



According to VIA and CEPAZ

“Deporting those fleeing the Venezuelan regime is a violation of the international law principle of non-refoulement.”

The recent decision by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to suspend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans has raised serious concerns among human rights organizations.

Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) and the Center for Justice and Peace (CEPAZ) [have strongly condemned this measure](#), warning that it will endanger the stability and security of approximately 300,000 people, who could now face mass deportations. According to representatives from both organizations, TPS holders who are deported would be forced to return to a country where their lives and fundamental rights will be gravely threatened.

Niurka Meléndez, co-director of VIA, and Beatriz Borges, director of CEPAZ, add that an additional 250,000 Venezuelans who still have TPS protection under the 2021 designation are also deeply concerned. They fear this decision marks the beginning of a shift toward more restrictive immigration policies, putting their status at risk in the future.

A Dangerous and Misleading Narrative

Meléndez and Borges explain that “the rhetoric surrounding it is even more concerning than the policy change itself. The decision has been followed by misleading claims that falsely associate Venezuelan migrants with criminal organizations. From our organizations, we emphasize that these characterizations are not only baseless but also fuel discrimination, criminalization, and xenophobia against the Venezuelan community in the United States,” they assure.

The activists say that “DHS’s data contradicts this narrative, showing that less than 1% of TPS beneficiaries have any ties to criminal activities. The portrayal of Venezuelan migrants as a security threat lacks factual basis and undermines the significant contributions they make to U.S. society and the economy.”

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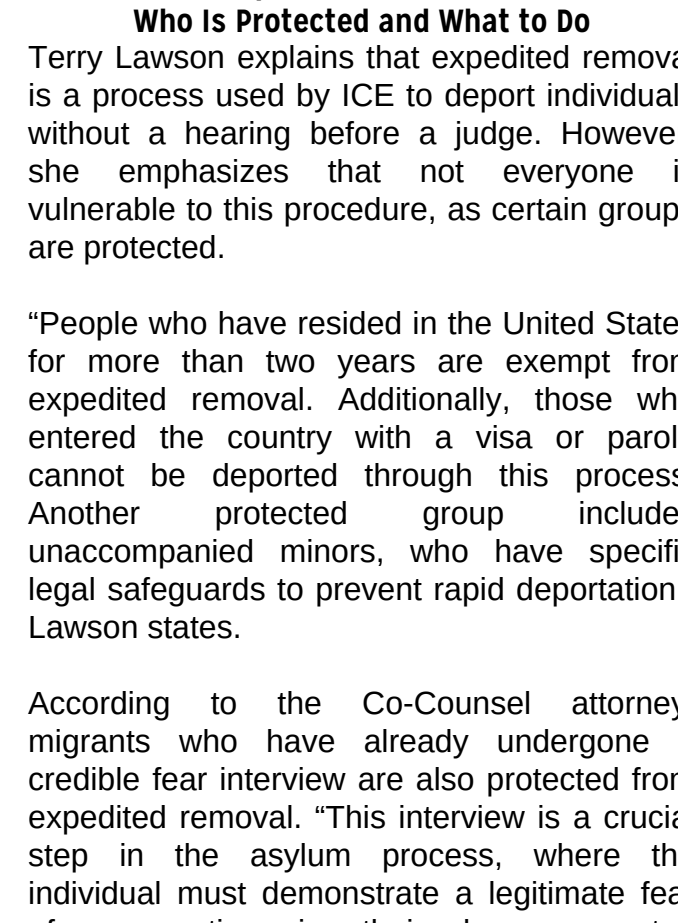
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An Ignored Humanitarian Crisis

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TPS and the Ongoing Lawsuit:

A Favorable Ruling Would Benefit Everyone

Attorney Rebecca Press clarifies a common concern within the community: “It is not necessary to register with any organization to benefit from a possible favorable ruling in the lawsuit against the termination of TPS for Venezuela. If the court determines that the revocation was illegal, the benefit will apply to all affected individuals, not just an exclusive group,” she explains.

Expedited Removal:

Who Is Protected and What to Do

Terry Lawson explains that expedited removal is a process used by ICE to deport individuals without a hearing before a judge. However, she emphasizes that not everyone is vulnerable to this procedure, as certain groups are protected.

“People who have resided in the United States for more than two years are exempt from expedited removal. Additionally, those who entered the country with a visa or parole cannot be deported through this process. Another protected group includes unaccompanied minors, who have specific legal safeguards to prevent rapid deportation,” Lawson states.

According to the Co-Counsel attorney, migrants who have already undergone a credible fear interview are also protected from expedited removal. “This interview is a crucial step in the asylum process, where the individual must demonstrate a legitimate fear of persecution in their home country. Furthermore, anyone already in removal proceedings with a scheduled hearing before an immigration court is also protected, as their case is under judicial review,” she explains.

Beyond understanding these protections, Lawson highlights the importance of having the Declaration of Inapplicability of Expedited Removal document available in English and Spanish on the NYLAG.org website. “This document helps at-risk individuals prove that they belong to a protected category and, therefore, cannot be subjected to expedited removal,” she emphasizes.

