

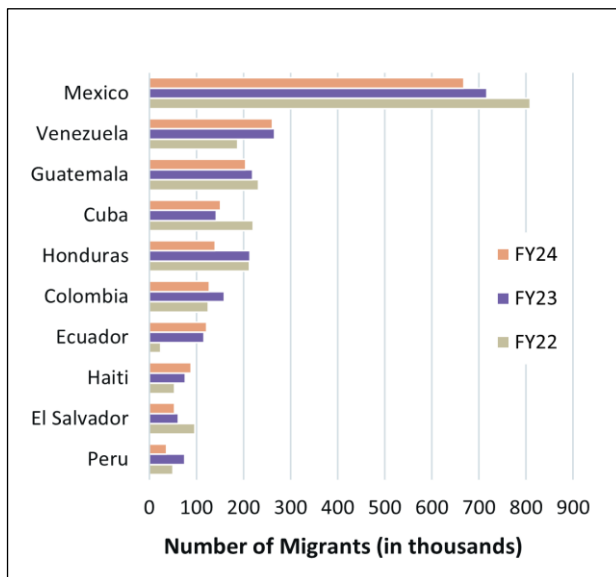
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U.S. Efforts to Manage Western Hemisphere Migration Flows

In FY2024, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) enforcement encounters at the Southwest border totaled 2.1 million, the lowest total recorded since FY2021 but still above the levels recorded prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2023, pandemic-related border entry restrictions ended; those restrictions had enabled CBP to expel migrants from the United States under 42 U.S.C. §265 (referred to as *Title 42*) for public health reasons. Since then, CBP has placed those who are encountered into removal proceedings under Title 8 of the *U.S. Code*. Encounters rose from June to December 2023 but have fallen in 2024 due to Mexican enforcement efforts and new U.S. asylum restrictions implemented in June 2024.

At least 89% of the migrants CPB encountered at the Southwest border in FY2024 originated in the Western Hemisphere (see **Figure 1** for data on the top 10 Western Hemisphere countries of origin in FY2024 and comparisons with FY2023 and FY2022). Whereas the vast majority of migrants encountered over the past decade have originated from Mexico or Northern Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), a slight majority of those encountered in FY2024 originated from other countries. More than 374,400 migrants traveled from South America through Panama’s dangerous Darién Gap jungle in FY2024, according to Panamanian migration data.

Figure 1. U.S. Southwest Border Encounters
(FY2024 Top 10 Western Hemisphere Countries of Origin)
Figure is interactive in the HTML version of this In Focus.



Source: CRS, using U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

Notes: Beyond Western Hemisphere sources, in FY2024, the number of encounters from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) slightly exceeded Peru, making the PRC the 10th-largest country of origin overall.

The Biden Administration has launched foreign policy initiatives aimed at managing migration in the Western Hemisphere and has allocated foreign assistance funds to implement them. Congress is considering legislation and appropriations that could affect those policies while overseeing existing regional migration management efforts.

U.S. Regional Migration Management

The Biden Administration’s approach to regional migration challenges initially focused on Central America. In July 2021, pursuant to the United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (P.L. 116-260, Division FF, Subtitle F) and Executive Order 14010, the Administration released a U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America. The strategy’s stated aim is to address socioeconomic, governance, and security challenges in the subregion. The Administration also created a Collaborative Migration Management Strategy to “promote safe, orderly, and humane migration.”

The Administration subsequently broadened its engagement on migration issues beyond Central America to other countries in the Western Hemisphere in the context of increasingly diverse migrant flows (see **Figure 1**). In June 2022, the United States and 20 other Western Hemisphere countries signed the Los Angeles Declaration for Migration and Protection. The declaration recognizes migration management as a shared responsibility and seeks to bolster regional efforts to improve border controls, create legal migration and protection pathways, support migrants and host communities, and coordinate responses to mass migration. In addition to engaging with U.S. partners to ensure they uphold their Los Angeles Declaration commitments, the Administration has implemented the following measures.

Foreign Assistance

The Biden Administration has used foreign assistance in the Western Hemisphere, in part, to stem irregular migration toward the U.S. Southwest border. For example, in FY2022 and FY2023 (combined), the Administration allocated nearly \$1.4 billion in bilateral and regional assistance to support the implementation of the root causes strategy in Central America. The Administration also obligated more than \$1.1 billion in Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) for the Western Hemisphere over the course of FY2022 and FY2023. The Administration has used MRA funds to respond to the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations in Central America and Mexico, as well as to support the economic and social integration of nearly 6.6 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees estimated to reside in other Latin American and Caribbean countries. The Administration also has provided MRA funds to UN agencies to create Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) in the region. SMOs vet potential candidates for refugee

resettlement or other legal migration options to the United States or other countries, such as Canada or Spain. Some 23,000 refugees were resettled in the United States in FY2024.

