



**MMC Latin America  
and the Caribbean**

**QUARTER 4 2023**



# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to some countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels. For more information on MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit [mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow us at [@Mixed\\_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

### MMC's understanding of mixed migration

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people engaged in mixed migration have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Mixed migration describes migrants travelling along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly, and wholly or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

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# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean

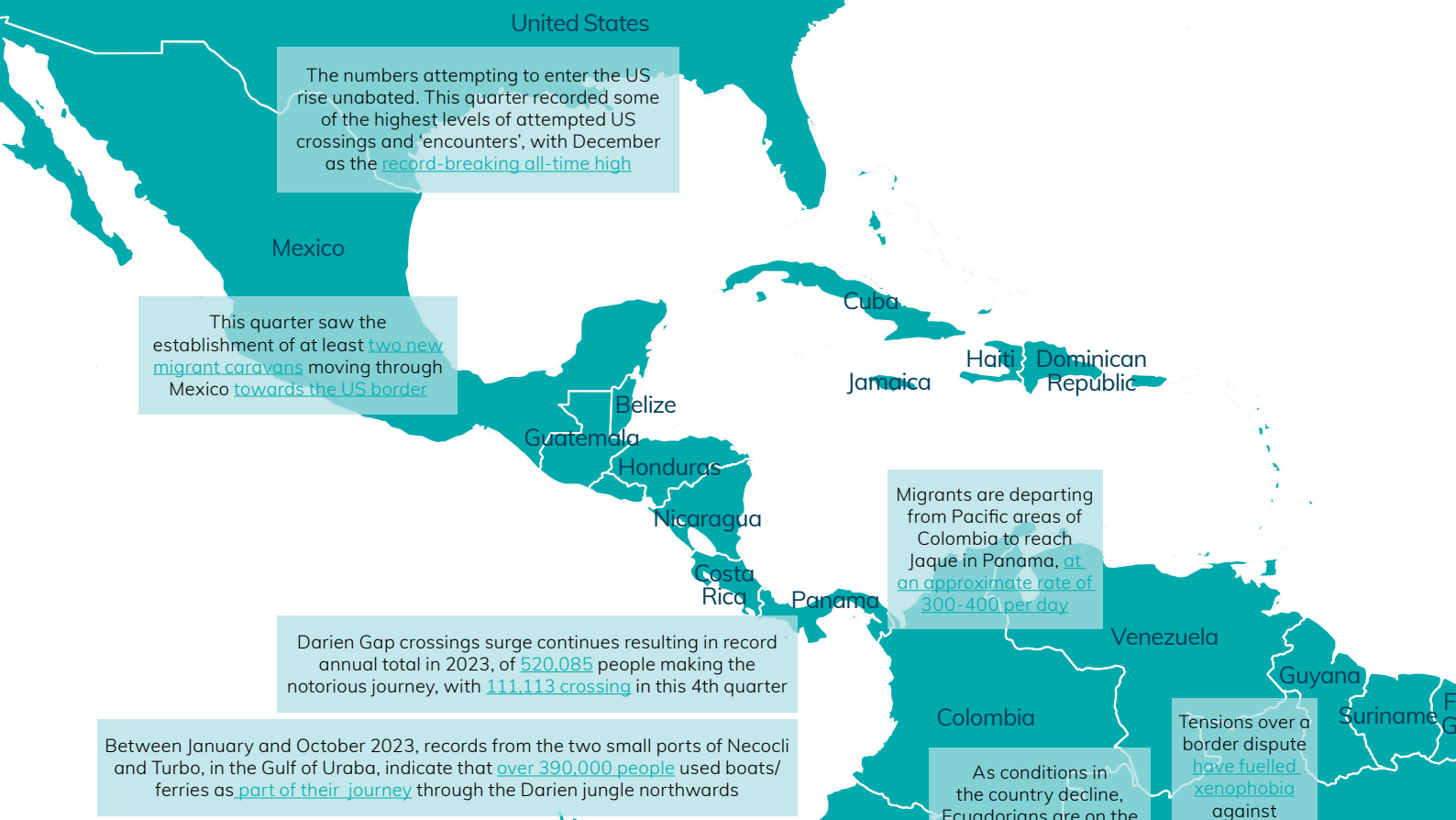
## Quarter 4 - 2023

### Key Updates

- **Movements from Venezuela continue:** Venezuelans continued to leave their homeland in the 4th quarter of 2023. According to R4V, the number of Venezuelans who had left the country by the end of November 2023 was [7,722,579](#) – 11,692 more than the total recorded at the end of August, 3 months earlier.
- **New migrant caravans:** A relatively small part of a record-breaking rise in northward movements this quarter saw the establishment of at least two new migrant caravans moving through Mexico towards the US border. One that started at the end of October from Mexico's southern border with Guatemala with [approximately 5,000](#) migrants and asylum seekers rapidly attracted an additional 2,000 more, while the second departed on 24 December 2023, numbering between 4,000 and 7,000, but [disintegrated soon after starting](#).
- **Darien Gap crossings surge continues:** According to [UNHCR](#), this quarter's crossings of the Darien Gap have contributed to a record annual total. In 2023, a reported [520,085](#) people made the notorious journey with almost [111,113 crossing](#) in this 4th quarter. In the whole year, 81% were from South America, 9% from the Caribbean Islands, 8% from Asia and 2% from Africa.
- **Nicaragua's 'weaponizing' of US-bound migrants:** During this quarter, [further reports emerged](#), highlighting Nicaragua's involvement in facilitating the movement of migrants heading northward, through the country.
- **Ecuadorians on the move:** US border authorities apprehended over [116,229 Ecuadorians](#) at the US southern border in fiscal year 2023 as they entered the US irregularly, representing a sharp rise of 383% from fiscal year 2022 and an annual record.
- **Record numbers of attempts to enter the US from Mexico:** This quarter saw some of the highest levels of attempted US crossings and 'encounters', with December as the [all-time high](#). CBP counted total encounters along the southwest border in October and November of around 240,000 each month, but in December the total was over [300,000](#). These numbers led to urgent US/Mexican diplomatic negotiations.



