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International Migration Trends in the Western Hemisphere

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SUMMARY

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International Migration Trends in the Western Hemisphere

Countries throughout the Western Hemisphere have experienced increased migrant flows since the easing of travel restrictions related to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In some cases, these flows demonstrate new characteristics of trends that observers have highlighted for decades; in others, they evince trends that have emerged in the last 10 years. Migration in the Western Hemisphere is driven by various factors that experts typically categorize into two broad categories: *push factors*, which drive people away from their place of residence, and *pull factors*, which encourage people to move to a new place. Experts cite poor economic conditions, natural disasters, and insecurity as major push factors that have driven migration across the hemisphere. Enhanced economic opportunity, family reunification, and misinformation and disinformation about migration policy have served as pull factors that draw migrants to a new country.

Migrants have adopted various tactics to reach their destinations. For example, observers have documented an increased use of social media by migrants and migrant smugglers, the use of commercial flights to third countries to facilitate migration routes, and the formation of migrant caravans.

The Western Hemisphere's changing sociopolitical, economic, and climate landscape has shaped migration trends across the region, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the trends observers have highlighted since the onset of the pandemic have persisted for decades and have taken on new characteristics, whereas others have emerged within the last 10 years. Such migration trends include

- **Elevated migration flows to the U.S.-Mexico border**: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) encounters—enforcement actions with foreign nationals that include migrant apprehensions, migrant expulsions, and denials of admission at a port of entry—on the U.S.-Mexico border increased by 40% in FY2021 compared with FY2019's pre-pandemic levels, after adjusting for average recidivism rates (which attempt to account for those who are encountered attempting to cross the border several times). In the first eight months of FY2022, recidivism-adjusted encounters rose 65% compared with the same period in FY2021. It is unclear how much of this rise may be attributed to increased recidivism due to U.S. policy changes, increased flows due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, or postponed migration from 2020 due to pandemic-related mobility restrictions and income losses.
- **Increased diversity in migrants' nationalities across the hemisphere**: On the U.S. Southwest border, encounters with migrants from countries other than Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras accounted for 40% of all encounters in the first eight months of FY2022, compared with 10% during the same period in FY2019. Migration authorities in other parts of the hemisphere, including Mexico and Panama, also have seen a rise in the diversity of migrant origins during these years.
- **Mass displacement of Venezuelans**: Since 2015, Venezuela's economic and political crisis has generated one of the largest external migration crises in the world by displacing more than 6 million people as of May 2022, according to U.N. agencies. The majority of these people are being hosted by South American countries.
- **Secondary flows of Haitian migrants**: Observers suggest that elevated migrant flows of Haitians recorded throughout the region have been driven by Haitian nationals who had left Haiti and migrated to South American countries before deciding to move again.

The 117th Congress has held numerous hearings and has considered a variety of legislation related to migration issues as U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has contended with elevated levels of migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border. Some Members of Congress also have sought to examine broader migration trends in the hemisphere, the underlying drivers of these trends, and the shifting tactics migrants employ to migrate. Moving forward, Members may consider measures to bolster regional collaboration to address migration management and protection challenges in the hemisphere.

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Introduction

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has experienced "unprecedented levels" of migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border since the easing of travel restrictions related to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in much of the Western Hemisphere.[1] Migration has been the subject of congressional interest for decades, and these elevated migration flows have raised several policy issues for the 117th Congress, including the impact they may have on border security and humanitarian protections for irregular migrants (see textbox below for definition) arriving at the U.S. Southwest border. Members also have begun to examine migration trends elsewhere in the hemisphere—especially in Latin America and the Caribbean—as they consider measures to bolster regional collaboration as part of the broader U.S. policy response to migration management and protection.

Some migration trends in the hemisphere—such as migration from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Central America to the United States—have persisted for decades, with fluctuations over time. Other trends, such as mass displacement of Venezuelans, have emerged within the last 10 years. Although the Biden Administration has launched strategies to address the root causes of migration and to collaboratively manage the hemisphere's migration flows with other countries in the region, regional migration may continue to pose an array of policy challenges for the United States.

Since the easing of pandemic-related travel restrictions, other countries in the Western Hemisphere also have seen increased mixed migration movements—people traveling together, generally outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements of the destination and transit countries, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons.[2] The individuals traveling in these movements may include asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, and irregular migrants. Venezuela's economic and political crisis has generated one of the largest migration crises in the world, displacing more than 6 million people, the majority of whom are being hosted by other South American countries.[3] Mexico's refugee agency has recorded a sharp uptick in the total number of individuals requesting asylum since 2019. Costa Rica has contended with increased numbers of Nicaraguans seeking improved economic, social, and political conditions.

This report provides an overview of migration trends in the Western Hemisphere since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the drivers of these trends, and the tactics migrants have used to

[1] There is no universally recognized set of terms that define migration in its many forms. This report uses terms found in the U.N. International Organization for Migration (IOM), *International Glossary on Migration*, 2019, at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf. The report also uses the term *encounter* used by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to describe migrant enforcement actions at the U.S. Southwest border. See the textbox "Key Terms Used in this Report" for definitions of terminology used in this report. For more information on global migration, see CRS In Focus IF11003, *The Global Compact on Migration (GCM) and U.S. Policy*, by Rhoda Margesson. This report does not consider border security or U.S. border policy. For more information on these topics, see CRS Report R46999, *Immigration: Apprehensions and Expulsions at the Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and William A. Kandel; and CRS Report R46012, *Immigration: Recent Apprehension Trends at the U.S. Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and William A. Kandel. Data are available at CBP, "Nationwide Encounters," at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters (hereinafter: CBP, "Nationwide Encounters"). FY2022 monthly encounter data may be updated by CBP with each new monthly data release. This report reflects CBP encounter data as of June 2022. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Fact Sheet: DHS Preparations for a Potential Increase in Migration*, March 30, 2022, at https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/03/30/fact-sheet-dhs-preparations-potential-increase-migration.

