



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Washington's forced and risky decision to facilitate the employment of migrants from Venezuela



The administration of US President Joe Biden has taken a risky, but also forced, step by granting temporary legal status to hundreds of thousands of migrants from Venezuela who are already residing in the US.

This step was forced because he has been under pressure from his own Democratic Party and the New York administration to ease the high costs of caring for migrants from Venezuela, most of whom are in New York City and New York State.

It was also forced by Biden's priority that during his presidential term, he would mitigate the consequences of a large influx of migrants from the south, which has been absent until now.

The administration's decision also carries several risks for Joe Biden, which will become part of his forthcoming campaign for a new term and future elections for congressmen, particularly in electoral districts in New York.

The most significant risk he has taken is that the decision to legalise the residence of hundreds of thousands of migrants from Venezuela and the possibility of obtaining work permits will trigger thousands of migrants from Venezuela and South America to try to reach the US. This began to happen a few days after this decision was reached.

Pressure from the Democratic Party succeeded

Nearly half a million migrants from Venezuela can now count on obtaining a work permit in the US, provided they entered the country before July 31.

"Work permits. I think that that's the most immediate need", said Adriano Espaillat, Democratic Representative from New York. He led a group of 13 congressmen demanding that the administration take decisions on the legalisation of a large number of migrants from Venezuela.

The demands of New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York State Governor Kathy Hochul that the executive authorities take decisions to ease the financial pressure caused by the large influx of migrants also strongly contributed to this pressure.

The city now accommodates up to 60,000 newly arrived migrants, which is an unbearable cost for its budget. Current trends reveal the growth of those costs.

The mayor predicted that, given that only an increase, not a decrease, in the number of new arrivals is anticipated, New York City will spend \$12 billion, or \$4 billion annually, on housing and providing for migrants over the next 3 years.

Both Mayor Adams and Governor Hochul were satisfied with the decision of the Biden administration because this will remove a significant financial burden, and the employment of migrants will solve part of the labour shortage in some sectors, for example, health care and construction.

High expectations from elections

With this decision, Biden seems to have solved one of the more significant political problems, which came from his party and supported his ambitions for a good result in next year's elections.

But at the same time, he also took a step towards realising the Democratic Party's expectations of regaining the seats in the House of Representatives they lost in New York in 2022. They hope that repairing that loss could lead to winning a majority in the House.

However, the risks he took with this decision are no lower than the political profit, or the expected financial savings.

The decision on the legalisation of residence and facilitated employment in the US triggered

a large wave of migrants from Venezuela and other South and Central American countries moving towards the southern border of the US.

More migrants are moving towards the US

About 3,000 people a day pass through the Darien Gap, a belt of jungle at the junction of South and Central America, between Colombia and Panama, risking their lives in harsh conditions.

When passing through Central America, their number doubles. In Mexico, this number increases by a few thousand more. Mexican authorities estimated earlier this month that around 8,000 migrants arrive daily at the border with the US.

On an annual basis, these figures show a significant increase, by as much as 50% compared to 2022, when, according to Panamanian authorities, close to 250,000 people migrated to the US.

Two-thirds of the people are refugees from Venezuela, raising particular concerns for the US, which is their final destination.

A quarter of the population, about 7.5 million people, fled Venezuela in the past decade due to the economic collapse during the leadership of Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro.

During the first years of the crisis, many moved to neighbouring countries, first of all to Colombia, but also to Ecuador or Peru. However, the local economies could not provide them with a much better life, so over time, thousands decided to go to the US, regardless of the enormous risks that path entails.

Sanctions against Venezuela did not bring results

Venezuela is holding presidential elections next year, but now few expect any change, given that Maduro's government controls all media and political life, with heavy repression of critics and the opposition.

Tens of thousands more people will attempt to enter the US as a result of the collapsed economy, shortages of basic needs like food, fuel, water, and electricity, and Maduro's anticipated new mandate.

Washington's decision to facilitate their legal status, particularly employment, will encourage them to leave the country and risk the dangerous migration route.

That is why the latest facilitations for the stay of migrants from Venezuela will have short-term scope. Even though effective, they will not reduce the new migrant waves from the south, but will encourage them.

The current US sanctions against the regimes in Venezuela, since 2012, have clearly not brought the desired result - the government's behaviour has not changed, even in conditions of extreme poverty and economic collapse.

Economic sanctions against Venezuela, according to Francisco Rodriguez of the Centre for Economic and Policy Research, are a major factor driving the exodus.

"If there had been no sanctions, Venezuela would still have suffered a major economic crisis. But by no means of the dimension of what we've seen", said Mr Rodriguez.