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FEATURED Q&A

How Will a New U.S. Plan Affect Migrants From Venezuela?



Earlier this month, the U.S. and Mexican governments agreed on a new plan to stem the flow of Venezuelans arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. Venezuelan migrants in Colombia are pictured. // File Photo: Colombian Government.

Q The U.S. and Mexican governments agreed on a new plan on Oct. 12 designed to reduce the number of Venezuelan migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. U.S. President Joe Biden agreed to take in as many as 24,000 Venezuelan migrants arriving to the country by air but will expel back to Mexico migrants who cross the U.S. border by land. The policy comes as Biden struggles to curb high immigration levels but faces strong criticism from international rights groups. How likely is the plan to effectively address rising immigration? How is Mexico dealing with the heightened inflow of Venezuelans, and how should the United States support it?

A Yael Schacher, director for the Americas and Europe at Refugees International: "Venezuelan applicants for the program need a passport and a financial supporter in the United States. It is a temporary immigration program rather than a refugee program; it is geared toward Venezuelans with means, documents and U.S. ties, unlike the majority of Venezuelan asylum seekers released at the U.S. border in recent weeks. Descriptions of the program refer to these Venezuelans as 'irregular migrants' rather than as asylum seekers. The program relies on a suspension of refugee law at the U.S. border and, further, coordination with other countries to prevent asylum seeking as well. Venezuelans who cross into Panama or Mexico without authorization are ineligible for the program. U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said expulsion would be the consequence for Venezuelans 'who choose to not avail themselves' of the program. But the program started suddenly. Many Venezuelans already in Mexico, Panama

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TODAY'S NEWS

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Colombia's Congress Allows Petro to Enter Talks With Rebels

Colombia's Congress on Wednesday authorized President Gustavo Petro's government to engage in peace talks with leftist rebels, including the National Liberation Army, and other criminal groups.

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ECONOMIC

Brazil's Central Bank Leaves Key Rate Unchanged

For the second meeting in a row, the rate-setting committee of Brazil's central bank left its key Selic interest rate unchanged at 13.75 percent, a six-year high.

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BUSINESS

Argentina, Mexico Help Fuel Profits at Santander

Spain's Banco Santander, led by executive chair Ana Botín, said strong performance in its units in Argentina and Mexico helped to fuel an 11-percent increase in net profit for the third quarter.

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Botín // File Photo: Banco Santander.

POLITICAL NEWS

Colombia's Congress Allows Petro to Enter Talks With Rebels

Colombia's Congress on Wednesday approved legislation that allows President Gustavo Petro's government to engage in peace talks with leftist rebels and other criminal groups, Reuters reported. Petro, Colombia's first leftist president, has said he wants to seek "total peace" in the Andean nation and put an end to insurgencies that have lasted for nearly six decades. The measure that lawmakers passed will allow the government to engage in talks with the National Liberation Army, or ELN, as well as dissident Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, factions that rejected the group's 2016 peace accord with the government, the wire service reported. The measure also allows Petro to enter talks with drug trafficking groups such as the Clan del Golfo. "This is the first step toward the deepening of democracy, solidarity, inclusion, but above all the start of definitively turning the page on the bloodbath in which we are still immersed, of the delay to which the armed conflict subjects us, which should lead us toward total peace, where life is dignified," Interior Minister Alfonso Prada told reporters, Reuters reported. The two chambers of Colombia's Congress are still at odds over a proposal on allowing youths to avoid military service by performing activities that promote peace in the country. The Chamber of Representatives approved the measure, but the Senate rejected it. Earlier this month, Petro's government and the ELN said that they would restart talks, though they have not specified when the discussions would begin. The announcements followed Petro's proposal in August of a multilateral cease-fire between Colombia's military and armed groups. Douglas M. Fraser, a retired U.S. Air Force general and former commander of the U.S. Southern Command, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Aug. 31 that, through its halting of arrest warrants and extraditions of ELN members, it has shown that it is "serious about pursuing peace negoti-

ations." However, Fraser said negotiations still could face several challenges. "Previous talks were difficult and were ultimately suspended. Future talks will also be difficult, largely due to the loose organization of the ELN. In addition, even if an agreement can be reached, as happened during implementation of the peace accord with the FARC, many ELN members may decide not to follow the guidelines of a future accord," Fraser told the Advisor.

