

REGIONAL MOVEMENT TRENDS AND PATTERNS

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN · JANUARY – JUNE 2026

KEY MESSAGES

 **26%** While the northbound movements remain substantially lower than prior 2025, U.S. Southwest land-border encounters increased by 26 per cent from Q1 to Q2 2026, reaching 39,294 compared with 31,079 in Q1, with Mexican nationals accounting for 77 per cent of encounters.¹

 **74%** Irregular entries to Honduras fell by 74 per cent in H1 2026 compared to H1 2025 (19,698 to 5,087). Ecuadorians (36%) and Cubans (34%) were the main nationalities recorded.³

 **61%** Southbound transit through Panama (Colón route) fell by 61 per cent in the first half of 2026 compared with the same period in 2025, from 12,794 to 4,929 movements. Venezuelan nationals accounted for 91 per cent of southbound travelers.²

 **44%** The number of returnees to Guatemala and Honduras increased by 44 per cent in the first half of 2026 compared with the same period in 2025, from 38,713 to 55,732, with increases in both Guatemala (+47%) and Honduras (+40%).⁴

Note: Data presented cover January–June 2026 and compare to the corresponding period in 2025.

1. REGIONAL PANORAMA

The first half of 2026 marked a further shift away from the large-scale northbound transit movements that defined previous years. Human mobility across Latin America and the Caribbean became less concentrated along a small number of transit routes and increasingly reflected a mix of regular migration, return movements, localized cross-border mobility and movements within South America⁵.

Irregular northbound transit continued to fall across several of the region's principal routes. Northbound movements through the Darién dropped to just 280 during the reporting period, irregular entries recorded in Honduras were 74 per cent lower than in the first half of 2025, and movement monitoring in Guatemala recorded a 62 per cent decline. These reductions point to a continued slowdown in the transit corridors that, until recently, carried large numbers of migrants and refugees towards North America. At the same time, United States of America (U.S.) Southwest land-border encounters increased by 26 per cent between the first and second quarters of 2026, indicating a moderate rise after historically low levels at the beginning of the year.

The decline in irregular transit did not mean less mobility overall. Several countries in South America recorded increases in regular cross-border movements, including Colombia, Ecuador and Paraguay. Movement patterns also differed increasingly by nationality. Cuban mobility through Panama and Honduras declined sharply, while asylum applications and migration balances pointed to continued arrivals and settlement in countries such as Brazil and Uruguay. Haitian migration was increasingly facilitated through regular pathways, including family reunification programmes connecting Haiti and Brazil.

Return movements became more visible across the region. Since early 2025 over 271,000 Mexicans were returned from the U.S. returns to Guatemala and Honduras increased by 44 per cent compared with the first half of 2025, removals from the U.S. continued to rise, and southbound movements through

Panama remained a notable feature of regional mobility. Forced removals, transfer arrangements, assisted voluntary return programmes and spontaneous returns all contributed to a more complex return landscape, increasing demand for reception, reintegration and protection support in countries of return.

Reasons for movement varied across countries where data were available. In Mexico, protection monitoring found that violence-related factors were the main drivers of departure, with 54% of respondents citing violence, threats, or intimidation. This was particularly common among Hondurans, 68 per cent of whom reported violence, threats, or intimidation as their main reason for leaving, and Haitians, among whom 74 per cent cited general insecurity. In contrast, Venezuelans reported a more balanced mix of protection-related (55%) and economic (43%) reasons for departure in this country⁶. In Guatemala, most refugees and migrants (76%) identified economic factors as their primary reason for migrating. Intended destinations differed by route, with Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru among the most frequently reported destinations in southbound movements⁷.

Across migration routes, refugees and migrants reported high levels of unmet basic needs, particularly food assistance (98% of refugees and migrants surveyed in Peru and 72% in Guatemala⁸), as well as water, sanitation and hygiene support. Moreover, and despite lower volumes on several major transit routes, protection concerns remained acute. At least 113 deaths were recorded across the Americas during the reporting period, with drowning, environmental exposure and hazardous transportation among the leading causes. Internal displacement also remained severe, particularly in Haiti, while evidence from Ecuador, Colombia, and Honduras highlighted the growing influence of violence, insecurity and environmental pressures on population movements within countries.

