



**MMC Latin America  
and the Caribbean**

**QUARTER 1 2025**

A wide-angle photograph of a vast, open landscape. In the foreground, a dry, yellowish-brown field with sparse green patches is visible. Several people are walking across the field, some carrying backpacks. In the middle ground, a small town or village is nestled at the base of a range of large, rugged mountains. The mountains have some snow or light-colored rock on their peaks. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean



This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. The core areas of focus include mixed migration dynamics within South America, mixed movements from this part of the region towards North America, and mixed migration in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. 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 and the quarterly updates from other regions, visit [mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and subscribe to the [MMC newsletter](#) to receive our latest research. Follow us on Bluesky [@mixedmigration.org](#), on X [@Mixed\\_Migration](#) and LinkedIn [@mixedmigration-centre](#).

### 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.

#### Front cover photo credit:

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Daily migrants crossing through one of the driest places in the world, trying to irregularly cross the border from Bolivia into Chile.

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# Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean

## Quarter 1 - 2025

## Key Updates

- **The US administration seeks to revise immigration law and policy:** the new administration has made [sweeping changes](#) to United States (US) law and policy, blocking access to asylum at the southern border, suspending the resettlement programme, and attempting to facilitate deportations in a variety of ways.
- **Northward migration drops to extremely low levels:** in the face of the raft of new and unpredictable US migration policies, few appear interested in heading northward. Only 408 individuals [crossed](#) the Darien in this direction in February 2025, the lowest level since 2020. The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reported a [decline in border apprehensions](#) to 8,347 apprehensions in February 2025, believed to be the lowest since the 1960s.
- **The fate of nearly 300 non-Panamanian deportees of diverse nationalities deported from the US to Panama is unclear:** the plan was to return them on to their home countries, but many refused to return, citing fears of persecution. Panama has now given them [permits to stay for 30 days](#), renewable to 90 days.
- **The number of migrants seeking asylum in Mexico has reportedly tripled:** unofficial reports indicate that the [number of asylum applications](#) in Mexico increased threefold in January (the official figures have not yet been released). The Mexican refugee agency was already struggling to meet expanding demand, and wait times for an appointment in Mexico City have reportedly expanded from two weeks to two months.
- **New north-to-south migration patterns are being observed:**
  - Initially, those who choose to move south through Panama were sometimes stopped and returned to Costa Rica. Panama and Costa Rica then [agreed protocols](#) to facilitate return through the country.
  - Increasingly, migrants are looking to move from Panama to Colombia by boat to avoid the treacherous Darien crossings. 180 [crossed](#) this way in a single day in February.
  - [Colombia](#) reported that between January 15 and February 28, it registered 1,885 migrants arriving from Panama.
- **Ecuador cancels regularisation effort:** on March 11, Ecuador cancelled its [ongoing regularisation effort for Venezuelans](#), citing a lack of resources in UNHCR and IOM, which had supported the effort. The fate of the estimated 3,000 visas that were under consideration at the time of the decision is unclear.

## Regional Overview\*



## The Caribbean



\*The information in the map refers to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration flows in and out of Latin America and the Caribbean.

# Modifications to US policies on asylum and immigration and their effects on mixed migration movements in the region to date

Since returning to office in January, the US administration has sought to radically change US immigration policy. These new policies have caused massive changes in mixed migration dynamics across Latin America and the Caribbean. For this reason, this Quarterly Mixed Migration Update has been restructured to instead begin with what has happened in the US and then explore the implications across the region, after which other mixed migration movements and policy and legal updates are presented.

## Policy and legal updates in the US

In the last quarter, widespread changes have been implemented in US immigration policy, including increasing arrests and deportations, ending access to asylum at the Southern border, suspending refugee resettlement and more.

### Facilitating arrests and deportations

The US administration has sought to make law and policy changes that facilitate its programme of mass deportations. One such change is the [expansion](#) of expedited removals. These were previously limited to border areas and to individuals who did not request asylum but can now occur anywhere in the US and can apply to anyone who cannot show that they have been in the US for at least two years. This should not apply to individuals with a [pending asylum application](#) or a case or appeal in an immigration court but can apply to people who are left without [humanitarian parole](#) (see *Terminating temporary protected status and humanitarian parole* below).

The administration also launched a [“CBP Home” App](#), allowing immigrants irregularly in the US to notify the government of their intent to depart to avoid “harsher consequences.” The government is promoting this as “self-deportation”, with the advertised incentive of not barring participants from re-entry. However, what will happen to people who register if they do not leave as anticipated is unclear. This measure appears to be part of a [broader set of actions](#) aimed at spreading fear and intimidating vulnerable migrants into leaving. In addition, the administration has reversed [previous guidance](#) prohibiting immigration raids in locations deemed “sensitive”, such as schools, hospitals and churches. The [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) has pointed out that this has caused fear and uncertainty in migrant communities. The administration has also directed the Department of Justice to take [civil and criminal enforcement actions](#) against local officials in sanctuary jurisdictions if they attempt to stop immigration enforcement actions. The app had over 5 Million Downloads on PlayStore by the end of March, but to date, [no official numbers](#) are available on how many migrants have registered for “self-deportation”.

Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) reports that it has used up all [available detention space](#) with 46,700 people in custody, representing 113% of [capacity](#). In response, the resolution passed on March 14 to continue funding the federal budget to the end of the fiscal year included a 5% [increase](#) in funding for ICE. However, an additional US \$90 (House) to \$175 (Senate) billion are proposed for the new budget under discussion, a more than [threefold](#) increase in the organisation's budget.

