

10 things to know about family separation

It's important to have correct information when discussing federal policies and their consequences. CLINIC created this list of facts to help you understand the complex immigration situation occurring now. Politics aside, families are being separated and their path to reunification is unclear. You can use these facts in conversations with your neighbors, fellow parishioners, colleagues and family members to share accurate information about this situation.

1

Many of the families affected by the crisis are fleeing gang threats and domestic violence situations in Central America. They are coming to the border seeking asylum, a legal process the United States has offered since the end of World War II. The horrors of the Holocaust led the U.S. leaders of the 1950s to recognize the pivotal role the country could play in saving countless lives.

2

There are strict protocols in place to qualify for asylum. All applicants are subjected to thorough vetting, which includes fingerprinting and background checks.

3

The family separation crisis is a result of the federal government's 'zero tolerance' policy. This policy instructed immigration officials to criminally prosecute anyone crossing the border between ports of entry into the United States, including those who came seeking asylum.

4

In order to criminally prosecute parents, they had to be separated from their children. The federal government was aware of this consequence when it put this policy in place.

5

No executive order or act of Congress was needed to end family separation. The federal government has the ability to abandon or amend its own policies without an executive order.

6

While the executive order states families will be reunified, it did not provide instructions on how the Department of Homeland Security should go about doing so. Some policies have been released since, but they are not comprehensive. This has slowed down the process and made it difficult to verify whether reunifications have actually occurred.

7

The executive order substitutes family detention for family separation. It instructs immigration officials to hold the entire family in detention centers together. The federal government is now asking that the current court-mandated 20-day limit for detaining children be removed so that parents and children can be held indefinitely while their case is processed, a procedure which can take several years.

8

Central American families who have attempted to apply for asylum through official channels since April have been forced to wait in line outside the border entrance for days, sometimes weeks, before being seen by immigration officers. This motivates some families to attempt to cross the border without documentation.

9

All enforcement agencies exercise discretion about how they enforce laws. Immigration is no different. Decisions about who to detain and who to release while a case proceeds, whether to seek out people who are leading law-abiding lives for deportation and how to treat those detained are all examples of discretion in enforcement.

10

While family separation began in April 2018, the tactic is in line with this administration's steady withdrawal of support for other types of humanitarian protection backed by the Catholic Church, such as Temporary Protected Status and programs for the Dreamers, such as DACA.