



TPS Workers Are Rebuilding States Devastated by Natural Disasters

By Nicole Prchal Svajlenka | March 5, 2019

Over the past two years, the Trump administration has taken steps to terminate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for nearly all of the 318,000 immigrants that the program protects. These immigrants' futures—as well as those of their families—are in limbo as legal challenges to the termination make their way through the courts.¹

The vast majority—94 percent—of these immigrants are from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti.² Under TPS, they hold a legal status that protects them from deportation and authorizes them to work. TPS holders have lived in the United States for an average of 22 years, in households with a total of 620,000 family members, and are crucial contributors to the U.S. economy.³

One outsized way in which TPS holders contribute to the economy is their role in the construction industry. With 45,900 workers, construction is the second-largest occupation group for immigrants with TPS who are from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti.⁴ One-quarter of these workers are laborers, but workers with TPS can also have more-specialized occupations as carpenters, at 7,900; brick masons, at 2,400; plumbers or pipe layers, at 1,800; and electricians, at 1,500. They are also in more senior roles, with 2,700 employed as first-line supervisors and 1,600 employed as managers. Among their many roles, construction workers are key to rebuilding efforts after the occurrence of natural disasters.

TPS holders in construction jobs help rebuild their states after extreme weather events

Over the past two years, seven weather and climate disasters caused more than \$5 billion in damages each across the United States and took hundreds of lives: Hurricane Harvey, Hurricane Maria, and Hurricane Irma in 2017; Hurricane Michael and Hurricane Florence in 2018; and the western wildfires of both 2017 and 2018.

Hurricane Harvey damaged or destroyed more than 200,000 homes and businesses in Texas and Louisiana, causing an estimated \$127.5 billion in damages.⁵ Hurricane Irma damaged or destroyed 90 percent of homes and businesses in the Florida Keys, as well as

13,000 other buildings throughout the rest of the state and Georgia; it was responsible for an estimated \$51 billion in damages.⁶ Hurricane Michael damaged 50,000 homes and businesses along the eastern seaboard from Florida to Virginia, causing an estimated \$25 billion in damages,⁷ while Hurricane Florence damaged or destroyed 86,000 homes and businesses in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, causing an estimated \$24 billion in damages.⁸ The western wildfires and California firestorm of 2018 also caused an estimated \$24 billion in damages, destroying more than 33,500 homes and buildings,⁹ while the western wildfires and California firestorm of 2017 damaged or destroyed 15,000 homes and businesses, causing an estimated \$18.4 billion in damages.¹⁰

With the exception of Hurricane Maria, which caused an estimated \$91.8 billion in damages mostly in Puerto Rico,¹¹ the states hit hardest by these disasters are also home to large communities of TPS holders. The large numbers of TPS holders who work in construction occupations in the following states demonstrate how inextricably TPS is linked to the efforts to rebuild:¹²

- **California**, which is recovering from two extreme wildfire seasons and ranks first for TPS recipients, is home to 5,100 TPS holders in construction-related occupations.
- **Texas**, which is recovering from Hurricane Harvey and ranks second for TPS recipients, is home to 6,800 TPS holders in construction-related occupations.
- **Florida**, which is recovering from two hurricanes: Irma and Michael and ranks third for TPS recipients, has 4,200 TPS holders who are in construction-related occupations.
- **Virginia**, which is also recovering from two hurricanes, Florence and Michael and ranks fifth for TPS recipients, has 8,400 TPS holders who are in construction-related occupations.
- **North Carolina**, which is recovering from Hurricanes Florence and Michael as well and ranks eighth for TPS recipients, is home to 1,800 TPS holders in construction-related occupations.
- **Georgia**, which is recovering from Hurricanes Irma and Michael and ranks ninth for TPS recipients, is home to 1,000 TPS holders in construction-related occupations.

Although TPS holders are a small share of the total U.S. population—between 0.1 percent and 0.3 percent for each of the states listed above—they are overrepresented in construction occupations, making up between 0.4 percent and 4.7 percent of all construction workers in the above states.¹³ While these shares may seem minor, they represent thousands of workers.

The end of TPS would make all of these immigrants ineligible to work, removing them from their roles in the U.S. workforce and potentially jeopardizing or setting

back recovery efforts in each of these states. On top of this, all individuals from a given country would lose their protections and work authorization on the same day,¹⁴ potentially bringing some rebuilding efforts to a halt. It is long past time for Congress to protect immigrants with TPS and their families; doing so would ensure that progress on rebuilding efforts continue apace in disaster-affected communities.

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Endnotes

- 1 Dara Lind, "Judge blocks Trump's efforts to end Temporary Protected Status for 300,000 immigrants," Vox, October 4, 2018, available at <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/4/17935926/tps-injunction-chen-news>; Jill H. Wilson, "Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues" (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2018), available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/RS20844.pdf>.
- 2 Wilson, "Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues."
- 3 Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, "What Do We Know About Immigrants With Temporary Protected Status?," Center for American Progress, February 11, 2019, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2019/02/11/466081/know-immigrants-temporary-protected-status/>.
- 4 Center for American Progress analysis of 2017 1-year American Community Survey microdata. Data accessed via Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimates" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2018), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. A February 2019 CAP publication cites 44,000 TPS holders in construction occupations; here, 1,600 construction managers were included in the count. See Svajlenka, "What Do We Know About Immigrants With Temporary Protected Status?" Totals differ from text above due to rounding.
- 5 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Table of Events," available at <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events/US/2017-2018> (last accessed February 2019).
- 6 Ibid.; John P Cangialosi and others, "National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Irma (AL112017)" (Washington: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2018), available at https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL112017_Irma.pdf.
- 7 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters"; National Weather Service, "Catastrophic Hurricane Michael Strikes Florida Panhandle: October 10, 2018," available at <https://www.weather.gov/tae/HurricaneMichael2018> (last accessed February 2019).
- 8 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters"; National Weather Service, "Hurricane Florence: September 14, 2018," available at <https://www.weather.gov/ilm/HurricaneFlorence> (last accessed February 2019).
- 9 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters."
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 The ranking of TPS beneficiaries and numbers of TPS holders in construction-related occupations were determined through CAP analysis of 2017 1-year American Community Survey microdata. Data accessed via Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2017 American Community Survey 1-year estimates."
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Catholic Legal Immigration Network, "Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforcement Departure (DED)," available at <https://cliniclegal.org/tps> (last accessed March 2019).