The attorney underscores that if a person is intercepted by ICE and fears returning to their home country, they must express their fear out loud. This simple act can halt the immediate deportation process and grant them the right to an interview with a USCIS asylum officer instead of being handled directly by ICE. “If someone encounters ICE and is afraid to return to their country, they must voice their fear out loud to stop the deportation process and secure an interview with an asylum officer rather than ICE,” Lawson stresses.

Expanding Access to Information

As part of these efforts, VIA has organized more than seven online discussions via Instagram and YouTube and in-person talks featuring the organization’s directors. Furthermore, over 50 informative posts have been shared on Instagram to warn and guide the community through the current migration challenges.

Miracle Mondays: A Safe Haven for Migrants

One of VIA’s most impactful initiatives is Miracle Mondays, in-person events providing legal guidance, community support, and essential resources to hundreds of migrants at St. Paul & St. Andrew United Methodist Church in New York City.

The first session of the year, held on Monday, January 27, welcomed over 120 attendees, who received legal counsel from Rebecca Press and Terry Lawson, attorneys from Co-Counsel.

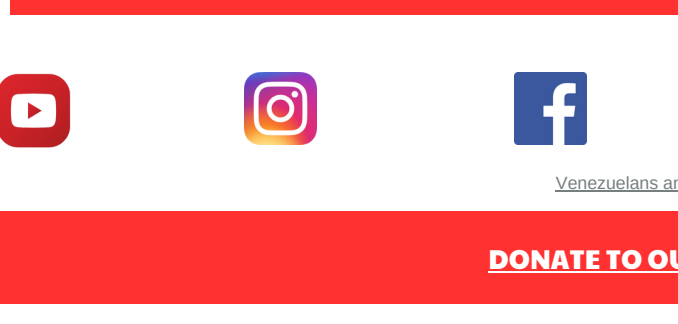
Legal experts such as Guillermo Nólives of The Nólives Firm and Victoria Gámez have also participated in online discussions and are committed to keeping the migrant community informed about immigration policy changes affecting their legal status in the U.S.

VIA Holds Its First Volunteer Meeting of 2025

This past Saturday, February 15, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) held its first volunteer meeting of the year in Brooklyn, New York. This gathering marked the beginning of 2025, filled with challenges and opportunities in a rapidly evolving immigration landscape.

The meeting served as a space to strengthen the team’s resilience, demonstrating an exceptional ability to adapt to recent changes in immigration policies. Héctor Arguinzones, VIA’s co-director and co-founder, explained, “At our organization, we understand that those supporting the community must also prioritize their own well-being. That’s why this gathering focused on sharing self-care and emotional resilience tools.”

According to Arguinzones, the leader of the Soporte Entre Pares (Peer Support) program, Liliana Torella, and longtime volunteer Alexandra Bermúdez provided key mental health resources and self-care strategies. Additionally, the team dedicated time for open dialogue, sharing experiences, and reflecting on the impact of recent U.S. government executive orders on the lives of migrants and the communities they serve.



The Global Impact of U.S. Policy Decisions

Furthermore, Meléndez and Borges warn that the implications of this decision extend beyond U.S. borders and could set a dangerous precedent for other nations. It also signals a retreat from the United States’ historical role as a human rights and refugee protection leader. The threat of deportation not only exposes many Venezuelans to direct dangers, such as arbitrary detention and persecution, but also allows authoritarian regimes to use these returnees as tools for political manipulation and retaliation. “Recent cases of deportations, such as those carried out by Iceland, have demonstrated the real dangers Venezuelans face upon returning. Many are labeled as traitors and subjected to severe abuse by Nicolás Maduro’s regime,” they state.

VIA and CEPAZ urge the U.S. administration to reconsider this harmful decision and align its immigration policies with its long-standing human rights and international protection commitment. “The organizations call for the immediate reinstatement of TPS to ensure the safety and dignity of Venezuelan migrants. Additionally, it is essential to put an end to harmful narratives that stigmatize Venezuelan refugees, as they contribute to discrimination and unwarranted hostility toward this vulnerable community. We believe that greater international solidarity is needed to defend the rights and protection of those fleeing the crisis in Venezuela, which is far from over.”

For VIA and CEPAZ, the need for international protection remains urgent. They stress that, as a nation that has historically championed democracy and human rights, the United States must uphold these principles by providing refuge to those escaping persecution, extreme poverty, and violence. “Millions of lives are at stake, and turning our backs on them is not an option,” they conclude.

Read the complete statement [here](#).

Co-Counsel Attorneys Warn: “Failing to Appear in Immigration Court for Fear of Deportation Is a Big Mistake”

Co-Counsel attorneys Rebecca Press and Terry Lawson are sounding the alarm about the risks faced by the migrant community, particularly Venezuelans in the United States. In a critical discussion, they address the lawsuit against the termination of TPS, the impact of expedited removal, and available legal options such as the Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa (SIJ).

Fear of Attending Court:

The Biggest Threat Is Not Showing Up

Many individuals with pending cases fear attending their immigration court hearings due to concerns about being detained. However, Rebecca Press clarifies that failing to appear is the greatest risk and a serious mistake, as it results in an automatic deportation order, making removal from the country easier.