[2] IOM, *Glossary on Migration*, pp. 141-142.

[3] IOM, *World Migration Report 2022*, p. 103.

evade authorities and facilitate their journeys. To approximate the direction and magnitude of migration flows, this report uses migrant detention and asylum application data. The report includes an **Appendix** of resources on migration from government and civil society sources.

Key Terms Used in this Report

Asylum Seeker: An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose asylum claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it.

Encounter: As defined by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), *encounters* are enforcement actions with foreign nationals, defined as a person who is not a U.S. citizen or a U.S. national per 8 U.S.C. Section 1101(a)(3). Since March 2020, CBP encounter statistics include Title 8 inadmissibles—foreign nationals encountered at a port of entry who seek lawful admission into the United States but who U.S. authorities determine to be inadmissible; Title 8 apprehensions—the temporary detainment of a person who is not lawfully in the United States; and Title 42 expulsions—public health-related expulsions of individuals found trying to enter the United States under a temporary rule in place since March 2020. This report considers only encounters that have occurred on the U.S. Southwest border.

International Migration: The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence and across an international border to a country of which they are not nationals.

Irregular Migrant: Also referred to as a *migrant in an irregular situation*, a person who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or stay in a country pursuant to the law of that country and to international agreements to which that country is party.

Sources: U.N. International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Glossary on Migration*, 2019, at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf; and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), *Nationwide Encounters*, at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters.

Drivers of Migration in the Western Hemisphere

Experts typically have categorized the factors that drive migration into two broad groups: *push factors*, which drive people away from their place of residence, and *pull factors*, which encourage people to move to a new place.[4] Factors in both categories are complex and often interrelated.

Push Factors. Experts cite poor economic conditions, natural disasters, and insecurity as major drivers of migration across the hemisphere. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic induced a regional economic contraction of 7% (more than double that of the global economy) and a 10% drop in the regional employment rate, exacerbating existing inequalities.[5] According to the *World Inequality Report 2022*, 10% of the population in Latin America owns an estimated 77% of total household wealth, whereas the poorest 50% of the population owns 1%.[6] Displacement due to natural disasters, including the slow-onset impacts of climate change, also has played a growing role in driving migration.[7] Over 1 million individuals were displaced by natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2021, and some experts have predicted that climate-related displacements in this region will continue to exceed 1 million individuals annually.[8] In addition, the armed conflict in Colombia

[4] IOM, *Understanding Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants*, April 25, 2016; and Francesco Castelli, "Drivers of Migration: Why Do People Move?," *Journal of Travel Medicine*, vol. 25, no. 1 (July 2018).

[5] Roxana Maurizio, *Employment and Informality in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Insufficient and Unequal Recovery*, International Labour Organization, Overview Series: Latin America and the Caribbean, September 2021.

[6] Lucas Chancel et al., *World Inequality Report 2022*, World Inequality Lab, 2022, p. 11.

[7] IOM, *World Migration Report 2022*, p. 7.

[8] Data available at Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Internal Displacement Database*, at https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data; and U.N. Development Programme, *Human*

and violence linked to transnational criminal organizations and gangs throughout the region internally displaced nearly 400,000 people in 2021, ultimately inducing some to flee their home countries.[9]

Pull Factors. Many migrants, especially those primarily motivated to move due to poor economic conditions, are "pulled" to countries with higher income levels. Nearly two-thirds of all international migrants across the globe lived in countries the United Nations classified as *high income* in 2020. Research has shown that migrant networks in host countries also may serve as strong pull factors for those remaining in the country of origin, as migrants seek to reunite with their families.[10] There is evidence that misinformation and disinformation about U.S. migration and border policy also pulls migrants to the United States. During a congressional hearing, a U.S. State Department official asserted that smugglers leverage uncertainty surrounding changes in U.S. policy to disseminate false information that migrants will be admitted to the United States without consequence.[11]

Shifting Migration Tactics

Migrants have adopted various tactics to reach their destinations in response to an increase in the availability of technology and changing government policies. Although the methods migrants use change frequently, the following three tactics have been widely documented: increased use of social media by migrants and migrant smugglers; the formation of migrant caravans; and the use of commercial flights to third countries to facilitate migration routes. These trends are discussed below.

Increased Use of Social Media. Migrants rely on mobile communication technologies, such as smartphones and social media platforms, prior to and during their journeys. They use these technologies to communicate with family and friends, organize and share information, and contract migrant smuggling services.[12] The ubiquity of social media has enabled migrants to frequently communicate and share their experiences with family and friends, potentially encouraging those still residing in their home countries to migrate and supplying would-be migrants with real-time information.[13] Social media platforms, including Facebook and

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Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier, Human Development and the Anthropocene, 2020, p. 61.

[9] Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022*, May 2022, pp. 77-78. For more information on Colombia's armed conflict, see CRS Report R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by June S. Beittel.

[10] Nicole B. Simpson, "Demographic and Economic Determinants of Migration: Push and Pull Factors Drive the Decision to Stay or Move," *IZA World of Labor*, vol. 1, article no. 373 (2017), p. 4.

[11] Emily Medrala, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State, testifying before U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Securing and Ensuring Order on the Southwest Border*, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., May 5, 2022. *Migrant smuggling*, also referred to as *human smuggling*, refers to the voluntary transportation of an individual across international borders, in violation of one or more countries' laws. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF12003, *Migrant Smuggling: Background and Selected Issues*, coordinated by Katarina C. O'Regan; UNODC, *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018*, 2018, p. 5; IOM, *World Migration Report 2022*, p. 256; and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas, *DHS Plan for Southwest Border Security and Preparedness*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Memorandum, April 26, 2022, p. 3.