## Regional Overview\*



Between January and October 2023, records from the two small ports of Necoclí and Turbo, in the Gulf of Uraba, indicate that [over 390,000 people](#) used boats/ferries as [part of their journey](#) through the Darien jungle northwards

## The Caribbean



\*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration within and out of Latin America and the Caribbean.

# Mixed Migration Regional Updates

## Mixed migration dynamics in South America

### Movements from Venezuela continue

Venezuelans continued to leave their homeland in the 4th quarter of 2023, albeit at a slower rate than in previous quarters. According to the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), the number of Venezuelans who had left the country by the end of November 2023 was [7,722,579](#). The vast majority ([6,538,756](#)) reside in Latin America and the Caribbean, although a rising number are travelling north to attempt access into the US (see below), mainly through irregular means. With an estimated population of [29 million people](#), the exodus of almost 8 million Venezuelans in the last decade represents a significant proportion of the total.

As of [November 2023](#), the top 5 hosting countries of Venezuelans were Colombia (2,876,000), Peru (1,542,000), Brazil (510,000), Ecuador (475,000) and Chile (444,000). Despite regularization and integration efforts (see updates below), according to a R4V [Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis \(RMNA\) report](#) for 2023, more than 4 million people currently face difficulties accessing food, shelter, health care, education and formal employment in Latin America and the Caribbean. A lack of stable livelihood opportunities has also contributed to the rise in the number of Venezuelans engaging in secondary movement – illustrated by 62% of all those crossing the Darien Gap being Venezuelans this quarter. A [new Amnesty International report](#) concluded that none of the major hosting states currently comply with “their obligations under international law to protect those fleeing Venezuela in order to safeguard their lives, integrity and human rights”.

### Venezuela’s migratory drivers ever-present

The Venezuelan exodus continues to be driven by multiple factors, including the country’s difficult socioeconomic situation and cost-of-living crisis, political [repression](#), erosion of human rights and freedoms, [state-generated violence](#), and insecurity. [Journalists](#) and human rights workers continue to face the risk of aggression, forced detention and censorship, as [new reports](#) this quarter illustrate.

During this quarter, Maria Corina Machado won the Venezuelan opposition’s presidential primary by [a large margin](#). However, President Maduro has reportedly attempted to [implement a ban](#) on Machado holding public office, which could prevent her from running in 2024. The government has also issued [arrest warrants for opposition staff members](#) amid fears that the new land dispute with oil-rich Guyana and subsequent [military manoeuvres and sabre-rattling](#) may offer the president [a pretext for delaying the 2024 elections](#).

## Mixed migration dynamics in the region

### New migrant caravans in Mexico

This quarter saw at least two new migrant caravans moving through Mexico towards the US border. One started at the end of October from Mexico's southern border with Guatemala at Tapachula, with [approximately 5,000](#) migrants and asylum seekers, and rapidly attracted an additional 2,000 'stranded' migrants [along the way](#). Most of the caravan were from Central America, Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti and during the quarter they made their way to the northern Mexican border, where they started arriving at the end of the year.

The [second caravan](#), also in Tapachula, began to group for departure on [24 December 2023](#), and was made up of between 4,000 and 7,000 people from 24 countries. However, this second caravan [disintegrated soon after starting](#), after Mexican immigration authorities promised to attend to their cases and provided onward bus transport to processing centres for some.

The phenomenon of migrant caravans is unique to Central America and Mexico and has [gained prominence](#) in the last six years (see also [QMMU 2022, 4th Quarter](#)). They are formed in order to protect their members from organised crime and abuse, garner publicity and force the hand of the authorities. They are also formed out of desperation at being stranded without visas, work authorisations or permission to move. Not all of the migrants are seeking to enter the US, some are hoping for documents to be able to stay in Mexico and find work and humanitarian relief (see asylum data in the Mexico sub-section below).

### Darien Gap crossings surge continues

According to [UNHCR](#) (Border Protection Monitoring with Mixed Movements in Darien and Chiriqui, Panama), this quarter's crossings of the jungle buffer between Colombia and Panama have contributed to an annual record. In 2023, a reported [520,085](#) people made the notorious journey with [111,113 crossing](#) in this 4th quarter. The 2023 figures are double those of 2022 ([248,000](#)), four times as many as 2021 ([133,000](#)), and a twenty-fold increase of 2019 (24,000) when the phenomenon of using the Darien Gap was first fully documented by Panama's National Migration Service (SNM). [In terms of nationalities](#), in the whole year, 81% were from South America, 9% from the Caribbean islands, 8% from Asia and 2% from Africa. Increasingly, migrants such as Venezuelans, Ecuadorians and Haitians as well as those from Asia and [Africa](#) are part of the movements north to the US. As noted in the previous QMMU ([Q3](#)), Asians are increasingly represented using this route with approximately [25,000](#) Chinese recorded as having passed through the Darien in 2023. Asians represented 12% of the movements in Q4 ([14,184](#)).

As mentioned in the [last QMMU](#) and its thematic focus on children and adolescents, the number of accompanied and unaccompanied children who use the Darien Gap route has been increasing every quarter. In 2023, on average 25% of all those who crossed were children, according to government data, and in the 4th Quarter between October and December an estimated [22% \(24,438/111,113\) were children](#). Overall the number of children crossing the Darien Gap in 2023 is almost [3 times the number](#) of those who crossed in 2022.

