

US Says It Will Expand, Extend Temporary Status for Haitians

Elliot Spagat

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SAN DIEGO — The Biden administration said this week that it would expand temporary legal status for Haitians already living in the United States, determining conditions in the Caribbean nation were too dangerous for their forced return.

The Homeland Security Department said Haitians who were in the United States on Nov. 6 could apply for Temporary Protected Status and those who were granted it last year could stay an additional 18 months until Aug. 3, 2024.

The administration has extended temporary status for several countries and expanded or introduced it for Haiti, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Myanmar, Cameroon and Venezuela, reversing a Trump-era trend to cut back on protections for those already in the United States. TPS, which typically comes with authorization to work, may be extended in increments up to 18 months for countries struck by natural disasters or civil strife.

Haiti has seen increasingly brazen attacks by gangs that have grown more powerful since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. A cholera outbreak sweeping the country is claiming more children's lives amid a surge in malnutrition.

“The conditions in Haiti, including socioeconomic challenges, political instability, and gang violence and crime — aggravated by environmental disaster — compelled the humanitarian relief we are providing today,” said Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Homeland Security didn’t say how many Haitians are expected to benefit from the expansion. An estimated 40,000 were granted TPS in 2011 — extended last month to June 30, 2024 — after a devastating earthquake in Haiti the previous year. Another 3,200 who got TPS last year are covered under Monday’s 18-month extension.

Haitians who enter the United States after Monday’s announcement will be ineligible for TPS, authorities said, though that may do little to discourage some. U.S. authorities detained Haitians more than 6,700 times along the Mexican border in October, a number that has grown every month since September 2021 and made Haitians one of the most common nationalities crossing the border illegally.

“We rejoice and celebrate with our Haitian siblings and stand undeterred in solidarity as we continue to work with and for the Haitian and Haitian-American communities,” said Guerline Jozef, executive director of the Haitian Bridge Alliance.

The Cato Institute, which advocates for more open immigration laws, said last week that nearly 1 million people are eligible for TPS under Biden, more than double the figure under Trump.