

Creating a Humanitarian Crisis

by Frederick Sneesby

There is no shortage of humanitarian crises. The collateral damage of the wars in Gaza, Iran, Lebanon, and Ukraine gains the most media attention. The Global Report on Food Crises published by the World Food Programme states that in 2024, more than 295 million people across 53 countries and territories experienced acute levels of hunger. These are just food shortage crises. There are other conditions besides hunger that could be labeled humanitarian crises. Populations suffering from disease, lack of permanent shelter, or living under constant threat of violence and persecution could all be called humanitarian crises.

Not lacking humanitarian crises, why is it that we are manufacturing one in the United States? Hundreds of thousands were granted entry into this country because they fled persecution and conflict. They were offered safety and security, a chance to work, support their families, and live normal lives until conditions improved in their countries of origin by being granted immigration statuses of Temporary Protected Status or Humanitarian Parole. Unfortunately, our government's promises of protection are being broken. Temporary Protected Status has been revoked for Haitians and Syrians with other populations to follow and with that revocation the termination of Employment Authorization Documents that allowed people to work, support their families, and contribute to the American economy. The same with Humanitarian Parole.

It is ludicrous to think that people will return to their home countries. Even if they had the financial means to do so, which they do not, who in their right minds would return to violent and impoverished conditions that threaten the lives of one's family?

What do the actions of the federal government mean practically? Households' breadwinners will lose their jobs and, with that loss, households' means of support will disappear. How will these people pay the rent? How will they buy food and medicine? How will they survive? Will they join the ranks of the homeless in Rhode Island, adding to the numbers of people for whom there is already a shortage of temporary shelter?

As a result of the short-sighted policies and actions of the federal government, we will have our own humanitarian crisis in Rhode Island and in every state. People could have continued to work and support themselves if the federal government had realistically evaluated the conditions in their home countries where chaos and violence still reign and extended their protections. Instead, the numbers of people in need of basic necessities will greatly increase.

Compounding this cancellation of legal status for thousands of people in Rhode Island is the reality that many who have been living and working in the state without immigration status are facing a similar fate. Breadwinners are being detained or deported leaving behind spouses and children, some of whom are U.S. citizens, without any means of support. These will also be added to the numbers of those who will lose shelter and need the basics.

The ideological, legal, and political arguments surrounding immigration can be had. In the meantime, we have human beings in need. While the legal issues are sorted out there is a growing need that must be addressed. Concerned Rhode Islanders have established the No Strangers Project to gather donations to be used through various social service outlets to bring relief to these households by providing basic necessities. If you want to help, please go to: www.nostrangersproject.org. You will find more information about the project and a way to support the effort.

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