During 2022, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reportedly treated [232 survivors of sexual violence](#) in the Darien Gap, but between January and November 2023, that number had [doubled to 462, including 33 children](#).

## Nicaragua's 'weaponizing' of US-bound migrants

[Further reports emerged](#) of Nicaragua's facilitation of an air services network so that migrants can reach the border with Mexico and the United States faster, using Nicaragua as a shortcut or 'bridge'. [According to experts](#), Nicaragua is deliberately using the migration movements to amplify the impact of the migration crisis to the United States and, simultaneously, generate income from the business by charging fees for visas, tourist permits, and landing taxes. Welcoming and potentially organising commercial flights from around the world to arrive in Nicaragua ([without visa](#)) is a form of [weaponizing](#) and [profiting](#) from migration aspirations and part of an aggressive migration [policy tool](#) by Nicaragua's president Daniel Ortega, reported experts.

Nicaragua has reportedly enabled "[more than 500](#)" of these [flights from various countries](#) during 2023, with many chartered flights arriving from Haiti. An attraction for many migrants is the ability to avoid the [Darien Gap](#), but the US has reacted by threatening airlines with [sanctions](#) (losing access to US markets). Some regional charter airlines have cancelled services from [Cuba to Nicaragua](#), but Haitian and African migration through Managua airport reportedly [remains prevalent](#).

## Costa Rica's migration-induced state of emergency

On 29th September President of Costa Rica, Rodrigo Chaves, signed an executive decree declaring a [National Emergency in response to the country's migration crisis](#) - specifically due to the increase in the transit of refugees and migrants through the country. Almost [85,000 migrants](#) entered Costa Rica from neighbouring Panama in August 2023, 55% more than in July, according to IOM. The decree allows the National Commission for Risk Prevention and Emergency Attention (CNE) to implement administrative, operational and economic measures; allows the government to more easily direct resources toward migration and its accompanying 'humanitarian crisis' and public security concerns; and allows the government to [take firmer action \(deportations\)](#).

In early October, Costa Rica and Panama established bilateral agreements to [provide buses](#) to facilitate migrants' transit. The main border town, Paso Canoas, does not have sufficient facilities to service tens of thousands of transiting migrants each month. The aim is that a fleet of [200 buses](#) will carry migrants daily from where they emerge from the Darien Gap in Panama through Costa Rica and up to the Nicaraguan border. The service began on [9 October](#). Panama and Costa Rica intend to [disrupt the smuggling networks](#) that charge migrants to get through their countries as well as reduce crowding.

## Ecuadorians on the move

More than [30,000](#) Ecuadorians had US asylum cases pending at the start of 2023, up from 10,000 in 2021. Immigration authorities have registered over [116,229 Ecuadorians](#) at the US southern border in fiscal year

2023, including a growing proportion of families with children. It is 382% more than in fiscal year 2022, and an annual record.

The number of Ecuadorians crossing the Darien Gap surged after Mexico imposed a visa requirement for Ecuadorians in 2021, posing an obstacle to flying to Mexico and then moving north to the US border, and either irregularly crossing or handing themselves over to border patrols for processing. Fewer than [400](#) Ecuadorians crossed the Darien Gap in 2021 but in 2023, Ecuadorians were behind Venezuelans, the second most numerous nationality crossing the Darien Gap. As of the end of December 2023, [57,250](#) Ecuadorians were recorded making the crossing into Panama during the year.

The Biden administration's Department of Homeland Security stated in October that it [intends to set up a family reunification program](#) that will allow eligible Ecuadorians to fly to the US and apply for temporary work permits if their US-based relatives sponsor them for an immigrant visa.

The key drivers of this relatively new phenomenon of Ecuadorians on the move in such numbers are the result of [socioeconomic, security and political changes](#) in their country. In the last five years, economic austerity, the high cost of living and high unemployment combined with the '[frustration and despair stemming from persistent corruption, increasing crime and political violence, the growing power of narcotraffickers, and the government's inability to address these issues](#)' have fuelled migration. Criminal groups have increased their control over Ecuadorian territory [in recent years](#), inflicting extortion and violence on the local population. Early January 2024 saw [prison mutinies, hostage-taking during a live television broadcast](#), and widespread violence in cities of strategic importance to the cocaine trade. In 2022, Ecuador was the tenth most violent country in Latin America and the Caribbean, after an [alarming 82% increase](#) in homicides compared to the previous year. Ecuador is expected to be in the top three in 2023. The new president declared a [60-day state of emergency and nationwide curfew](#) in early January 2024.

## Regularisation processes update:

### Update on temporary regularisation processes in the region with special focus on Venezuelans

#### Colombia

Colombia provides Temporary Protection Permits (Permiso por Protección Temporal - PPT) to Venezuelan citizens as a means of regularizing their immigration status, and the PPT is considered the key to integration in Colombia for Venezuelan migrants. Children of Venezuelan nationals born in Colombia [may be naturalized](#) without apostille documents (an official government-issued certificate added to documents so they will be recognised when presented in another country).

The total number of Venezuelans with PPTs at the end of this quarter is reportedly [2,394,202 people](#) (see our previous [QMMU](#) for more on the recent PPT campaign). Migration Colombia further announced that it will extend (via resolution No. 4321) the validity of the processing certificate for the PPT for Venezuelans in-country until [30 June 2024](#).



