



League of Women Voters of Jefferson County Colorado
Member Meeting Information

May 2024

THE PERMANENT CRISIS - IMMIGRATION/MIGRATION 2024

LWVUS Position on Immigration (April 2008)

The League of Women Voters believes that immigration policies should promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic business and employment needs of the United States; be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises; and provide for student visas. All persons should receive fair treatment under the law. In transition to a reformed system, League supports provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.

Migration and Causes

Migration is not new! It has been happening for millennia. DNA studies show us that people have always been on the move from one country or region to another by choice, instinct, or plan.

Current Motivations:

- * Authoritarian governments.
 - * Targeted or generalized violence committed by organized crime, with governments unable to protect citizens, and sometimes co-opted and unwilling to protect citizens.
 - * Poverty, including food insecurity and lack of basic educational opportunities.
 - * Systematic racial or ethnic discrimination.
 - * Gender-based violence.
 - * Storms, droughts, crop failures, rising sea levels, and other natural disasters, increasingly caused by climate change.
 - * An inability to integrate and prosper after migrating elsewhere in the region.
- (Isacson, December 2023)

The Global Picture

In 2020 there were about 281 million international migrants (people living in a country other than their country of birth). That number has only grown. (Localize, March 2023)

In 2020, 55 million people were displaced because of conflict, violence or disasters. (Natarajan, December 2022)

With more international migrants than any other nation, 50.6 million or 15.1% of the population makes the United States the No.1 destination. **(Id.)

Developmentally mid-ranked countries can be significant source, transit and destination countries simultaneously. Nationals from countries with high levels of human development travel visa-free to around 85% of all countries. Regular migration pathways are problematic for citizens from countries with very low levels of human

development and restrictive visa availability. Irregular pathways are likely to be the most realistic option open to potential migrants from these countries. (UN Migration, 2022)

Colorado Demographics

Colorado resident population as of July 2021 was 5,814,707, representing growth of 30,000 more than the state's July 2020 population. The increase was due to fewer deaths than births plus 15,000 net migration. Through 2025 the forecast is for the natural increase to remain between 15,000 and 20,000 and net migration to be between 30,000 to 40,000 depending on job growth and international migration policy. (State Demography Summit, November 2023)

In Colorado, 38 of 64 counties (59%) experienced a natural decrease. (Jefferson County's population declined by just 2 people). Aging, COVID deaths and fewer births contributed to the decline. (Id.)

Southern Border Crisis

United States immigration agents intercepted record numbers of migrants attempting to cross the border illegally in December 2023, more than any month in over 20 years. Migrants from Central and South America, the Caribbean, Cuba, Haiti, and China are fueling those numbers. The total number dropped by half in 2024, typical of the colder months.

Both Democrats and Republicans agree something must be done. The House of Representatives has chosen not to support the bipartisan bill the Senate proposed. Texas Governor Greg Abbott's ploy of dropping busloads of immigrants in Democratic cities and calling for National Guard support from Republican states is a way of making the issue seem like an "invasion." This rhetoric serves to "otherize" migrants and plays into white fear about racial diversification of the country. (See Sources)

President Biden has the authority to reinstate the border policies implemented by former President Trump. These include agreements that allow the US to reroute asylum-seekers to third countries and the "Remain in Mexico" program. Federal law allows officials to return asylum seekers to Mexico, but does not require it. US law also allows the president, through the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security, to place limits on asylum. Mr. Biden has already done that. The Biden administration enacted a regulation that presumes migrants are ineligible for asylum if they enter outside of the legal pathways and have passed through a third country. (Id.)

The reality is that the administration has not been able to implement the asylum restriction at scale because of the lack of officers, detention facilities and money. The president does not have the legal authority to unilaterally suspend U.S. asylum law which grants migrants the right to request humanitarian refuge even when they cross illegally. Only the Congress can change the U.S. asylum law. (Id.)

What Happened to Migrants who Crossed the Southern Border in 2023?

* 3.1 million attempted crossings at the US southern border in 2023.

