

For Haitian migrants, temporary protected status is not enough

## **TPS is a short-term solution to an enduring problem rooted in centuries of Haitian history.**

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Haitian migrants use a dam to cross into the United States from Mexico in Del Rio, Texas on September 18, 2021. The Biden administration has been forced to confront unusually high numbers of migrants trying to enter the country along the U.S.-Mexico border and the federal response has inflamed both critics and allies. (AP Photo/Eric Gay, File)

When tens of thousands of Haitian migrants crossed from Mexico into Del Rio, Texas, over the course of a few days last month, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas attributed the influx to misinformation about the border being open and misunderstandings of how the Temporary Protected Status program works.

It's true that many migrants don't understand the complexities of TPS—and neither do most US citizens. Created in 1990 as a way of dealing with forced migration in times of extreme crisis, TPS allows migrants from select countries who have already

entered the United States to apply to stay for a short (but renewable) period of time. It prevents the deportation of people to countries where their lives would be in danger, but it doesn't provide a path to permanent US residency.

Administrations of both major parties have relied on TPS as a short-term solution to an enduring problem. Migration is increasing because of climate change and extreme poverty, and Congress continues to fail to enact fair and humane immigration laws. As Ariel Henry, Haiti's new prime minister, said in a speech to the UN General Assembly on September 25, "migrations will continue as long as there are pockets of wealth on the planet, while the majority of the world population lives in precarity."

*Precarity* is an accurate description of life in Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Widespread disease and starvation exacerbate political instability. Armed violence and kidnappings are frequent. Very few Haitians have been vaccinated against COVID-19. The poverty at the root of these problems goes back to the Haitian Revolution, when France required Haiti to pay reparations—what would today be \$21 billion—in exchange for independence and freedom from slavery. This debt crippled the Haitian economy from 1825 until 1947, leading to deforestation and preventing investment in education, health care, and infrastructure. The US occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 was precipitated by the massive debt Haiti owed to Citibank.

Haiti was designated for TPS status after its devastating 2010 earthquake. The designation was renewed repeatedly until the Trump administration ended it in 2018, without taking effective steps to improve conditions in the country. This August, Mayorkas issued Haiti a new TPS designation, citing "a deteriorating political crisis, violence, and a staggering increase in human rights abuses." Any Haitian who entered the United States before July 29 is eligible—a group that excludes all those who entered Del Rio in September.

Some advocacy groups are calling for a new TPS designation for Haiti that would allow the most recent Del Rio migrants to apply. This would undoubtedly help many individual Haitians. But it's not enough. After a history of exploitation, the United States owes Haiti a more comprehensive response to its current struggles than temporary protection for migrants who arrive within a certain timeframe. What Haiti needs most is politically stable self-rule, debt forgiveness, and an infusion of resources to help meet basic human needs. Meeting these needs will take

international collaboration, respect for Haiti's political autonomy, and a commitment to providing ongoing aid and care.

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