1 U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Southwest Land Border Encounters (accessed on 04 August 2026).

2 National Migration Service of Panama, Migration Movements (accessed on 04 August 2026).

3 National Migration Institute of Honduras, Data Portal – Irregular Migration (accessed on 04 August 2026).

4 Migration Institute of Guatemala, Data Portal – Regular Migration Flow (accessed on 04 August 2026).

5 IOM, (2026), Regional Mobility Trends: Latin America and the Caribbean (January–June 2026). IOM, Panama.

6 UNHCR, 2026.

7 IOM Guatemala – Data and Resources – Migration Trends (accessed on 04 August 2026).

8 IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Peru – Flow Monitoring Survey at the Border – Tumbes and Tacna (April–June 2026) (accessed on 11 August 2026).

2 REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

Note: The data presented cover January–June 2026 and the corresponding period in 2025, except for Mexico and Chile for which data cover January–May of both years.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Mexico ↑ Regular movements ↓ Irregular movements

Regular cross-border movements remained relatively stable between January and May 2026, reaching 16.2 million entries, 2 per cent more than in the same period of 2025 (15.9 million). Despite this overall increase, monthly regular migration figures have been slowing in 2026, from 3.6 million in January to 2.6 million in May. Irregular movements showed a different pattern, falling by 85 per cent compared with the same period in 2025 (from 120,338 to 18,084). This decline was observed across most nationalities, including Venezuelans (-90%), Ecuadorians (-96%), Nicaraguans (-95%), Colombians (-89%), and Haitians (-56%).⁹

Guatemala ↓ Irregular movements ↑ Returns

Population monitoring exercises recorded 8,737 irregular movements through Guatemala during the first half of 2026, a 66 per cent decrease compared with the same period last year. Southbound flows included mainly Venezuelan refugees and migrants; while northbound movements included largely Honduran nationals. Guatemala received 31,780 forced returnees during the reporting period compared to 21,611 during the same period in 2025 (47% increase).¹⁰

Panama ↓ Irregular movements

Northbound irregular movements through the Darién dropped to just 280 during the first half of 2026, a decline of over 90 per cent compared with the first half of 2025. In June 2026, however, 101 migrants and refugees were recorded by the authorities, having travelled through Darién, indicating a potential re-opening of this route segment. Registered southbound movements through maritime routes decreased to 4,929, compared to 12,794 in the first half of 2025.¹²

Honduras

↓ Irregular entries ↑ Returns

In Honduras, irregular northbound entries fell to 5,087 in the first half of 2026, nearly 75 per cent lower than the same period of 2025. In contrast, forced returns to Honduras remained consistently above 2025 levels, averaging nearly 4,000 returnees per month and reaching their highest monthly level in June (4,407), with an overall increase of 40 per cent compared with the first half of 2025.¹¹

Colombia

↓ Irregular movements ↓ Regular movements

Overall cross-border movements in Colombia decreased slightly in the first half of 2026, with 3 per cent less movements than in the same period of 2025 (5.0 million vs. 5.14 million). Regular movements, which accounted for most of the total, declined by 2 per cent, while recorded irregular movements decreased by 38 per cent (from around 84,000 to 52,000). Venezuelan nationals recorded 12 per cent fewer cross-border movements in Colombia (637,623) than in the first half of 2025. Movements also decreased among Ecuadorians (-10%), Dominicans (-13%), Peruvians (-2%) and Cubans (-4%), with all four nationalities recording slightly more exits than entries. Haitians showed a different pattern, with movements increasing by 26 per cent compared to 2025 and entries slightly exceeding exits, although the overall number remained small.¹³

Brazil ↓ Regular movements

During the first half of 2026, Venezuelan nationals' movements declined slightly compared to the same period in 2025 (-9.8%). However, mobility between the border of Venezuela and Brazil remained stable and no significant increase in arrivals was recorded at Brazil's northern border.¹⁴

⁹ Government of Mexico, Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB), Migration Policy, Registration and Identity of Persons Unit (UPMRIP). Estadísticas Migratorias: Síntesis 2025 (accessed on 04 August 2026) and Government of Mexico, Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB), Migration Policy, Registration and Identity of Persons Unit (UPMRIP). Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias 2026 (accessed on 04 August 2026).

¹⁰ IOM, Guatemala – Data and Resources – Migration Trends (accessed on 04 August 2026).

¹¹ National Migration Institute of Honduras, Data Portal – Irregular Migration (accessed on 04 August 2026).