Notwithstanding the lack of detention space, the administration is reviving its [controversial family detention policy](#), and as of March 12, it had reportedly detained fourteen families with children. The [detained children](#) are as young as one year old. The detainees had been in the US between 20 days and 10 years.

The administration also began to use the US military installation at Guantanamo Bay to detain migrants, housing about 270 migrants there between 4 February and 7 March and [preparing](#) the base to hold up to 30,000. The effort faced an array of legal challenges, seeking to [block removal](#) to Guantanamo, ensure that detainees could [access attorneys](#), and block the use of the facility entirely. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called for the [complete closure](#) of the facility, arguing that it does not meet the standards of due process, prohibition of arbitrary detention, and humane treatment. In early March, all detainees at the facility were [moved back](#) to the US, with the government confirming that no detainees were held there by 13 March.

The administration has also sought to apply the [1798 Alien Enemies Act](#), which empowers the US president to bypass certain due process constraints where there is a “declared war” or “invasion.” To invoke this, the president declared an invasion by the Venezuelan gang “Tren de Aragua” on US territory. The courts quickly issued an [injunction](#), but the administration nonetheless [deported](#) an initial group of more than 200 Venezuelans who were taken into custody in El Salvador in apparent [violation](#) of the court order, an incident that sparked [intense criticism](#). Of this group, 137 were accused of being members of the “Tren de Aragua”, while for 101 deportees, the [charge](#) was “illegal migration”. At the end of March, [another group](#) of 17 people were also deported.

While the deportees were supposedly gang members, the administration has not provided details as to the identities of those deported, or what evidence it had that they were actually gang members. The administration conceded in a court filing that many did [not have criminal convictions](#). The families of presumed deportees have contested their [gang affiliations](#). The deportation of these migrants in violation of the court order sets a concerning [precedent](#), and particularly because it was carried out without any due process whatsoever. The deportees were not given an opportunity to appear before a judge or to contest the accusations against them, let alone prove their innocence. This raises the [alarming possibility](#) that virtually anyone could now be [labelled and expelled](#) as a “foreign alien terrorist.”

Further, the deportation to El Salvador has raised concerns due to conditions there. The US State Department has described [prison conditions](#) in the country as “harsh and life-threatening.” [Human Rights Watch](#) has described how the recent state of emergency has worsened “historically poor conditions in detention—overcrowding, violence, and inadequate access to basic services, including food and drinking water.” Further, families of Venezuelan detainees have not had confirmation of whether their relatives were among those detained and deported. [CBS News](#) has published what it claims is a copy of the official government list.

In recent weeks, the administration has also moved to [revoke](#) visas from, and deport, students who have been involved in activism in favour of Palestinians. Secretary of State Rubio has [stated](#) that this has affected “maybe more than 300”. The administration has implied that the student involvement in protests indicates that they have not come to the US only to study. Still, specific charges against the students are unclear, and advocates question whether individuals are targeted only for exercising their right to free speech.

Notwithstanding this variety of measures, the US administration is reportedly unhappy with the [pace of deportations](#), indicating that additional measures may be introduced in the coming weeks and months.

## Ending access to asylum

President Trump suspended [access to asylum proceedings](#) at the border through an executive order. The Biden administration had previously limited access to asylum to those who arrived at an official point of entry with an appointment in the CBP One app.

The US administration has scrapped [the use of the CBP One app](#), leaving an estimated 30,000 who had already booked appointments, and 270,000 trying to [secure appointments](#), without an opportunity to present their cases. Amnesty International noted that this means that, at present, there is [no way to apply for asylum](#) at the Mexican border, in violation of the US’ international human rights obligations.

The American Civil Liberties Union challenged the [action in the courts](#), and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights criticised these moves as restricting [access to fair procedures](#) for refugee status determination.

## Suspending refugee resettlement

The administration also suspended the [refugee resettlement program](#), which had accepted 100,000 refugees in 2024, and ordered that it be [realigned](#) to focus only on those who “can fully and appropriately assimilate into the United States.” The Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, [should](#) report quarterly to the President on whether resuming the programme is in the US national interest. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has [criticised](#) the provision calling for resettlement only of those who “can fully and appropriately assimilate,” arguing that it can be the basis for discrimination. On 25 February, a federal court in Seattle ruled that [the suspension](#) amounted to a “nullification of Congressional will.” However, the administration argued in a [follow-up filing](#) in March that it would be months before they would be in a position to restart the programme, citing a “significant deterioration of functions” in the programme. Those deteriorations are due, at least in part, to the [termination](#) of federal funding contracts with programme partners following the court’s injunction.

## Terminating temporary protected status and humanitarian parole

The US administration also terminated the 2023 [designation of temporary protected status](#) for Venezuelans, effective 7 April 2025. They will also not renew the temporary protected status for Haitians, which has been in place since 2010, when it expires in August, leaving its 500,000 beneficiaries [without protection](#) against

deportation. [The move](#) has been widely criticised by those who point out that violence is still prevalent in Haiti. In the face of widespread humanitarian need, the country has little capacity to receive deportees.

The administration ended the Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, and Venezuelan (CHNV) [parole programme](#), as well as a similar programme for Ukraine and certain Afghans. The humanitarian parole programme had [granted](#) legal status to 531,690 people since late 2022. Although they can generally stay [until their status expires](#), the administration has stopped processing claims for other statuses that would let them stay longer, arguing that additional [security screening](#) was needed. Some reports indicated that asylum applications were still [accepted](#), and others say their processing was [suspended](#). Based on an internal email they reviewed, [Reuters](#) has reported that those who lose their humanitarian parole could be subjected to expedited removal processes. The US administration's action has been challenged in court by a [group of eight plaintiffs](#) who entered legally through the programme, supported by civil society organisations.