[12] U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Technology in Smuggling of Migrants*, Education 4 Justice Initiative, May 2019.

[13] Ailsa Chang, Amy Isackson, and Miguel Macias, "How Social Media Has Changed Migration to the United States," *NPR*, October 14, 2021.

WhatsApp, have enabled prospective migrants to organize and migrate as a collective, as evidenced by the appearance of large migrant caravans (discussed below).[14]

Migrant smugglers have proven adept at adopting new technologies, including social media, to promote their business, engage with clients, and evade authorities. Observers have reported instances of human smugglers using messaging applications such as WhatsApp to guide migrants along their routes remotely. Human smugglers also have leveraged social media to advertise their business and recruit workers.[15] Evidence suggests these tools increase smuggling operations' resilience; human smugglers continued to operate in 2020, despite pandemic-related travel restrictions and migration controls.[16]

Migrant Caravans. Migrant caravans are large groups of migrants who migrate together by land. They have existed for at least the last decade but have received increased attention since April 2018, when over 1,000 Central Americans formed a U.S.-bound caravan.[17] Migrant caravans are composed of groups of individuals who travel together but do not share strong ties and often migrate for different reasons, providing an example of mixed migration movements. Participants in migrant caravans often include vulnerable groups such as family units, women, and unaccompanied minors.[18] Despite loose ties with one another, travelers in caravans may seek to take advantage of safety in numbers, pool resources, and avoid the cost of contracting with human smugglers.[19] Migrant caravans, however, also appear to draw increased attention from government authorities attempting to stem irregular migration flows.

After a surge of large U.S.-bound migrant caravans in 2018 and 2019, linked to a broader increase in Central American migration, reports of caravans dwindled in 2020, ostensibly due to pandemic-related migration controls. Reports of migrant caravans forming in Central America resurfaced in late 2020, but the implementation of stricter border controls and public health-related requirements by Mexican and Central American authorities dispersed these groups before they reached the United States.[20] Civil society organizations have decried authorities' use of excessive force to disperse or detain members of migrant caravans.[21] Some observers have reported that migrant caravans formed after 2019 have taken on new characteristics, including that some organizers may be associated with migrant smuggling groups.[22] In late 2021 and early 2022, thousands of migrants who had been waiting for months to be processed by Mexican

[14] Mary Louisa Cappelli, "Digital Mobilization and Politicization of El Caminata del Migrante," *Social Networking*, vol. 9 (2020), pp. 11-37; and Jeff Ernst, "How Migrant Caravans Are Organized—and Scammed—via Facebook and WhatsApp," *Rest of World*, May 10, 2021.

[15] Ailsa Chang, Amy Isacson, and Miguel Macias, "How Social Media Changed Migration to the United States," NPR, October 14, 2021; and CBP, "Smugglers Utilize Social Media to Recruit Minors," press release, February 9, 2022.

[16] IOM, *El Tráfico Ilícito de Migrantes en América Central y México en el Contexto de la COVID-19*, 2020, p. 4.

[17] IOM, *World Migration Report 2022*, p. 106; and University of California San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, *The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana*, 2019, pp. 35-36.

[18] Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), "IACHR Conducted Visit to the United States' Southern Border," press release, September 16, 2019.

[19] For more information, see CRS Report R45489, *Recent Migration to the United States from Central America: Frequently Asked Questions*, coordinated by Jill H. Wilson.

[20] Mixed Migration Centre, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean*, Quarter 4, 2021, and *Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean*, Quarter 1, 2022, at https://mixedmigration.org/regions/latin-america-and-caribbean/.

[21] Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), "A Call Upon the Governments of the Region to Respond to the Displacements from Central America Following Domestic and International Law," January 15, 2021.

[22] Jeff Ernst, "How Migrant Caravans Are Organized—and Scammed—via Facebook and WhatsApp," *Rest of World*, May 10, 2021.

migration authorities in Tapachula, Mexico, formed multiple caravans bound for Mexico City to demand an expedited determination of their migration status in Mexico or to continue their journey to the United States. The Mexican government has mobilized security forces and has offered humanitarian visas to vulnerable caravan members to disperse most of the groups, although continued strain on the Mexican migration system and a large backlog of migration applications suggest similar caravans could continue to form.[23]

Commercial Flights to Third Countries. A growing number of migrants have taken advantage of bilateral and multilateral visa-free travel agreements to facilitate their journeys via commercial flights. Observers documented African migrants using this tactic to reach the Western Hemisphere prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and migrants from across the hemisphere have adopted the practice since the easing of pandemic-related travel restrictions.[24] Migrants from countries including Ecuador, Brazil, and Venezuela have used commercial flights into Mexico to shorten their journey to the United States or to apply for asylum in Mexico.[25] Tens of thousands of Cubans have traveled via airplane to Nicaragua to migrate northward, as Nicaragua lifted visa requirements for Cubans in November 2021.[26] Others from outside the Western Hemisphere also appear to have used this tactic; since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, thousands of Russians and Ukrainians have traveled to Mexico as tourists to apply for asylum in the United States at the Southwest border.[27]

In an effort to stem irregular migration flows from countries in the Western Hemisphere, Mexico's government imposed visa requirements for travelers from Ecuador, Brazil, and Venezuela in September 2021, December 2021, and January 2022, respectively.[28] CBP data showed a significant decline in Southwest border encounters with nationals from all three countries a month after Mexico implemented these visa requirements, but encounters with citizens from these countries have steadily risen since.[29] The Pacific Alliance, a multilateral agreement between Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, prevent Mexico from implementing similar requirements for nationals from these countries.[30] Several countries, including Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, have implemented visa requirements for Cubans seeking to transit through their airports to Nicaragua in response to increased numbers of migrants from the Caribbean country.[31]

[23] Paulina Villegas, "Tired of Waiting for Asylum in Southern Mexico, Thousands of Migrants March North," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2021.