¹² National Migration Service of Panama (SNM). Migration Movements, Statistics and Operational Results. Weekly Reports (accessed on 04 August 2026).

¹³ Migration Colombia, Data Portal - Foreign Migration Flows (accessed on 04 August 2026).

¹⁴ DataMigra BI Brazil, DataMigra BI (accessed on 04 August 2026).

2 REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

Note: The data presented cover January–June 2026 and the corresponding period in 2025, except for Mexico and Chile for which data cover January–May of both years.

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Ecuador ↑ Regular movements ↓ Irregular movements

Between January and June 2026, officially registered international movements of foreign nationals in Ecuador increased by 8 per cent compared with the same period in 2025 (1.44 million vs. 1.33 million), with exits remaining slightly higher than entries. Movements increased for Venezuelans (+7%), while Cubans and Haitians recorded 31 per cent and 59 per cent fewer movements, respectively, than in the same period of 2025. Recorded irregular movements declined from 243,551 to 204,638¹⁵.

Population monitoring exercises at the northern and southern borders also indicated lower levels of irregular movement, with an estimated average of around 515 people in transit per day between January and April 2026, about 25 per cent below the levels observed during the last monitoring months of 2025. Venezuelans remained the predominant nationality among surveyed people in transit, accounting for approximately 86 per cent of respondents.¹⁶

Paraguay ↑ Regular movements

Regular cross-border movements of non-resident foreigners increased by 11 per cent in the first half of 2026, reaching 5.3 million, compared with 4.8 million in the same period of 2025. The balance of movements also changed direction - exits exceeded entries by around 94,000 in 2026, while in 2025 there were around 13,000 more entries than exits.

Among the nationalities showing increases, Colombians recorded 23 per cent more movements than in the same period of 2025 (30,892 compared with 25,118). Movements also increased among Dominicans (+16%) and Ecuadorians (+11%), with entries slightly exceeding exits for all three nationalities. Venezuelan movements showed a different pattern, decreasing by 67 per cent (from 10,860 to 3,547), while entries remained slightly higher than exits.²⁰

Peru Irregular movements

From April to June 2026, DTM surveys of refugees and migrants in irregular movements showed that Venezuela (45%), Chile (19%) and Peru (16%) were the most commonly reported countries of origin or usual residence. Between April and June, Peru was reported as an intended destination by 37 per cent of irregular migrants and refugees surveyed at the country's borders, an increase compared to 31 per cent in February–March 2026.¹⁷

Chile ↓ Regular movements

Up to May 2026, total movements of Venezuelan nationals increased by approximately 6 per cent compared to the same period in 2025 (144,586 to 153,200). However, the migratory balance fell by roughly two thirds (65%), from 7,870 to 2,794 in 2026, mainly due to a 10 per cent increase in exits (68,358 to 75,203), while entries increased by only 2 per cent (76,228 to 77,997).¹⁸

Uruguay ↓ Regular movements

Venezuelan movements decreased by 12 per cent in the first half of 2026, from 37,279 to 32,788. Both entries and exits declined, while exits remained slightly higher than entries, resulting in a negative balance of 976 movements, compared with a positive balance of 835 in the same period of 2025.²¹

Argentina ↓ Regular movements

During the first semester of 2026, movements of Venezuelan nationals decreased slightly compared to the same period in 2025. Total recorded entries fell by 16 per cent and exits by 10 per cent, resulting in an overall decline of 13 per cent in cross-border movements. The decrease in entries was observed consistently across all months, with the sharpest reductions recorded in January. As inflows declined more rapidly than outflows, the positive migration balance observed in the first semester of 2025 (+4,187) shifted to a negative balance in 2026 (-1,060), indicating that departures slightly exceeded arrivals during the period.¹⁹

15 Ministry of the Interior of Ecuador. Migración Ecuador – Estadística Migratoria (accessed on 04 August 2026).

16 IOM, DTM Ecuador – Registro de Monitoreo de Flujos – Movimiento de entradas y salidas por las fronteras de Ecuador, June 2026.

17 IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Peru – Flow Monitoring Survey at the Border – Tumbes and Tacna (April–June 2026) (accessed on 11 August 2026).

18 Investigations Police of Chile (PDI), data upon request.

19 National Directorate of Migration of Argentina, data upon request.

20 National Directorate of Migration of Paraguay, Data Portal - Statistical Migration Movements (accessed on 04 August 2026). Only individuals classified as "Foreign nationals" were included in this analysis.

