



## **IRAP Explainer: Trump Policy Effects in the Western Hemisphere to Date**

### **Understanding President Trump's Immigration Policies in His First Month in Office**

In his first month in office, President Trump launched an aggressive campaign against both lawful and unauthorized migration to the United States and against immigrant communities within the United States. Among other measures, Trump has ramped up interior enforcement, suspended entry at U.S. borders, sent noncitizens to Guantánamo and Panama instead of their country of origin, and suspended foreign aid. Trump has terminated or paused key lawful pathways such as various parole processes and refugee resettlement programs, including the Safe Mobility Initiative, and is taking steps to terminate the lawful status of around one million or more people inside the United States, such as Venezuelans with Temporary Protected Status and parolees.

This explainer summarizes many of Trump's initial immigration actions and their effects for the Western Hemisphere region. The context for all of these immigration changes is rhetoric framing immigration as an "[invasion](#)" and immigrants as dangerous – justifying the administration's extreme, potentially unlawful measures.

#### **I. Changes to Lawful Pathways to the United States from the Region**

##### ***A. Refugee Resettlement, Including the Safe Mobility Initiative, Central American Minors Program, Follow-to-Join Cases, and Private Sponsorship***

On President Trump's first day in office, he issued more than a dozen executive actions on immigration. The White House, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Department of State (DOS) have issued numerous additional directives since then.

Among these initial actions was the executive order "[Realigning the United States Refugee Admission Program](#)," which suspended all refugee resettlement. This suspension affected all stages of processing, from initial application through travel for approved refugees. It also affected all programs and access points to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), including the [Safe Mobility Initiative](#), Central American Minors (CAM) Program, Follow-to-Join refugee petitions for family members of refugees already resettled in the United States, and private sponsorship, also known as [Welcome Corps](#).

While the executive order provides that the suspension is subject to review every 90 days, there is no guarantee that processing will resume at any specific time. Therefore, experts

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expect that all forms of refugee resettlement are suspended indefinitely unless and until litigation requires the government to continue processing for any subset of cases. IRAP [filed a lawsuit](#) challenging this suspension on February 10, 2025.

### ***B. Parole Programs such as the Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, Venezuelan Parole Processes and Family Reunification Parole Processes***

On Trump's first day in office, he issued two executive orders, "[Protecting the American People Against Invasion](#)" and "[Securing our Borders](#)," that terminated "categorical" parole programs like the Parole Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans ("CHNV"). These orders, alongside related [statements](#) and memoranda, suspended access to most or all "group-based" parole programs. These programs had required case-by-case, individual determinations to be approved for parole, but the U.S. government designated groups of eligible applicants who could apply – often based on nationality and having a U.S.-based sponsor or petitioner, among other criteria.

At the time of suspension, [millions](#) of people had pending CHNV applications. Far fewer people had pending applications for other forms of parole that may be suspended, such as [CAM](#) parole for certain Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran families, or for [Family Reunification parole](#), previously available by invitation only for beneficiaries of approved family-based petitions without available visa numbers for certain Cuban, Haitian, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, Colombian, and Ecuadorian families.

These executive actions terminated access to these programs: no one can file new applications, and no one with a pending application will have that application processed further at this time. However, these actions terminating the parole *programs* do not themselves terminate the parole *status* of individuals already granted it.

## **II. Changes to Policies at U.S. Borders**

### ***A. Termination of CBP One Mobile Application for Port of Entry Appointments***

The executive order "[Securing Our Borders](#)" ended the use of the [CBP One app](#), a tool to schedule appointments at U.S. Ports of Entry through which U.S. border agents made an individual determination to parole people into the United States. Trump's Day One action canceled over [30,000 scheduled appointments](#) and left [270,000](#) people who had been in the process of obtaining such appointments with nothing.

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## ***B. Suspension of Entry at U.S. Borders and Military Deployment***

On Inauguration Day, Trump declared through presidential proclamation, "[Guaranteeing the United States Protection Against Invasion](#)," a national emergency at the U.S. southern border, suspending entry to the United States indefinitely. The proclamation indicated unspecified public health concerns as a basis to deny entry or expel individuals seeking protection in the United States, similar to the [Title 42](#) pretextual public health basis to expel asylum-seekers during the first Trump administration.

