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POLITICS

Thousands of Afghans in U.S. Get Deportation Protections

A small group of Afghans would benefit most from Temporary Protected Status, which lets them stay in the U.S. and work legally for 18 months



Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas says the TPS designation will protect Afghan nationals in the U.S. from returning to unsafe conditions.

PHOTO: ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

By [Michelle Hackman](#) [Follow](#)

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WASHINGTON—The Biden administration is offering a form of temporary humanitarian protection to thousands of Afghans living in the U.S. without a permanent legal status, the Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday.

Any Afghan present in the U.S. on or before March 15 would be eligible for the protection, known as temporary protected status or TPS, which shields them from deportation and allows them to work legally for 18 months, a term that can be renewed.

The people who stand to benefit the most from the announcement are a small group of about 2,000 Afghans who arrived before the U.S. withdrew from their country and the Taliban reclaimed power. They range from international students and employees living here on temporary visas to people visiting on vacation who couldn't return once the Taliban took over. TPS allows them to stay in the country without overstaying a visa.

“This TPS designation will help to protect Afghan nationals who have already been living in the United States from returning to unsafe conditions,” said Homeland Security

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Most of the Afghans present in the U.S. arrived beginning last August through the evacuation out of the Kabul airport and already carry a temporary immigration status, known as parole. This group, which DHS estimates is about 72,500 people, won't need TPS right away but could benefit from it down the road if Congress doesn't pass legislation offering them green cards to stay permanently. Without new legislation, people covered by parole would need to apply for asylum, a backlogged process that will take years to complete.

TPS, a program created by Congress in 1990, gives the Homeland Security secretary the authority to provide legal protections and work permits to immigrants and visitors from countries where it is deemed too dangerous to return them, typically because of war or a natural disaster. The Biden administration has made expansive use of the program, extending protections to Venezuelans, Haitians and most recently Ukrainians in the U.S. Together, the new covered population totals in the hundreds of thousands.

Though immigration advocates welcomed the move, several expressed frustration that the administration moved ahead with TPS for Afghanistan—a population that is mostly already protected—rather than heeding their calls to protect Ethiopians or Cameroonians, both of whose countries are currently roiled by civil war.

“In addition to saving lives, subsequent TPS designations—particularly for Black-majority nations—would represent a meaningful step toward racial equity in our immigration system,” said Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, president of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

Write to Michelle Hackman at michelle.hackman+1@wsj.com

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