U.S. foreign assistance allocations for FY2024 are not yet publicly available. In September 2024, however, the Administration asserted that it had “committed over \$1.2 billion under the Los Angeles Declaration framework in 2024 alone.” The Administration also noted that it had launched a new U.S.-funded removal program in Panama that “has resulted in the removal of hundreds of foreign nationals who did not have a lawful basis to remain in Panama, after they were screened for protection needs.”

For FY2025, the Administration requested at least \$632.6 million in bilateral and regional assistance to continue implementation of the root causes strategy in Central America and at least \$164.1 million to support migrant integration and migration management elsewhere in the region. The Administration also planned to allocate \$475.0 million in MRA for the Western Hemisphere to address humanitarian needs and expand its SMO initiative.

Legal Pathways, Stiffer Penalties

The Biden Administration has expanded legal pathways for migrants to enter the United States, while increasing penalties for those who enter the country illegally and restricting access to asylum at the border. In January 2023, for example, the Administration expanded a humanitarian parole program, which began in October 2022 for migrants from Venezuela, to include migrants from Cuba, Haiti, and Nicaragua (CHNV). Due to concerns about fraud among would-be sponsors, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) paused the program in July 2023 for several weeks to enhance vetting procedures. By the end of September 2024, 531,000 people had entered the United States through the CHNV program. In October 2024, the Administration announced it would not extend the two-year parole status for CHNV beneficiaries.

Relief from Removal

The Biden Administration has designated Venezuela and Haiti for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which provides protection from removal and work authorization for individuals already present in the United States who are nationals of countries DHS deems unsafe. DHS also extended earlier TPS designations for El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, which the first Trump Administration had tried to terminate. Together, these designations allow some 782,000 individuals to remain in the United States.

Anti-Smuggling and Law Enforcement Efforts

The Biden Administration has worked with regional partners to combat migrant smuggling. In June 2021, the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security established Joint Task Force Alpha (JTFA) to enhance efforts against human smuggling in Mexico and Central America. By June 2024, JTFA efforts had resulted in 240 U.S. convictions. The State Department has imposed visa restrictions on the owners of charter flight companies and criminal groups that have facilitated U.S.-bound irregular migration.

Such activities build on existing cooperation mechanisms, such as Transnational Criminal Investigative Units, which investigate and prosecute smugglers and human traffickers, and an International Biometric Information-Sharing Program to help governments detect and detain potential security threats before they reach the United States.

Considerations for Congress

Congress may consider various policy options as part of its legislative and oversight responses to regional migration challenges. For example, the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-47, Division F), directed U.S. agencies to prioritize programs that address factors that contribute to irregular migration to the United States when allocating funding for the Western Hemisphere (§7045(a)). At the same time, Congress opted not to specifically designate any resources to fund the Administration’s \$1.3 billion emergency FY2024 supplemental funding request for migration management in the region.

P.L. 118-47 also placed limitations on humanitarian assistance for migrants and directed the Secretary of State to report to certain congressional committees on “the organization and funding of mass migration caravans in the Western Hemisphere” (§7045(f)). Additionally, the act directed U.S. agencies to comply with directives in H.Rept. 118-146 (§7019(e)), including requirements to report to Congress on the needs of communities hosting Venezuelan migrants, metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of the root causes strategy in Central America, and opportunities to support Panama’s migration management efforts.

Those reports may inform final FY2025 SFOPS appropriations decisions and additional oversight efforts. The FY2025 SFOPS measures passed by the House (H.R. 8771) and reported in the Senate (S. 4797) would shape U.S. migration management policies in several ways. For example, H.R. 8771 would prohibit funding for SMOs “unless expressly authorized by a subsequent Act of Congress” (§7045(f)). S. 4797 would prohibit the State Department from obligating funding for the “involuntary repatriation operations of a foreign government” until the Secretary certifies that an independent monitoring and oversight plan is in place (§7045(d)).

Congress also may seek to shape U.S. diplomatic engagement related to regional migration management. For example, H.R. 2, passed by the House in May 2023, would direct the Secretary of State to seek to reestablish migration agreements similar to the Migrant Protection Protocols with Mexico and Asylum Cooperation Agreements with Central American countries concluded by the Trump Administration but terminated by the Biden Administration.

More broadly, Congress may consider the extent to which U.S. policy in the Western Hemisphere should prioritize migration management among other U.S. objectives in the region, such as expanding commercial ties, addressing potential criminal and geopolitical threats, and strengthening adherence to democracy and human rights.

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