparison to the number apprehended in FY 2014, the numbers were still high. Higher numbers of Central Americans crossing our border require greater resources, as the removal process for this population takes more time, personnel resources, and funding to complete compared to the removal process for Mexican nationals. Additionally, many of these Central American nationals are asserting claims of credible or reasonable fear of persecution. Such cases require careful adjudication, and therefore, take longer to process. Early data indicates that some individuals have successfully obtained asylum in the removal proceedings process.

For a comprehensive breakdown of ICE’s FY 2015 removal numbers, please see the FY 2015 report here.

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[i] Federal court rulings, such as *Rodriguez v. Robbins*, 715 F.3d 1127 (9th Cir. 2013), continue to challenge ICE’s interior operations. *Rodriguez* applies throughout the Ninth Circuit, the federal court jurisdiction with the largest number of individuals in removal proceedings. It allows individuals who previously would have been detained without bond, to seek release on bonds from immigration judges. Their cases are then transferred from the relatively expedited detained court docket to the slower non-detained court docket, thereby decreasing the number of overall removals in a given year. | return to text