

The Cost of Inaction on Immigration

By the editorial board, *The New York Times*, Oct 7, 2023

It is difficult to find an issue that more exemplifies the dysfunction of American government today than immigration.

5 In the past year, more than a million people have entered the United States through the southern border, overflowing shelters and straining public services. Most of the newcomers claim asylum, a status that allows them to be in the country legally but leaves them in limbo. They often must wait years for their cases to be heard, and it can be a lengthy process to obtain legal permission to work.

10 This nation has long drawn strength from immigration, and providing asylum is an important expression of America's national values. But Congress has failed to provide the necessary resources to welcome those who are eligible and to turn away those who are not. Instead, overwhelmed immigration officials allow nearly everyone to stay temporarily, imposing enormous short-term costs on states and cities that the federal government hasn't done enough to mitigate.

[...]The federal government's negligence is fueling anger against immigrants and stoking divisions. The question is whether Congress, mired in dysfunction, can stir itself to enact sensible changes so the nation can reap the benefits of immigration.

15 Neither party has come up with a solution that is both practical and compassionate. Many in the Republican Party want to return to the Trump-era policies of strictly curtailing refugee and asylum admissions and requiring many people to stay in Mexico while their asylum cases are heard. Some Republicans still embrace the fiction that building a huge wall would solve everything, despite abundant evidence that it would be ineffective in stopping people from coming to the border. On 20 Thursday the Biden administration moved to expand that wall as well.

Some lawmakers on the left have tried to ignore or downplay the extent of this challenge. Illegal border crossings by families, while they are a small portion of the total number of people entering the United States, are rising. The consequences of allowing huge numbers of asylum seekers to enter without sufficiently providing for them are real. The result is not only relentless pressure on the 25 immigration system at the border and elsewhere but also a devastating failure to protect people from smugglers, who have made sneaking people into the United States a big business, or from exploitation after they arrive.

30 Congress can raise the level of legal immigration — by increasing the quotas for employment visas and other categories that allow people to come to the United States legally and have the chance to become permanent residents and then citizens. [...]

The country has already seen the consequences of keeping legal immigration artificially low. [...]Even worse, the [Trump] administration removed children from their parents in a cruel attempt at deterrence. That inhumane policy also didn't work[...].

35 While the Biden administration has mostly ended the policy of family separation, it has been slow in resettling refugees, has not pushed for raising quotas for most other forms of legal immigration and has offered no sustainable, long-term solution to the challenge of illegal immigration. [...]

Then there is the question of how to support those who have already arrived in the United States.

40 [...]The White House is limited in the actions it can take; Mr. Biden may have exhausted what he can do through his executive authority. Until Congress decides to take meaningful action, America will continue to pay a price.