ICE has announced that it will begin making arrests at immigration courts, which has heightened fears within the community. However, Press explains that this does not mean all individuals with hearings will be detained. Rather, the strategy appears designed to discourage migrants from attending, thereby facilitating their eventual deportation.

Lawson adds that in New York and some other states, ICE cannot conduct arrests in state courthouses without a judicial warrant.

Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa (SIJ):

A Clear Deadline

Another key topic was the Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa (SIJ), a form of relief for migrant minors. Press and Lawson emphasize that this process is more complex than asylum and that finding free legal assistance for such cases can be challenging.



However, they point out that young individuals and their families can take the first step themselves by going to their county’s family court to request custody or guardianship—an essential requirement for starting the SIJ visa process. Additionally, organizations in New York, such as Safe Passage Project, The Door, and KIND, may offer assistance.

A crucial piece of information highlighted by the attorneys is that USCIS must receive the SIJ visa application before the applicant turns 21. “Even if someone is 20 years and 364 days old, as long as the application has been submitted, it remains valid,” Press clarifies.

Knowledge and Action as Keys to Immigration Protection

The Co-Counsel attorneys emphasize that the best way to protect oneself from current immigration policies is to stay informed and act swiftly. Resources such as the Declaration of Inapplicability of Expedited Removal, access to family court for SIJ visa applications, and the importance of attending immigration hearings are critical in avoiding greater risks. “The migrant community has resources and organizations willing to help, but taking the initiative and not missing legal deadlines is essential,” they warn.

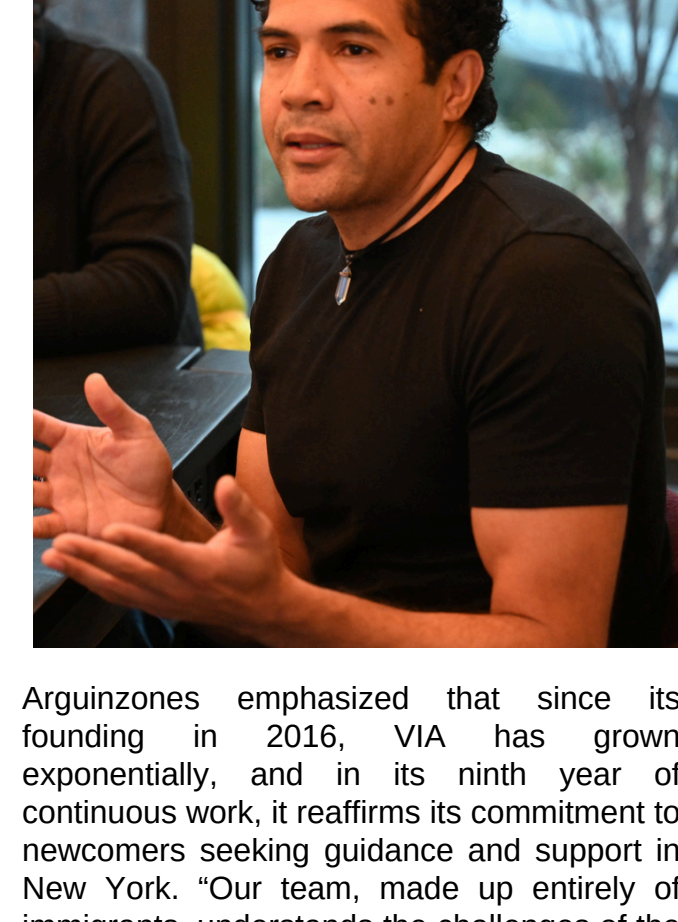
“Your immigration future is too important to entrust to just anyone,” the organization warns. “A paralegal, notary, or ‘form preparer’ is not a licensed attorney in the U.S. and is not qualified to handle your case. Only a licensed lawyer can legally represent you and offer a real and secure immigration strategy.”

A Commitment to Reliable Information and Community Support

With the success of these initiatives, VIA remains committed to organizing both in-person and virtual activities to ensure that the migrant community in New York has access to reliable information and essential resources.

Miracle Mondays will continue to grow as a fundamental pillar of support and guidance for those navigating the complexities of the immigration process.

In times of uncertainty, “information is power,” and community is our greatest strength. VIA reaffirms its commitment to providing trustworthy guidance and tangible support to those most in need.



Arguinzones emphasized that since its founding in 2016, VIA has grown exponentially, and in its ninth year of continuous work, it reaffirms its commitment to newcomers seeking guidance and support in New York. “Our team, made up entirely of immigrants, understands the challenges of the community firsthand. That’s why we remain here, committed to providing the tools and guidance many need now.”

The event concluded with a symbolic gesture: the preparation of a traditional Venezuelan tizana (a sweet drink made with pieces of fruit and syrup), to which each volunteer added ingredients representing the values that unite them within the organization—empathy, leadership, resilience, and solidarity.

Arguinzones concluded, “At VIA, we are not alone. We are a family, a movement, and a beacon of hope for those beginning their journey in a new country.”