- * 2.5 million "encounters" by U. S. Customs and Border Protection, 83% between designated ports of entry in dangerous, remote locations.
 - * 600,000 entered undetected - (estimate)
 - * 1.9 million were processed under Title 8 immigration law (the process for handling migrants)
 - * 185,000 were expedited removals because of a criminal record or prior border apprehension.
 - * 180,000 were voluntary departures.
 - * 1.5 million new immigration court cases were added in 2023.
 - * 300,000 were granted humanitarian parole, which allows some to temporarily live in the US, such as Venezuelans and Nicaraguans.
 - * 2,700 were granted relief in the form of asylum and other paths toward permanent residency.
 - * 1.8 million are in ongoing proceedings or legal limbo.
 - * 870,000 experienced deportation orders, expulsion totals.
- (Rattner, January 2024)

Mexico's Immigrant Crackdown

On Dec. 21, 2023, President Biden called Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and asked for help. The number of migrants crossing into the US – about 10,000 people per day – had reached the highest level of Biden's presidency. The next week, a delegation led by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, arrived in Mexico for talks. Partly in response, Mexico soon began to enforce its own immigration laws more strictly, making it harder for migrants from other countries to use Mexico as a route to the US. Lopez Obrador's government has increased the deportation of migrants to their home countries and disrupted bus networks run by cartels that funnel migrants from other countries toward the U.S. border. (Leonhardt, February 2024)

Consequently, migration flows at the U.S./Mexico border fell more than 50% in early January. (U.S. Customs and Border Protection data). Numbers have risen somewhat, but are still below December levels. Stricter enforcement of immigration laws does tend to reduce migration flows. In the short term, a less porous border allows fewer people to enter the US. Longer term, a more secure border changes the calculation for people contemplating a harrowing journey toward the US. (Id.)

In recent months, Biden has begun to change his initial approach as his administration appears to be on the verge of doing the same thing it recently urged Mexico to do: enforce existing immigration laws more tightly. (Id.)

Climate Change and Migration

The impacts of climate change are never the sole cause of human movements. (Foresight 2011). Climate change interacts with and exacerbates the drivers of human movement, which is why it is sometimes referred to as a "threat multiplier." (UN Security Council 2019).

Since climate refugees are not recognized by international law, no protections are accorded to them, and they may even be sent back to their homelands. Often, they are the most vulnerable. (Id.)

Climate change affects migration from Central America in two major ways: the increased intensity of storms and changes in precipitation patterns that have negatively affected crop production. The [International Red Cross](#) estimates that disasters displaced at least 1.5 million Central Americans in 2020.

Farmers face many problems when moving from rural to urban areas: differences in culture and a lack of relevant skills; they often lack personal connections to help them get other jobs. These problems are compounded when they move to a foreign country.

Although a long-term prospect, the United States should lead in regional development assistance that addresses: governmental corruption, economic instability caused by climate change and famine, and personal safety from crime and violence. In the absence of improving futures in these countries, migrants will continue to be susceptible to the promises of smugglers and the dreams of previous migrants of life in the north.

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) measures the ecological threat with projections up to 2050, which show that we may have roughly [1.2 billion people displaced](#) by climate change should the same rate of extreme weather events remain constant.

Why Can't We Stop Unauthorized Immigration?

"Unauthorized immigration, remains a boon for countless U.S. employers and a reasonable bet for migrants who seek a better life." (Valdes, October 2023)

America's economy has always relied upon a mass of disempowered foreign laborers; enslaved Africans picking cotton, Chinese building railroads, Irish digging coal, Italians sewing garments, or Mexicans harvesting fruit. (Id.)

American consumers benefit every time they find an inexpensive way to get their lawns cut, their bathrooms cleaned, their houses built, their nails done, and their young and old cared for. The prices we pay for these services have been subsidized for generations by transnational immigrants. (Id.)

Illegal immigration is the natural consequence of the conflict between America's thirst for foreign labor and its strict immigration laws. Congress tends to invest heavily in immigration enforcement, but not in the enforcement of labor laws that could dissuade businesses from exploiting unauthorized workers in the first place. (Id.)

Politicians decline to make changes to the immigration problem as incendiary rhetoric about migrants has become a powerful and popular political tool. It is difficult for those politicians to compromise on any issue related to immigration. (Id.)

We can turn them away. We can round them up and send them back to terrible circumstances. They will try again. No signs or fences will stop them. We need these immigrants to enable economic growth! to populate our scientific research labs! and yes, to harvest our crops!

The Cost of Inaction on Immigration

According to a *New York Times* editorial, (October 2023), more than a million people have entered the United States through the southern border. Most of these people claim asylum, which allows them to be in the country legally but leaves them in limbo because it can be a lengthy process to obtain legal permission to work. Congress has failed to provide the necessary resources for those who are eligible. The Biden administration has been slow in resettling refugees and has offered no sustainable, long-term solution to the challenge of illegal immigration. The White House is limited in the actions it can take; Mr. Biden may have exhausted what he can do through his executive authority. Until Congress decides to take meaningful action, America will continue to pay a price.

