

**Factsheet: Family-Based Parole Programs**

Parole is a [tool](https://immigrationforum.org/article/explainer-humanitarian-parole/) that allows specific groups of individuals to enter and temporarily stay in the United States without the use of a visa. The tool has driven recent headlines due to high-profile special parole programs used for [Afghan evacuees](https://immigrationforum.org/article/explainer-humanitarian-parole-and-the-afghan-evacuation/), [Ukrainians](https://immigrationforum.org/article/explainer-uniting-for-ukraine/) fleeing the Russian invasion, and [Venezuelans](https://www.uscis.gov/venezuela) seeking protection from the Maduro regime.

But the Biden administration has also recently overseen the reimplementation of three other parole programs that have received less attention, each of them focused on family reunification in the Western Hemisphere. These family-based parole programs aim to reunite families who were separated in their home countries because of humanitarian crises.

This fact sheet will describe and analyze three currently active family-based parole programs: The **Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program (CFRP),** the **Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program (HFRP),** and the **Central American Minor Refugee/Parole Program (CAM).**

***What are the currently active family-based parole programs?***

CFRP, HFRP, and CAM are the three most prominent currently active family-based parole programs. Though each was discontinued under the Trump administration, the Biden administration reimplemented CAM in 2021 and announced planned resumptions of CFRP and HFRP in 2022. Not included here is the work of the [Family Reunification Task Force](https://www.dhs.gov/family-reunification-task-force), which has been tasked with reuniting families unjustly separated at the border under the Trump administration and has also at times used parole to do so.

**Cuban Family Reunification Parole Program**

The [CFRP](https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-parole/the-cuban-family-reunification-parole-program) was [established](https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/uscis-resumes-cuban-family-reunification-parole-program-operations) in 2007 for the purpose of assisting family members of Cuban-born American citizens and green card holders attempting to flee the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Cuba. The CFRP was formed in part due to the ineffectiveness of the pre-existing [Special Cuban Migration Program](https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/wha/cuba/migration.html), also known as the “Cuban Lottery.” After several waves of Cuban migrants attempting to flee oppression and economic depression in Cuba, in 1994 the U.S. committed to accept a [minimum](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2007/11/21/E7-22679/cuban-family-reunification-parole-program) of 20,000 Cuban immigrants each year in exchange for the Cuban government’s promise to discourage unsafe departures. The Cuban Lottery — which was open to all adult Cubans, regardless of their eligibility for other immigration pathways to the U.S. — was intended to follow through on this commitment, but it was not effective in resettling 20,000 Cubans each year. Thus, in 2007, the CFRP was enacted as a corollary to the 1994 agreement and to create a more effective and efficient way to help reach the annual quota.

**Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program**

The [HFRP](https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-parole/the-haitian-family-reunification-parole-hfrp-program) was created in 2014 for the benefit of family members of Haitian-born US Citizens and green card holders. This program was primarily created as a response to a number of economic and social [crises](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/haiti) that dealt significant and lasting damage to Haiti’s infrastructure and economy, including the magnitude 7.0 earthquake in 2010 and of Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The HFRP was created to establish an additional humanitarian pathway for Haitian migrants with ties to the U.S.

**Central American Minors Program**

Finally, the [CAM](https://www.uscis.gov/CAM) started in 2014 in order to provide children stranded in dangerous parts of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras an opportunity to be admitted into the U.S. either as refugees with paths to citizenship or under temporary parole protections. The program was implemented in the midst of then-record levels of unaccompanied children arriving at the Southwest border, many of them from these three “northern triangle” countries. Many of the children were arriving at the border because they had family members of potential sponsors waiting for them in the U.S., and CAM was designed to provide a safe, orderly pathway to some of these children.

***Who is eligible to apply to each program?***

**CFRP** **Program**

This program allows for eligible U.S. citizens and green card holders to “petition” for parole on behalf of family members still in Cuba, identified as “beneficiaries.” For a petitioner to become eligible for the program, her or she must:

* Have an approved [family-based green card application](https://www.uscis.gov/i-130) for a Cuban family member.
* Lack any available immigrant visa for that family member.
* Have received an invitation from DOS’s National Visa Center (NVC) to participate.

Additionally, the principal beneficiary must be a Cuban National living in Cuba. Immediate relatives (spouses, unmarried children under 21, or parents over 21) are not eligible for the program because they are able to directly apply for immigrant visas. If a petitioner believes he or she is eligible for the program, he or she must first contact the NVC via public inquiry and await its response before submitting the application.