Similarly, the "[Declaring a National Emergency at the Southern Border of the United States](#)" executive order declares a national emergency and orders DHS and the Department of Defense (DOD) to take all possible measures to block unauthorized entry, including restarting construction of the border wall and expanding detention facilities. The "[Clarifying the Military's Role in Protecting the Territorial Integrity of the United States](#)" executive order directs the United States Northern Command – a military, unified combatant command structure of DOD – to prepare plans to seal the borders. The media reported [deployment of armed forces](#) to the border within one day of President Trump taking office.

Thus, there is no way to seek protection at U.S. borders at this time. During the Biden administration, policies such as the [Circumvention of Lawful Pathways](#) rule and the [Securing the Border](#) rule eliminated access to asylum unless one obtained a CBP One appointment, subject to a number of [narrow exceptions](#). With the elimination of CBP One and the suspension of entry, there is no longer any means to seek asylum at U.S. borders. This suspension has been [challenged](#) in court.

## ***C. Remain in Mexico (previously known as Migrant Protection Protocols)***

The executive order "[Securing Our Borders](#)" reintroduces the "Remain in Mexico" policy, requiring asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico in dangerous conditions with limited access to legal services for the duration of their asylum process. This policy as enacted during the first Trump administration was subject to [massive litigation](#). Despite a [DHS agency announcement](#) following the executive order, how this policy will be implemented in practice this time is virtually unknown at time of publication. The government published a website titled "[Alien Protection Protocols](#)" on February 18, 2025.



#### ***D. Family Separation and Family Detention***

The [Securing Our Borders](#) executive order, issued Trump's first day in office, directs that agencies prioritize prosecuting immigration-related offenses. These prosecutions were the [vehicle](#) to enacting the family separation policy of the first Trump administration: by charging the parent with a crime, as opposed to a civil immigration violation, officials justified separating children from their parents who were taken into criminal custody. [News reports](#) indicate the Trump administration's intent to restart family detention as well.

### **III. International Detention and Deportation Policies: U.S. Actions Abroad**

In his first month in office, Trump has taken numerous actions to transfer noncitizens in the United States with final orders of deportation and possibly others, such as those expelled from the United States under Section 212(f), to a number of other locations. For the first time in history, the United States has begun sending people with final orders of deportation from the United States to the U.S. Naval Base at [Guantánamo Bay](#). Bilateral agreements – not public and in some cases not written – now govern U.S. flights to Latin American countries like [Panama](#), [El Salvador](#), and [Guatemala](#). It is unprecedented to deport individuals from [so many countries](#) – like Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, China, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Pakistan – to a country that is not the deportees' country of origin or removal.

#### ***A. Guantánamo Detention***

The U.S. government has operated the [Migrant Operations Center](#) (MOC) at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base for decades, exclusively to detain individuals interdicted at sea, primarily from Haiti and Cuba. However, Trump's presidential memo of January 29, 2025, "[Expanding Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantánamo Bay to Full Capacity](#)," directs agencies to prepare to detain up to 30,000 people at Guantánamo, requiring a [massive tent camp](#), which U.S. Marines have been [building](#) since then.

To date, Trump has sent over [100 Venezuelan men](#) with final orders of deportation to Guantánamo's military prison and the MOC. One lawsuit was filed to [prevent the transfer](#) of three men there; days later, [DHS deported them](#) to Venezuela instead. The ACLU, Center for Constitutional Rights, and IRAP [filed suit](#) to ensure people detained at Guantánamo have access to counsel. At the time of publication, the men are being held incommunicado. The U.S. government [has not asserted](#) a legal basis for transferring people to Guantánamo, a legal basis to detain them there, any legal proceeding against them, or a plan for them.

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## ***B. Deportation Flights to Panama and Elsewhere of Many Nationalities***

On February 12, 2025, the U.S. government sent a military plane to Panama with over [100 individuals](#) from Asian countries such as Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Vietnam, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Iran, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. [Three flights](#) had landed by February 15, 2025. It is unknown what will happen to people deported to Panama in this manner. [Reporting](#) on February 19, 2025, describes the transfer of some of them to a camp in the Darien region.

These deportation flights to Panama may be understood in the context of immense pressure from the Trump administration on numerous fronts, including around management of the [Panama Canal](#).

The Biden administration established a diplomatic [agreement](#) with Panama through which the U.S. State Department financed, for the first time, a [foreign country's deportation flights](#). This agreement facilitated the deportation of almost 2,000 people who had recently transited northward through the Darien Gap, primarily Colombians and Ecuadorians.