For now, those with humanitarian parole are left with looming uncertainty, wondering if they will be able to remain. This includes a [group](#) of 222 Nicaraguan political prisoners whose release was negotiated by the US government two years ago. All have had their nationality revoked and are uncertain where they could go if they cannot stay in the US.

## Possible ban of certain nationalities from entering the US

The US administration issued a 30 January executive order proposing a ban of certain nationalities from the US, requiring [state agencies](#) to identify which countries would be targeted. It is expected to affect Muslim-majority countries primarily. Still, a recent [report](#) included Cuba and Venezuela on a “red list” of countries from which all travel by nationals would be completely barred and included Haiti on an “orange list” of countries whose visas would be sharply restricted. The Caribbean nations of Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Lucia would be given 60 days to address US concerns about failing to share information, inadequate security practices for issuing passports, or selling of citizenship to people from banned countries. The final contours of the list remain to be decided.

## Other measures

President Trump also ordered the US armed forces to take “all appropriate action” to take [control of the border](#). The [Washington Office on Latin America \(WOLA\)](#) reports that there are now approximately four uniformed personnel for each migrant at the border.

In addition, an [executive order](#) requires all aliens in the country aged 14 and up of all nationalities to register and be fingerprinted if they stay there for more than 30 days. Failure to comply could result in criminal or civil penalties, imposition of fines, and/or incarceration.



## Bilateral agreements between the US and governments in LAC to receive deportations of nationals and non-nationals

The US administration has pushed countries around the region to accept deportations of their own nationals and those from other countries to facilitate deportations.

### South America

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has long refused to accept deportees, citing *inter alia* US sanctions, and creating problems for the US in handling this group. However, following a [meeting](#) between Maduro and US envoy Richard Grenell, Venezuela decided to allow deportation flights. The first, conducted by two planes from Venezuelan airline Conviasa, arrived in Caracas on 10 February. After these first flights, Maduro temporarily [refused](#) deportation flights, but the US and Venezuela agreed to [resume deportations](#) again on 13 March.

In response to Venezuela receiving deportation flights, [UNHCR](#) issued a reminder that Venezuelans with international protection needs should not be returned, pointing out that the situation on the ground has not improved and rather has only worsened since the July elections. Among the migrants who have been deported to Venezuela, a number faced pending charges in the country, including two accused of deserting the army (a charge that carries a penalty of up to [eight years](#) imprisonment). The Venezuelan government has refused to release details of the treatment of these individuals, but given the seriousness of the charge, there is concern that they have been detained, sparking [serious concerns](#) about the treatment such individuals might receive, including denial of a fair trial and being subject to harsh [prison conditions](#).

Colombia initially refused to receive deportation flights if the deportees were handcuffed but subsequently agreed after President Trump threatened a trade war. Colombia provided its [own planes](#) in an effort to ensure its [citizens](#) were “treated with dignity”. Ecuador’s president, Daniel Noboa, announced in early March that the country would receive [Ecuadorian deportees](#) but would not accept deported migrants of other nationalities. Currently, there are no specific agreements between the US and Peru regarding the deportation of nationals and non-nationals, despite the [deportation of Peruvian](#) nationals taking place, as before. In January, Brazil announced the creation of a [working group](#) with the US Embassy in Brasilia to exchange information on deported Brazilian nationals and the operation of deportation flights. Chile has affirmed that it has the obligation to receive its nationals, and the Undersecretary of the Interior has said that the government is studying the potential impact of [receiving non-nationals](#).

### Mexico and Central America

The status of an agreement with Mexico is less clear, although the US administration says that an [agreement](#) has been reached. Mexico is affirming its willingness to accept its nationals while at the same time pointing out the [vital role](#) that they play in the US economy. In Mexico, policy has reportedly shifted to focus more on deporting migrants by air [further south](#) in Mexico (a trend that was already underway when President Trump took office). Mexico, meanwhile, has accepted thousands of deportees, mostly Mexicans but also including some third-country nationals.

Guatemala agreed to receive [deportations of foreigners](#) and increase the number of deportation flights of both its own and third-country nationals by 40 per cent. Meanwhile, El Salvador agreed to [accept anyone](#), including US citizens, permanent residents, and those convicted of a crime. In February, [Honduras](#) reported that it had acted as a “humanitarian bridge” by acting as a brief stopover for the deportation of Venezuelans from the US. [Another flight](#) via Honduras with 199 deportees was reported in March.

Costa Rica and Panama have agreed to [receive deportees](#) of various nationalities, primarily [Asian](#), from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, and China, to which the US cannot easily [return people](#). [The agreement](#) between US Secretary of State Rubio and President Mulino was presented as Panamanian assistance to the US and perhaps intended to [soften](#) US [criticism](#) over the management of the Panama Canal. IOM agreed to provide reception services, the US promised to cover onward deportation costs, and the Panamanian President said that he “hoped to get [the deportees] [out of the country](#) as soon as possible.” The [role](#) of IOM in providing services in these circumstances has been questioned by advocates who say that although they understand IOM concerns that the situation would be worse without them, their actions risk “whitewashing those of the administration.” [Critics](#) have also complained that these agreements are not transparent and push weaker countries to accept populations that they lack the capacity to receive.