21 National Directorate of Migration of Uruguay, data upon request.

3 IRREGULAR MOVEMENTS

Although **irregular transit volumes remained substantially below the levels observed in recent years**, irregular movements did continue across multiple routes and directions in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Available monitoring data suggests that **irregular mobility in 2026 was increasingly characterized by repeated movement between neighbouring countries, temporary stays in transit locations, and changes in destination plans during the journey**. In several locations, movements reflected a combination of onward migration, return, and re-migration rather than a single journey from origin to destination.

Data collected through IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) highlights the growing diversity of irregular mobility patterns. In Guatemala, monitored flows during the first half of 2026 were evenly divided between northbound (52%) and southbound (48%) movements.²² Northbound migrants were predominantly Honduran nationals heading towards Mexico and the United States, while southbound flows were largely composed of Venezuelans, majority of whom were bound for Venezuela, while still many reported destination countries elsewhere in the region.

Monitoring in Costa Rica and Panama points to similar dynamics. In Costa Rica, southbound mobility continued alongside substantial circular cross-border movements linked to seasonal work, livelihoods and access to services.²³ In Panama, southbound movement towards Colombia remained more significant than northbound transit, indicating the continuing importance of reverse and multidirectional mobility mainly towards Venezuela. Together, these findings suggest that irregular movements increasingly involve return and circulation within the region rather than transit through the region.

DTM data from Ecuador further illustrate the complexity of current flows.²⁴ Monitoring undertaken in June 2026 found

movements to be almost evenly split between northbound (55%) and southbound (45%) directions. Children and adolescents represented approximately one quarter of refugees and migrants observed at key monitoring locations in Ecuador, pointing to the continued presence of families among populations on the move.

UNHCR protection monitoring in Mexico corroborates this pattern of interrupted and non-linear journeys. Of 711 individuals interviewed between January and June 2026, 86 per cent cited violence and/or persecution as their reason for leaving their country of origin, and 83 per cent said they would face a similar risk if returned – yet only 32 per cent had initially intended Mexico as their destination, against 52 per cent who had originally aimed for the United States. Despite this, 95 per cent of respondents in northern Mexico reported an intention to remain in the country rather than continue onward or return, and 74 per cent had already been in Mexico for more than six months at the time of interview, pointing to prolonged, unplanned settlement rather than transit.²⁵

A similar reassessment of plans in transit is evident further south. UNHCR Mixed Movements Monitoring in Bolivia and Chile recorded 353 interviews between January and June 2026, mostly with Venezuelan and Colombian nationals; 74 per cent of respondents intended to move on to a further country rather than settle or return, and the destination reported at interview frequently differed from the one reported at the outset of the journey – Chile's share of stated destinations fell from 63 per cent to 48 per cent, while Brazil's share rose from 21 to 40 per cent, consistent with in-transit change rather than a fixed origin-to-destination route.²⁶

Protection risks remained significant with refugees and migrants exposed to violence, limited access to humanitarian aid, exploitation, trafficking and environmental hazards.

Movement Trends Spotlight #1

Cuban Flows through LAC

Cuban migration dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean continued to diversify during the first half of 2026, with evidence pointing to a growing concentration of movements and settlement processes in South America. Brazil received more than 17,000 asylum applications from Cuban nationals during the first five months of the year, making it one of the principal destinations in the region. Uruguay also recorded a strongly positive migration balance, suggesting sustained arrivals and longer-term settlement among Cuban migrants. At the same time, countries across Central and northern South America continued to play distinct roles within broader movement corridors. Guatemala and Colombia remained important transit locations for onward travel, while Panama maintained characteristics of both a transit and destination country. These patterns suggest that Cuban mobility is increasingly distributed across a range of routes and migration modalities rather than concentrated along a single northbound flow. Despite these evolving routes, protection risks remain significant. Deaths and disappearances of Cuban migrants continued to be reported along migration corridors during the reporting period, highlighting the persistence of dangerous journeys even as overall transit volumes through traditional routes declined.²⁷

22 OIM Guatemala, Matriz de Seguimiento de Desplazamientos (DTM), Monitoreo de Flujos, junio 2026.

23 IOM Costa Rica, DTM Monitoring Report: Nicaraguan Migration. Northern Border of Costa Rica – Regular and Irregular Migration, Round 8 (March 2026).