BUSINESS NEWS

Argentina, Mexico Help Fuel Profits of Spain's Santander

Spain's Banco Santander on Wednesday reported an 11-percent increase year-on-year in net profit for the third quarter, driven in part by strong performance in the banks units in Argentina and Mexico, Agence France-Presse reported. Santander posted a net profit of 2.42 billion euros (\$2.41 billion) for the quarter, beating the average estimates of analysts, who had expected profit of 2.15 billion euros for the quarter. For the year through September, Santander's profits rose 25 percent as compared to the same period last year, to 7.32 billion euros. The bank's executive chair, Ana Botín, said Santander delivered a "strong quarter with revenues increasing and profitability remaining above target ... supported by our rock-solid balance sheet," AFP reported. However, Botín added that the bank expects the "macroeconomic environment to remain challenging as markets across Europe and North America adapt to levels of inflation not experienced in decades." Despite a soaring rate of inflation in Argentina, which analysts estimate could surpass 100 percent this year, the country's banks have "fared relatively well this year," Marcelo De Gruttola, vice president and senior analyst at Moody's Investors Service, told the Dialogue's biweekly Financial Services Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published June 15. Argentine banks' fundamentals "will remain broadly stable," De Gruttola said, but he added that

NEWS BRIEFS

Same-Sex Marriage Now Legal in All Mexican States After Vote in Tamaulipas

Lawmakers in Mexico's Tamaulipas state voted Wednesday night to legalize same-sex marriage, making Tamaulipas the last of Mexico's 32 states to legalize such unions, the Associated Press reported. The measure to amend the state's Civil Code passed with 23 votes in favor, 12 against, and two abstentions. "The whole country shines with a huge rainbow. Love is love." Arturo Zaldivar, president of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation tweeted in response to the vote.

Fitch Downgrades Argentina's Long-Term Sovereign Credit Rating

Fitch Ratings on Wednesday downgraded its long-term sovereign credit rating for Argentina by one notch, citing macroeconomic imbalances and a rising level of risk surrounding the country's ability to meet future debt payments, Reuters reported. Fitch downgraded the credit rating to CCC- from CCC. Argentina has been facing capital flight, a weak currency and inflation that analysts forecast could surpass 100 percent this year.

TotalEnergies Entering Joint Venture With Brazil's Casa dos Ventos

TotalEnergies said on Wednesday that it will partner with Brazilian developer Casa dos Ventos to develop a 12-gigawatt renewable portfolio, Dow Jones reported. The French oil and gas company will hold 34 percent of portfolio and will pay a cash consideration of \$550 million as well as up to \$30 million in earn-out as part of the transaction. According to TotalEnergies, the portfolio includes 700 megawatts of onshore wind capacity in operation and 1.6 gigawatts of solar projects that are currently under development.

“currently unstable macroeconomic conditions continue to pose downside risks.” In addition to a strong performance in Argentina and Mexico, Santander said its unit in Poland also helped to drive profits. The bank has approximately 159 million customers worldwide, and its profit grew despite headwinds in its home market. Earlier this month, the Spanish government said it would impose temporary taxes on banks and energy companies in order to cover the costs of state programs to help Spaniards cope with high inflation, AFP reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil's Central Bank Leaves Key Rate Unchanged at 13.75%

Brazil's central bank on Wednesday left its benchmark Selic interest rate unchanged for the second meeting in a row, Reuters reported. Policymakers again maintained the key rate at 13.75 percent, a six-year high, following 12 consecutive rate increases that raised it from a record low of 2 percent in March 2021. The central bank said it will maintain the elevated interest rate for a “sufficiently long period,” until inflation returns to “around its targets,” Bloomberg News reported. “The Brazilian economy performed surprisingly well in the first half of this year. GDP expanded at an annualized pace of 4.5 percent in the first quarter compared to the previous one”, Michael Heydt, senior vice president for global sovereign ratings, told the Advisor in a Q&A published on Sept. 15. However, Heydt said he expects the South American country's economy to “run out of steam” as a result of moderated “external demand, the erosion of consumers' purchasing power due to high inflation and the full impact of tight monetary policy.” Brazil's central bank expects inflation rates to stay at 5.8 percent this year, and fall to 4.8 percent rate for 2023, up from a forecast last month of 4.6 percent, Reuters reported. Policymakers' target rate for next year is 3.25 percent.

