

Officials target immigrants with criminal records

Paul Srubas, Green Bay Press-Gazette 3:38 p.m. EST November 3, 2013

Immigration and Customs Enforcement shifted focus from workplace roundups to criminal immigrants.

GREEN BAY, Wis. -- Even as immigration reform remains up for congressional consideration this fall, [deportations continue](#) to take place regularly across the Midwest.

However, it is less likely to be in the news than it was several years ago.

In the 1990s, [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) would storm workplaces, march dozens of laborers out in handcuffs and load them onto awaiting buses.

"There was backlash, children being left behind," said Laurie Martinez, who works with immigrants through the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, Wis. "ICE will still do roundups, where they're looking for several individuals, and we usually hear about it a week after. But you don't hear much of them going to employers.

"Now it seems to be they're targeting people in jail, in the prison system."

Deportations and so called "sweeps" by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents remain a part of life all over the country, but it's a quieter approach. It targets specific individuals rather than workers or a place of business. Those individuals targeted primarily have serious criminal records or had run-ins with immigration authorities in the past. The most recent one in Brown County, Wis., where Green Bay is the county seat, was in April, when ICE picked up 44 people.

In 2008, Congress directed ICE to shift its focus and prioritize criminal immigrants, not just undocumented ones, according to the federal agency. Immigration and Customs Enforcement says it now targets criminal immigrants and those who pose a danger to national security or public safety and those "repeat violators who game the immigration system."

The reason for the change? The agency noted its "limited resources" and, according to independent analysis, the roughly \$23,000 per immigrant cost for deportation.

The shift in strategy is evident in the agency's numbers.

Since 2008, the number of convicted criminals deported nationwide has increased 89%, while the number of undocumented immigrants without criminal convictions has dropped 29%. Last year, ICE records show the agency deported 409,849 people, 96% of which fell into the agency's

enforcement priority definition, which covers criminals, threats to national security and repeat violators of immigration laws.

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— Laurie Martinez, works with immigrants through Catholic Diocese of Green Bay

The six-state region that includes Wisconsin shows the same shift in strategy by the agency. Last year, the agency deported 10,296 immigrants from Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri and Wisconsin. Nearly two-thirds of those immigrants were convicted criminals.

In 2011, 11,786 immigrants were deported from that area, and 64% of them were convicted criminals. In 2010, 10,346 immigrants were deported, and 52% were convicted criminals.

"Our removal stats are not broken down by county or even by state," said Gail Montenegro, public affairs officer for ICE's Chicago region. "Our stats are for the entire six-state area."

Generally, people in the country illegally who are incarcerated or picked up in a community sweep are held in either the Dodge or Kenosha, Wis., county jails. Both counties have contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement to house and transport immigrants, who get a chance to argue against deportation in federal court, usually in Chicago.

Immigrants who commit serious crimes and are sentenced to prison fulfill those terms, but are identified as being of interest to the federal immigration agency, Wisconsin corrections prison spokeswoman Joy Staab said. When their prison sentences are over, they are transferred to Dodge and Kenosha county jails for deportation proceedings.

Since 2008, about 391 of those inmates were transferred to ICE custody in Dodge and Kenosha counties. Of those, 33 had been convicted in Brown County courts, Staab said.

Deportations by the numbers

2012: Immigration and Customs Enforcement deported 10,296 immigrants from Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri and Wisconsin. Of those, nearly two-thirds were convicted criminals.

2011: ICE deported 11,786 immigrants from that six-state area. Sixty-four percent of them were convicted criminals.

2010: ICE deported 10,346 immigrants. Fifty-two percent were convicted criminals.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/11/03/immigrants-deported-criminal-records/3420445/>