Nicaragua is secretly receiving deportation flights from the US, according to a [Confidencial's](#) report. It is estimated that since January, five flights carrying deported Nicaraguans have landed in Managua. These flights were not recorded on the National and International Airports Administration Company's platform. However, the flights were tracked and documented on air traffic monitoring platforms, photos, and videos, which affirms the report.

## Caribbean

The Grenadian Foreign Affairs Minister, Joseph Andall, confirmed that the country had been approached by the US to [accept](#) not only deportees who are citizens but also non-citizens. They reported that they had refused the offer, although they confirmed a willingness to accept back any citizen. Jamaica signed a bilateral agreement with US ICE regarding the [sharing of information](#) about potential deportees in January.

Since the beginning of the US administration, at least [two deportation flights](#) from the US have arrived in Cuba. Although the island has been receiving one deportation flight per month since 2023, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlos Fernández de Cossío, stated that they are willing to accept [more flights](#).

## Deportations from the United States

The US Department of Homeland Security reported that in the first 50 days of the new administration, ICE made 32,809 [arrests](#). Of those, 14,411 reportedly had [criminal convictions](#), 9,980 were facing pending criminal charges, and 8,718 had only violated immigration laws. Although large, these numbers are far short of the targets set by President Trump, and the administration is likely to continue to find ways to increase them.

Although the US administration has reported that it is focusing on criminal aliens, it is clear that a large percentage of those targeted do not have a criminal record (about a quarter of the total, according to their own statistics). Analysis of the [data](#) shows that this category (immigrants who are neither facing a pending criminal charge nor have a criminal conviction) is increasing the fastest, with detainees in this category growing more than threefold between 12 January and 9 February. As [analysts](#) argue, because immigrants with criminal records are a relatively small percentage of the total immigrant population, it would be very difficult for the administration to show a significant increase in arrests and deportations by only focusing on this category.

299 third-country deportees who arrived in Panama in mid-February were reportedly held in a hotel in the capital [under armed guard](#) for a week, even though Panamanian law prohibits detention for more than 24 hours without a court order. After this period of detention, the Panamanian government informed that 171 migrants voluntarily [agreed to return](#) to their countries of origin, with the US covering transportation costs. At least 103 migrants (from Iran, Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Cameroon, Ethiopia, China and Russia), who did not agree to depart were subsequently moved to the [San Vicente migration centre](#) in the Darien jungle. On March 7th, after two weeks in San Vicente, the migrants were [moved and left](#) in Panama City with a 30 days (renewable for 60 more) [permission](#) to depart. Next to [no arrangements](#) were made for their release. Migrants were simply told that they would have a few hours to vacate, despite most having no money, no ability to speak Spanish, and nowhere to go.

Panama claimed that those with a fear of persecution would be allowed to apply for asylum, although an asylum lawyer was prevented from [accessing the deportees](#). Some reported that when they asked about claiming asylum, they were [simply told](#) “no”. Some of the migrants have been visiting foreign missions and embassies of Canada, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Australia in Panama looking [to claim asylum](#) with no success.

Costa Rica has also received an estimated 200 non-Costa Rican migrants as part of a [bilateral deal](#). [Human Rights Watch](#) has documented how some of these individuals had attempted to seek asylum in the US and called on Costa Rica to consider and process asylum applications. As of 26 February, the [Costa Rican government](#) said it had not received any requests for asylum from the US deportees. Two days later, it confirmed that the first “voluntary” return from the group, a family from Armenia, had been completed. It is unclear whether problems like those faced by Panama may be faced in time. However, on 19 March, the [Costa Rican authorities](#) reported that 93 of the detainees were still being detained at the Migrant Attention Centre (CATEM) and that the government had extended their temporary entry permits (which had been valid for 30 days) for an additional 30 days in an attempt to resolve their situations. The [Costa Rican Ombudsperson’s office](#) has criticised the treatment of the deportees saying that they should receive medical checks prior to being transported seven hours to the shelter housing them, and provided information and translation. In addition, a habeas corpus petition has been filed asking for the [release](#) of the migrants and to ensure their access to the asylum process in Costa Rica.

# Implications for mixed migration dynamics in the region

## Mixed migration movements in North America

These various policies implemented by the US administration have profoundly disrupted migration dynamics that had been unfolding in the region for years, effectively reversing long-standing trends. Faced with increasing restrictions on regular migration to the U.S. and growing fears of deportation, many migrants are no longer heading north. In some cases, those already in Central or North America have even begun returning southward.

## Border crossings fall to the lowest level in sixty years

The US CBP reported a [decline](#) in border apprehensions to 8,347 in February 2025, the first full month since President Trump's Executive Orders shutting down access to asylum. This represents a 94% decline compared to February 2024, and WOLA estimates it to be the [lowest level](#) since the 1960s.

[Humanitarian groups in Arizona](#) warned, however, that these measures seem to be pushing some, and particularly more women and children, to take more remote paths in desert areas, which increases risks for migrants.

## Northward movements fall precipitously

Official Panamanian government figures show that the number of migrants [crossing the Darien Gap](#) fell to 408 in February 2025, representing the [lowest number](#) since November 2020. Due to the fewer migrants, the Panamanian government has announced [plans](#) to dismantle reception facilities in Bajo Chiquito and Lajas Blancas "as soon as possible." They intend to maintain the facility at San Vincente.

