



## Migration Profile

### CUBA

#### A. Executive Summary

The Republic of Cuba is located in the Antilles, in the Caribbean Sea. Compared to its total population, the country has the lowest migrant stock in the Caribbean area, being instead a mostly emigrant and a transit country<sup>i</sup>.

The economy mainly depends on the services sector, representing more than 76% of the state's GDP<sup>ii</sup>. Most services involve especially social services, commerce, restaurants and hotels<sup>iii</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely harmed the Cuban economy because of border restrictions and closures, drastically reducing tourism revenues<sup>iv</sup>. This economic impasse severely affected the Cuban population by restricting their fuel supplies, limiting foreign investment, reducing the flow of visitors, and impeding remittances (after the commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States)<sup>v</sup>.

Most of the population lives in Havana thanks to the city's economic opportunities and higher wages<sup>vi</sup>. Furthermore, it has the highest emigration rate in the country<sup>vii</sup>. In 2019, the leading destination countries were the United States, Spain, Italy, Canada, and Puerto Rico<sup>viii</sup>. In terms of immigration, however, they mainly came from Spain, the Russian Federation, Haiti, Ukraine, and the United States<sup>ix</sup>. As far as refugees arriving in Cuba, they were especially from Western Sahara, Syria, and Afghanistan<sup>x</sup>.

In 2020 Cuba's GDP amounted to US\$ 107,352,000,000<sup>xi</sup>, experiencing an annual decrease of -10.9%<sup>xii</sup> mainly due to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>xiii</sup>. There is no official data on Cuba's foreign direct investment (FDI), but this was limited during the pandemic<sup>xiv</sup>. In addition, the inflation rate experienced a sharp increase in 2020, representing 16.6% of the GDP, compared to 3.5% in 2019<sup>xv</sup>.

#### B. Country Profile

##### I. Basic Information

The country is an archipelago including Cuba, the largest island in the Antilles, the Isle of Youth, and 4,195 other keys, islets and adjacent islands<sup>xvi</sup>. It extends in an area of 109,880 square kilometres, organised in fifteen provinces whose capital is Havana<sup>xvii</sup>. In 2021 the state had 11,317,498 inhabitants<sup>xviii</sup>.

The official language is Spanish, and the youth literacy rate is 99.98%. In terms of religion, Cuba is a secular state<sup>ix</sup>. Nevertheless, the main religion is Catholicism, although Afro-Cuban religions (syncretism between religions originating from Africa and Catholicism) are widely practised. In the last 20 years, the number of people belonging to other Christian denominations, like Pentecostal, Evangelist, Baptist and Jehovah's Witnesses, has increased, and it is also present a small Jewish community<sup>xx</sup>.

## **II. International and Internal Migration**

Cuba is considered a country of origin and transit for migrants<sup>xxi</sup>, involving predominantly Caribbean migration flows intending to travel to the United States<sup>xxii</sup>.

Cuba has the lowest migrant stock among the Caribbean countries compared to its total population<sup>xxiii</sup>. According to the United Nations, in 2019 there were only 4,886 immigrants in the country, which means 0.1% of the total population<sup>xxiv</sup>. They came mainly from Spain (1,513), the Russian Federation (633), Haiti (290), Ukraine (192), and the United States (166)<sup>xxv</sup>. Among the international migrants, there are more females (57.1%) than males (42.9%); most of them are older than 65 (46.1%), or between the age of 20 and 64 (42.2%)<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Internal migration in Cuba is mainly a rural to urban phenomenon, accounting for 42,909 internal migrants in 2021<sup>xxvii</sup>. They mostly came from the provinces of Holguin, Granma, Santiago de Cuba and Guantanamo and relocated to Havana (42.9% of the total flow). Men often migrate within rural areas, while women prefer moving into urban areas where there are better opportunities for employment and services offered. Moreover, internal migrants usually work in the service sector in a more significant proportion than the non-migrant population<sup>xxviii</sup>.

They mainly migrate because of financial reasons, looking for job opportunities. There are better wages in Havana, but the cost of living is also higher, and migrants also face problems such as prejudice and discrimination<sup>xxix</sup>. In Cuba there is a growing informal sector of unauthorised private activities<sup>xxx</sup>. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted Cuba's economy, exposing migrants to a more vulnerable condition<sup>xxxi</sup>.

