

## Policy Recommendations for USCIS: Supporting International Students and Scholars from Countries Experiencing Violent Conflict and Humanitarian Crises

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### I. Introduction

On behalf of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, we offer the following recommendations to support international students and scholars from countries experiencing violent conflict and humanitarian crises. For international students and scholars, individual circumstances may favor Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Special Student Relief (SSR), or Severe Economic Hardship (SEH). Streamlining all three will allow students to make the best decision without feeling the need to double-file because of uncertainty on processing times. Also, students and scholars who can secure TPS, SSR or SEH may no longer feel pressured to apply for asylum—a benefit now at a time of record numbers of asylum applications and stress on pro bono resources. Moreover, streamlining could reduce processing times, thus saving both individuals and the government valuable resources.

### II. Recommendations to Support International Students and Scholars

- A. **Ensure Special Student Relief (SSR) is simultaneously provided for students and scholars from conflict-affected countries whenever Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is designated.** In order to avoid uncertainty, the administration should routinely ensure that whenever TPS is designated, an SSR announcement for F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors, students, and scholars will also be expected and published simultaneously when the TPS designation is published. To highlight just a few of the countries with students in the United States for which DHS should immediately make SSR available: Afghanistan (354), Cameroon (930), Colombia (7107), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1125), El Salvador (1492), Ethiopia (2166), and Guatemala (1102). While the number of students needing SSR may seem small in comparison to the numbers of displaced individuals worldwide, these students nonetheless need our support in enabling them to continue their programs without the additional stress of worrying whether they might fall out of status.
- B. **Streamline the process to shorten the timeline between the announcement of relief and the opportunity to apply for and receive relief.** Often, when TPS is announced, many individuals immediately file for relief but are ineligible until Federal Register notices are published, which can take weeks or longer. The Department of Homeland Security should ensure that official designations are published immediately following announcements of relief.
- C. **Create efficiency by expediting employment authorization documents (EADs) based on economic hardship for F-1 and J-1 students, scholars, and other individuals from countries with TPS/SSR.** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services should take measures to shorten processing times for EADs, particularly when applicants must find ways to meet the economic gap caused by violent conflict, natural disasters or other humanitarian crises. And, specifically, applicants coming from countries with TPS and/or SSR should not have to prove their

individual cases of severe economic hardship. USCIS should automatically presume that students from countries with TPS designations and/or Special Student Relief are experiencing economic hardship, which will help to expedite the process and save time and resources.

In addition to these recommendations above, we also urge the Biden Administration to continue to institute equitable policies for designating TPS and SSR. We appreciate the swift announcement made by the Biden Administration about TPS for [Ukraine](#), the subsequent announcement for [Afghanistan](#), the recent announcement regarding [Cameroon](#), and the simultaneous publications of SSR and TPS in the Federal Register for [Ukraine and Sudan](#). We urge DHS to continue to make similar announcements for other countries where conditions have long warranted such international support, including African and Central American nations that have been affected by natural disasters, violent conflict, and humanitarian crises.