[24] Caitlyn Yates and Jessica Bolter, *African Migration Through the Americas: Drivers, Routes, and Policy Responses*, Migration Policy Institute (MPI), October 2021, p. 14.

[25] American Immigration Council, *Rising Border Encounters in 2021: An Overview and Analysis*, March 4, 2022.

[26] Adam Isacson, "Weekly U.S.-Mexico Border Update: March Migration Data, Title 42 Politics, Diplomats in Panama, Abbott Faces Backlash," WOLA, April 22, 2022.

[27] Dasha Afanasieva, Ted Hesson, and Kristina Cooke, "More Russians, Ukrainians Seek Asylum at U.S.-Mexico Border," Reuters, March 4, 2022.

[28] American Immigration Council, *Rising Border Encounters in 2021: An Overview and Analysis*, March 4, 2022.

[29] CBP, "Nationwide Encounters."

[30] Adam Isacson, "Weekly U.S.-Mexico Border Update: Title 42 Persists, Migration Trends, Migrant Deaths, 'Critical Incident Teams,'" WOLA, May 13, 2022.

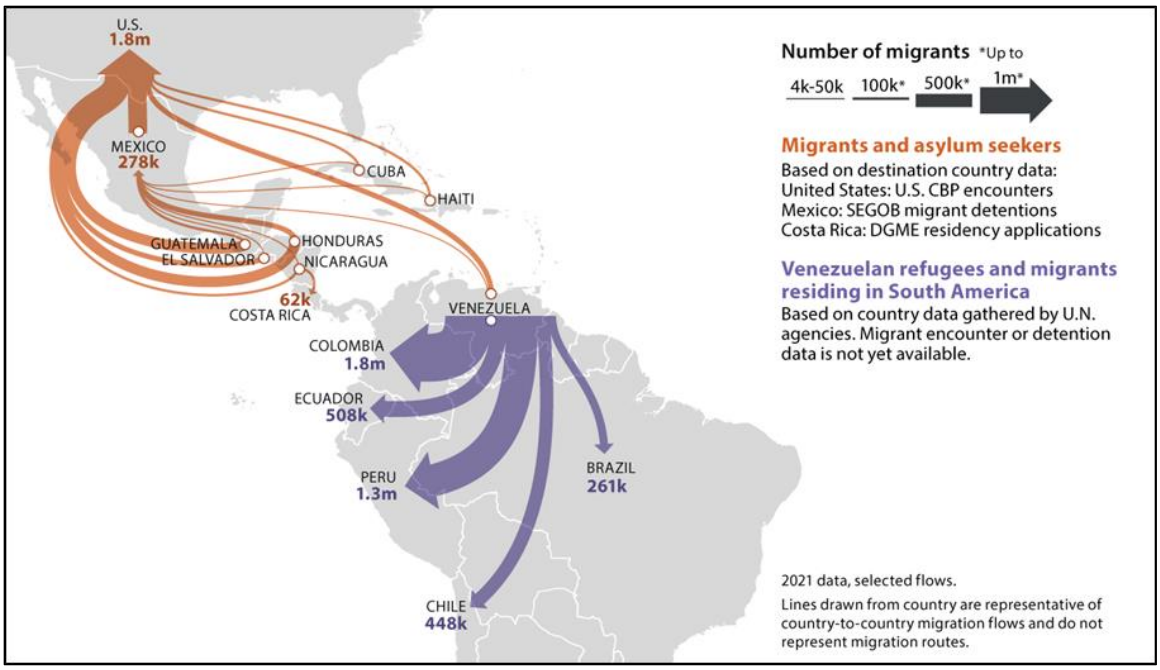
[31] Dave Sherwood, "Explainer: Rivaling Cold War Exodus, Cuban Migration to the U.S. Is Soaring. Here's Why," Reuters, April 28, 2022.

Selected Migration Trends

The Western Hemisphere's changing sociopolitical, economic, and climate landscape has shaped recent migration trends across the region. Although migration trends may fluctuate rapidly, observers have documented the following recent trends in the Western Hemisphere: elevated numbers of migrants encountered at the U.S.- Mexico border; increased diversity in migrants' nationalities across the hemisphere; the mass displacement of Venezuelans; and, the presence of Haitian secondary migration flows (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1. **Selected Migration Flows in the Western Hemisphere**

(based on 2021 destination country data)



Sources: Created by CRS based on U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), *Nationwide Encounters*; Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería (DGME) de Costa Rica, *Informe Anual 2021: Solicitudes de Permanencia Según País De Origen, Categoría Migratoria y Sexo, Año 2021*; Secretaría de Gobierno (SEGOB) de México, *Boletín Estadística 2021, Extranjeros Presentados y Devueltos, 2021, Cuadro 3.1.1 Eventos de Extranjeros Presentados o Canalizados por la Autoridad Migratoria, Según Continente y País de Nacionalidad,* 2021; and Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, *Evolution of the Figures in R4V 17 Countries*, accessed June 22, 2022.

Notes: Selected flows represent 88% of total CBP encounters, 90% of Mexican migration authority detentions, and 81% of DGME residency applications reported 2021. The top five destination countries for displaced Venezuelans are shown, which host over 70% of total displaced Venezuelans.

