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A flawed immigration policy

By CAROLA OTERO BRACCO

On March 3, the Biden administration announced that it had designated Temporary Protected Status to Ukraine on the basis of the “ongoing armed conflict” within the country. This means that Ukrainian nationals who have continuously lived in the United States since March 1 of this year are allowed to stay and work here legally for 18 months.

**Guest
COLUMN**

Neighbors Link and our Community Law Practice division applaud this humanitarian action and stand ready to assist any qualified individual who is attempting to navigate the complex process of applying for TPS. At the same time, we feel a moral imperative to call for immediate changes in the application of TPS to make it more equitable across countries and cultures.

Specifically, we urge changes in the TPS system to eliminate disparities linked to national origin, and as a consequence, to race and ethnicity. It does not seem an accident that dark-skinned people from non-European nations are more likely to be turned away or to have their TPS terminated than are white people of European heritage. While Ukrainian refugees were promptly welcomed with open arms, others from Cameroon, Ethiopia and (until recently) Afghanistan were denied entry. Also of concern are people from Burma, Haiti, South Sudan, Syria and Venezuela, whose TPS status is set to expire in the next eight months, well

before experts believe it will be safe for them to return home. We have not projected the colors of these flags on the White House, nor have we devoted hours of primetime television coverage to the plight of their people.

Migrants who have managed to negotiate harrowing escapes from war-torn countries and regions decimated by natural disasters and disease arrive on our shores exhausted, without material resources, having left behind family members, friends, pets, and everything that is familiar or held dear. Refusing them sanctuary based on arbitrary qualifications is far below the values and standards upon which our democracy rests.

The vast majority of us are migrants or descendants of migrants. We arrived with little more than hope and aspirations and proceeded to build better lives for ourselves and our fellow citizens using our bodies, brains and dreams. Today's migrants, from wherever they hail, are much the same.

Regardless of what some policymakers fear, migrants are contributors, not takers. According to a 2017 study of TPS holders from El Salvador, Honduras and Haiti, 88.5% are working. Together they contributed \$4.5 billion in pre-tax wages annually to our country's gross domestic product. Over a 10-year span, their contributions to Social Security and Medicare are estimated at more than \$6.9 billion.

As a population, TPS recipients skew younger than average. This is very important for a nation like the United States, which has an aging population and needs young work-

ers. Many of these same people were designated “essential workers” during the most intense days of the pandemic.

It is estimated that at least 130,000 TPS holders served in essential critical infrastructure jobs during the pandemic, including health care, delivery, food services and manufacturing.

Additionally, we need to recognize that while TPS is important, it is not nearly enough. It does not provide a permanent solution and does not address the fact that new arrivals who continue to come to the U.S. to seek protection are not eligible. For example, Ukrainians who arrived after March 1 are not eligible for TPS. It also does not address the millions of immigrants already living in the United States and contributing to our communities who are not eligible for any form of immigration status.

Let's face it: we need these workers as much as they need us. Many of the readers of this newspaper likely employ one or more migrants in their homes or businesses. They are indeed essential; our society does not run smoothly without them. It is not fair to deny them the same opportunities that benefitted our families. And it is simply immoral to deny refuge based on nationality.

We have inherited a great nation. Now we must live up to the values expressed in our founding documents.

Carola Otero Bracco is executive director of Neighbors Link, a nonprofit organization that works to strengthen the whole community through the healthy integration of immigrants.