

# Biden Administration's Cuba Policy Changes

Updated August 11, 2022

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

Although the changes have involved easing some restrictions on travel and remittances, including [amendments](#) to the Cuban Assets Control Regulations ([CACR; 31 C.F.R. 515](#)), the United States maintains [comprehensive economic sanctions](#) on Cuba, including restrictions on transactions with entities on a “[Cuba Restricted List](#)” that are controlled by the Cuban military, intelligence, or security services. Administration officials assert that [human rights](#) issues will remain at the center of U.S. policy toward Cuba. In the aftermath of the Cuban government's harsh response to government-wide protests in July 2021, the Administration imposed several rounds of targeted [financial sanctions](#) and [visa restrictions](#) on Cuban officials found to be responsible for the repression.

## Family Reunification

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

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IN11937

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

## Expansion of Authorized Travel

On June 1, 2022, the Department of Transportation, acting on a request from the State Department, revoked restrictions on scheduled and charter flights to Cuban locations beyond Havana imposed by the Trump Administration in 2019 and 2020.

On June 9, 2022, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) amended the CACR authorizing travel under general licenses (meaning travelers would not have to apply to Treasury for authorization) for two types of travel that were restricted under the Trump Administration. OFAC reauthorized people-to-people educational travel for group travel at 31 C.F.R. 515.565(b) (individual people-to-people travel remains unauthorized) and reinstated a general license authorizing attendance at, or organization of, professional meetings or conferences in Cuba at 31 C.F.R. 515.564(a)(2).

## Eased Restrictions on Remittances

The Administration eased some restrictions on sending cash remittances to Cuba that the previous Administration tightened in 2019. On June 9, 2022, OFAC amended the CACR at 31 C.F.R. 515.570 to remove previous limitations of \$1,000 per quarter in family remittances that could be sent to any one Cuban national. OFAC also reauthorized donative or nonfamily remittances, with the goal of supporting independent Cuban entrepreneurs.

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

## Support for Cuba's Private Sector

The Administration announced it would increase support for independent Cuban entrepreneurs by authorizing greater access to U.S. internet services, applications, and e-commerce platforms and expanding access to microfinance and training. U.S. officials maintained they would explore options for electronic payments and for U.S. business activities with independent private entrepreneurs.

As with most changes in Cuba policy, reaction to the Administration's announcement was mixed among Members of Congress and policy groups, although the changes do not require congressional action. Some Members who support maximum sanctions pressure criticized the changes as "providing concessions to the brutal Cuban dictatorship." Some specifically opposed authorizing group people-to-people travel, characterizing it as "akin to tourism," or "remain unconvinced" that it will weaken Cuba's oppressive policies. Among those advocating for engagement, some characterized the changes as a "timid but very welcome step," while some applauded the Administration for reversing policies "that only succeeded in harming the Cuban people" and for moving "beyond the failed policy of isolation." Policy groups on both sides of the sanctions/engagement debate expressed support for reinstating the CFRP program to restore a channel for legal migration.

In the aftermath of a recent massive fire (ultimately contained August 9, 2022) at Cuba's main oil-storage facility, some pro-engagement organizations called on the Administration to expedite disaster assistance

and suspend relevant sanctions to facilitate recovery. Amid the disaster, U.S. firefighting experts provided technical advice to Cuban officials and U.S. officials asserted, “[U.S. law authorizes](#) U.S. entities and organizations to provide disaster relief and response in Cuba.”

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

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