

Center for the Victims of Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.cvt.org/blog/healing-and-human-rights/venezuelans-must-be-granted-tps-covid-19-pandemic-spreads>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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As COVID19 continues to spread around the world, Venezuela is no exception. The country faces an even grimmer fate than many of its sister nations, as its citizens live under the authoritarian Maduro regime, in a hyper-inflated economy on the verge of collapse. Today, Venezuela is the number one country filing for affirmative asylum with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), meaning that individuals apply once they are inside the United States, as opposed to at a port of entry or upon apprehension. [According to the latest USCIS data](#), Venezuelans represent 26 percent of the approximately 339,836 pending asylum applications, a backlog that continues to grow in the face of COVID-19 as the agency has halted many services, including interviews that lead to a decision on an application.

The scale of the need for asylum, compounded by the pandemic, makes it urgent that Venezuela be designated for [Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\)](#), a [form of temporary immigration relief](#) for nationals of countries experiencing certain types of emergency situations, including ongoing armed conflict and/or extraordinary temporary conditions that make return to their countries unsafe.

Venezuela is clearly experiencing the kind of emergency upheaval for which TPS was designed. Extra-judicial killings and persecution of individuals who oppose Maduros rule have been the norm in recent years. This has led to one of the worst refugee crises in Latin America. The International Office of Migration (IOM) and UNHCR [stated that](#) during 2018 an average of 5,500 people have been leaving the country every day.

Beyond the general brutality of life under this authoritarian regime, Venezuelans have been suffering from shortages in health care and food for some time. Diseases such as measles and cholera thought to have been eradicated long ago have re-emerged and are once again a public health hazard. Malnutrition is rampant. The public health system is already severely compromised as the *Washington Post* noted, [more than 30 percent of hospitals lack power and water, and 80 percent lack basic supplies or qualified medical staff](#), and so a COVID-19 outbreak in Venezuela could be devastating.

The Trump administration has repeatedly recognized the dire state of Venezuela under the Maduro regime. Trump recognized Guaid, the opposition leader, as acting president of Venezuela and even invited him to the State of the Union this past February. Most recently, the Justice Department brought narco-terrorism and other criminal charges against Maduro and several other current and former senior Venezuelan government officials, and the State Department is offering tens of millions of dollars in rewards for information leading to their arrest and/or conviction.

While it is possible that these steps will at some point assist Venezuelans who remain in their country, there is a much more direct way to help Venezuelans now living in the United States and who are at risk of being returned: designating TPS for Venezuela.

Among the thousands of Venezuelans who have come to the United States seeking refuge, there are many [survivors of torture](#). In fact, both of CVT's U.S.-based centers are currently working with Venezuelans who have survived torture, and we are deeply aware of the challenges they face in their pursuit of asylum. For example, to show they meet the definition of refugee which is needed to demonstrate they qualify for asylum survivors have to retell their story, which might mean reliving their profoundly disturbing experiences. However, retelling their story is not a [requirement for TPS](#). If these survivors had the choice to apply for TPS instead of asylum, it would bring a real sense of relief for survivors who dread having to bring up their torture experiences. Applying for asylum is also much more complicated and takes more time than applying for TPS which leads to higher attorney fees, and non-profits are overwhelmed as the need for services is much greater than the ability to provide them.

Designating Venezuela for TPS would also serve one of the administration's immigration-related goals: reducing the asylum backlog. This backlog results in asylum seekers, including many CVT clients, facing years waiting for the agency to hear their cases. This is a disastrous and painful situation for people who are attempting to heal and to rebuild their lives after torture.

As the Trump administration continues to voice its opposition to the Maduro regime, granting temporary protected status to Venezuela is a coherent and easy next step to show more concretely its support for the Venezuelan people.

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