



Temporary Protected Status (TPS) *for Mali*

The African country of Mali faces extraordinary crises, including armed conflict, political instability, and a deteriorating humanitarian emergency. The conditions in Mali continue to worsen as the country has endured three military coups, a rise in violence from extremist groups, intervention by foreign powers, and abuses by state security forces. The Biden Administration must designate the country for Temporary Protected Status and protect the thousands of Malians living in the U.S. who cannot return home safely.

The number of people internally displaced in Mali [increased](#) from nearly 40,000 in 2017 to over 400,000 by the end of 2022, nearly a 1,000% increase. Since 2020, over [10,000 lives have been lost](#) as a direct result of the violence in the country. If deported to Mali, individuals and families would be forced to return to a country with widespread [human rights violations](#) and [abuses against civilians](#), including summary killings, forced disappearance, torture, arbitrary arrest, ethnically targeted crimes, gender-based violence, and the recruitment of child soldiers.

“Even this morning, my village is under fire. Our families are fleeing because they are afraid their village will be the next to be attacked by armed groups.”

—Anonymous civilian

Congress created the [Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\) program](#) to prevent such tragedies by extending protections from deportation, as well as providing the ability to work legally, to people in the U.S. who have come from countries where it's unsafe to return. Designating Mali for TPS—a country that evidently meets the [statutory requirements](#) for these protections—would provide vital humanitarian relief to Malian nationals currently living in the U.S., allowing them to remain with their families in their communities, and to live free from the fear that they could be deported to harm.

Armed conflict and political instability

The origins of the conflict in Mali can be traced to 2011, when [armed groups in the north](#) of the country staged an insurgency and pushed out Malian government forces with support from other violent extremist groups. At the same time, [military forces staged a coup](#) in the capital, Bamako, further intensifying the violence and setting off a decade-long armed conflict. In total, [1.5 million people](#) have been forced to flee their homes since the start of the conflict. Despite [international intervention](#), armed insurgent and extremist groups have [continued to proliferate and gain ground](#), leading to brutal fighting in central and northern regions. Tragically, civilians have been routinely harmed in this conflict, with around [40% of all violent events](#) targeting civilians.

Since 2020, the situation has only worsened. Two consecutive coups, only nine months apart, [cemented the rule of a military government](#), throwing the country into further chaos and souring relations with the international community. In that time, violence has escalated further, leading to the deaths of [10,000 people](#) and an [almost 100% increase](#) in the number of violent events from 2020 to 2022. Meanwhile, Mali's military government has [abandoned its security partnership](#) with its West African neighbors, and has imposed heavy restrictions on UN peacekeeping operations, which is forcing the UN to consider [scaling back or completely ending](#) its peacekeeping operation by June 2023. Diminished security partnerships will only leave civilians more vulnerable as violence continues to surge.

Despite the chaos, the military government shows no signs of relenting. In late 2021, the military [refused to transition power to civilian rule](#) as it had committed to doing earlier that year. After facing political pressure from its neighbors, it established a timeline through 2024 for the transition to take place. Yet in March 2023, the government doubled down on military rule once again, [postponing the constitutional referendum](#) that was the first step in their proposed timeline.

Mali's military has recently turned to the [Wagner Group](#), a [brutal Russian mercenary force](#), for assistance. The Wagner Group has been documented to routinely target civilians and commit heinous human rights abuses alongside government forces. Their forces arrived in Mali at the end of 2021, and since then,

over [70% of the violent events involving the Wagner Group](#) has represented violence against civilians. UN experts have recommended an independent investigation into [potential war crimes and crimes against humanity](#) by the Wagner Group and government forces, after reports showed that they have killed at least 750 civilians in Mali, including more than 300 civilians in the horrific [Moura Massacre](#).

“We echo the Secretary-General’s deep concern about the exceptionally high level and frequency of violence in Mali.”

—Richard Mills, U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations

Humanitarian crisis

Amidst this violence, [human rights watchdogs](#) and the [U.S. Department of State](#) have reported widespread human rights violations. As a result, people have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety. Over [470,000 people are currently displaced](#) in Mali, including over [60,000 refugees from neighboring countries](#) who have fled similar violence from extremist groups. Over 200,000 Malians are refugees in neighboring countries.

The combination of this displacement, worsening climate shocks, economic sanctions placed on Mali, and the rise in food and fuel prices due to the war in Ukraine have all [dramatically increased the need](#) for humanitarian assistance in a country where [almost half of the population](#) lives below the poverty line. An astounding [8.8 million people](#), or 42% of the entire population, will require humanitarian assistance in 2023, a sharp increase from 5.9 million in 2021.

As events related to climate change worsen—including [ongoing drought in some areas and severe flooding](#) in others—around [1.2 million people](#) will face acute food insecurity during the lean season. Children face the brunt of this toll, with [1.5 million children](#) currently facing acute malnutrition. In addition, a measles outbreak in 2022 and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continue to strain the country’s [fragile healthcare infrastructure](#).

The Biden Administration should not return people to danger. Designating Mali for TPS will save lives and keep families together

The Biden Administration should immediately designate Mali for TPS and provide protection and stability to families and communities in the U.S. By doing so, the Administration can ensure that Malian nationals living in the United States are not deported to a country rife with conflict, where they will almost certainly face

violent conflict, horrific human rights abuses, and even death. The U.S. Department of State recently issued the [highest-level warning against travel](#) to Mali due to persistent violence, threats of kidnapping, and attacks against civilians.

Congress [created TPS in 1990](#) to provide protection from deportation and work authorization to individuals from designated countries that face unsafe conditions in their home countries due to armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. The program was created to provide a form of humanitarian relief in situations exactly like those currently taking place in Mali: to prevent individuals from having to return to countries where they face life-threatening armed conflict or other disasters. Members of Congress have repeatedly spoken out against the [mass atrocities](#), [ongoing violence](#), and [political instability](#) in Mali, while human rights [advocates](#) have called on the Biden Administration to designate TPS for Mali.

Providing TPS protections to individuals from Mali would also empower them to better contribute to their communities and the broader U.S. economy. Finding an estimate for the number of Mali nationals in the U.S. that could benefit from TPS is challenging. However, FWD.us research indicates that a combined [8,000 individuals](#) from Mali and neighboring Mauritania, neighboring countries with some overlapping language groups that can be identified in the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, are potentially TPS-eligible. Those in this combined group have, on average, lived in the U.S. for nine years, have contributed \$230 million to the economy annually, and have a workforce participation rate of 73% providing essential services at a time of worker shortages and [high inflation](#). TPS potentially-eligible individuals from Mali and Mauritania also live in households with 14,000 U.S. citizens. Designating TPS for Mali would keep thousands of American families together.

To date, the Biden Administration has successfully taken steps to extend TPS and Deferred Enforced Deportation (DED) protections for thousands of individuals from countries devastated by natural disaster, war, and other humanitarian and security crises. The Administration should expand on these successes and designate Mali for TPS. Doing so would align with the Administration's goals of realizing a more humane, safe, and orderly immigration system, while keeping individuals and families safe and together.