## Peru

As of the end of November 2023, Peru hosts approximately [1,540,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants](#), the second largest after Colombia. Peru issues Temporary Permit to Stay (PTP), giving foreigners one year of regular status in the country through the temporary residence permit card, [also known as the Temporary Stay Permit Card \(CPP\)](#). After six months with the CPP, migrants can request special resident immigration status, which allows them to access the immigration card for one year, renewable. Those who do not regularise their status within the established deadlines may be sanctioned and expelled. However, [180,000](#) previously fined migrants were given amnesty through their application for the PTP before October 28th. The majority of Venezuelans in Peru have regular status.

During 2023, the authorities campaigned for foreigners to apply for the CPP/PTP before the deadline of 10 November 2023. [More than 205,000](#) applications had been received through the Digital Migration Agency by the deadline, most of Venezuelan nationality. It is not clear what will happen to those who had not registered by 10 November.

## Brazil

As of the end of November 2023, Brazil hosted [510,499 Venezuelan](#) migrants, up from 477,493 in August (an increase of 33,006). The Venezuelan population in Brazil has nearly doubled in just two years, and 2023 was the fifth year of Operation Welcome (Operação Acolhida), the policy designed to ease the absorption and integration of Venezuelan migrants.

'[Interiorization](#)' is a key element of the policy, consisting of a voluntary relocation program to move Venezuelans to municipalities across the country. In November 2023, [2,063 refugees and migrants](#) from Venezuela were supported by the Voluntary Relocation Strategy. Of those, 379 were supported by the Job Placement modality, through which [315 \(about 83 per cent\)](#) were effectively hired.

Evidence suggests that those who participated had better access to formal jobs, housing, and education programmes after being relocated, with eight out of ten adults having found employment or started their own businesses. Interiorisation distributes responsibility away from the high-profile situation in the north (such as Roraima state) and towards areas with greater opportunities and public services. [112,293 Venezuelans](#) have taken part in the interiorization program thus far, around 80 per cent of whom are women and children, relocated to [988 of Brazil's 5,568 total municipalities](#). [Inside](#) and [outside](#) of Brazil the successes of their policies are considered a useful model, but some have found the approach too state-led while [pushing civil society and participating NGOs to one side](#).

## Chile

As of November 2023, Chile is estimated to host approximately [444,400 Venezuelans](#). Chile has been both applauded for taking in so many Venezuelan migrants and criticised for growing anti-migrant policy positions (policies since 2019 mean that many Venezuelans have entered Chile irregularly), [anti-migrant sentiment](#) and sensationalist media representations of migrants. [In a 11 December 2023 letter to Chile](#),

following previous communications with the Chilean government, the UN Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) summarised ongoing concerns about the country's treatment of migrants and asylum seekers, citing xenophobia and discrimination, the criminalization of migration, associating migration with crime and general insecurity, particularly targeting Haitian and Venezuelan migrants who make up the two most numerous groups of migrants and most of whom are newly arrived (i.e. [since 2017](#)).

Amongst other measures regarded as heavy-handed, the Ministry of Interior and National Migration Service announced the launch of a [biometric registration](#) system for all foreigners who irregularly entered the country before 30 May 2023 to register and identify themselves by the end of the year (31st December). While this process was presented as voluntary, on 30 November [President Boric ordered police](#) to arrest, detain, and [expel](#) any migrant who has not completed the registration – as well as any migrant with an outstanding arrest warrant. However, deportations will be challenged by the Venezuelan government's refusal to allow flights carrying deported migrants from Chile. On 17 December 2023, a national referendum rejected a proposed new constitution that included, inter alia, [requirements for the expulsion of irregular migrants](#) from the country.

## Mixed migration update reports from Mexico

### Record number of asylum applications

Mexico has been the epicentre of large mixed migration movements and migration-related events and policy developments throughout 2023, including in the final quarter. Additionally, Mexico has over a [quarter of a million internally displaced people](#) according to UNHCR.

In 2023, Mexico received [140,982 asylum applications](#) – the highest number of asylum claims ever received in this time frame. The Southern states of Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz accounted [for 72.5% of all claims](#) processed in the country. Since 2018, the Mexican Refugee Commission (COMAR) has increased its response capacity to register and process asylum claims almost four-fold, with support from UNHCR, which is still not sufficient to meet the requests received by the institution, [according to the COMAR coordinator](#). In 2023 the highest number of asylum applications by far were from Haitians and Hondurans.

### Dangerous passage through Mexico

Mexico is [notorious for risks](#) to migrants passing through its states, waiting to cross into the US from northern towns, or [having been expelled or returned from the US](#). This quarter, typical reports include accounts of a [surge in deaths](#) in the border areas, of [rape of migrant women](#), the rescue of [31 kidnapped migrants](#) from an armed gang, and the discovery in November of [123 migrants](#) trapped in a trailer in the central state of San Luis Potosí. [Human Rights First](#) published a report in late November documenting over 1,300 reports of torture, kidnapping, rape, extortion, and other violent attacks on asylum seekers and migrants stranded in Mexico, including those struggling to secure CBP One appointments.

At the end of September, freight trains from Mexico to the US were [unusually halted for three days](#). The National Migration Institute and the company (Ferromex) [announced the reopening of the service](#) with more

security agents from both sides to control the boarding of the trains by migrants and prevent accidents. At the end of December 2023, President Biden asked Mexican President López Obrador to enforce the security controls: [2,000 migrants](#) were taken off the train. However, this is a token gesture, considering the numbers that use the train.

## Mexico's leverage and policy pressures in migration diplomacy

With movements towards the US through Mexico at a record high in 2023, diplomatic pressure on Mexico to implement elements of US migration policy is increasingly evident. Reportedly, [over 32,000](#) Mexican military and National Guard troopers — about 11% of Mexican military total forces — have been assigned to enforcing immigration laws.