Further reporting indicates that the United States will commence similar flights to [Costa Rica](#) as early as February 20, 2025, in accordance with a new set of [rules](#) Costa Rica established for these deportations.

## ***C. U.S. Agreements with El Salvador and Guatemala to Receive Deportees***

Public reporting states that the Trump administration has secured agreements with [El Salvador](#) and [Guatemala](#) to accept deportation flights from the United States of many nationalities, including U.S. citizens. These actions are unprecedented.

During the first Trump administration, the United States established [Asylum Cooperative Agreements](#) (ACA) with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to deport certain people seeking protection in the United States to the Central American countries to seek asylum there. These were subject to [litigation](#). However, this time, the Trump administration is not describing the deportation agreements as connected to the ostensible ability to seek asylum following deportation from the United States.



#### **IV. Suspension of Foreign Aid and Regional Commitments**

On his first day in office, President Trump issued the executive order, "[Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid](#)," halting all U.S. international assistance, pending a "review" of the programs to ensure that they are in "alignment with U.S. foreign policy." Days later, the Secretary of State issued a "stop work" order that immediately suspended around [\\$58.4 billion](#), including an estimated \$2 billion for Latin America and the Caribbean, in funding for Fiscal Year 2025 that was meant for foreign governments, NGOs, and international organizations, with limited exceptions.

These executive actions have significant consequences for U.S. [foreign assistance](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean, effectively suspending a [massive array](#) of key development, economic support, health, narcotics control, military, and regional cooperation efforts – including those addressing migration, security, health, and humanitarian crises.

The U.S. foreign aid freeze has led to the suspension of innumerable programs related to migration management and integration efforts, including "[Operation Welcome](#)" for Venezuelans in [Brazil](#) as well as [many programs](#) and [governmental migration jobs](#) in Colombia, home to more displaced Venezuelans than any other country. The suspension on foreign aid has had drastic consequences in [Haiti](#).

[Analyses](#) of the suspended foreign aid destined for Latin America and the Caribbean underscore that the absence of these U.S.-funded programs may have direct consequences for migration patterns. Foreign aid projects on topics as diverse as governance, counternarcotics, climate, and health may have an immediate bearing on forcible displacement. The foreign aid freeze has been challenged in court, with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia [issuing](#) a temporary restraining order on February 13, 2025. It remains to be seen how the freeze and the injunction will play out in practice.

In addition to suspending foreign aid, the Trump administration has [taken down the Los Angeles Declaration website](#), the Biden administration's framework of commitments to foster long-term migration stabilization, expand lawful pathways, and strengthen humane enforcement in Latin America and the Caribbean.

#### **V. Changes to Immigration Enforcement inside the United States**

##### ***A. Deploying Federal and State, Civil and Military, Resources for Enforcement***

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President Trump's executive order "[Protecting the American People Against Invasion](#)" established numerous directives to expand immigration enforcement inside the United States, as part of an unprecedented mass deportation campaign. These directives include:

- Revocation of many Biden administration policies and programs that sought to protect the rights of immigrants;
- Prioritizing civil and criminal prosecutions related to immigration and immigrants;
- Establishing Homeland Security Task Forces in all states to "end the presence of criminal cartels, foreign gangs, and transnational criminal organizations";
- Creating a legal obligation to "register" as a noncitizen, with civil and criminal penalties for failing to register;
- Ramping up deportations and detention capacity;
- Deputizing state and local law enforcement agencies to engage in federal immigration enforcement;
- Adoption of policies to "encourage" people to "voluntarily depart" the United States;
- Leveraging visa policy to pressure countries to accept their nationals on repatriation flights; and
- Actions to eliminate sanctuary jurisdictions and penalize state and local actors that assert policies inconsistent with President Trump's immigration agenda.

In addition, on January 23, 2025, the Acting DHS Secretary issued a "[Finding of Mass Influx of Aliens](#)," asserting that "an immediate federal response" is required and requesting "the assistance of State and local governments in all 50 States."

The executive order "[Designating Cartels and Other Organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists](#)" directs the Attorney General, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Secretary of State to make operational preparations on the president's invocation of the [Alien Enemies Act](#). If invoked, this would allow the president to detain or deport the natives and citizens of an "[enemy nation](#)," without a hearing and based only on their country of birth or citizenship.