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or Central American countries in between do not have the necessary passports to participate in it. They are stranded, with permission to stay in Mexico only briefly; they also cannot get visas required to enter other countries in the Americas. Mexican shelters are overwhelmed with expelled Venezuelans. The United States should not simply support shelters in Mexico; it should process Venezuelan asylum seekers at ports of entry along the southern border and support shelters welcoming asylum seekers in the United States. It should also lift the 24,000 cap on the program and should consider lifting the passport requirement as well.”

A Vincent T. Gawronski, professor of political science at Birmingham-Southern College and teaching committee chair at the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs:

“According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 7.1 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees worldwide, with 970,000 seeking asylum due to political persecution and intolerable living conditions. More than 15 years of broad economic-financial sanctions related to terrorism, drug trafficking, anti-democratic actions, human rights abuses and corruption have exacerbated the economic crisis, hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid and harmed average Venezuelans. Currently the 26th most fragile state, Venezuela is incredibly corrupt, according to the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (which ranks Venezuela 177th out of 180 countries). For now, the U.S. policy is to admit 24,000 qualifying Venezuelans who arrive by air and have a sponsor in the United States. Thousands are now stranded in Mexico. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has promised to support the growing influx of Venezuelans, saying, ‘We cannot turn our backs on those who suffer; Mexico is a fraternal country.’ However, López Obrador also called for the United States to normalize relations with Venezuela

and increase the number of admissions. Mexico can only absorb so many migrants from Honduras, Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and elsewhere. Humanitarian services on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border are overwhelmed. Moreover, Mexico's militariza-

“Humanitarian services on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border are overwhelmed.”

– Vincent T. Gawronski

tion of immigration policy will inevitably lead to human rights abuses. The conundrum stems from how U.S. policies and actions can inadvertently and counterproductively contribute to complex root migration forces, which are domestic, geopolitical and historical-structural. Moreover, the United States must learn to engage more effectively with unsavory governments whose own policies and actions generate unlivable conditions.”

A Adriana Kostencki, attorney at Exoro Law: “The new U.S. policy designed to reduce the number of Venezuelan migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border is weeding out the truly most desperate Venezuelans, and it will not be an ‘incentive’ for these migrants to avoid the dangerous journey to the border altogether. The policy is instead shutting down access to asylum for Venezuelan nationals. The most desperate Venezuelan migrants who are fleeing extreme hardship could not ‘fly’ into the United States back when the U.S. Consulate in Caracas was open and adjudicating visas to enter the United States legally, whether in the form of tourism, business, investment or because of a family-based petition. The Venezuelan migrants who are crossing the U.S. border these days would not qualify for U.S. visas back then and would not qualify now. Most

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of these Venezuelan migrants do not have family members in the United States who can financially support them. The most desperate will continue to carry their babies on their backs and face extremely dangerous situations while trying to cross the U.S. border. The new policy is coming at the expense of fundamental human rights. Automatically returning migrants to Mexico without giving them the opportunity to seek asylum is a blatant violation of international treaties, to which the United States is signatory, and U.S. asylum laws. It is also a discriminatory policy against Venezuelan nationals only.”

A **Richard Kiy, president & CEO of the Institute of the Americas:**
 “In June, President Biden joined other heads of state from across the hemisphere at the Ninth Summit of the Americas to sign the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection ‘to create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane and regular migration and to strengthen frameworks for international protection and cooperation.’ So, DHS’ move to evoke the Trump-era Title 42 rulemaking—denying asylum to Venezuelans arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border—came as a surprise. The policy is anything but orderly and doesn’t live

up to the spirit of the Los Angeles Declaration. While the United States has agreed to take as many as 24,000 Venezuelan migrants arriving by air and with in-country sponsors, the policy does little to respond to the needs of those would-be asylum seekers who can ill afford a passport, much less air travel. As part of the deal, Mexico agreed to receive an equal number of deported Title 42 Venezuelan migrants from the United States, but Mexican communities, such as Tijuana, are overwhelmed, under-resourced and ill equipped to handle the recent migrant surge. Given shifting geopolitics, the Biden administration is now considering easing economic sanctions on Venezuela to permit Chevron to pump oil there with the aim of free and fair elections in 2024. If sanctions are relaxed, over time, this alone could do more to decrease outbound Venezuelan migration. After all, those most directly affected by the sanctions are not Maduro and his inner circle but rather the many economically under-served Venezuelan migrants now arriving here at the San Diego-Tijuana border.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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