A U.S.-Mexico [Joint Statement](#) of the High Level Security Dialogue 2023 was released mid-October: Inter alia, Mexico has [committed to facilitate removals from Mexico of US-bound and US-ejected migrants](#). This is part of the [15-action point agreement](#) between the US and Mexico in September 2023. Mexico currently carries out deportation to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (reportedly, [six flights per week](#)) and plans to expand them to Ecuador, Venezuela, and Colombia. By the end of December Mexico had begun repatriating Venezuelans according to [press reports](#), but few details are available.

At the same time, there are signs of an increase in [Mexico's leverage and power in migration diplomacy](#). [Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#), and other ministers at the end of December in a [closed-door meeting](#) in Mexico City. Just ahead of the talks, a [migrant camp in Matamoros](#) was bull-dozed, in what may be a foretaste of a harsher stance from Mexican authorities.

## The southern border

The demand for services and assistance in Tapachula, Chiapas, where thousands of migrants arrive every day either travelling through Central America from starting points further south, in the Caribbean and beyond or from Central America itself, is [challenging the capacity](#) of humanitarian actors and institutions. Some [4,000 frustrated](#) and stranded migrants formed a caravan on 24 December and began transiting southern Mexico on foot but were persuaded to disperse with the promise of more rapid processing. [Buses provided by Mexican immigration authorities](#) – took the migrants to facilities in Huixtla, just 25 miles (41 km) north of the southern city of Tapachula near the Guatemalan border.

In October, [as mentioned](#), another caravan of 5,000-strong left from Tapachula gathering an estimated [additional 2,000 migrants](#) as it travelled by foot towards the northern Mexican border unhindered. There, migrants mainly either attempted to enter the US irregularly or presented themselves to the authorities seeking asylum.

## Updating the northern border

The number of people being processed at US border posts in northern Mexico exceeded a record-breaking [10,000 per day](#) in December 2023. Some reported that the US border and migration system was at a [“breaking point.”](#) Rail bridges and crossings between Mexico and the US (Eagle Pass, Texas; San Ysidro, California; Lukeville, Arizona; and Nogales, Arizona) were [temporarily closed, reopening in early January](#). The aim was to stem the number of irregular migrants using trains and also, reportedly, to [free up staff](#) to help process the huge increase in migrants arriving at US border posts.

Between May and December 2023, the US Department of Homeland Security deported or returned over [445,000 migrants](#).

As of the end of December, approximately [11,000 migrants](#) hoping to enter the US through legal pathways (using the CBP One app) were waiting on Mexico’s northern border. According to [one report](#), migrants from Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela and elsewhere were waiting in Tijuana (est. 3,800), Reynosa (est. 3,273), and Matamoros (est. 4,000). Conditions are poor (see our [previous QMMU](#)).

## Mixed movements into North America

### Post-Title 42 border processing through Title 8

Following the suspension of Title 42 in May 2023, the US Customs and Border Protection (US CBP) is processing all non-citizens under Title 8 and applying expedited removal proceedings for those who cross the border or points of entry irregularly (see our [previous QMMU](#)).

December saw an [all-time high](#) of attempted US crossings and ‘encounters’. US CBP’s total encounters along the southwest border in October were [240,988](#), 11% less than in September 2023. In November 2023, US CBP’s counted [242,418](#) encounters, and over [300,000](#) in December.

## A sense of scale, the political impact and burden on US legal system

During the fiscal year 2023 (October 2022 to September 2023) approximately [2.6 million people \(81%\) were processed under Title 8](#), of 3.2 million that attempted the crossing into the US. Just [2,700](#) people were granted asylum or other paths towards permanent residency. Almost 200,000 were placed into expedited removal proceedings, usually because of a criminal record or a prior border apprehension. As of the end of 2023, some [1.8 million](#) of the new arrivals remained in the United States, either part of the unprecedented backlog of [3 million](#) or with some other form of temporary status. The trend of [non-Mexican nationalities dominating](#) among those attempting the crossing has continued [throughout this quarter](#).



With fewer than 800 immigration judges, the backlog could take up to 3 years to clear. US border facilities have a record number of migrants in custody, and border agents are trying to release migrants as fast as possible to avoid overcrowding. On 19 December Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill, subsequently [challenged by federal authorities](#), making irregular immigration into Texas a [state crime](#).

The political and practical pressures of high mixed movements at the southern border [are likely](#) to bring further [significant immigration policy changes](#) in 2024 - an election year in the US.

## Consistent use of Title 8 processing using CBP One app system

To enter the US regularly through its southern land borders, migrants and asylum seekers are required to schedule an appointment through the CBP One mobile application.<sup>1</sup> When an appointment is offered at a port of entry, a CBP officer performs a Title 8 inspection.

In October, CBP processed more than [44,000 individuals](#) at ports of entry through CBP One. In November, the total was over [43,000](#). December figures have yet to be released but initial indications are that they were approximately [50,000](#). Between January 2023 through the end of November, [nearly 360,000 individuals](#) have successfully scheduled appointments using CBP One. Reportedly, the top nationalities who have scheduled appointments are Haitian, Mexican, and Venezuelan. The app has been downloaded by [more than a million](#) migrants and asylum seekers. There are reports that it can take many weeks to obtain an appointment.

## Proof of concept and expansion of Safe Mobility Offices

As reported earlier, from [April 2023](#) the Biden Administration started establishing Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs), in collaboration with IOM and UNHCR (see previous [QMMUs](#)). Five offices offering access to regular migration pathways were initially opened in Guatemala (1), Costa Rica (1), and Colombia (3). In October the [State Department indicated](#) a further office was being opened in Ecuador. However, issues of capacity have constrained operations: in Colombia, for example, the SMOs were [only open for 3 days](#) and then closed, and remained closed at the end of this quarter. [In Ecuador](#), a quota system was implemented in early 2024 as the SMO was open for 3 days a week.