Further North, in Honduras, 13,473 [irregular movements](#) were recorded between January 1 and March 20, compared to 62,418 in the last quarter of 2024. Cubans were the largest group arriving in the first quarter of 2025, whereas Venezuelans were the largest group in the last quarter of 2024.

There have been important declines in migration numbers in the past in response to policy changes such as Title 42, which allowed for tightened processing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the introduction of CBP One. Those declines were temporary, so it remains to be seen whether the current declines will be temporary or durable.



## Drastic reduction in the number of migrants crossing the Darien was slower to impact extraterritorial migrants

As the numbers crossing the Darien have fallen, the [patterns](#) have changed to more heavily feature extra-continental migrants. In February 2025, the movements through the Darien were in the majority made by those from outside the continent, in contrast to patterns in 2024, when only 17% of all migrants were from outside the continent. It seems likely that the different time scales of extra-continental and continental migration drive this trend. Unlike those moving from Venezuela, for example, who could more easily halt or not start their migration, these migrants likely began their journeys months ago, before the new policies were put in place.

## Migrants in Mexico react to changing US policies

The recent, newly restrictive migration policies imposed by the US administration are drastically changing the landscape on the Mexican border. The [cancellation of the CBP One app](#), which allowed migrants to make appointments to present their cases at the border, has removed the incentive to wait at the border, drastically reducing the numbers in shelters or camped out along the border.

Migrants now have essentially three choices: try to cross the border without detection (as opposed to presenting themselves in an orderly manner to authorities), seek to make a life in Mexico, or move south, either home or to another host country.

A [substantial number](#) are staying in Mexico. Unofficial reports indicate that the [number of asylum applications](#) in Mexico increased threefold in January (the official figures have not yet been released). One [complication](#) is that Mexican law requires asylum claims to be made within 30 days of entry into the country. However, the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) has been accepting applications from individuals present in the country longer if the justification is the inability to make a CBP One appointment. There is concern, however, that the criteria might change or not be applied evenly across the country. In addition, the COMAR was already struggling to meet expanding demand, and [wait times](#) for appointments in Mexico City reportedly increased from two weeks to two months. President Sheinbaum has promised [increased funding](#), which may help.

## Mixed migration movements in Central America

### In a reversal of migration patterns, more migrants are moving south

Costa Rica is registering [increasing numbers](#) of immigrants attempting to move south either to return to their countries of origin or [other possible host countries](#). Some report that they have given up on reaching the US in the face of harsh US administration policies, while others say that they will try again when [conditions](#) are more favourable. Panama has also recorded a large number of [arrivals](#), reportedly 2,200 in February alone.

From the Nicaragua/Costa Rica border, migrants [travel](#) by bus—at their own expense—to Costa Rica's southern border with Panama. From there, they board additional buses to Las Blancas or San Vicente in the Darién, following the same route previously used in the south-north migration pattern. The journey from the Nicaragua/Costa Rica border to the Darién (Panama/Colombia border) reportedly costs USD 120. Organisations working in Panama and Costa Rica interviewed by MMC have expressed concerns about the lack of information provided by both governments, which have acknowledged signing a protocol to manage return migration but have not disclosed details on its implementation.

In early February, a [caravan of returnees](#), mostly Venezuelans, was stopped in Panama and told to return to Costa Rica to register. In mid-February, the arrival of 150 migrants at Paso Canoas at the Costa Rica/Panama border was reported by [local television](#). The migrants said they simply wanted to transit Panama on the way home. Others seeking to return have found themselves in [shelters](#) in Panama. Lajas Blancas has received 2,925 [southbound migrants](#) in the last four months (these are separate from deportees, who are housed in San Vincente). Although called a reception centre, no one can enter or leave without permission. Migrants are frustrated that “they don't want us here, but they don't let us leave.” Access by journalists is limited, leading a Human Rights Watch researcher to say that the region was turning into a [“black hole”](#) for migrants.

## Mixed migration movements towards South America

### Returns by boat from Panama to Colombia

In an effort to avoid the dangers of the Darien, some migrants are seeking to return from Panama to Colombia by boat, with at least 180 [departing](#) on a single day in February. However, this route carries its own risks.

On February 22, an eight-year-old [Venezuelan girl](#) died and 20 others were rescued after bad weather sank a [small fishing boat](#) carrying migrants. The [boat](#) apparently ignored local weather warnings. [Migrants](#) are aware of risks on the maritime routes and the costs, which apparently range up to [US \\$300](#), but many, having experienced the jungle on the way north, say boats are still preferable. MMC has been monitoring return movements in Colombia. According to MMC data, 73% of the 160 surveyed individuals who arrived from Panama had crossed the border via the Caribbean Sea, 21% had traveled southward on foot through the Darien jungle, and 6% had used the Pacific Ocean route along the west coast.

There have been press [reports](#) that the Panamanian government is facilitating these journeys by transporting migrants to the region and even facilitating agreements with boat captains. However, the [Panamanian government](#) says that these are private deals that they are working to formalise and monitor with a view to preventing human trafficking. If they are facilitating travel, this raises concerns about the legal framework within which this is happening as there is no agreement in place with the government of Colombia.

Local authorities in the Guna Yala region, from which the boats are departing, have [asked for help](#) in slowing the arrival of migrants to the area, complaining that [small local ports](#) have neither housing nor transportation for so many people. [Local leaders](#) have sought to meet with Panama's border security agency to discuss. Similarly, community councils and local authorities in northern Colombia have indicated that their communities cannot receive more migrants, as current arrivals already stretch the towns' [capacities and resources](#).

