

MOST COMMON VISAS IN THE U.S.

WHICH VISA TYPES DOMINATE U.S MIGRATION FLOWS? HOW DO THEY DIFFER FOR MEXICAN WORKERS? WHAT POLICY CHANGES COULD IMPROVE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS?

Most common visas for Mexican workers:

- Family based visas
- Employment based visas (H-1B, H-2A/B, L-1)
- Humanitarian Programs
- Diversity Visa Lottery

FIGURE 2
Total New Lawful Permanent Residents from Mexico and Northern Central America, FY 2014-23

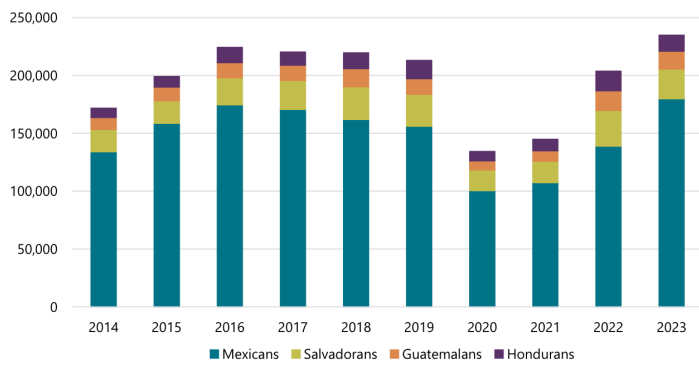


FIGURE 7
Number of TN Visas Issued to Mexicans and TN Share of All Visas Issued to Mexicans, FY 2010-23

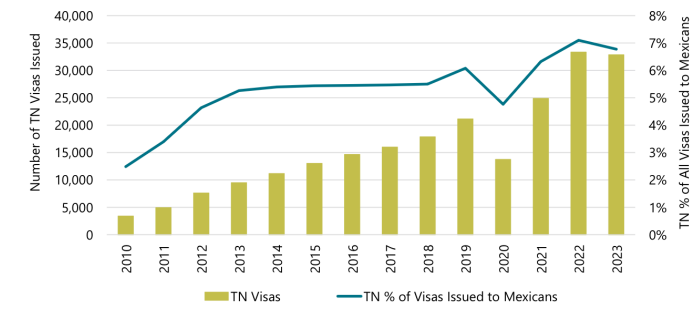
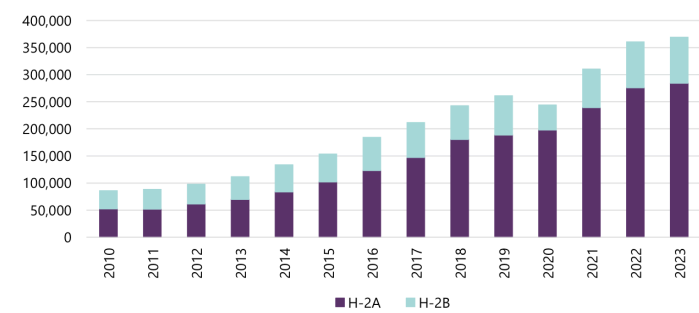


FIGURE 4
Number of H-2A and H-2B Visas Issued to Mexicans, FY 2010-23



CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, although unauthorized migration from Mexico and northern Central America remains higher than legal migration, lawful pathways to the United States have expanded and they continue to grow. However, economic integration between the two countries has not yet been matched by equal mobility in work or education.

Legal channels are increasing, yet they still fall short of reflecting regional ties and labor demands. In my view, expanding and modernizing these pathways is not just about managing migration but it includes aligning policy, strengthening cooperation, and creating safer, and more orderly systems.

Policy Implications & Recommendations

- **Increase H-2A/H-2B caps and streamline employer certification** - can reduce unauthorized flows while meeting U.S labor needs
- **Create a dedicated Mexican worker track within the CMMS** - ensures resources focus on security threats
- **Enhance outreach** - so eligible families and workers can navigate the family based and season visa systems easily



SIX MOST USED VISAS OVERALL

- **H-2A - Seasonal agricultural work:** Fuels America's food supply by bringing in reliable, temporary farmworkers when domestic labor falls short. Gives employers predictable staffing and workers a clear job that's easy to track
- **H-2B - Seasonal non-agricultural work:** Plugs seasonal gaps in industries like hospitality, landscaping, and construction, offering short term but flexible employment while giving workers a legal, paid entry route
- **TN - NAFTA/USMCA high skill professionals:** Allows qualified Mexican professionals enter the U.S for up to three years with minimal paperwork, highlighting the benefits of regional trade agreements
- **H-1B - Specialty occupations:** Attracts global talent in STEM, finance, and other high value sectors. Gives skilled workers a clear pathway to work and transition to permanent residency.
- **F-1 / M-1 - Academic & vocational study:** Student visas for foreign nationals to get legal status to study, work on campus, and gain experience through the Optional Practical Training
- **J-1 - Exchange visitors:** Enables foreign students, scholars, professionals, to come to the U.S for a sponsor approved program. Allows U.S institutions to access specialized expertise and talent without permanent immigration commitments

AUTHORS

ARIEL G. RUIZ SOTO
SENIOR POLICY ANALYST
AT THE MIGRATION POLICY
INSTITUTE (MPI) WORKS
WITH THE U.S
IMMIGRATION POLICY
PROGRAM AND THE LATIN
AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN
INITIATIVE.



ANDREW SELEE
PRESIDENT OF MPI.
HIS RESEARCH
FOCUSES ON
MIGRATION GLOBALLY
WITH A SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON LATIN
AMERICA AND THE
UNITED STATES.