24 IOM Ecuador, DTM Monitoreo de Flujos en Fronteras (Tulcán, Huaquillas y Lago Agrio), June 2026.

25 UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, Mixed Movements Monitoring Mexico, January–June 2026. 31 UNHCR, Mixed Movements Monitoring Bolivia and Chile, January–June 2026.

26 UNHCR, 2026.

27 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2026. Cuban Migration Dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean - (January - May 2026). IOM, Panama.

Movement Trends Spotlight #2

Haitian Flows through LAC

During the first half of 2026, Haitian migration in the region increasingly relied on regular pathways. Within South America, Haitian mobility was shaped largely by a family reunification programme linking Haiti and Brazil through charter flights. Since April 2026, more than 2,600 Haitian nationals have arrived in Brazil through these organized channels, primarily to southern and southeastern states. These movements illustrate how family reunification mechanisms are structuring part of contemporary Haitian mobility, distinguishing this route from the predominantly irregular movements observed elsewhere in the region.²⁸

4 VENEZUELAN MIXED MOVEMENTS

As of May 2026, an estimated 6.96 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants were living across Latin America and the Caribbean, making the Venezuelan situation one of the largest displacement contexts globally. Unlike previous years, however, the first half of 2026 was not defined by a major new outflow from Venezuela. Despite political developments in the region, concerns regarding possible population movements following events in Venezuela, and preparedness measures undertaken by governments and humanitarian actors, neighbouring countries did not report a significant increase in arrivals. Instead, **mobility patterns reflected the realities of a mature displacement situation** in which most Venezuelan migrants and refugees were already established elsewhere in the region and movements increasingly occurred within an existing regional population rather than through large-scale new displacement.

This was particularly evident in countries neighbouring Venezuela. In Brazil, population movements across the Venezuela-Brazil border remained relatively stable throughout the reporting period, albeit at lower levels than during the first half of 2025. Despite concerns early in the year regarding the possibility of increased displacement and corresponding preparedness efforts by governments and humanitarian partners, no significant surge in arrivals was recorded at the northern border. Similarly, Colombian authorities reported that the late June earthquakes in Venezuela did not result in immediate substantial cross-border displacement, while mobility trends continued to be shaped by ongoing return-oriented movements and declining transit towards Central America.

Across the region, increasing attention focused on the legal and socioeconomic situation of Venezuelans already residing in host countries. Access to regular status, documentation, and protection mechanisms emerged as recurring concerns. In Argentina, humanitarian and legal assistance organizations reported growing challenges linked to regularization processes and asylum procedures, particularly for individuals facing documentation barriers or limited economic resources. Colombia advanced discussions on the *Permiso Especial de Contingencia* (PEC), while Costa Rica continued to offer the

Temporary Special Category for eligible Venezuelans, providing an alternative pathway for individuals with pending or rejected asylum claims. In Panama, asylum applications lodged by Venezuelans during the first six months of 2026 had already surpassed the total registered during all of 2025, suggesting growing interest in regular stay and protection options as opportunities for onward movement diminished.

Mobility nevertheless remained an important feature of the Venezuelan displacement context. Rather than concentrating on a single route, **movements increasingly reflected relocation within the region, family reunification, documentation-related travel, temporary transit, and return-oriented mobility.** Panama remained one of the clearest examples of this shift. While only 280 northbound irregular crossings were recorded through Darién during the reporting period (all nationalities), more than 4,400 Venezuelans were registered travelling southbound through this country, confirming the continued importance of reverse mobility. Costa Rica similarly reported a sharp decline in northbound transit alongside continuing movements towards South America. In Bolivia, Venezuelans remained among the main populations transiting through the Southern Cone, although nationwide roadblocks during May and June disrupted mobility, stranded migrants, and increased humanitarian needs.

Protection and inclusion challenges remained significant despite lower levels of onward transit. Humanitarian actors across several countries reported needs related to documentation, legal assistance, healthcare, livelihoods, and access to regular status. For those traveling through transit locations, risks included extortion, robbery, exploitation and gender-based violence, while border disruptions and increased migration controls in some countries prompted greater use of informal routes. **Overall, the first half of 2026 highlighted a gradual shift in regional response priorities: from managing large-scale arrivals and transit movements towards supporting the long-term inclusion, protection and regularization of an established Venezuelan population across Latin America and the Caribbean.**

28 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2026. Regional Mobility Trends: Latin America and the Caribbean (January - June 2026). IOM, Panama.