Increased Migration Flows Arriving at the Southwest Border[32]

CBP Southwest border encounter data indicate that, after a slowdown in 2020, irregular migration to the U.S.-Mexico border has risen significantly following the easing of pandemic-related travel

[32] For additional analysis of the demographics of migrants encountered at the Southwest border in FY2021, see CRS Report R46999, *Immigration: Apprehensions and Expulsions at the Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and William A. Kandel.

restrictions and worsening economic and sociopolitical conditions across much of the hemisphere, compared with pre-pandemic levels. Encounters on the U.S.-Mexico border increased in FY2021 by 40% compared with FY2019's pre-pandemic levels, totaling nearly 1.27 million unique encounters, after adjusting for average recidivism rates, which take into account those who are encountered attempting to cross the border several times.[33] In the first eight months of FY2022, unique encounters rose 65% compared with the same period in FY2021. FY2022 encounters have accelerated in recent months, and May 2022 saw the most encounters in a single month in 22 years.[34]

Although some of the rise in migration since 2020 may be attributed to emerging migration flows from countries that normally do not account for large outflows to the Southwest border (see "Increased Migrant Diversity," below), flows from long-standing source countries also have increased substantially. In FY2021, CBP encounters with citizens of Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries increased by approximately 58% and 235% compared with FY2019 and FY2020 figures, respectively; amounting to nearly 1.36 million encounters, or 78% of all encounters in FY2021. The trend persisted into the first eight months of FY2022, when CBP officials documented more encounters with individuals from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico than over the same period in FY2021, although it is unclear how much of this increase is driven by recidivism.[35] It also is unclear how much of this increase reflects migration by individuals who had planned to migrate in 2020 but faced pandemic-related impediments.

Economic fallout related to the COVID-19 pandemic and displacement from climate disasters and violence have contributed to increased migrant outflows from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries. In 2020, all four countries suffered economic contractions as large as 9% due to pandemic-related economic shocks. Economic recovery slowed in these countries in late 2021, in part driven by inflationary pressures that experts expect will persist through 2022.[36] Surveys conducted in the Northern Triangle in 2021 indicate that economic conditions are the most commonly cited motivating factor for migration from the region but are far from the only one.[37] Climate disasters, including hurricanes such as Eta and Iota (which displaced over 1 million people within Guatemala and Honduras in 2020), and persistent drought in the Central American Dry Corridor, a noncontiguous strip of Central America, also have been shown to contribute to

[33] According to CBP, *recidivism* refers to the percentage of individuals apprehended more than one time by the U.S. Border Patrol within a fiscal year. CBP Southwest border encounter statistics after FY2020 are not strictly comparable to previous years due to policy changes associated with Title 42 that led to increased recidivism rates, which inflated CBP encounter statistics after FY2020. For more information on Title 42, see CRS Report R46999, *Immigration: Apprehensions and Expulsions at the Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and William A. Kandel; and CRS Infographic IG10031, *U.S. Border Patrol Encounters at the Southwest Border: Titles 8 & 42*, by Audrey Singer. To compare border encounter data across these fiscal years more accurately, total encounter figures for each fiscal year have been adjusted by an estimated recidivism rate published by CBP at CBP, "CBP Enforcement Statistics Fiscal Year 2022," at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics. This report refers to fiscal year CBP encounter totals adjusted by these recidivism rates as *unique encounters*. Unique encounters still likely overcount the number of individuals encountered at the U.S. border, because some migrants may be encountered attempting to cross the border several times.

[34] Miriam Jordan, "Thousands of Migrants Have Been Waiting for Months to Enter U.S.," *New York Times*, May 19, 2022.

[35] CBP, "Nationwide Encounters."

[36] International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook: War Sets Back the Global Recovery*, April 2022; and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean 2021*, p. 18.

[37] Ariel G. Ruiz Soto et al., *Charting a New Regional Course of Action: The Complex Motivations and Costs of Central American Migration*, MPI, November 2021, p. 20 (hereinafter MPI, *Charting a New Regional Course of Action*).

Northern Triangle migration.[38] These phenomena have severely reduced agricultural production and have helped to triple the number of individuals who are food insecure from 2.2 million in 2019 to 6.4 million in 2021, leading to an increase in the number of people making concrete plans to move.[39]

Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries also have continued to contend with elevated levels of crime and violence, often related to transnational criminal organizations and gangs. In Mexico, cartel-related violence has displaced thousands in the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, and Zacatecas, and a 2021 survey found more than 30% of the population nationwide reported being the victim of a crime in the prior year.[40] Although homicide rates fell in the Northern Triangle in 2020, homicide rates for all three countries were among the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2021.[41] After several years of declining homicide rates, El Salvador recorded a sharp uptick in homicides in March 2022, prompting the government to implement a state of exception—a temporary order that allows the government to suspend certain civil rights in extreme circumstances—to combat gang-related violence and signaling that citizen insecurity remains a major challenge.[42] In March 2022, the International Committee of the Red Cross predicted criminal violence likely would continue to drive migration in Central America and Mexico.[43]

Mexico's Transformation as a Migration Destination Country

Although Mexico has continued to serve as a country of origin and transit for migrants seeking to reach the U.S. border, elevated migration levels and policy changes in the United States also have made Mexico a destination for many migrants, including asylum seekers, particularly since 2019. Mexico received asylum applications from 70,351 individuals in 2019, an increase of 137% from the previous year. In 2021, Mexico's refugee agency received the most asylum applications in its history (131,448 individuals), a 343% increase compared with 2018 levels. In the first four months of 2022, Mexico's refugee agency received over 40,000 asylum applications, 27% more than in the first four months of 2021. Citizens from Honduras, Haiti, and Cuba accounted for approximately 68% of asylum claims in Mexico between 2019 and April 2022, according to government figures.