As of December 2023, [Safe Mobility reports that it is primarily screening for](#) the US Refugee Admissions Program, parole for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and for Venezuelans and family reunification parole programs. [Specific categories and groups](#) of people to which the US are offering assistance are detailed according to the different offices in an approach that appears to be very targeted. Although these are early days, and there is [criticism](#), an initial 'proof of concept' is illustrated by the [US government's claim](#) that it had "welcomed more than 2,000 refugees to the United States", [a number](#) that [increased to 3,200](#) in early January 2024. More than 107,000 people have [reportedly](#) applied through Safe Mobility, of which 11,800

<sup>1</sup> Non-citizens who enter the country between ports of entry or present themselves at a port of entry without first scheduling a CBP One appointment are subject to deportation or expedited removal under Section 240 of Title 8, as well as the Circumvention of Lawful Pathways rule, which presupposes ineligibility for asylum. If someone in deportation proceedings re-enters the country without permission, they risk minimum five-year admissions ban and potential prosecution charges.

have been referred for US resettlement, and [281 individuals registered](#) in Costa Rica have been [referred for resettlement in Spain](#).

The initiative may create useful linkages with other national programmes. On the SMO website, there are currently alerts for Venezuelans, Haitians and Colombians who reside in Latin America and the Caribbean and who have family members in Canada about a new channel facilitating safe and regular immigration to Canada. In early October, [Mexico reportedly rejected the US offer](#) to establish SMOs in the country, however, [reports indicate](#) that Mexico may also host reception centres for refugees from Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, and facilitate labour pathways for nationals of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

## Mixed migration by sea: the Caribbean

Many Caribbean states face [challenges](#) dealing with [irregular migration](#), human smuggling, and [trafficking](#), which are all partly made possible by sea travel and the naturally porous borders of the islands.

According to data from Migración Colombia, migrants are departing from the Pacific area in Colombia to reach Jaque in Panama, [at an approximate rate of 300-400 per day](#). On the Atlantic side, between January and October 2023, records from the two small ports of Necocli and Turbo, in the Gulf of Uraba, indicate that [over 390,000](#) used boats/ferries as [part of their journey](#) through the Darien jungle northwards. For some these short sea journeys are [fatal](#).

Maritime migration in the Caribbean often involves smugglers and overloaded vessels of different sizes on waters with strong currents, prone to storms and interception. Interdictions of maritime migrants in the Caribbean have been [rising dramatically](#) in the last two years. The US Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma intercepted and [repatriated 82 migrants](#) in October and November. Elsewhere, [23 irregular migrants](#)—among them three children—were intercepted by the Colombian Navy on 4 October. At the end of September, the [Dutch Coast Guard](#) intercepted two vessels carrying Venezuelan migrants: 19 people headed to Curaçao, and 28 people travelling to Aruba. Earlier, the same patrols had intercepted other Venezuelans in these waters. Maritime migrants, and in particular [Venezuelans looking for livelihoods](#) and refuge in the Caribbean [have been identified](#) in a report this quarter [as vulnerable to trafficking](#) in the Caribbean.

Despite [record high numbers of reported deaths and disappearances](#) in 2022 and the first three quarters of 2023, according to IOM's Missing Migrants Project, only [2 incidents](#) have been recorded this quarter. IOM has recorded [1,543](#) missing migrants in the Caribbean since 2014. It is suspected that many deaths and disappearances in the Caribbean are not [registered](#), as many shipwrecks are never identified.

# Thematic Focus:

## Organised criminal exploitation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants

An under-examined aspect of the Venezuelan crisis is the scale of [criminal exploitation of the migrant crisis](#) and the vulnerability of displaced and/or mobile Venezuelans as [prey](#) to organised crime and armed groups.<sup>2</sup>

The exodus of over [7.7 million](#) Venezuelans (20 per cent of their population) in the decade to the end of 2023 represents the largest contemporary displacement crisis globally. The fact that the international spotlight has moved away from the Venezuelan crisis is not just a sign of the [global competition for headlines and aid budgets, as new crises erupt](#), but also a testimony to the relative success of the region in admitting and hosting almost 6.5 million Venezuelans.

However, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans are still on the move – either continuing to leave Venezuela itself or moving onward from elsewhere, having found it [hard to survive, thrive, and live without discrimination in host communities](#). The context has created an enabling environment for organised crime and armed groups to exploit migrants.

The region has seen large-scale movement spread over a long time period. Millions of migrants have entered countries undocumented, and in many cases by using smugglers (MMC has found that [69%](#) of Venezuelan nationals reported hiring one or more smugglers for their journey between 2019 and 2021). Unlike migration and refugee profiles in other displacement contexts, whole Venezuelan families left together resulting in a high number of [women](#), children and adolescents on the move - all trying to start new lives in new countries. Many of them were fleeing economic deprivation and had become impoverished during Venezuela's severe economic and sociopolitical decline, and then sought refuge in countries with their own economic and employment challenges. Levels of organised crime are high and defence of human rights is low in many of these countries.

Taken together, these factors create a context of high vulnerability to exploitation among Venezuelan migrants, as organised criminal groups control and dominate smuggling along some routes (see below), and newly arrived Venezuelans seek to survive in unfamiliar and often unpromising environments.