[Colombia](#) reported that between 15 January and 28 February, it registered 1,885 migrants arriving from Panama. Of these, they determined the nationality of 1,599, of whom 1,585 were Venezuelans. Colombian citizens are not recorded in these registries. The Colombian [report](#) indicated that most were arriving from Mexico waiting for appointments through the CBP One app before this was shut down and pushing them to return. It is unclear how many migrants may have other experiences, such as trying to cross the US border irregularly or having tried unsuccessfully to integrate in Mexico. The Colombian [report](#) indicates that most intended to return to Venezuela using their own resources, but more information is needed about the intentions of migrants. According to MMC return data, 62% of the 506 respondents surveyed in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Colombia stated that they were returning to their country of nationality, 40% were migrating to a country where they had a support network, and 27% chose a previous host country. Additionally, while 47% planned to stay in their destination permanently, a quarter (25%) were uncertain about their plans after arrival, 18% intended to migrate again to their country of nationality, and 4% planned to move to another country later.

## Fewer people migrated out of Venezuela, but interest in migration remains high

The number of irregular Venezuelan migrants [entering Colombia](#) through its borders in January and February 2025 decreased by about 33% compared to the last two months of 2024. In the first two months of 2025 (numbers for March were not yet available at the time of writing), 13,943 Venezuelans were detected entering irregularly from Venezuela, compared to 43,005 in the same period in 2024 and 20,702 in the last two months of 2024, indicating a significant decline in outward migration.

The number of Venezuelans entering from Ecuador also declined, though more moderately, from 15,811 in the last two months of 2024 to 12,619 in the first two months of 2025 (-20%). This trend is also reflected in the [analysis](#) of border analyst William Gómez who reports that at the Colombian border post of Táchira in Colombia, crossings by Venezuelans have dropped by 82%, a decline that he linked to US administration policies.

However, a recent [survey](#) by Poder & Estrategia found that there was still a high interest in migration. Eighteen percent of Venezuelans—including 40% of those under the age of 30— still wish to emigrate. Intended destinations have shifted significantly, however. Only 11% expressed an interest in going to the US in January 2025 compared to 27% in September 2024. Interest in migrating to Spain increased from 18% to 26% and to Brazil from 11% to 16%. Preference for Colombia stayed steady at 13%, whereas the preference for Chile fell from 9% in November to 5% in January.

## Policy updates by LAC countries in reaction to measures imposed by the US administration

### Measures to manage return migration

#### Costa Rica and Panama discuss protocols to manage the new North-South migration

In February, Panamanian and Costa Rican authorities met to discuss [protocols](#) for the safe, orderly and humane return of migrants. Security ministers from both countries [met again](#) in Peñas Blancas, on the Costa Rican border with Nicaragua, in the first week of March. The ministers discussed the facilitation of transport of Colombians, Venezuelans and Ecuadorians home, which they hope will spare migrants from abuse.

The process involves migrants in Costa Rica registering with the CATEM in Paso Canoas to verify the [absence of criminal charges](#) and facilitate travel first to Panama and then onwards to their home countries, with coordination from the US. Although [local TV](#) reported in mid-February that eight buses holding more than 200 migrants were verified and allowed to travel from Pasos Canoas on the Panamanian border with Costa Rica to the Darien, there is still significant confusion, and the process leaves vulnerable migrants at the border with Colombia with little provision for their onward movement.



## Measures for the reception and reintegration of deported co-nationals

President Trump came into office promising historic levels of deportation. Although it is early to assess the scope of the deportation project, South American countries are already working to receive deportees and brace for more.

[Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum](#) reported that in the first six days of President Trump's second term, the country received 4,094 persons, mostly, though not exclusively, Mexicans. Although this was not a significant increase from the average, Mexico has taken steps to increase its capacity to receive and reintegrate its nationals. Returnees receive a countryman's [well-being card](#), worth about \$100, and can register for social insurance. Other policies on (re)integration are also being developed.

In Honduras, President Xiomara Castro announced the [creation](#) of a programme called "Brothers and sisters return home" to support the reintegration of returnees, offering training and work opportunities. An estimated 261,651 Hondurans are subject to deportation orders in the US. El Salvador has a similar [programme](#) called "El Salvador is Home." In Guatemala, a government programme called "Return Home" has adopted [new measures](#) to ensure that deportees have the support that they need to reintegrate. Some are now reporting that these efforts – in particular those aimed at matching returnees with jobs – are being undermined by the US administration's [assertions](#) that the deportees are criminals.

In Brazil, where 199 people have been deported, the government is setting up [measures](#) to better receive deportees. A human services post has been set up in Confins, Minas Gerais, a state with high levels of migration, expanding on a service that had previously been offered in Sao Paulo. A proposed law would provide deportees with a minimum wage salary for twelve months on return. The government also said that it would take up its concerns about migration with the US Embassy and the Inter-American Commission.

Colombia's President Petro announced a [series of measures](#) intended to improve the reception and integration of deported citizens, including special attention by the Colombian Institute for Family Well-Being to the needs of young returnees. Colombia's Ombudsperson's Office also submitted reports to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Migrants to express [concern](#) about the treatment of individuals deported from the US saying that they had documented cases of mistreatment, sexual abuse, improper searches, and undignified detention conditions among deportees.

Peru has stated that its first priority will be to ensure the [reintegration of deported citizens](#), although no specific measures were announced. [Ecuador](#) is also receiving its deported nationals. Deportees are reportedly given a US\$50 card to buy food from the World Food Programme. The [Ecuadorian government](#) also announced that it would offer US \$470 per month (equivalent to a minimum wage) for the first three months to help deportees reintegrate through a [programme](#) known as "Ecuador is home."