5 ASYLUM TRENDS

Asylum systems across the Americas are under severe strain. The Americas hosts 20.3 million refugees, other forcibly displaced and stateless people, most of them choosing to remain in countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.²⁹ The overall regional backlog has reached 5 million pending asylum cases, which represents a 10 per cent increase from the previous year, and a 60 per cent increase since 2022. The multi-year backlog continues to grow, driven by years of applications outpacing decisions due to capacity constraints and with forced displacement in the Americas persisting at high levels due to political instability, conflict, and violence, predominantly in the main countries of origin of new applicants in 2025: Cuba, Venezuela, Haiti and Nicaragua.

The region hosts 6.5 million asylum seekers and refugees, along with 5 million forcibly displaced individuals benefiting from other protection-oriented alternative legal stay arrangements. In 2025, countries in Latin America received 234,731 new asylum applications: mostly from Cuba (40%), Venezuela (30%) and Nicaragua (10%). United States (911K), Canada (117K), Brazil (75K 519) and Mexico (70K) are the countries with the highest number of asylum applications in 2025 in the Americas, mainly from Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico and Haiti.

The limited access to asylum procedures and alternative forms of stay in the United States have placed **additional pressure on asylum systems**, as individuals in need of international protection are increasingly compelled to seek protection elsewhere. In 2025, Honduras registered a fourfold increase on asylum applications, followed by Paraguay (152%), Uruguay (77%), Ecuador (38%), Colombia (17%) and Brazil (11%), to name a few. The signature and implementation of transfer arrangements, termination of parole programs (CHNV), TPS and the end of CBP One in the US have inevitably impacted asylum systems in countries across the region.

The asylum systems have, however, been able to continue ensuring access and producing decisions. In 2025, the Americas region received more than 1.2M new asylum applications and rendered more than 1M decisions - including

both administrative closures and decisions on the merit. In Latin America, the number of decisions rendered surpassed the number of claims received (234K vs. 284K), indicating a possible short-term easing of backlog growth; however, this progress is undermined by persistently low levels of substantive adjudication, with decisions on the merits accounting for only around 20 per cent—the lowest rate on record.

Venezuela continued to dominate pending caseloads across countries of asylum in 2025 (especially Peru, Brazil and Mexico) with more than 645K pending applications in Latin America. Despite the slight decrease (5%) in asylum applications in 2025 compared to 2024, applications from Venezuelan nationals represent more than 30 per cent of all asylum applications received in 2025 in Latin America.

Cuban asylum applicants have emerged as central to the regional asylum dynamics with a rapid and large-scale increase in asylum claims (88% increase in Latin America in a year – from 2024 to 2025), overwhelming processing capacity and revealing major inconsistencies in how countries assess and respond to their international protection needs. As such, Cuba has become the first country of asylum in Latin America with asylum applications representing 40 per cent of the total of new applications received in 2025, and with 160K pending asylum applications.

Throughout 2025 and 2026, **budget cuts have had a profound impact on UNHCR and its partners' ability to continue supporting asylum systems** in Latin America and the Caribbean, affecting both operational capacity and the quality of the protection provided to asylum seekers and refugees. The most significant effects have been observed in three key areas: human resources, territorial presence and technical infrastructure. The reduction in specialized personnel has limited the ability to conduct interviews, issue decisions, and provide legal assistance. The downsizing of institutional presence in key areas has made access to the asylum system more difficult, while the suspension of key projects, such as digitalization, has hindered progress in efficiency and data analysis.

6 RETURN DYNAMICS: FORCED, ASSISTED, AND SPONTANEOUS RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Return dynamics continue as an increasingly prominent feature of mobility across the Americas during the first half of 2026. Latest developments suggest a continuing shift towards increasingly diverse forms of return, including forced removals, assisted returns, and spontaneous return movements. Return is often not the end of the journey but part of broader mobility trajectories, with returnees frequently facing challenges related to employment, housing, documentation, recognition of skills, psychosocial wellbeing and social inclusion. As return movements continue to reshape mobility patterns across the Americas, reintegration support is becoming increasingly important not only as a migration management response, but also as a development and social cohesion priority for countries and communities of return.