## **III. Emigration and Skilled Migration**

Cuba is the leading sending country in the Caribbean<sup>xxxii</sup>. According to United Nations, in 2019, there were 1,654,684 Cuban emigrants<sup>xxxiii</sup>, and their countries of destination were the United States (1,337,371), Spain (141,447), Italy (37,307), Canada (19,010), and Puerto Rico (13,645)<sup>xxxiv</sup>.

During the first seven months of 2022, at least 2,000 Cubans were rejected at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard<sup>xxxv</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected Cuba's economy, especially the tourism industry, increasing emigration to other countries. However, there are multiple restrictions still in effect for Cuban migrants trying to enter the United States, because of US migration policies and admission rates<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Recently, Cuban flows have drastically decreased due to the shift in the overall immigration policy<sup>xxxvii</sup>. US Title 42 on public health has, in fact,

increased the deportation of Cubans to Mexico and accounts for record levels of detentions<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

In 2018, the average age of Cuban immigrants living in the United States was 53 years old, and 75% of them were older than 65. Regarding the education level, 54% of Cuban adults older than 25 had no more than a high school diploma or equivalent, and only 24% had a bachelor's degree or higher. They mainly worked in the civilian labour force (60% of all the Cubans 16 or more years old in the U.S.)<sup>xxxix</sup>.

Cubans face multiple problems abroad. There are severe restrictions on international mobility; the CIDH (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos) has been denouncing the limitations to the right to free movement and residency inside and outside the island for the migrant population<sup>xl xli</sup>. Moreover, there are few easy legal ways to migrate to the United States, resulting in attempts to travel irregularly and exposing migrants to costly and potentially dangerous trips<sup>xlii</sup>.

Smuggling networks charge thousands of dollars for safe passage to the US border. There are multiple scams and dangerous conditions that migrants need to face through these routes<sup>xliii</sup>. In Mexico, they are exposed to kidnappings and extortions, especially in Ciudad Juarez<sup>xliv</sup>.

#### **IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)**

According to UNHCR, 222 refugees and 10 asylum seekers were registered in Cuba in 2020<sup>xlv</sup>. Most of them came from Western Sahara (95 persons), the Syrian Arab Republic (40), Afghanistan (28), Yemen (15), Eritrea (12), Iran (11), Ethiopia (6), and Haiti (5)<sup>xlvi</sup>. Refugees are more male (153 persons) than female (69 persons), and the primary age group is between 18 and 59 years old<sup>xlvii</sup>.

In Cuba, refugees' rights are very limited, and their status allows them to stay in the country only temporarily. In addition, it does not grant them legally recognised identification documents or membership to a specific migratory group giving access to public rights and services<sup>xlviii</sup>.

Refugees do not also have the right to work in Cuba. Therefore, they cannot secure an income during their stay in the country unless they receive assistance from abroad. As far as medical care, the Cruz Roja Cubana will issue for them a card giving them access to health centres where refugees can be treated. Regarding children's access to education, UNHCR provides support to refugees by dealing with the respective authorities<sup>xlix</sup>.

Therefore, refugee integration opportunities are low and many need to be resettled, being for them the only possible durable solution. Resettlement quotas are not available for refugees living in the country for a long time<sup>l</sup>.

Lately, the needs of all refugees and asylum seekers in Cuba have increased due to social and economic difficulties caused by the pandemic, in particular shortages of some basic supplies affecting both the displaced and the local population<sup>li</sup>.

It is important to underscore the fact that the different economic crisis and the deterioration of the standard of living that the country has experienced have been the main factors driving many Cubans to leave the country<sup>lii</sup>. Currently, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's economy has been affected<sup>liii</sup>. In 2020, according to data provided by UNHCR, 8,912 Cuban refugees and 62,234 asylum seekers were registered<sup>liv</sup>, and their main destination places were the United States, Mexico, and Canada<sup>lv</sup>. Likewise, in 2021 194,000 people were displaced within the country due to floods and storms<sup>lvi</sup>.