**HFRP** **Program**

This program works in largely the same capacity as the CFRP. Specifically, it enables U.S. citizens and green card holders to petition for Haitian family members still in their home country. The requirements for a petitioner are nearly identical:

* Petitioner must have filed a family-based green card application, but for a Haitian family member.
* There is no available immigrant visa.
* Petitioner must have received an invitation to participate from NVC.

Further, the principal beneficiary must be a Haitian national living in Haiti, and the same NVC invitation inquiry and reception is required to apply. However, this program contains a few more limitations than CFRP as to the eligibility of beneficiaries. Immediate relatives are still barred, but the HFRP also bars any individual unable to attend in-person interviews in Haiti, application beneficiaries approved after December 18, 2014, and beneficiaries of approved applications whose petitioners applied without an NVC invitation.

**CAM** **Program**

The Central American Minor program works in a much different way than the other two family-based parole programs. Primarily, this program enables lawfully present, qualifying parents or legal guardians to request access for their qualified children to apply and receive either refugee status or, if ineligible, a (typically) 3-year parole status. For a parent or legal guardian to qualify, he or she must:

* Be at least 18 years old
* Reside in the United States as either a U.S. citizen, green card holder, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holder, minimum 1-year parolee, or under Deferred Enforced Departure, withholding of removal, or a pending asylum/U-visa filed prior to May 15, 2021.

For a child to qualify, he or she must, at the time of filing, be the genetic, step, or legally adopted child of the qualifying parent; unmarried; under 21 years old; and physically located in and a national of El Salvador Guatemala, or Honduras. CAM also provides for certain eligible family members to be included in the child’s application. This includes the child’s unmarried children (if any), or a parent if they meet certain requirements listed by [USCIS](https://www.uscis.gov/CAM). To qualify for refugee status under the CAM, the qualifying child and eligible family members must establish an individual refugee claim. Then, if this claim is rejected, USCIS will move to parole.

***Why were CFRP, HFRP, and CAM discontinued and when did they return?***

**CFRP** **Program**

DHS suspended CFRP in 2018 after the closure of the U.S. embassy in Cuba for undisclosed security reasons. As conditions in the country worsened, more and more Cubans began making the journey to the U.S.-Mexico border to attempt to apply for protections there. In May 2022, the U.S. [reopened its consulate](https://www.voanews.com/a/us-begins-issuing-first-visas-in-cuba-in-more-than-4-years-/6555536.html) in Cuba and began issuing visas for the first time in four years. Also in May 2022, USCIS [announced](https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-parole/the-cuban-family-reunification-parole-program#:~:text=In%20May%202022%2C%20the%20United,instructions%20for%20the%20beneficiary%20interview.) the resumption of CFRP. Shortly after that announcement, in August 2022, USCIS began sending [interview notices](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/web-content/SampleCFRPProgamInformationLetter.pdf) to petitioners with pending cases to begin the renewed process.

**HFRP** **Program**

In August 2019, the Trump administration [announced](https://www.uscis.gov/archive/uscis-to-end-certain-categorical-parole-programs) its intention to terminate HFRP in the interest of “preserv[ing] the integrity of our immigration system” and not “encourag[ing] aliens to unlawfully enter the United States.” Following a political crisis that involved the assassination of then-president, Jovenel Moïse, Haiti has descended into an unprecedented level of violence and civil unrest. In June 2022, the Biden administration [announced](https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/06/09/fact-sheet-dhs-resumes-cuban-family-reunification-parole-cfrp-program-and-haitian) that they intended to resume HFRP operations towards the end of 2022. The announcement and commitment arose out of the Summit of the Americas that also took place in June.

**CAM Program**

 In August 2017, President Trump [terminated](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-administration-ends-obama-era-protection-program-for-central-american-minors/2017/08/16/8101507e-82b6-11e7-ab27-1a21a8e006ab_story.html) CAM and rescinded all parole determinations for any child who had not yet entered the United States. After a [class action suit](https://refugeerights.org/news-resources/court-finds-mass-rescission-of-cam-parole-program-unlawfulc) filed against the Trump administration in 2018 and its following decision and settlement agreements, DHS was permitted to continue processing the few hundred parole determinations that had been rescinded. In March 2021, the Biden administration [announced](https://www.state.gov/restarting-the-central-american-minors-program/) that it intended to to reopen CAM in two phases, first by finalizing processing of applications put on hold when the program was suddenly terminated, and second by opening the program to new applicants. upon the program’s prior termination. The reinstatement of CAM occurred during a period of record levels of unaccompanied children arriving at the border.