Sources: Secretaria de Gobernación de México, *Estadísticas de la Coordinación General de la Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*, July 9, 2019, p. 2; Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR), *La COMAR en Números: Estadísticas a Diciembre 2021*, January 5, 2022; COMAR, *La COMAR en Números: Estadísticas a Diciembre 2021*; and COMAR, *La COMAR en Números: Abril 2022*, May 2, 2022.

[38] The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "Communities Affected by Hurricanes Eta and Iota Are Threatened by Food Insecurity, Displacement, and the Climate Crisis," press release, November 11, 2021; and Boris Miranda, "El Corredor Seco de Centroamérica, Donde Millones de Personas Están al Borde del Hambre y la Pobreza Extrema por el Coronavirus y los Desastres Naturales," BBC Mundo, March 17, 2021.

[39] World Food Programme, "Report: Stemming Rising Migration from Central America Calls for Tackling Immediate Needs and Root Causes," press release, November 23, 2021; and MPI, *Charting a New Regional Course of Action*, p. 2.

[40] Noam Lupu, Mariana Rodriguez, and Elizabeth Zechmeister (eds.), *2021 AmericasBarometer Pulse of Democracy*, Latin American Public Opinion Project 2021, p. 71; and Mary Beth Sheridan, "The War Next Door: Conflict in Mexico Is Displacing Thousands," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2022.

[41] Insight Crime, *InSight Crime's 2021 Homicide Round-Up*, February 1, 2022.

[42] *LatinNews*, "El Salvador: State of Emergency Declared as Killings Soar," March 28, 2022.

[43] International Committee of the Red Cross, "Armed Violence in Mexico and Central America Continues to Cause Large-Scale Suffering," March 16, 2022, press release. For more information about violence related to transnational criminal organizations in Mexico, see CRS Insight IN11535, *Mexican Drug Trafficking and Cartel Operations amid COVID-19*, by June S. Beittel and Liana W. Rosen, CRS Report R41576, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, by June S. Beittel, and CRS Report R42917, *Mexico: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Joshua Klein.

Increased Migrant Diversity

Government migration statistics across the Western Hemisphere suggest migration flows in the region are coming from a more diverse range of countries than in years past, a trend that is especially apparent at the U.S. Southwest border. Prior to 2021, the majority of irregular migration via the U.S.-Mexico border flowed from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries.[44] CBP encounters with migrants from these four countries accounted for at least 88% of all encounters in FY2019 and FY2020. This trend shifted markedly in FY2021, as officials encountered more migrants from an increasingly diverse range of nations, including from South America and outside the Western Hemisphere; 22% of all encounters were with nationals from countries other than Mexico and the Northern Triangle. More recently, this shift has accelerated; encounters with migrants from countries other than Mexico or the Northern Triangle accounted for 40% of all encounters in the first eight months of FY2022.[45]

Nearly 23% of all CBP encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border between October 2021 and May 2022 were with individuals fleeing the authoritarian regimes of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Cubans fleeing poor economic conditions, food and medicine shortages, and increased government repression since massive anti-government protests in July 2021, made up a larger share of CBP border encounters than any country other than Mexico or the Northern Triangle countries during that period.[46] In the first eight months of FY2022, CBP authorities at the Southwest border encountered nearly 140,000 Cuban migrants (66% of whom arrived in the last three months of this period). Additionally, the U.S. Coast Guard interdicted over 3,000 additional Cuban migrants at sea as of early July 2022.[47] In Mexico, nearly 11% of asylum applications received between 2020 and April 2022 were from Cuban citizens, ranking third among all countries.[48]

Although the majority of Venezuelan migrants and refugees fleeing the country's political, economic, and humanitarian crisis are residing in neighboring countries (see "Displacement of Venezuelans," below), an increasing number of Venezuelan nationals have made their way to North America. Between 2019 and the first four months of 2022, more than 21,000 Venezuelans applied for asylum in Mexico, ranking fourth among all nationalities.[49] The number of U.S. authorities' encounters with Venezuelans at the Southwest border increased from approximately 2,790 in FY2020 to 48,680 in FY2021 and totaled over 97,600 in the first eight months of FY2022.[50] Monthly encounters with Venezuelans at the Southwest border dropped dramatically after Mexico implemented visa requirements for Venezuelan nationals in January 2022, but these numbers rose again in March through May 2022, according to CBP data.

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[44] CRS Report R46999, *Immigration: Apprehensions and Expulsions at the Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and William A. Kandel

[45] CBP, "Nationwide Encounters."

[46] Lillian Perlmutter, "Cubans Choose Exile to Escape Post-Protest Political Crackdown," *Guardian*, March 24, 2022; and Mauricio Vicent, "Cuba's New Emigration Boom Dwarfs Those of the Past," *El País*, May 17, 2022. Also see CRS In Focus IF10045, *Cuba: U.S. Policy Overview*, by Mark P. Sullivan.

[47] U.S. Coast Guard, "Coast Guard Repatriates 61 People to Cuba," press release, July 2, 2022; and CBP, "Nationwide Encounters."

[48] COMAR, *La COMAR en Números: Estadísticas a Diciembre 2021*; and COMAR, *La COMAR en números: Abril 2022*.

[49] Ibid.

[50] CBP, "Nationwide Encounters."

