News

Migrants from Venezuela walk along a trail after crossing the Rio Grande in Del Rio, Texas, Ma

Migrants from Venezuela walk along a trail after crossing the Rio Grande in Del Rio, Texas, May 23, 2022. (CNS photo/Marco Bello, Reuters)



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Immigration supporters expressed a mix of gratitude and disappointment with a Biden administration decision on Temporary Protected Status with regard to Venezuelans.

On July 11, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas announced the agency was extending the length of a humanitarian immigration program for another 18 months for Venezuelans currently eligible for TPS benefits but did not extend the benefit to those who arrived in the U.S. after March 8, 2021.

The move left many organizations puzzled.

"Venezuela is a country in turmoil -- in the midst of an unprecedented social and economic collapse that has led to hyperinflation, starvation and the second largest migration crisis in the world," said the Catholic Legal Immigration Network in a July 11 news release.

"TPS was established to protect those who are unable to return to their home country, and the ongoing crisis in Venezuela makes it clear that humanitarian protection for Venezuelans remains imperative," it said.

Anna Gallagher, CLINIC's executive director, said the decision leaves approximately 250,000 Venezuelans in the U.S. without relief.

DHS said approximately 343,000 individuals "are estimated to be eligible for TPS under the existing designation of Venezuela," and said it would continue to work with "international partners to address the challenges of regional migration while ensuring our borders remain secure."

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The move comes as many Venezuelans are leaving a home country experiencing economic and political upheaval. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 6 million have fled the once rich nation. Some have fled to neighboring countries, but many have arrived in the U.S.

"While we welcome the warranted move by DHS to extend TPS status for Venezuela, we know that failure to redesignate will put hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans who fled seeking refuge at risk -- in violation of humanitarian principles as well as what we, as Catholics, believe is our duty to shelter those in need," said Gallagher.

But the move mirrors a direction the administration seems to have been signaling for a while: to demand that immigrants try to make a life in other countries along the way.

On July 12, a bipartisan group of Venezuelan American leaders called on Congress to designate a pathway to U.S. citizenship for Venezuelans who already have TPS, saying it would eliminate the uncertainty many of them feel, wondering every 18 months whether they will be allowed to stay.

Others also pleaded with the Biden administration to reconsider its position on whether to allow new applicants to the program.

"Venezuelans who came to the United States after March 9, 2021, are suffering the same conditions today as those who left Venezuela prior to that date," said Ade Ferro, executive director and co-founder of the Venezuelan-American Caucus. "While we celebrate and are thankful that TPS is being extended until March 2024, we will keep urging Secretary Mayorkas to redesignate Venezuela for TPS."

CLINIC said the decision not to expand the programs is misguided and urged the administration to reconsider.

"We pray for Venezuelans who will be unable to access TPS due to this decision and who will fear being returned to a context of instability and violence," Gallagher said. "We pray that, after further review, the Biden administration considers redesignating TPS for Venezuela immediately to offer protection to our neighbors seeking refuge."