## **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

Cuba is a tier 3 country in the 2021 US Trafficking in Persons Report<sup>lvii</sup>. Traffickers exploit Cuban citizens in sex trafficking and forced labour in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, Latin America, and the United States. Moreover, they also exploit foreign nationals arriving from Africa and Asia in sex trafficking and forced labour inside the country to pay off travel debts<sup>lviii</sup>.

In 2020, Law enforcement efforts were minimal, and the country reported neither investigating cases, nor prosecuting or convicting any traffickers, compared to the 15 prosecutions in 2019. Moreover, the state did not identify any victims in 2020, compared to the 15 in 2018. As for forced labour, Cuba did not report having any victims' identification procedures. Especially during the pandemic, the courts were shut down to mitigate the virus, negatively impacting police measures to encourage child sex trafficking victims younger than 16 years old to assist them in prosecuting their traffickers<sup>lix</sup>.

Regarding prevention measures, the country developed some awareness campaigns through newspaper articles, television and radio programs about sex trafficking. They also provided workshops and training to government agents to inform them on human trafficking. However, there were no publicly available materials to evaluate the impact of these programs. The country did maintain an office within the Ministry of Tourism to combat sex tourism and address the demand for commercial sex acts<sup>lx</sup>.

The main concerns regarding Cubans living abroad are the issues of sex trafficking and forced labour cases, especially in state-sponsored programs for medical missions. Furthermore, it must be mentioned the increased vulnerability of Cuban economic migrants, including cases of professional baseball players victims of labour and sex trafficking<sup>lxi</sup>.

Lack of proper information, training and resources hinders the elimination of human trafficking. Moreover, the lack of freedom of movement encourages Cubans to use irregular alternative ways to migrate, often exposing them to trafficking<sup>lxii</sup>.

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

The main law regarding migration in Cuba is law no. 1312 (Law on Migration), issued on September 20, 1976<sup>lxiii</sup>, and modified by Decree Law no. 302 on October 11, 2012<sup>lxiv</sup>. This law deals with migrants' rights and obligations in the country, documentation and other requirements, as well as it defines the responsible actors and public policies on migration<sup>lxv</sup>.

Refugees are considered “temporary residents” by the Cuban law on migration<sup>lxvi</sup>. As a matter of fact, there is no specific law concerning refugee status in the country, and they are only allowed to stay provisionally, without any official migratory status enabling them to exercise their rights and have access to public services<sup>lxvii</sup>. Refugees in Cuba, however, are protected under the status provided for them by UNHCR, which is the organism that works to protect their rights in the country<sup>lxviii</sup>. Regarding human trafficking, articles 203, 310, 312 and 316 of the Cuban criminal code penalise acts related to sex and labour trafficking<sup>lxix</sup>.

Internationally, Cuba ratified the 1949 ILO Migration for Employment Convention<sup>lxx</sup> in 1952 and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1972<sup>lxxi</sup>. In 2009 it also ratified the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance<sup>lxxii</sup>. However, Cuba has not yet signed the 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>lxxiii</sup> and its 1967 Protocol<sup>lxxiv</sup>, as well as the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons<sup>lxxv</sup> or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness<sup>lxxvi</sup>.

Furthermore, Cuba ratified the 2007 UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime<sup>lxxvii</sup> and in 2013 it acceded to the Palermo Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons<sup>lxxviii</sup>.

## **VII. Main actors**

### *The State*

As stated by law 1312 on migration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior deal with visa and passport applications and the development of the necessary regulations on migration<sup>lxxix</sup>. Moreover, there are different sub-organisms in the Ministry of Interior, such as the Identification, Immigration and Foreigners Management Centre<sup>lxxx</sup>.

Furthermore, the Council of Ministers is responsible for granting asylum in the country<sup>lxxxi</sup>. Regarding human trafficking, in 2020 child protection and guidance centres for women victims and their families were operating<sup>lxxxii</sup>.

### *International Organisations*

IOM and the United Nations are the two main international agencies dealing with migration in Cuba. IOM assists refugees in resettlement programs in the country, looks after the repatriation process for stranded migrants in Cuba, assists with family reunification cases and helps returnees reintegrate within the country<sup>lxxxiii</sup>. Furthermore, this organisation helps the government in the identification of migrant traffickers and in the protection of victims<sup>lxxxiv</sup>.