Since 2018, migration from Nicaragua has increased due to increased political repression by the government of President Daniel Ortega. Neighboring Costa Rica, historically a common destination for Nicaraguan migration flows, has been a popular destination country for Nicaraguans fleeing their homes in the last four years; Nicaraguan asylum applications in Costa Rica increased from less than 100 in 2017 to nearly 53,000 in 2021.[51] A spokesperson for the U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees estimated that approximately 150,000 Nicaraguan refugees and asylum seekers were residing in Costa Rica as of February 2022.[52] U.S. authorities also documented nearly 110,000 encounters with Nicaraguan citizens on the U.S. Southwest border in the first eight months of FY2022, exceeding the number of encounters with Nicaraguans recorded in all of FY2021 by 121%.[53]

Observers have reported large flows of Haitian migration across the Western Hemisphere in recent years (see "Haitian Secondary Migration," below). Nearly 83,000 Haitian nationals were recorded passing from Colombia to Panama via the notoriously dangerous Darien Gap region in 2021, in addition to more than 18,000 Chilean and Brazilian nationals who Panamanian officials identified as children of Haitian citizens previously residing in those countries. Combined, these groups accounted for about 68% of all migrants reported to have passed through this route in 2021, according to Panamanian migration statistics.[54] Haitian migrants also account for a significant proportion of asylum claims made in Mexico, comprising almost a quarter of total asylum applications between 2019 and April 2022.[55] In 2021 and 2022, U.S. officials have encountered tens of thousands of Haitian migrants attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border on foot or using sailboats to travel between the Bahamas and Cuba to reach the United States.[56]

Migrants originating from outside the Western Hemisphere also have been registered in greater numbers. After fewer than 1,000 Ukrainians were apprehended cumulatively at the U.S.-Mexico border in FY2020 and FY2021, nearly 25,000 were apprehended in the first eight months of FY2022.[57] Meanwhile, Panama, Costa Rica, and Colombia have registered migrants from Asian and African countries (e.g., Senegal, Cameroon, Bangladesh, India) passing through their borders to reach North America.[58] Approximately 35% of irregular migrants transiting through the Colombia-Panama border in the first four months of 2022 were originally from Africa or Asia, according to Panamanian migration data.[59] Some observers maintain that the growing presence of African migrants in the hemisphere generally coincides with increased efforts on the part of

[51] Direccion General de Migracion y Extranjeria de Costa Rica, *Informe Anual 2021*, 2021, at https://www.migracion.go.cr/Paginas/Centro%20de%20Documentaci%C3%B3n/Estad%C3%ADsticas.aspx.

[52] U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Number of Displaced Nicaraguans in Costa Rica Doubles in Less Than a Year," press release, March 25, 2022.

[53] CBP, "Nationwide Encounters."

[54] The Darién Gap is an approximately 60-mile stretch of dense rainforest along the border of Colombia and Panama that is known as one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world. During passage, migrants are vulnerable to many dangers including rugged terrain, disease, and violence and exploitation by criminal groups. Diana Roy and Sabine Baumgartner, "Crossing the Darien Gap: Migrants Risk Death on the Journey to the U.S.," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 22, 2022. Data available at Servicio Nacional de Migración Panamá (SNM), *Estadísticas Migratorias*, at https://serviciomigraciones.cl/estadisticasmigratorias/ (hereinafter SNM, *Estadísticas Migratorias*).

[55] COMAR, *La COMAR en Números: Estadísticas a Diciembre 2021*.

[56] CBP, "Nationwide Encounters"; and Tim Craig, "As Haitian Migration Routes Change, Compassion Is Tested in Florida Keys," *Washington Post*, April 9, 2022.

[57] CBP, "Nationwide Encounters."

[58] Andrew Selee et al., *Laying the Foundation for Regional Cooperation: Migration Policy and Institutional Capacity in Mexico and Central America*, MPI, April 2021, p. 40.

[59] SNM, *Estadísticas Migratorias*.

European governments to stem irregular migration into Europe from Africa.[60] Data on these extra-hemispheric migrants can be scarce because each nationality comprises a comparatively small portion of total flows in the region, making it difficult to determine where they typically end their journeys.

Displacement of Venezuelans[61]

Venezuela has been mired in a deep political, economic, and humanitarian crisis since at least 2015, partially driven by declining oil production, hyperinflation, and poor governance and corruption on the part of President Nicolás Maduro's authoritarian regime.[62] The country's economy contracted by an estimated 77% between 2014 and 2021, according to the International Monetary Fund.[63] Poor economic conditions, food shortages, and hyperinflation from 2018 to 2021 have contributed to widespread food insecurity, which the COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated. A 2019 World Food Programme assessment estimated that 9.3 million Venezuelans (approximately 32% of the country's population) were severely or moderately food insecure before the pandemic.[64] The socioeconomic and political environment in the country has displaced an estimated 6.1 million Venezuelans, of which approximately 5 million remain in neighboring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.[65]

Various countries have received Venezuelan migrants and refugees, but five countries in the hemisphere host more than 70% of the total estimated displaced Venezuelan population: Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, and Brazil. Colombia and Peru have been the most popular destinations for displaced Venezuelans, hosting approximately 1.8 million and 1.3 million Venezuelans, respectively, which amounts to more than 3% of each country's total population.[66]

Haitian Secondary Migration

Much of the Haitian migration observed in recent years has been driven by Haitian nationals who migrated to South American countries years before deciding to move again, a practice known as *secondary migration,* in the face of deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and anti-immigrant sentiment. In a 2021 U.N. International Organization on Migration survey of more than 730 Haitian migrants passing through Colombia, 14% attested that they usually reside in Haiti.[67] After Haiti suffered a devastating earthquake in 2010, tens of thousands of Haitians migrated to Brazil, which offered humanitarian visas to those displaced by the earthquake and plentiful construction

[60] Caitlin Yates and Jessica Bolter, *African Migration Through the Americas: Drivers, Routes, and Policy Responses*, MPI, pp. 13-14.

[61] For more information on the Venezuelan Regional Humanitarian Crisis, see CRS In Focus IF11029, *The Venezuela Regional Humanitarian Crisis and COVID-19*, by Rhoda Margesson and Clare Ribando Seelke.

