

Biden Administration's Cuba Policy Changes

May 25, 2022

On May 16, 2022, the Biden Administration announced several forthcoming [changes to U.S. policy](#) toward Cuba, with the overarching goal of increasing support for the Cuban people. The changes, which emanate from a policy review begun by the Administration in 2021, fall into four broad areas—facilitating family reunification, expanding authorized travel, supporting Cuba's private sector, and easing some restrictions on remittances. According to the State Department spokesperson, the changes will provide Cubans with “[additional tools to pursue life free from Cuban government oppression and to seek greater economic opportunities](#).” The Administration stated that it plans to implement the policy changes in the coming weeks through various steps and regulatory changes undertaken by relevant U.S. departments and agencies.

Although the forthcoming changes include some easing of restrictions on travel and remittances, the United States maintains a [comprehensive economic embargo](#) on Cuba, including restrictions on transactions with entities on a “[Cuba Restricted List](#)” that are controlled by the Cuban military, intelligence, or security services. Biden Administration officials assert that [human rights](#) issues, including political prisoners, will remain at the center of U.S. policy toward Cuba. In the aftermath of the Cuban government's harsh response to government-wide protests in July 2021, the Administration imposed several rounds of targeted [financial sanctions](#) and [visa restrictions](#) on Cuban officials found to be responsible for the repression.

Family Reunification

The Administration said it will reinstate the [Cuban Family Reunification Parole](#) (CFRP) program and increase immigrant visa processing at the U.S. Embassy in Havana. The CFRP program, administered by the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, allows certain U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents with approved petitions for family members in Cuba to apply for immigration parole for those individuals. If a CFRP application is approved, the family members are issued documentation to enable them to travel to the United States. The program was established in 2007 to help the United States meet its annual obligations under the 1994/1995 U.S.-Cuba migration accords to legally admit a minimum of 20,000 Cubans annually. CFRP processing at the U.S. Embassy in Havana was suspended in 2017 amid the drawdown of staff due to the [unexplained health injuries](#) suffered by some embassy community members. In the 117th Congress, H.R. 6907, introduced in March 2022, would direct the Administration to reinstate the processing of applications under the CFRP.

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN11937

Limited immigrant visa processing at the U.S. Embassy in Havana resumed on May 3, 2022, and Administration officials maintain they want to staff up the embassy to process the full 20,000 immigrant visas in Havana as quickly as possible. Until that time, the United States plans to continue to process the majority of Cuban immigrant visa cases at the U.S. Embassy in Georgetown, Guyana.

Expansion of Authorized Travel

The policy change affecting authorized travel to Cuba for U.S. citizens has three components. First, the Administration plans to reauthorize scheduled and charter flights to Cuban locations beyond Havana. During the Trump Administration, the Transportation Department suspended such scheduled flights in 2019 and such charter flights in 2020.

Second, the Administration plans to reinstate people-to-people educational travel under a general license (meaning travelers would not have to apply to the Treasury Department for authorization) and would limit the authorization to group travel. During the Trump Administration, the Treasury Department, by amending the Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR, 31 C.F.R. 515), eliminated individual people-to-people travel in 2017 and group people-to-people travel in 2019. The Biden Administration's change would require the Treasury Department to amend the CACR at 31 C.F.R. 515.565.

Third, the Administration plans to authorize additional travel related to professional meetings and professional research, including travel to support expanded internet access and remittance processing companies and to provide support to Cuban entrepreneurs. This change also would require amending the CACR at 31 C.F.R. 515.564.

Support for Cuba's Private Sector

The Administration states that it will increase support for independent Cuban entrepreneurs by authorizing access to U.S. internet services, cloud technology, applications, and e-commerce platforms and will work to expand entrepreneurs' access to microfinance and training. U.S. officials maintain the United States will explore options for electronic payments and for U.S. business activities with independent private entrepreneurs. These changes also likely would require changes to the CACR.

Eased Restrictions on Remittances

The Administration plans to ease some restrictions on sending cash remittances to Cuba that the previous Administration tightened in 2019. The current limit of \$1,000 per quarter in family remittances that can be sent to any one Cuban national is to be lifted, and donative or non-family remittances are to be authorized with the goal of supporting independent Cuban entrepreneurs. These changes would require amending the CACR at 31 C.F.R. 515.570.

The Administration asserts that it will not remove from the "Cuba Restricted List" entities that are associated with the Cuban military, including *Financiera Cimex* (FINCIMEX), a financial investment and remittance company owned by a Cuban military-controlled umbrella enterprise. FINCIMEX's addition to the list in 2020 led to Western Union ceasing its operations in Cuba. At the time, Western Union was the major financial services company used for transmitting remittances to Cuba.

As with most changes in Cuba policy, reaction to the Administration's announcement has been mixed among Members of Congress and policy groups, although the changes do not require congressional action. Some Members who support maximum sanctions pressure criticize the changes as "providing concessions to the brutal Cuban dictatorship." Some advocating for engagement characterize the changes as "very welcome" or a "significant" step forward and laud "measures to support the Cuban people." Some Members oppose authorizing group travel to Cuba, characterizing it as "akin to tourism," or

“[remain unconvinced](#)” that it will weaken Cuba’s oppressive policies. Policy groups on both sides of the Cuba sanctions/engagement debate have expressed support for the Administration’s reinstatement of the CFRP program to restore a channel for legal migration.

Also see CRS In Focus IF10045, *Cuba: U.S. Policy Overview*; CRS Report RL31139, *Cuba: U.S. Restrictions on Travel and Remittances*; and CRS Report R45657, *Cuba: U.S. Policy in the 116th Congress and Through the Trump Administration*.

Author Information

Mark P. Sullivan
Specialist in Latin American Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS’s institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.