## Other Mixed Migration Movements

### Nicaraguans refused entry to the country

At least 160 Nicaraguans attempting to return home have been [refused entry](#) on the basis of a November 2024 law that allows the government to refuse entry even to nationals if they pose a threat to national security. These individuals are now [in limbo](#), having lost their status in the US and unable to return home. Asked to comment on the situation during his visit to Costa Rica, [US Secretary of State](#) Marco Rubio blamed the “dictatorship” in Nicaragua and called it an “enemy of humanity.”

### Displacement continues in Haiti

Displacement is continuing in Haiti following an increase in violence in mid-February. According to [IOM](#), more than [42,538 people](#) were displaced in Port au Prince between 14 February and 5 March, the largest number displaced in such a short time since 2021. From 11 to 17 March, [23,510 people](#) were displaced. Because of the protracted nature of the conflict, many have been displaced [three or four times](#), growing more and more vulnerable each time. [Ten sites](#) that had previously hosted 14,104 people were closed as a result of the mid-March violence. Meanwhile, the UN Humanitarian Response Plan is only [5%](#) funded, leaving major gaps in an already fragile humanitarian response.

### US Coast Guard intercepts more than 100 Haitians

The [US Coast Guard](#) intercepted and returned more than 130 Haitians en route to the Florida Keys in early February. The boat was sailing between Cuba and Cay Sal Bank in the Bahamas, about 50 miles southeast of the Florida Keys. The interception was part of a Coast Guard surge to guard the country’s maritime borders.

### The Dominican Republic continues deportations

The Dominican Republic is further pushing deportation of Haitians, with [news reports](#) claiming that 31,200 were returned in January alone. If this figure is accurate, it approaches President Abinader’s October target of returning 10,000 per week. However, official figures maintained by [IOM](#) show that 18,944 Haitians were deported from all countries that month, which would correspond to a weekly average of around 4,700 returnees. Many of the deportations are reportedly accompanied by [serious human rights violations](#), with deportees describing raids in the middle of the night, racial profiling, and targeting of breastfeeding mothers and unaccompanied minors.

In addition, the Dominican government plans to expand [its border wall](#) with Haiti by 10 to 12 kilometres, bringing it up to about 176 kilometres. The government [claims](#) that the wall has decreased crime in the areas where it has been completed.

## Seven migrants dead and more missing as a result of two shipwrecks in the Caribbean in February

In early February, a [ship](#) travelling from San Andres Island in Colombia to Nicaragua, a route that is sometimes used to avoid the dangers of the Darien Gap, sank, killing five, including two Egyptian children. Three more remain missing. In the same month, a Venezuelan mother, 26, and her 11-month-old daughter [died](#) when a boat off the coast of Trinidad and Tobago sank. Eight remain missing.

## Other policy and legal updates

### Update on regularisation processes and integration-related policies in the Americas

#### **Brazil's Operation Horizon regularisation initiative ramped up services in 2024**

Brazil's Operation Horizon, an initiative that guides migrants on how to regularise their status (covered in our [fourth Quarterly Mixed Migration Update of 2024](#)), concluded its 12th phase in February 2025. According to a [report](#) by UNHCR, the number of appointments offered rose from 7,036 in 2023 to 12,538 in 2024, and the number of cases processed rose from 4,815 to 8,688. Not only were more cases processed overall, but the efficiency increased, with the share of cases concluded rising from 62% to 69%. The programme has also been [praised](#) by Graziella Rocha, coordinator of the civil society organisation Casa de Passagem Terra Nova in Sao Paulo, for "[strengthening](#) the creation of a network of support for vulnerable refugees and migrants." The [13th phase](#) began on 28 February.

#### **Ecuador cancels regularisation effort**

On 11 March, Ecuador issued [Executive Decree 560](#), cancelling the regularisation process that had been put in place by Decree 370 last year. The government cited a lack of resources in UNHCR and IOM, which had supported the effort. The government has since clarified that the [4,941 visas](#) that had already been issued by the programme remain valid and can be renewed for another two years. The fate of the estimated 3,000 applications [under consideration](#) at the time of the decision is unclear. The [decision](#) was decried by refugee groups in Ecuador, who noted that the elimination of the programme "impedes access to fundamental rights integration and dignified work, increasing the risk of exploitation and discrimination."

#### **Uruguay moves ahead with regularisation efforts thanks to new measures for asylum seekers**

Measures introduced by the Uruguayan Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior to facilitate regularisation in 2024 (covered in our [second Quarterly Mixed Migration Update of 2024](#)) are starting to bear fruit. More than 2,000 [residency applications](#) have been submitted since the beginning of the initiative last August, and it is hoped that 20,000 will eventually be able to regularise. [Several](#) Venezuelans have been recognised as refugees through a simplified *prima facie* process, which it is hoped will expand to 3,500.

## Modifications to immigration policies in the region

### Peru considers a law to expel foreigners convicted of crimes

Legislators in Peru are considering [a law](#) that would obligate foreigners to leave the country if they are caught flagrantly committing crimes against property, public safety, and the economic order, among others. It would not apply, they say, to individuals only guilty of immigration infractions. It is argued that the measure will save the state the [expense of detaining](#) these foreigners in the country.