***How many families have been reunited in the U.S. as a result of these programs?***

The relevant agencies involved in overseeing the programs do not provide any specific, up-to-date statistics related to how many individuals have entered under each of the CFRP, HFRP, and CAM prior to their terminations or after their resumptions. In fact, there is no public data available concerning the CFRP.

Regarding HFRP, USCIS most recently released a [stat sheet](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/HFRP_performancedata_fy2020_qtr1.pdf) indicating that as of December 31, 2019, NVC sent out 12,534 invitations that covered 23,993 beneficiaries. From those invitations, 10,534 applications were accepted, and 8,313 were approved. Though this data does not provide numbers for the number of people who entered the U.S., it is reasonable to assume the vast majority of the 23,993 beneficiaries were permitted to enter via the HFRP.

Concerning CAM, limited available data described in a [2021 MPI report](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/cam-program-2021-english_final.pdf) notes that as of March 2017, USCIS had received about 12,100 CAM applications and had made final decisions for 6,300 of them. Of that portion, 70% were granted parole and 29% were granted refugee status. By the program’s termination in August 2017, 1,627 applicants had resettled as refugees, and 1,465 were reunited with their families via parole. According to a September 2022 [IRAP report](https://refugeerights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/CAM-Report-FINAL-v3.pdf), only a few hundred families have been able to file CAM applications since the program reopened to new applicants in 2021, and it appears that zero of these new applicants have thus far been reunited with their parents in the U.S.

***What can be done to improve family-based parole programs?***

The three currently active parole programs are designed to reunite families quickly and safely in the U.S., improving upon slow and backlogged family visa processes in contexts where individuals may otherwise be subject to danger and persecution and/or be forced to flee on their own to the border to seek asylum. There are several ways these programs can be improved to follow through on these goals.

1. **Ensuring eligibility and access**

HFRP and CAM would particularly benefit from targeted efforts to increase access to the programs. HFRP is the most restrictive of the three programs, and the requirement for an in-person interview in Haiti may seriously delay reimplementation. CAM is designed to protect the most vulnerable children in the region — those who otherwise intend migrate to the border unaccompanied — but the program does not adequately ensure safety to children who are in the midst of their applications. DHS should consider broadening eligibility for HFRP and solutions to ensure safety and access for CAM applicants.

1. **Creating more efficient processing**

All three programs have suffered backlogs and bottlenecks that render them less effective, which can leave some recipients in serious danger or prevent them from accessing the program in the first place. In some cases, these backlogs are due to broader resource constraints at USCIS that have causes [similar delays](https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/reducing-processing-backlogs) across numerous other programs. However, the [speed and efficacy](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukrainian-refugees-us-sponsorship-45000-americans-apply/) of the recent Uniting for Ukraine parole program suggests the administration and the agency are capable of much more efficient processing.

1. **Ensuring paths beyond parole**

Parole provides only temporary protections in the U.S. For certain individuals — particularly parolees in the CAM program — the administration should provide legal counsel and resources to assist with alternative paths to status once already in the U.S. The U.S. should also not rely exclusively on parole programs to provide pathways to protection for individuals at risk in the region. Building robust refugee resettlement infrastructure is also critical as the Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is a process that recognizes some migrants will need additional support and a path to permanent status upon arrival in the U.S.

1. **Providing more transparency**

The Biden administration has provided exceedingly little public information about the status or efficacy of any of the three family-based parole programs. Even data on how many people have applied or entered the U.S. via the programs is scarce, something the administration [regularly](https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/) [reports](https://www.axios.com/2022/07/29/ukraine-refugees-united-states-numbers) for other humanitarian pathways. The administration should report out monthly metrics on progress reimplementing the three programs.

***Conclusion***

Parole is an important tool to provide flexible and timely protection to humanitarian migrants and others with ties to the U.S. However, it comes with drawbacks: Parolees do not receive the same benefits or support as other humanitarian entrants and their protections are only temporary.

Programs designed to reunite families are a particularly effective use of parole, as recipients have family members that can support them when they arrive in the U.S. and in many cases there is a clear path to more permanent status via family-based immigration visas.

The Cuban Family Reunification Parole program, the Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program, and the Central American Minors program each play a critical role in reuniting families at risk and providing a safe, orderly path to protection in the U.S. But as the Biden administration continues reimplementation of each program, it must work to address lingering concerns related to efficiency, transparency, and access.