

BRIEFING ROOM

Action the Biden-Harris Administration Has Taken to Address the Border Challenge

JUNE 15, 2021 • STATEMENTS AND RELEASES

The Biden-Harris administration is working to rebuild our immigration system after four years of chaos and mismanagement. The trend of border apprehensions in May is a reduction of individuals (unique encounters) and families below the peak in 2019. Border numbers fluctuate, however, based on annual migration trends and that is why this administration is working to establish lawful pathways for individuals to migrate or seek protection, address the root causes of migration, restore fair, orderly and humane means to apply for asylum and deter irregular migration. The administration has made significant progress at establishing a well-managed and secure border while also treating people fairly and humanely. The American people support this approach.

- **Improved Processing of Unaccompanied Children**

- The administration successfully reduced the number of unaccompanied children in U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities **from 5,676 in late March to 570** on June 14.
- The administration reduced the average amount of time children are in CBP facilities to **26 hours, compared with 131 hours on April 1st**.
- The administration has reduced the number of unaccompanied children in the care of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to **under 16,000 from over 22,000 in late April**.

- **Removed Barriers to Unifying Children with Parents and Sponsors**

- HHS has surged case management resources to **dramatically increase the rates by which children are united with their sponsors**.
- DHS and HHS **rescinded an agreement from the former administration** that subjected undocumented parents to immigration enforcement when they came forward to claim their child.

- HHS **expanded access to fingerprinting sites** to conduct background checks on sponsors that has resulted in reduced backlogs and long-distance travel for sponsors.
- With support from the United States Digital Service, HHS implemented **the UC Bed Census** that assists facilities and licensed providers with **reporting bed capacity data, thereby improving bed count accuracy and data collection.**
- **Put in Place Orderly Processes and Protocols at the Border**
 - Through support and coordination with the Government of Mexico, the Department of State (State), and international organization partners, DHS has successfully processed over **11,900 eligible people who had been returned to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP)** to reenter the United States to pursue their active U.S. immigration cases in a safe and orderly manner.
 - DHS has developed a partnership model, working with community-based organizations, cities, and counties **to ensure that family units and single adults released from DHS custody are COVID tested and isolated in compliance with CDC recommendations.**
- **Expanded Lawful Pathways for Protection and Opportunity**
 - DHS announced the availability of **6,000 temporary, non-agricultural worker – or H-2B – visas** for nationals of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala for FY 2021.
 - State and DHS **reopened the Central American Minors (CAM) program** to reunite children who are nationals of El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras with their parents in the U.S. through refugee resettlement or humanitarian parole. On June 15th, State and DHS announced the second phase of CAM, which will expand access to the program to legal guardians (in addition to parents) and to U.S.-based parents or legal guardians who have a pending asylum application or pending U visa petition filed before May 15, 2021.
 - State and DHS resumed interviewing individuals via the **Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA)** to expand protection for vulnerable nationals of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.
 - The President issued a new FY 2021 Presidential Determination on refugees that created **4,000 additional slots for refugees** from Latin America and the Caribbean, which includes the Northern Triangle.
 - State is supporting the **Regional Conference on Migration (RCM)** through U.S. partner organizations to **promote humane practices in labor migration agreements**

in the region. In late May, 61 participants from 11 RCM member countries, the private sector, and civil society organizations exchanged best practices on fair recruitment and protection of migrant workers.

- **Enhanced Migration Management**

- On June 10, the U.S. Government announced an additional \$57 million in funds, including \$46 million the President authorized from the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance Fund, to support **urgent humanitarian needs of vulnerable refugees and migrants in Central America** and third countries in the region, including the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on forced displacement. **This builds on the \$310 million in humanitarian support for the region announced in April.**
- The Department of State opened the first **Migration Resource Center (MRC)** in Guatemala to provide individuals with protection screenings and referrals to asylum, refugee resettlement, and parole options. The MRC will also have referrals for labor and reintegration programs for individuals who do not have protection needs.
- The Department of Justice, with support from the Department of State, will create a **regional task force to identify, disrupt, and prevent migrant smuggling and human trafficking operations.**
- DHS implemented “Operation Sentinel” – a U.S. government effort to **crack down on international criminal organizations engaged in migrant smuggling** by targeting their ability to travel, trade, and access financial assets in the United States.
- On her trip to Guatemala, the Vice President announced a new **Human Smuggling and Trafficking Task Force** that will identify, disrupt, and prevent migrant smuggling and human trafficking operations.
- On her trip to Mexico, the Vice President announced that U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies will partner to exchange information and take appropriate actions to address the shared priority of **disabling human trafficking and human smuggling organizations.**
- Mexico is **increasing border checkpoints and deployed more than 12,000 security personnel to southern Mexico.**
- Mexico **received 31,800 asylum requests** from January to April, compared to 18,500 during the same period in 2019.

- State has nearly **quadrupled the number of radio ads in Central America** to discourage irregular migration compared to January. State continues to run a comprehensive digital marketing campaign in the region, emphasizing the value of staying with family and building a better life at home.

- **Addressed the Root Causes of Migration**

- Demonstrated a strong U.S. commitment to good governance by **redirecting funding for certain Salvadoran government institutions** in response to democratic backsliding.
- On her trip to Guatemala, the Vice President announced that the Department of Justice, with support from the Department of State, will create an **anticorruption task force** that will include U.S. prosecutors and law enforcement experts to investigate and prosecute corruption cases with a nexus in the United States, Guatemala, and the region.
- On her trip to Guatemala, the Vice President announced that USAID and DFC will provide up to **\$48M in U.S. government resources to advance economic opportunity in Guatemala** through support for entrepreneurs and innovators, expanding access to affordable housing, agricultural businesses, and development of micro, small, and medium enterprises.
- USAID launched a three-year regional initiative to support local partners in the Northern Triangle to **increase community resilience** in the face of poverty, violence, poor governance, corruption, and climate change.
- To increase security in the region, **USAID trained police officers** on domestic violence procedures, trained investigators and analysts on the prosecution of human smuggling cases, and State Department-supported partners **identified 19 human smugglers** with outstanding warrants in the United States.
- On her trip to Guatemala, the Vice President announced that USAID will provide up to \$40 million over three years to launch the **Young Women's Empowerment Initiative that will focus on creating opportunities for young, primarily indigenous women.**
- On her trip to Mexico, the Vice President witnessed the signing of an MOU between the United States and Mexico. This MOU establishes a partnership to **address the lack of economic opportunities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras by fostering agricultural development and youth empowerment programs** in these countries to address the root causes of migration.

###