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USA

# Venezuelan immigrants win victory

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**Venezuelan immigrants to the United States, whose numbers have grown dramatically in the last few years, won a victory this week when Joseph Biden's administration granted them Temporary Protective Status. TPS will allow some 472,000 Venezuelan immigrants who have been in the United States as of July 31, 2023 to live and work in the country legally for an indefinite period.**

At present as many 9,000 immigrants are crossing the border each day, coming from dozens of countries and Venezuelans making up a large portion of them. Republican Greg Abbott of Texas as governor of a border state has been fiercely opposed to immigration. He has filled buses with immigrants and sent them north to Democratic cities like Chicago and New York. Until now, Venezuelan asylees, unable to work legally in the United States, have been dependent upon local governments to house them, find schools for their children, and take care of their medical care.

In New York they have been housed in hotels and former military facilities. In Chicago, the immigrants are placed in temporary shelters, in police stations, and at O'Hare Airport. Some have been sheltered in colleges in Massachusetts and New York. But some conservative, white rural and suburban counties in New York State closed their shelters to immigrants and refused to allow New York City to rent hotel space for the immigrants. Mayor Eric Adams of New York City—with 60,000 new migrants, 15,000 of them Venezuelan—said before the TPS decision that the migrants were costing the city \$4 billion a year and in order to cover the cost he would have to cut other agencies by 15%.

The TPS status was won by pressure from Mayor Adams and New York State Governor Kathy Hochul as well as immigration rights and human rights organizations. Soon able to work legally, the immigrants will have to find jobs and homes for themselves as well as enrolling their children in public schools. In places like Illinois and New York state governments and local school boards will have to find classroom space and hire bilingual teachers for the thousands of immigrant children.

Why this massive Venezuelan immigration? Some 7.7 million people have emigrated out of Venezuela fleeing the country's collapsing economy and the repressive government of Nicolás Maduro in what is the great migration in the history of Latin America and one of the largest in the world. The country's economic problems have been aggravated by U.S. sanctions, which according to Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have affected the Venezuelans' food and health. About 6.5 million Venezuelans have been received in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru with varying degrees of acceptance and support. About 500,000 have come to the United States where now, with their new TPS status, they can integrate themselves into the economy and society.

In granting TPS status to the Venezuelans, Biden has taken a risk, since immigration has become a divisive political issue. Trump and the Republicans call for closing the border and turning in the immigrants away while most Democrats are more supportive of the immigrants. At the same time, it seems that Biden, to shore up his base in the Democratic Party, is moving to the left, granting TPS to these immigrants and going to join the picket line of striking United Auto Workers. In this way he hopes to increase his working-class vote in key industrial states like Michigan and Ohio and to win more votes in Florida, which is 26% Latino. Whatever Biden's motives, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans should be somewhat better off.

*24 September 2023*

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