UNHCR collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Education, Public Health and Foreign Trade to assist refugees in Cuba<sup>lxxxv</sup>. It is the agency providing the right of international protection against forced return to their countries of origin<sup>lxxxvi</sup>. Moreover, it provides access to education, counselling services and humanitarian assistance to this population<sup>lxxxvii</sup>. This organisation also assists unaccompanied migrant children along their migratory project and inside Cuba<sup>lxxxviii</sup>. Finally, UNHCR is participating in the UN

Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the UN Socio-Economic COVID-19 Response Plan to protect vulnerable groups, including refugees and asylum seekers<sup>lxxxix</sup>.

Furthermore, Cuba is a member of the Caribbean States Association<sup>xc</sup>, the Caribbean Tourism Organisation<sup>xc<sup>i</sup></sup>, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation<sup>xc<sup>ii</sup></sup>, the International Criminal Police Organisation<sup>xc<sup>iii</sup></sup>, and the Latin-American Economic System,<sup>xc<sup>iv</sup></sup> fostering regional cooperation in their respective areas<sup>xc<sup>v</sup></sup>. Likewise, under the EU-Cuba political dialogue and cooperation agreement, the European Union helps Cuba address migration-related issues, such as smuggling of migrants, readmission, integration and prevention of irregular migration<sup>xc<sup>vi</sup></sup>.

### *NGOs and Other Organisations*

Among the leading NGOs present in Cuba, it is worth highlighting the work of the Cruz Roja Cubana, whose activity focuses on disaster response, re-establishing contacts between separated families, ensuring aquatic safety through a lifeguard service and adequate signposting of bathing areas, communication and dissemination of international humanitarian law, and assistance to migrants and refugees<sup>xc<sup>vii</sup></sup>. In this regard, Cruz Roja Cubana works closely with UNHCR in offering medical assistance to the refugee population in the country<sup>xc<sup>viii</sup></sup>. It further supports special programmes for AIDS, care for the elderly, the disabled, and mothers and children<sup>xc<sup>ix</sup></sup>. Moreover, UNICEF's work focuses on helping refugee children and adolescents to integrate into the Cuban educational system<sup>c</sup>.

Also important is the work carried out by Oxfam, which cooperates with research centres and local partner organisations to expand capacities and communities by promoting participation, sustainable food production and commercialisation, gender equality and natural disaster risk reduction. Likewise, in a regional context, this organisation supports South-South exchanges of experiences, multi-country projects and initiatives, as well as the participation of representatives of its Cuban partner organisations in international networks, especially in Central America and the Caribbean<sup>ci</sup>. Oxfam is present in several provinces of Cuba: Havana, Pinar del Río, Artemisa, Mayabeque, Sancti Spiritus, Camagüey, Las Tunas, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. It is also worth mentioning the work of Manos Unidas in the education and health areas<sup>1</sup>.

### *The Catholic Church*

Among the Catholic organisations active in Cuba, the work of the Catholic Relief Services-CRS should be pointed out. This organisation has supported Cuba in emergencies, strengthening its response capacity<sup>2</sup>. With the help of CRS, Caritas Cuba has promoted programmes to improve the welfare of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, people with disabilities and their families, children, adolescents and young people and their families, and people living with HIV/AIDS<sup>3</sup>. In addition, small educational and cultural projects are carried out in three dioceses. All projects are based on awareness-raising and participatory

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> CRS

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

approaches that bring together different actors to build an inclusive society for all Cubans without any distinction<sup>4</sup>.

Likewise, Caritas Cuba's actions focus on discovering and protecting the dignity of the most vulnerable people in society, as mentioned above<sup>5</sup>. Caritas also directly addresses migration issues, by helping migrants to avoid trafficking and abuse. It advocates for the rights of domestic workers (who are often migrants) and for adequate legal protection for all those who move in search of employment and security<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, this organisation cooperates with other agencies that have similar interests in the public field, including Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Spain, Caritas Germany, Kindermissionswerk (PMK) and Misereor<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Caritas cubana

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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