### Chile establishes new National Policy on Migration and Foreigners

In February, Chile established its first [National Policy on Migration and Foreigners](#). The policy takes a long-term view, while at the same time proposing 28 measures for immediate application and proposing legal changes. Some of the immediate action items include biometric registration, strengthening local capacities in the areas most affected by migration, and strengthening of the education system.

### Mexico offers temporary work to migrants in Tapachula

Mexico announced a [new programme](#) in February that will allow migrants to earn money by participating in public works projects in its southern city of Tapachula for three months. The programme is seen as an opportunity for migrants to support themselves while waiting for longer-term visas or to earn enough money to return.

### Panama creates a new visa category

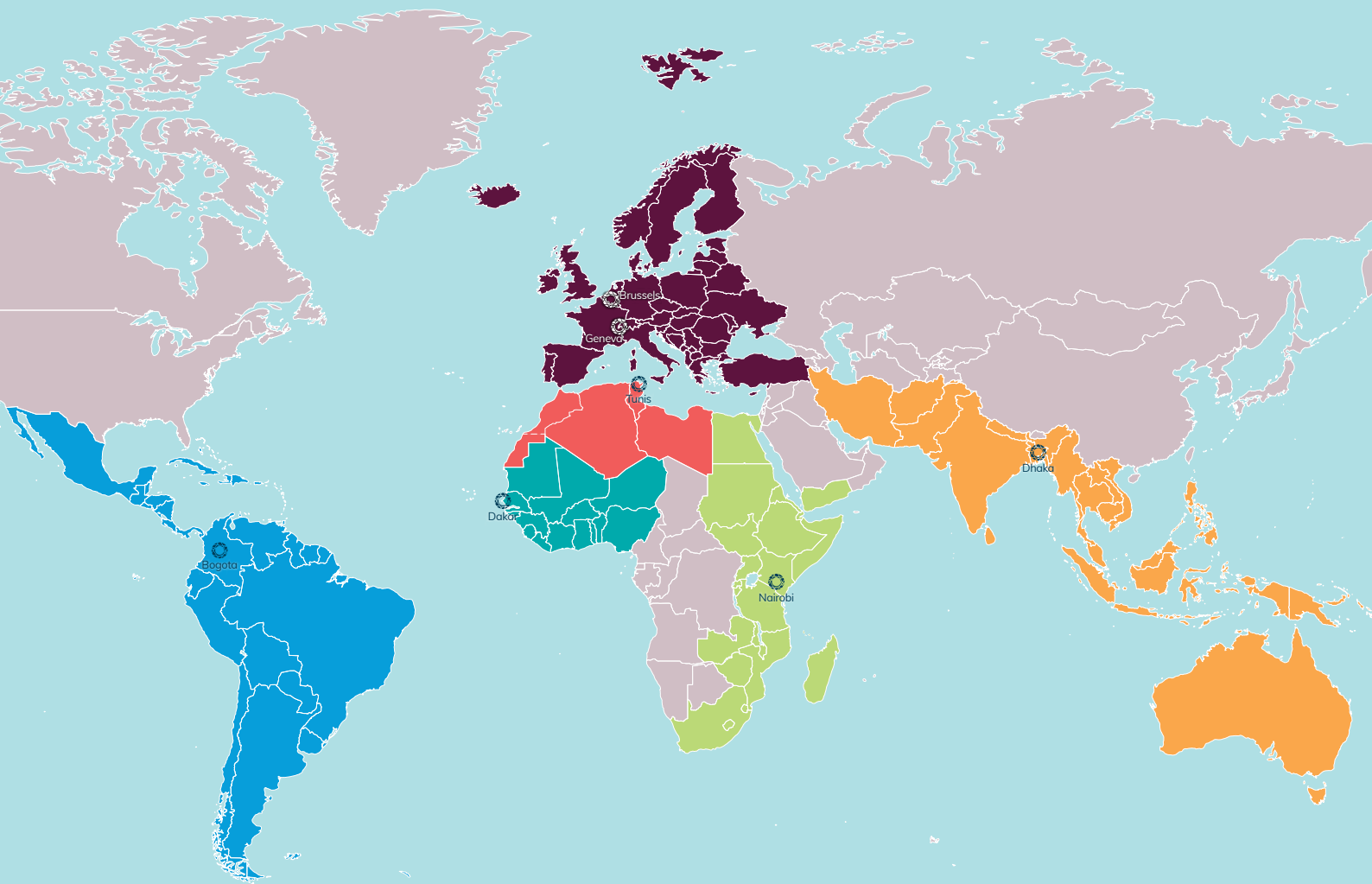
A new visa in Panama may help some to regularise. The [“humanitarian permit”](#) allows individuals who were already in Panama for more than a year at the time of its establishment to regularise their status and obtain permission to work. The visa is [valid](#) for two years and renewable for up to [eight years](#). The [cost](#) of the visa and processing, however, is relatively high – US \$1,150 – meaning that many of the most vulnerable are likely to be unable to access it.

## Modifications to asylum processes in the region

### Colombia adopts a new decree on refugee protection

In January, Colombia [adopted Decree 89](#) on refugee protection modifying Decree 1067 of 2015. The changes respond to the recommendations made by the constitutional court in the [case](#) of Dorotea Capielo de Romero against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These included allowing for virtual interviews and setting out a plan for improving response time, both of which are provided for in the decree. The law also extends the rights of asylum seekers, including [granting](#) them the right to work. It also extends the ability to claim asylum without renouncing temporary protected status.





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** [www.mixedmigration.org](http://www.mixedmigration.org)

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