

Updated September 10, 2025

Mexico's Migration Control Efforts

For more than a decade, consecutive U.S. Administrations have sought to coordinate with Mexico to reduce unauthorized migration to the United States. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reported record numbers of migrant encounters (2.5 million) on the southern border in FY2023 and still elevated numbers in FY2024 (2.1 million), raising concerns in Congress. Since January 2025, President Trump has declared a national emergency at the southern border and imposed tariffs in an effort to compel Mexico to reduce unauthorized migration and drug trafficking. In response, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has expanded collaboration with U.S. officials on migration control. Migrant encounters fell by 93.3% from February to July 2025, as compared to the same period in 2024. Increases in migration through Mexico and requests for asylum in Mexico have revealed gaps in the government's capacity to manage migration and protect migrants.

The 119th Congress may assess Mexico's role in controlling U.S.-bound migration and receiving U.S. repatriations of Mexicans and individuals from third countries. Congress may examine the effect of U.S. migration and border security policy changes and reductions in foreign assistance on Mexican and bilateral migration management efforts.

Mexico's Migration Policies

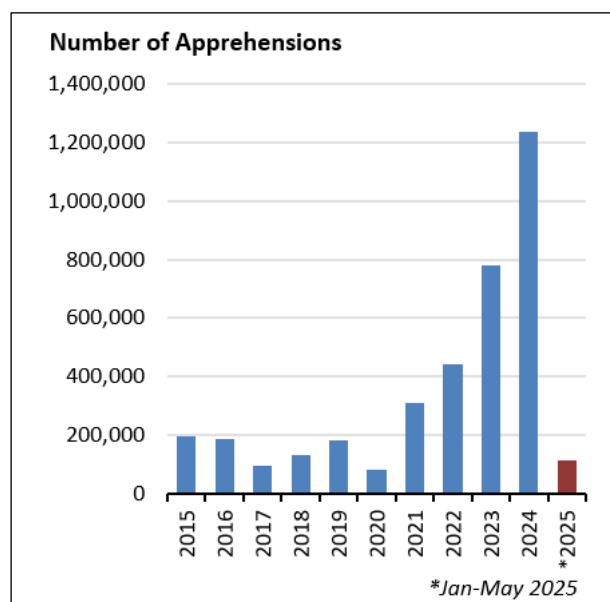
Since 2014, with financial and technical support from the United States, Mexico has established naval bases on its rivers, security cordons north of its borders with Guatemala and Belize, and drone surveillance in border regions. Unarmed agents from Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) have increased migrant interdiction operations along train routes and at bus stations, screening at border crossings, and mobile highway checkpoints. INM conducts biometric screening of migrants at ports of entry and detention centers using equipment supplied by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). INM also has sought to professionalize its workforce and to improve coordination with federal, state, and local security forces. Despite reform efforts, corruption and weak observance of migrant protections by some INM personnel have led to some migrant deaths and cases of abuse.

Former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024) initially pledged to adopt a humanitarian approach to migration. From 2019 onward, his government implemented tougher migration control strategies, partially in response to pressure from the Trump and Biden Administrations. INM increased migrant apprehensions, and the government deployed its National Guard (formed in 2019) for migration enforcement (See **Figure 1**).

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of migrants entering Mexico from regions beyond Central America increased. In 2024, Mexican authorities apprehended more

than 1.2 million migrants, largely from South America (primarily Venezuela). Migration through Mexico slowed after a June 2024 executive order (E.O.) restricted asylum access at the southern border. Migration flows dropped dramatically in 2025.

Figure 1. Reported Apprehensions of Migrants by Mexican Authorities



Source: Graph by CRS, based on information from Mexico's Secretary of the Interior.

The Mexican government took a number of measures to respond to changing migration patterns prior to the drop in 2025. Starting in 2021, Mexico began requiring visas for nationals of Venezuela and other South American countries. The government also sought to keep asylum seekers in southern Mexico, often busing migrants from northern Mexico. Mexico's Commission for the Aid of Refugees (COMAR) restricted access to humanitarian visas that had allowed migrants to transit the country. These policies coincided with reported human rights abuses and crimes against migrants.

Sheinbaum Administration

Since taking office in October 2024, President Sheinbaum has continued to implement her predecessor's enforcement policies and redirected funds to INM and COMAR. In February, Sheinbaum deployed 10,000 additional National Guard troops to Mexico's borders. Her government has flown some migrants to their countries of origin in cooperation with the United States.

President Sheinbaum has not formally agreed to restart the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), an initiative that had allowed DHS to return certain non-Mexicans in U.S.