### ***B. Attacks on Sanctuary Jurisdictions and Eliminating Sensitive Locations***

Numerous executive [actions](#) direct more severe and expansive prosecutions and minimal use of prosecutorial discretion to prioritize cases based on public safety, nationality security, or flight risk. The Trump administration has [eliminated restrictions](#) on immigration enforcement in "[sensitive locations](#)," like hospitals, schools, and places of worship.

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The Trump administration has a multifaceted approach to target sanctuary jurisdictions, from establishing a “[Sanctuary Cities Enforcement Working Group](#)” within the Department of Justice (DOJ) to try to eliminate sanctuary cities through prosecution, to [threatening](#) state and local officials if they do not comply with the Trump administration’s immigration agenda, to [weaponizing unrelated federal prosecutions](#) to wield power over immigration policy. At time of publication, Congress will vote in coming weeks on the [No Bailout for Sanctuary Cities Act](#), which would withhold federal funding from jurisdictions that do not cooperate with federal immigration enforcement.

### ***C. Rescinding Lawful Status of People in the United States***

The Trump administration has [taken steps](#) to [terminate](#) the Temporary Protected Status of approximately 600,000 Venezuelans in the United States. [Public reporting](#) indicates the administration’s intention to terminate the parole status of those half a million Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans paroled into the United States who have not sought another form of immigration relief, as well as other parolees.

While [unlikely to be upheld](#) by the courts (and in fact already enjoined by several courts), the Trump administration has sought to [end birthright citizenship](#), enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.

### ***D. Expanding Categories of People Subject to Fast-Track Deportation***

On January 21, 2025, DHS published a [rule expanding expedited removal](#) to the entire interior of the United States, which means that anyone who cannot prove two years’ presence in the United States or their lawful admission into the United States may be deported in a matter of hours or days without seeing a judge. This [expansion of fast-track deportation](#) [has been challenged in court](#).

On January 23, 2025, DHS issued a [memo](#) seeking to vastly expand the groups of people who may be placed in expedited removal. The memo directs the evaluation of who, including people paroled into the United States and including people already in standard deportation proceedings, may be amenable to expedited removal – signaling an intention to utilize this fast-track deportation process at an unprecedented scale across the country. For more information on attacks on parole, please see IRAP’s [parole explainer](#).

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### ***E. Casting Immigrants as Terrorists, Curtailing Due Process Protections***

Trump's "[Designating Cartels and Other Organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists](#)" executive order directed government agencies to provide a recommendation on designating international cartels and transnational organizations, such as MS-13 and El Tren de Aragua, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). DHS and DOS appear likely to [designate multiple Mexican cartels as FTOs](#).

These measures risk depriving individuals accused of gang affiliations of basic protections – and profiling people based on national origin alone. In short, the administration could misuse these expanded designations to deny asylum seekers protection and justify their detention and expeditious deportation under the pretext of combating terrorism.

### ***F. Subjecting More Immigrants to More Severe Civil and Criminal Penalties***

The [Laken Riley Act](#), the first bill President Trump signed into law, expanded the categories of offenses (including based on a mere arrest, without charge) that would make certain noncitizens subject to mandatory detention (without the possibility of bond). The Act also [authorizes](#) state Attorneys General to interfere in federal immigration policy, including with respect to individual parole decisions as well as U.S. visa policies vis-a-vis entire nations.

On February 13, 2025, the House of Representatives passed and the Senate referred to the Judiciary Committee the [Agent Raul Gonzalez Officer Safety Act](#), which imposes additional criminal and immigration penalties for driving within 100 miles of the United States border while intentionally fleeing from either Border Patrol or law enforcement assisting Border Patrol. At time of publication, this bill had not passed Congress or been signed into law.

The "[Restoring the Death Penalty and Protecting Public Safety](#)" executive order, from Inauguration Day, also directs DOJ to seek the death penalty in every case where the defendant in a capital crime is a noncitizen "illegally present" in the United States.

Finally, the Trump administration's expansive attack on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community has multiple immigration dimensions, including eliminating gender-affirming policies on [government-issued identification documents](#) and contemplating charging [fraud and willful misrepresentation](#) inadmissibility grounds for people who describe their gender inconsistently with their sex assigned at birth in applications for entry to the United States.

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