This is Not the Border Situation the U.S. Government Prepared For.

Until about 2013 or 2014, most migrants apprehended at the US/Mexico border were single adults, usually Mexican. In October 2023, half of all migrants at the border were traveling as families or as unaccompanied children. Just 26% were from Mexico. A strong majority were seeking to turn themselves in to U.S. authorities and petition for protection in the United States. (Isacson, December 2023)

One reason this seems chaotic is that the U.S. border and immigration apparatus was not set up to handle this profile of migrant. During the 1990s and 2000s and post-September 11, 2001 period, when Border Patrol quintupled in size, demand for asylum was a slim fraction of what it is now. (Id.)

Border Patrol agents are now processing asylum applications, instead of being on the line carrying out law enforcement duties, because Department of Homeland Security (DHS), particularly Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), lack sufficient personnel, like processing coordinators, who can do this. About 1,000 processing coordinators have been hired, but more are needed to free up other agents to do what they were trained to do. (Id.)

The U.S. immigration court system has 659 judges to handle a backlog of nearly 2.2 million cases or 3,277 cases per judge. These courts handed down 71,000 asylum decisions in 2023, but that's nowhere near enough to meet the current need. (Of those decisions, [49 percent](#) were grants of asylum or other protection in the United States. That is 34,000 people who were judged to face imminent threats to their lives or freedom had they been deported by the United States. (Id.)

“Within our fundamentally failed paradigm, the images of people forced to cross between ports of entry will not only be used to fuel more crackdowns on immigrants, but will be used to attack the legitimacy of any government whose approach is not the near-complete elimination of all immigration avenues and attacks on the basic dignity of immigrants.” (fwd.us/immigration)

Fears vs Facts

What makes Congress and many U.S. citizens so reluctant to address immigration issues? One reason is fear, whether real or unfounded.

One fear of immigration is manifested in “The Great Replacement Theory.” It can be defined as immigration policies that welcome non-white immigrants, are part of a plot designed to undermine or replace the political power and culture of white people in Western countries. This could be achieved through non-white immigration and lower birth rates among the white population. A poll in May 2022, found that one in three Americans believe there is an effort to replace U.S. born citizens with immigrants. (PBS News Hour, May 2022)

Fears vs Facts

1. Immigration depresses the wages of native workers.

** Most studies for industrialized countries have found no effect on wages, and only modest effects on wage differentials between more and less educated immigrant and native workers.*

** Evidence shows that immigration is likely to boost firm productivity and the wages of native workers by stimulating firm growth and contributing a range of skills and ideas.*

2. Migrants take the jobs of native workers.

** Migrants often complement native workers or accept jobs that natives don't want or can't do.*

** They create new jobs by increasing production, engaging in self-employment, and easing upward job mobility for native workers.*

** The presence of immigrants increases demand and can spur new businesses, creating more jobs for immigrants and natives.*

3. Immigrants are attracted by generous welfare benefits.

** Contrary to the welfare magnet hypothesis, empirical evidence suggests that immigration decisions are not made on the basis of the relative generosity of the receiving nation's social benefits.*

** Evidence in some countries suggests that immigrants exhibit less welfare dependency than natives, despite facing a higher risk of poverty.*

4. Immigration leads to higher levels of crime.

** Most studies find that larger immigrant concentrations in an area have no association with violent crime and, overall, weak effects on property crime.*

** However, immigrant groups that face poor labor market opportunities are more likely to commit property crime. But this is also true of disadvantaged native groups.*

5. Immigrants will be a drain on healthcare resources.

** There is growing evidence that immigrants are more likely than natives to work in risky jobs, as they are more inclined to take on physically intensive tasks.*

** Recent studies show that as immigration rises, native workers are pushed into less demanding jobs.*

**New evidence using longitudinal data from Germany shows that an increase in the share of immigrants living in a local labor market decreases the likelihood that natives will report doctor-assessed disability and, more generally, has a positive impact on native health.*

https://youtu.be/nobd_hmumlo

Immigrants and the U.S. workforce

The share of foreign-born workers in the U.S. labor force reached a record high in 2022. With more Americans aging out of the workforce and labor shortages, immigrants are playing an increasingly crucial role in the labor market.

* The number of foreign-born workers in the US increased to 29.8 million, a jump of about 6%. Native-born workers barely went up by 1% - to 134.5 million.

