

Immigration Sentinel

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Immigrant Visa Ban Broadens

The State Department (DOS) put a hold on issuance of immigrant visas to nationals of 75 countries it found were “high-risk” for welfare in the United States or becoming a public charge. This pause only applies to the issuance of immigrant visas and does not apply to nonimmigrant visas or adjustment of status applications. DOS indicated it will continue to accept immigrant visa applications and consular posts will continue to schedule and hold interviews, but no immigrant visas will be issued to anyone affected by the pause. DOS will not revoke any visas already issued. For those with dual nationality, an immigrant visa can still be issued if the applicant uses a passport from a country that is not subject.



Project Firewall

The Labor Department (DOL) launched a new webpage related to Project Firewall, signaling that the Trump Administration will ramp up investigations of employers using the H-1B program to sponsor foreign workers. DOL describes Project Firewall as “an H-1B enforcement initiative that will safeguard the rights, wages, and job opportunities of highly skilled American workers by ensuring employers prioritize qualified Americans when hiring workers and holding employers accountable if they abuse the H-1B visa process.” DOL also released a flyer that includes information on H-1B employers’ obligations and how to report violations.

H-1B Lottery Dates

U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) announced the registration period for the upcoming H-1B lottery will run from 3/4/26 to 3/19/26.

Another TPS Program Terminating

DHS announced the termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Somalia, effective 3/17/26.

February 2026 Visa Bulletin

DOL published the February 2026 Visa Bulletin. For family-sponsored preference categories, most countries only had forward progress in the F2B category, with Mexico as the only country that saw progress in the F1 and F2A categories. For employment-based preference categories only the 3rd category for professional and skilled workers had progress in priority dates. The 4th category for non-minister religious workers (SR) expired on 1/29/26 resulting in no visas available under that category unless legislation is passed to extend the SR category. In the event such legislation is passed it is expected the Visa Bulletin will be updated and visas would be available again. Finally, similar to the month prior, USCIS announced that all applicants in both family- and employment-based categories must use the Dates for Filing chart for filing adjustment of status applications.

R-1 Religious Worker Visa Max Changes

DHS issued an interim final rule eliminating the one-year wait time R-1 religious workers must reside abroad before becoming eligible for an additional 5-years of R-1 status. DHS is changing this regulation due to the historic backlog religious organizations have when sponsoring R-1 workers for a green card. DHS estimates the backlog has gotten so long that it could take two decades for the sponsored religious worker to obtain the green card. Eliminating the one-year foreign residency requirement avoids a significant disruption in the R-1 worker's U.S. employment while waiting for the green card process.

H-2B Visa Quota

DOL completed the randomization process for 10,062 H-2B applications covering 162,603 worker positions with a start date of work of April 1, 2026. Those applications selected in Assignment Group A are now with analysts for issuance of Notices of Deficiency or Acceptances. DOL and DHS announced that an additional 64,716 H-2B visas will be available for FY2026, supplementing the annual quota of 66,000.

B-1/B-2 Visitor Visa Bond Program

DOS published an updated list of countries subject to a visa bond pilot program. With 25 countries added, the list now includes a total of 38 countries that are subject to the visa bond pilot program. For nationals of these countries, U.S. consular officers may require a bond be posted as a condition of issuance of a B-1 (visitor for business) or B-2 (visitor for pleasure) visa. The exact amount of the bond is based upon the applicant's circumstances as determined by the consular officer in an amount of no less than \$5,000 and up to \$15,000. All visa holders who are required to post a visa bond must enter and exit the U.S. through a designated airport. DOS updates this list of airports on a rolling basis so affected travelers are advised to review the current list before planning any travel to the U.S.