



Biden to offer 22K additional guest worker visas, 6K targeted toward Northern Triangle

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The Biden administration plans to offer 22,000 extra guest worker visas for the rest of the year, setting aside 6,000 for countries where the president has pledged to address the surge of migration to the U.S.

If finalized, the rule forwarded by the Department of Homeland Security is one of the few avenues to temporarily increase the number of legal pathways for those seeking to come to the U.S. without getting Congressional approval.

The number is a substantial increase in the number of H-2B visas. These visas otherwise cap at 66,000 per year, and allow people to enter the U.S. for seasonal work in industries such as tourism and landscaping.

Those from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, collectively called the Northern Triangle, would be able to apply for the 6,000 visas specially set aside.

“The H-2B program is designed to help U.S. employers fill temporary seasonal jobs, while safeguarding the livelihoods of American workers,” Secretary of Homeland Security [Alejandro Mayorkas](#) said in a release announcing the proposal.

“This supplemental increase also demonstrates DHS’s commitment to expanding lawful pathways for opportunity in the United States to individuals from the Northern Triangle.”

Nearly 85,000 of the 172,000 southwest border encounters in March were between U.S. Border Patrol and migrants from the Northern Triangle countries, compared to 62,000 with those from Mexico.

[President Biden](#) has pledged to spend \$4 billion in the Northern Triangle over the course of his administration on efforts to boost the region’s economy and address violence and corruption.

Though Tuesday’s move is designed to increase legal pathways for those interested in temporarily working in the U.S., some are concerned major visa processing delays at the State Department — an issue exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic — will limit the impact of the increased cap.

“It’s certainly a welcome development and something that could provide a great deal of meaningful assistance to businesses and people in the Northern Triangle,” said Jorge Loweree, policy director at the American Immigration Council.

“But its impact remains unclear due to the fact that visa processing abroad still remains sparse following disruption from Covid-19 pandemic and the Department of State has not outlined a clear plan for moving forward.”

Research released earlier this month by the Cato Institute found some 76 percent of consulates remain partially closed to visa processing, while a review of State Department data shows this February employees processed a just under a third of the number of visas processed the same time last year.