InSight Crime reports identify a wide range of aggravating [conditions and specific situations](#) where Venezuelans are both vulnerable to and exploited by crime as they live and move around the Latin America and Caribbean region. Some highlights include:

- Distrust of local authorities exacerbates vulnerability, particularly in contexts like Peru and Chile where the government is taking harsh action against irregular migration, and irregular migrants move and

<sup>2</sup> In this overview, we mainly reference the extensive analysis and investigative reporting by InSight Crime. Readers seeking further elaboration are recommended to follow up and explore hyperlinked references.

live under the radar. Victims of crime and organised crime also fear coming forward in places where [members of the migration and security forces](#) are known to be corrupt and/or collude and participate in criminal activities, including human trafficking and modern slavery.

- [Dependence on human smugglers](#) can be related to criminal gangs, which exploit migrants' vulnerabilities through various human rights abuses, extortion, and labour and sexual exploitation with virtually complete impunity. Restrictions on the route to the US [have pushed people](#) to irregular and increasingly risky routes, facilitating human smuggling, which has become a [key source of illicit income](#) for gangs and cartels in Mexico. In 2023, [Venezuelans](#) became the second largest nationality group attempting irregular entry to the US. According to InSight Crime, "[In response, human smuggling operations, as well as criminal groups that exploit migrants, have become even more sophisticated and powerful, and the participation of corrupt officials in these activities has also grown.](#)"
- Human traffickers have also profited, [recruiting women and girls](#) inside Venezuela as well as in host countries by offering [false offers](#) of jobs, scholarships, or even religious charity that result in human trafficking, modern slavery [and coerced sexual exploitation](#). Cases are recorded from [Mexico](#) to [Trinidad and Tobago](#) and elsewhere in the [Caribbean](#) and all host countries, often facilitated by [corrupt local officials](#). Some reports cite the rising number of [murdered Venezuelan migrants in paid sexual activities](#) in Mexico. The specific issue of '[gender and organised crime](#)' is covered in a wide range of reports by InSight Crime, including specific reports highlighting the vulnerabilities of Venezuelan migrants.
- The large and continuing movements through irregular border crossings present a highly lucrative source of income for armed groups and "[predatory criminals](#)", even if they do not engage in smuggling or trafficking, as they extort migrants crossing their territory, [rob](#) or kidnap them, or use them as human couriers for drug trafficking.
- Men and boys have been invited to work in the agricultural sector, in ranches in [Brazil, for example, or in coca fields in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia](#), and then coerced to work in dire conditions. Similar cases are reportedly found in Chile and Argentina as well as in [illegal mining and timber trafficking](#) in the Amazon region.

Three types of criminal and armed groups victimising Venezuelans [have been identified](#). First, those who traditionally control the territory into which Venezuelans arrive but who may be more vulnerable to the kind of exploitation and extortion affecting all residents within such territory. Examples in [Colombia and Brazil](#) are identified, but other reports have indicated that in [Mexico](#) there are links between major cartels such as the Sinaloa Cartel, Jalisco Cartel New Generation (Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación – CJNG) as well as Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel and the Unión de Tepito and the [trafficking of Venezuelan women](#).

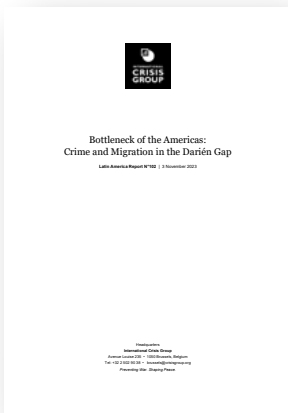
Second, the more opportunistic exploitation of Venezuelans by smaller criminal groups and third, even smaller groups, family-run gangs or individuals.

A third and newer phenomenon can be added to these categories with the rapid emergence of the powerful, Venezuelan-based, multi-national gang deeply invested in migrant exploitation - [Tren de Aragua](#). Tren de Aragua, a transnational Venezuelan "[megabanda](#)", or large criminal network, has grown rapidly since 2018, forging alliances with other gangs and [creating cells](#) in various South American countries. They



use violence to take over [local criminal economies](#) and are involved in extortion, migrant smuggling, loan sharking, retail drug trafficking, kidnapping, small-scale international [drug trafficking](#), human trafficking, [sexual abuse/exploitation](#) and robberies. Tren de Aragua currently operates in [Colombia](#), Peru, Ecuador and Brazil and [more recently](#) in [Chile](#) and Bolivia. Their expansion, according to InSight Crime, often [follows migrant smuggling routes](#). According to [some investigations](#), [“the Tren de Aragua is systematically preying on undocumented migrant women in vulnerable conditions, bringing them to Chile, and sexually exploiting them”](#).

# Highlighted New Research and Reports



## [Bottleneck of the Americas: Crime and Migration in the Darién Gap](#)

### **International Crisis Group, November 2023**

Mass movement across the Darien has become at the same time a humanitarian emergency, a business for criminal groups, and a high-stakes political battleground, above all in the US, claims International Crisis Group. In this up-to-date description of the dynamics, new trends, players and responses in the ever-evolving story of migrants using the Darien Gap to travel northwards, ICG gives an analysis of the situation and recommendations for regional stakeholders.



## ["This Hell Was My Only Option"- Abuses Against Migrants and Asylum Seekers Pushed to Cross the Darién Gap](#)

### **Human Rights Watch, November 2023**

This report is the first in a series of HRW reports planned on the Darien Gap. Their perspective is that movement restrictions, often promoted by the United States, have pushed migrants and asylum seekers to cross the Darien Gap, exposing them to abuse and empowering organized crime. It frames 'the devastating stories' of abuses of people who try to cross the Darien Gap as the result of failed immigration policies that push people into danger. They conclude that governments in the Americas should take steps towards ensuring rights-respecting immigration policies, including by increasing safe and legal pathways for migration and ensuring access to asylum.