[62] For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10230, *Venezuela: Political Crisis and U.S. Policy*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

[63] Data are available at IMF, "GDP per Capita, Current Prices," at https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPDPC@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD.

[64] World Food Programme, *Venezuela Food Security Assessment: Main Findings*, 2020, p. 1; and Nicolle Yapur, "Venezuela Breaks One of World's Longest Hyperinflation Bouts," January 14, 2022.

[65] Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, *Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela*, May 22, 2022.

[66] Diego Chaves-Gonzalez, Jordi Amaral, and Maria Jesus Mora, *Socioeconomic Integration of Venezuelan Migrant and Refugees: The Cases of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru*, MPI and IOM, 2021, p. 1.

[67] IOM, "More Than 91,000 Migrants Have Crossed Darién Gap on Way to North America This Year," October 8, 2021.

jobs to build facilities for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. Chile also became a popular destination for Haitians in the mid-2010s, until visa requirements for Haitian citizens curtailed entries into the country. Nevertheless, by mid-2020, an estimated 237,000 and 143,000 Haitians resided in Chile and Brazil, respectively.[68]

Many Haitians living in South America have attempted to migrate again, most often to the United States, arguably motivated by worsening economic conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic in South America and increasing anti-immigrant sentiment.[69] In 2020, Chile and Brazil suffered economic contractions of 6% and nearly 4%, respectively, which severely impacted both countries' labor markets. In Chile, the government enacted a stringent immigration law in 2020, permitting the immediate deportation of irregular migrants without a court case, and anti-migrant protests prompted the government to declare a state of emergency in four northern provinces in early 2022.[70]

Issues for Congress and Outlook

Looking ahead, regional migration trends are likely to remain a key interest to Congress, as these movements touch upon an array of policy challenges for the Biden Administration and Congress. Congress may continue to seek to influence the U.S. policy response to hemispheric migration flows through oversight, appropriations, and other legislation. During the June 2022 Ninth Summit of the Americas, the United States and 20 other countries in the Western Hemisphere signed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration, which seeks to strengthen hemispheric efforts to "create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration and to strengthen frameworks for international protection and cooperation."[71] Implementation of some of the declaration's provisions may hinge on congressional decisions, such as appropriations to support the efforts of partner nations through foreign assistance and contributions to multilateral development banks and policy changes to expand legal immigration and protection pathways in the United States.[72] The extent of such changes may influence the decisions other countries in the region make in terms of dedicating resources to migration management or meeting their commitments to approach migration as a shared responsibility.

[68] Caitlyn Yates, *Haitian Migration Through the Americas: A Decade in the Making*, MPI, September 30, 2021.

[69] Ibid; and Sandra Sanchez, "Thousands of Haitian Migrants Arrive in Mexican Border City of Nuevo Laredo, Hoping to Cross When Title 42 Ends," *Border Report*, May 11, 2022.

[70] *LatinNews*, "Chile: State of Emergency in Four Provinces as Anti-Migration Protests Escalate," February 14, 2022.

[71] White House, "Fact Sheet: The Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection U.S. Government and Foreign Partner Deliverables," press release, June 10, 2022; and White House, "Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection," June 10, 2022, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/10/los-angeles-declaration-on-migration-and-protection/.

[72] For example, the White House asserts, "Working with Congress, we will provide an additional $25 million to the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) housed at the World Bank to prioritize countries in Latin America such as Ecuador and Costa Rica in their newly announced regularization programs for displaced migrant and refugee populations residing within their respective countries." Ibid.

Appendix. Regularly Updated Resources on Migration

Table A-1. Regularly Updated Resources on Migration

Title	Author	Resource Type
Glossary on Migration (latest version published in 2019), at https://www.iom.int/glossary-migration-2019	U.N. International Organization on Migration (IOM)	A collection of migration-related terminology and definitions designed for those working with migration issues at the international level. The glossary is updated periodically.
Migration Data Portal, at https://www.migrationdataportal.org/about	IOM	A regularly updated repository of timely, comprehensive migration statistics and information related to global migration.
International Migrant Stock Data, at https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock	U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division	Estimates on the number (or *stock*) of international migrants disaggregated by age, sex, and country or area of origin, based on national statistics. Data are revised at least every two years.
International Migration Statistics Webpage, at https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/international-migration-statistics	Migration Policy Institute	Periodically updated data hub of international migration statistics on topics including net migration by country, humanitarian migration, and global remittances.
Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), at https://www.r4v.info/en/refugeeandmigrants	U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and IOM	Website containing periodically updated data on Venezuelans displaced abroad as part of the Venezuelan economic and humanitarian crisis.
World Migration Report (last report published in 2022), at https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/	IOM	IOM's flagship publication providing evidence-based research and analysis on international migration. The report is updated biennially.
UNHCR Refugee Data Finder, at https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/	UNHCR	A periodically updated database on global refugee population statistics.
Quarterly Mixed Migration Updates – Latin America and the Caribbean, at https://mixedmigration.org/regions/latin-america-and-caribbean/	Mixed Migration Centre	Quarterly updates on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration, including related policy developments in the region.
Displacement Tracking Matrix, at https://dtm.iom.int/	IOM	A resource that tracks and monitors displacement and population mobility. Resources include mobility tracking, flow monitoring, and migrant registration and surveys.

Extranjeros con estatus irregular en tránsito frontera Panamá-Colombia, at https://www.migracion.gob.pa/inicio/estadisticas	Servicio Nacional de Migración de Panamá	Regularly updated statistics on migrants in an irregular situation recorded passing from Colombia to Panama via the Darién Gap (available in Spanish only).

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