According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), 356,389 individuals had been removed from the U.S. during 2026 the fiscal year as of July 2026, surpassing the 319,980 removals recorded in 2025 fiscal year and the 271,484 reported in 2024. At the same time, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recorded 60,497 nationwide apprehensions between January and June 2026. Although apprehensions remained well below the levels observed during previous surges, they increased from 7,920 in January to 11,400 in June, peaking at 11,919 in May, suggesting a moderate increase in encounters during the second quarter of 2026 following historically low levels at the beginning of the year.³⁰

²⁹ UNHCR. 2026.

³⁰ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). [Detention Management](https://www.ice.gov/detain/detention-management). Available at: <https://www.ice.gov/detain/detention-management> (accessed 11 August 2026).

Across the region, declining northbound movements through key transit corridors reflected the overarching changes in human mobility dynamics in the Americas. At the same time, southbound and return-oriented mobility became increasingly visible. More than 4,900 refugees and migrants were reported moving southward through Panama by June 2026, while Panamanian authorities facilitated the voluntary return of 134 Venezuelans in May. Panama also recorded 330 deportations and 258 expulsions during the first six months of 2026. Irregular entry was the leading cause, accounting for 359 cases.³¹

Mexico likewise continued to play a significant role in facilitating regional return flows. Between January and May 2026, Mexican authorities registered 5,438 return and deportation events, including 4,370 Central American nationals. Guatemalans accounted for 2,338 return events and Hondurans for 1,715. Mexico also recorded 567 return events involving South American nationals, led by Colombians (355), Ecuadorians (91), Venezuelans (49) and Peruvians (25). These figures illustrate the continued importance of return mechanisms affecting both traditional and emerging migration corridors across the region.³²

Deportations to Haiti also remained substantial throughout the reporting period. More than 140,000 deportations and returns were recorded between January and June 2026, primarily

from the Dominican Republic, highlighting the persistence of large-scale movements and the significant reintegration and humanitarian pressures facing receiving communities.³³ In Chile, authorities increasingly highlighted strengthened return and deportation policies and enhanced border management measures as key components of broader migration governance strategies, reflecting a growing regional focus on return and deportation as a policy response to mixed migration movements.³⁴

Regional return dynamics were also influenced by U.S.-led arrangements for the removal of certain third-country nationals to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, which became an increasingly visible topic in migration and protection discussions across the region.

Alongside deportations, removals and spontaneous return movements, assisted voluntary return programmes such as IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return continued to facilitate returns for migrants who chose to return but lacked the means to do so independently. The continued use of these mechanisms alongside growing return and deportation flows highlights the increasingly diverse nature of return dynamics across the Americas and the corresponding need for reintegration support in countries of return.

Movement Trends Spotlight #3

Forced returns to Central America

Forced return dynamics in Central America are changing. According to available data, the profile of those returning has shifted toward refugees and migrants with deeper ties to the United States, including many who spent years abroad and now face the challenge of rebuilding livelihoods, family connections and community ties after return. Research conducted by IOM and the Migration Policy Institute in Guatemala suggests that economic reintegration remains the central concern for most returnees. Many arrive with work experience acquired abroad, particularly in construction, services and skilled trades, and express strong interest in formal employment, entrepreneurship and certification of skills gained overseas. Yet significant obstacles persist. Returnees frequently report outstanding migration-related debt, loss of assets, limited awareness of available support programmes, and difficulties transferring experience obtained in the United States into employment opportunities in Guatemala. Employers, meanwhile, often require formal credentials that do not reflect migrants' practical experience. Additionally, a growing share of returnees originates from the Western Highlands and Indigenous communities, increasing pressure on areas that are already highly dependent on remittances and where formal employment opportunities remain limited. The findings suggest that successful reintegration will depend not only on reception assistance, but also on longer-term access to employment, skills recognition, local economic opportunities, and community-based support. As enforcement patterns continue to evolve, return is increasingly becoming a development, labour-market and social-cohesion issue rather than solely a migration-management challenge.³⁵

7 MISSING MIGRANTS IN THE AMERICAS

Migrants continue to face significant protection risks along migration routes across LAC. As migration dynamics evolve and movements increasingly occur in multiple directions across the region, migrants are using remote routes, including desert crossings, dense jungle corridors and maritime

pathways. Since 2014, more than 11,500 migrants have died or disappeared along migration routes in the Americas.³⁶ The actual number is likely higher due to persistent gaps in reporting and documentation, particularly in remote border regions, at sea and in difficult-to-access transit corridors.