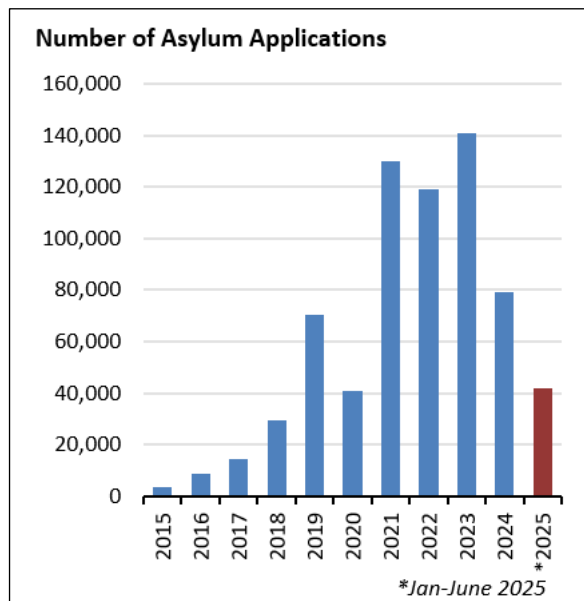
removal proceedings to Mexico from 2019 to 2021. Nevertheless, the Mexican government accepted some 6,500 non-Mexican migrants from the United States from late January to June 2025, and some 69,000 Mexicans were repatriated during that period. Although Mexico has a program to receive and reintegrate Mexicans removed from the United States, services for non-Mexicans are limited. Some analysts maintain that the DHS decision to send repatriation flights to southern Mexico rather than to Mexico City or to northern border cities has complicated humanitarian efforts to assist deportees.

Humanitarian Protection in Mexico

Mexico has a broader definition of *refugee* than the United States or the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Mexico recognizes a right to asylum based on “generalized violence; foreign aggression; internal conflicts; massive violations of human rights; and other circumstances leading to a serious disturbance of public order.”

Asylum requests more than tripled in Mexico from 2020 to 2023, before falling in 2024 (**Figure 2**). Between January and June 2025, 42,000 migrants applied for asylum in Mexico, according to COMAR data obtained by CRS. Whereas most applicants came from Haiti, Honduras, and Cuba in 2024, Cubans and Venezuelans together have comprised some 75% of applicants in 2025. With support from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), COMAR reportedly increased its capacity to process migrants by over 500% from 2017 to 2023. Amid reductions in U.S. foreign assistance, COMAR reportedly is struggling to process asylum requests that are on pace to exceed 2024's total.

Figure 2. Asylum Applications in Mexico



Source: CRS, based on data from Mexico's Commission for the Aid of Refugees (COMAR).

U.S. Policy

The Trump Administration has taken numerous executive actions to counter unauthorized migration. On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued a presidential proclamation suspending the entry of unauthorized migrants at the

southwest border, including nearly all asylum seekers. That suspension of asylum has been subject to legal challenge. In E.O. 14165, “Securing Our Borders,” the President terminated use of the “CBP One” application, a tool the Biden Administration created to manage appointments for asylum seekers at ports of entry, canceling the appointments of migrants waiting in Mexico. DHS has sought to increase removals to Mexico, including of migrants from third countries. The U.S. military has expanded its footprint at the southern border, including in new “national defense areas”—or military zones—as directed by President Trump.” Migrants detained while trespassing those zones face federal charges.

Foreign Assistance

From FY2015 to FY2023, the State Department provided more than \$176.6 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funding to support Mexico's immigration control efforts. U.S. funds enabled the provision of nonintrusive inspection equipment, mobile kiosks, canine teams, and vehicles, as well as training for more than 1,000 officials. It is unclear whether any such programs continue to operate.

From FY2018 through FY2023, the State Department provided more than \$163 million through the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account to UNHCR to improve access to asylum in Mexico and increase COMAR's asylum processing capacity. MRA funds also enabled the International Organization for Migration to support shelters, the reintegration of deportees, and assisted voluntary returns for migrants who agreed to return to their countries of origin. The Trump Administration's cancellation of some MRA funds reportedly has caused UNHCR to scale back operations in Mexico. U.S. assistance through MRA funds to nonprofit organizations that had supported migrants in Mexico, including those stranded after the cancellation of CBP One appointments, reportedly has ended.

Congressional Considerations

Congress may influence U.S.-Mexico migration cooperation through legislation, including appropriations, and oversight. P.L. 119-21 (H.R. 1), signed into law in July 2025, includes a significant increase in funds for immigration detention and removals but no funds for migration-related programs in Mexico. The House-reported version of the FY2026 National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Act (H.R. 4779) would replace the MRA account with a new International Humanitarian Assistance account focused primarily on emergent situations. The measure would prohibit funding for any programs that contravene E.O. 14165 and E.O. 14218 (“Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Open Borders”) and any assistance that facilitates “irresponsible migration.” The accompanying report (H.Rept. 119-217) expresses support for the provision of U.S. assistance for Mexico's refugee agencies. Congress could consider expanding, restricting, or placing conditions or reporting requirements on any U.S. migration assistance provided to Mexico and could assess the effects of reductions or cancellations of such assistance.

Clare Ribando Seelke, Specialist in Latin American
Affairs

IF10215

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.