

FACT SHEET: WHAT ARE SAFE MOBILITY OFFICES (SMOs)?

[Safe Mobility Offices \(SMOs\)](#) are a recent initiative by the United States administration to offer safe alternatives to irregular migration towards the USA in Latin America. According to the US state department SMOs were set up to help ensure that:

“... refugees and vulnerable migrants do not have to undertake dangerous journeys in search of safety and better opportunities.”

(US State Department on [Safe Mobility Initiative.](#))

Overview:

- Since the SMO initiative was announced in April 2023, SMOs have been set up in Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Ecuador.
- The SMOs are not new physical locations, but rather online mechanisms operated by UNHCR, IOM, and other partners.
- According to US State department figures: 200,000 people have reportedly registered on the platform, 21,000 have been approved for some kind of legal status and 9,000 have moved to the US.

Eligibility:

The application criteria are different in each national context, criteria evolve over time, and can be difficult to obtain, but this is the information obtained as of **beginning of September 2024.**

2. Currently, only nine nationalities are eligible to apply: Cubans, Guatemalans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Colombians and Venezuelans, and recently to Ecuadorians, Hondurans and Salvadorans.
3. Only in Guatemala can nationals of the same country of the Office apply.
4. Applicants must have been present in the partner country prior to the opening of the Offices. The exact date depends on the country.
5. In Colombia and Ecuador, applicants must have documents and a regular immigration status or be in the process of obtaining a regular status.

Application Process :

- Applications are submitted online, with no option for walk-ins. However, in-person interviews may occur after an online assessment.
- The portal questionnaire directs applicants to UNHCR or IOM depending on the answers. UNHCR initially applicants for protection needs:
 - If eligible, the case is referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for possible resettlement.
 - If not eligible, applicants are referred to IOM for information on other legal pathways.

- Refugee settlement is capped at 125,000 individual per year (globally) and at about 30,000 – 50,000 individuals from Latin America.

Other Legal Pathways:

IOM does not facilitate these immigration pathways; it only provides information. These pathways mainly require a sponsor in the US to initiate the process.

- **Humanitarian Parole:** Needs to be initiated by family members in the US. It allows nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to enter the U.S. with a sponsor, providing temporary two-year residence. Humanitarian Parole is more common than refugee resettlement. The humanitarian parole programme can grant travel authorisations to up to 30,000 non-US citizens per month.
- **Family Reunification:** Needs to be initiated by family in the US. It reunites eligible family members with relatives in the U.S.
- **Work Visas:** Information is provided on H-2A and H-2B work visas, but these applications generally must be initiated in the U.S.
- **Other countries:** SMO applicants may be considered for refugee resettlement to other countries and may be provided with information and referrals to labour pathways to countries other than that United States, such as Canada and Spain. The number of people who moved through other countries than the US remains limited.