31 Servicio Nacional de Migración de Panamá (SNM). 2026. [Deportados y expulsados 2026](#). Available at: [Deportados y expulsados 2026 \(PDF\)](#) (accessed 7 August 2026).

32 Secretaría de Gobernación (SEGOB), Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas (UPMRIP). 2026. [Cuadro 3.2.5. Eventos de presentación ante la autoridad migratoria](#), 2026. (accessed 11 August 2026).

33 Office National de la Migration (ONM) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). [Statistiques des personnes retournées de force en Haïti depuis 2021](#). Power BI dashboard. Available at: [Forced Returns to Haiti Statistics Dashboard](#) (last updated 10 August 2026; accessed 11 August 2026).

34 Servicio Nacional de Migraciones de Chile. 2025. [Alza histórica en deportaciones y éxito del Plan Escudo Fronterizo](#). (accessed 11 August 2026).

35 IOM and MPI, [Rebuilding Lives in Guatemala: Understanding Returnee Profiles and Reintegration Challenges](#) (June 2026).

36 IOM. [Missing Migrants Project](#). 2026.

During the first half of 2026, 113 migrant deaths were recorded across migration routes in the Americas. Drowning, exposure to harsh environmental conditions and lack of access to food, water or shelter, and vehicle accidents linked to hazardous transportation methods were the leading causes of death. Together, these patterns point to the continued reliance on dangerous routes and transport methods across the region.

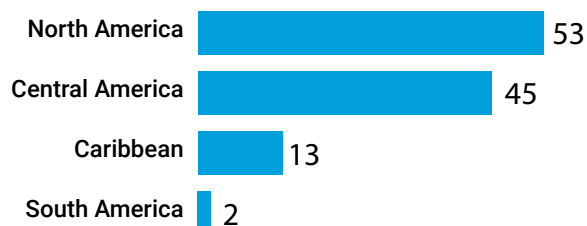
The deadliest route during the reporting period remained the U.S.-Mexico border, where 69 migrant fatalities were recorded. Deaths occurred along the Rio Bravo and in remote sections of the Sonoran Desert and Arizona, where extreme temperatures, difficult terrain and the remoteness of crossing areas continue to contribute to migrant deaths.

Maritime routes in the Caribbean also remained hazardous. Fatal incidents were recorded on sea crossings between Caribbean islands and towards Central America, underscoring the risks associated with irregular maritime movements, including overcrowded or unsafe vessels and the possibility of disappearance at sea.

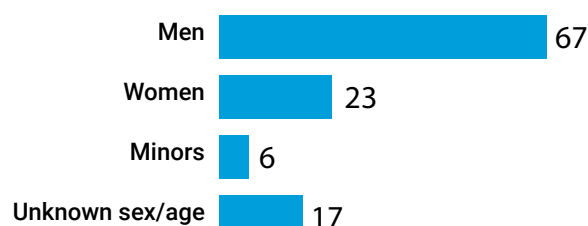
Although movements through the Darién have declined compared with previous years, the route continued to be used during the first half of 2026, and fatalities were recorded. Difficult terrain, environmental hazards and the limited availability of assistance continue to place migrants at risk along this crossing.

These patterns suggest that, despite shifts in migration routes and volumes, migrants continue to face serious risks across land and maritime corridors throughout the Americas. Strengthening monitoring, search-and-rescue efforts and information-sharing mechanisms remains critical to better understand and respond to these risks.

Recorded migrant fatalities during transit in the Americas, January-June 2026



Fatalities recorded by sex and age in the Americas, January-June 2026



Leading causes of death, January-June 2026



Scope and coverage

This report draws on a range of governmental, inter-agency and operational data sources to analyse mobility trends across Latin America and the Caribbean during the first half of 2026. It covers mixed migration movements of all nationalities, including regular and irregular migration, returns, asylum movements, with special attention to protection risks experienced by migrants in route. The analysis incorporates evidence from IBC partners, R4V National and Sub-Regional Platforms, national authorities, and mobility monitoring systems. Coverage varies by country and source; the report highlights the most significant regional developments and emerging trends rather than providing exhaustive country reporting.