* A bigger share of the immigrant population is of working age (18 to 64). (Peck, May 2023)

The American Immigration Council's **2023 Map**, showcases the contributions of immigrants in the country, and industry sectors across the economy:

* Immigrants paid over \$500 billion in taxes in 2021.

* 22% of all U.S. entrepreneurs are immigrants. (Id.)

Almost 4% of the American workforce consists of undocumented immigrants, with their total number approaching 10 million. They paid over \$30 billion in taxes in 2021. There are currently an estimated 20,000 undocumented workers in Colorado District 7, 60% of whom are essential workers. (*Forbes*, November 2023)

"By 2040, the United States will have over 6 million fewer working-age people than in 2022," stated Professor Madeline Zavodny. International migrants represented the only source of growth in the U.S. working-age population in 2021 and 2022. (Anderson, August 2023)

Changes to our immigration system are required to facilitate migrant agricultural workers:

* Decrease the time required for immigrants to begin farm work.

* Many immigrant agriculture workers would love to come to the US to work and then go home when not planting or harvesting. However, present H2A and H2B visas (visas that allow nonimmigrants to work in agriculture, H2A, and non-agricultural, H2B, sectors) do not provide for this kind of fluidity.

* Training takes time and ag workers who work with animals are needed year-round. So, there is a need for more temporary work permits and permanent work visas. (FWD.US, December 2023)

"A shrinking working-age population can easily lead to economic stagnation or even falling living standards for a nation," concludes Zavodny. A growing workforce is not going to happen without immigration. (Anderson, August 2023)

The Way Out

Deterrence or Governance

The United States faces an urgent need to adjust to the new, hemisphere-wide and global, migration reality. Responses can broadly be categorized as “deterrence” or “governance.” (Isacson, December 2023)

Option 1: Deterrence. Efforts to deter migrants may push the numbers down for short periods of time. But, there is little the US can do to make the experience at the border more miserable than the conditions migrants are fleeing. (Id.)

Option 2: Border governance with due process. If deterrence doesn’t work, the alternative is to be realistic, giving due process to people who need protection. (Id.)

First. Help other countries integrate people so they don't feel they need to come to the US. (Id.)

Second. Legal pathways are needed for the many migrants who believe that they can only gain protection and support their families in the United States, including: humanitarian parole; modernized new family reunification programs; opening Safe Mobility Offices in several countries which streamline access to lawful pathways to the US and other countries; create pathways for employment, including while awaiting asylum approval. (Id.)

At the border. Adjust our border apparatus to today’s reality of large-scale protection-seeking migration. The United States ratified the Refugee Convention in 1968 and passed the Refugee Act in 1980. The idea was that we would not repeat the horrors of World War II. The 2023 asylum data indicates that only 25% of those seeking protection qualify. (Id.)

What Would a Better System Look Like?

First. Allow more capacity at the border to process protection-seeking migrants. People would be taken to a nearby processing center with trained coordinators. They wouldn't have to consider climbing the wall or crossing the river, resulting in fewer opportunities for migrant smugglers, and fewer dangers of being forced to wait in Mexico. (Id.)

Second. There would be a robust case-management system, operating at a fraction of the cost of detention. DHS then knows where migrants are. At the same time, asylum seekers would have assistance, so that they wouldn't have to face the labyrinth of U.S. asylum law alone. About two-thirds fewer asylum seekers gain asylum or other forms of relief without a lawyer. (Id.)

Third. We would have a well-resourced immigration court system with enough judges or asylum officers and support staff to hear and decide cases, shortening the time for those decisions. (Id.)

Conclusion

Migration and border governance are polarized issues in the United States and around the world. (Isacson, December 2023)

Should migration be deterred?
Is it possible or desirable to shut the border down?
Is asylum a human right? A global standard? (Id.)

Can we agree that a dangerous journey across the Americas to set foot on U.S. soil is not a proper pathway for those seeking protection?
Can we agree that the United States and countries around the world must do far more to manage these migration flows humanely? (Id.)

The only way to move toward solutions is to move forward pragmatically.
How can we manage the current reality at the U.S. border in the most orderly and humane way? Our laws and long-held international standards commit us to do so. (Id.)

The ideas discussed in this paper are not a wild utopian plan for the border. It's just processing, case management, and adjudication. The issue of world-wide migration is not going away. Here in the United States, we hope our Congress can lay the foundation for some rights-respecting, pragmatic, practical and dignified changes like those presented here. (Id.)

Let us work together to help accomplish this goal.

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