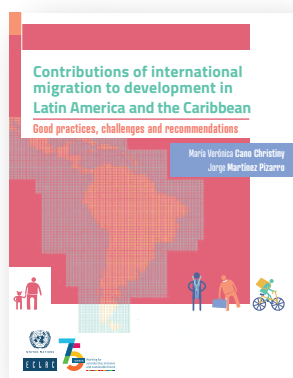


## [A Winding Path to Integration: Venezuelan Migrants' Regularization and Labor Market Prospects](#)

### **Migration Policy Institute and IOM, October 2023**

With many of the 6.5 million displaced Venezuelans intending to remain permanently in their new countries of residence, there is a growing recognition that governments will need to critically assess their institutions and policies to foster effective integration. This new study from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) seeks to provide

a preliminary assessment of the effects of regularization policies on labour integration outcomes. It finds, among other things, that the economic benefits linked to regularization tend to be stronger in receiving countries where migration and labour regulations are enforced in practice.



## [Contributions of international migration to development in Latin America and the Caribbean: good practices, obstacles and recommendations](#)

### **CEPAL, November 2023**

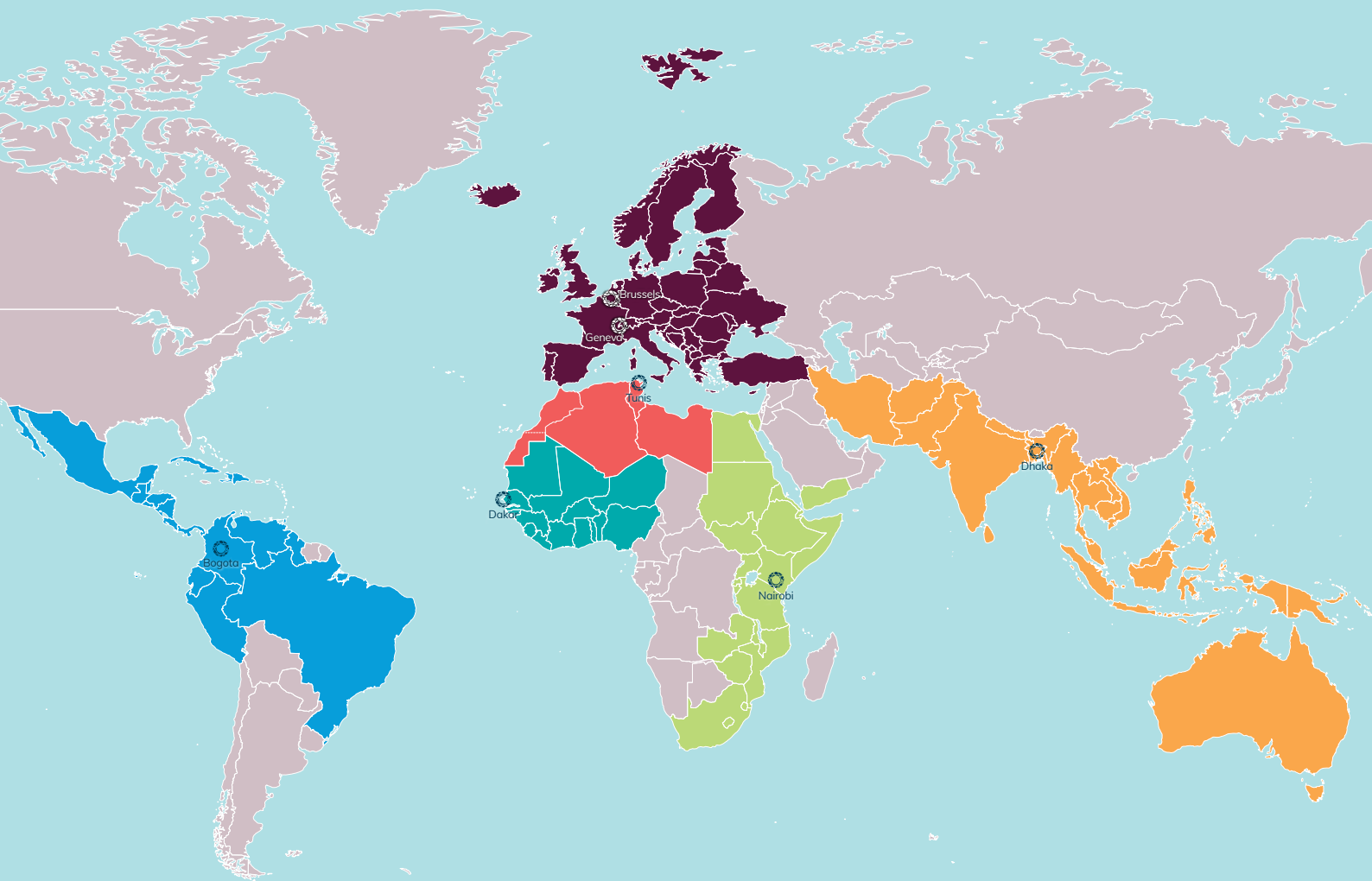
This publication collates national studies on the contribution of migration to sustainable development in five countries in the region—Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico and Peru. It is the final report of the project implemented between 2020-2023 focusing on “Harnessing the contribution of international migration to sustainable development in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean”.



## [Americas: Regularization and protection: International obligations for the protection of Venezuelan nationals](#)

### **Amnesty International. September 2023**

In this report, Amnesty International analyses the migratory regularization measures and procedures for the recognition of refugee status implemented by Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile, states that host nearly 70% of displaced Venezuelans. Its analysis concludes that Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile are failing to comply with their obligations under international law to protect those fleeing Venezuela in order to safeguard their lives, integrity and human rights.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based mixed migration responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

For more information visit:  
[mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow us at [@Mixed\\_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

