



Office of the International Student & Immigration Services

Dear Students and Scholars,

We would like to share an important update from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). On January 1, 2026, USCIS issued an [updated policy memorandum](#) expanding guidance first released on December 2, 2025. This policy is effective immediately and may impact immigration benefit applications for certain individuals.

Under this policy, USCIS has placed a hold on the *final adjudication* of all pending and future immigration benefit applications filed by or on behalf of individuals connected to countries designated as “high risk” under Presidential Proclamations [10949](#) and [10998](#). While USCIS may continue processing these applications, cases will be paused before a final decision is issued, regardless of the individual’s date of entry into the United States.

USCIS will also re-review certain immigration benefits approved on or after January 20, 2021, that fall under Presidential Proclamation 10998. These cases may require additional background screening, documentation, interviews, or re-interviews. In addition, USCIS continues to pause processing of all Form I-589 asylum applications, regardless of country of citizenship or birth.

This policy applies to individuals whose country of citizenship, country of birth, or citizenship-by-investment is listed under Presidential Proclamation 10998, even if the individual currently holds a different nationality. Impacted individuals include those born in, nationals of, or carrying travel documents from the following countries:

Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burma (Myanmar), Burundi, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville (Republic of the Congo), Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, The Gambia, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Palestinian Authority, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The adjudicative hold affects all USCIS benefit applications, including common forms such as I-129, I-140, I-539, and I-765. As a result, applications related to OPT, STEM OPT, J-2 employment authorization, changes or extensions of status, H-1B status, and employment-based or self-petition green card applications may be impacted.



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What to Expect:

Affected individuals should expect longer processing times and possible delays in employment authorization, extensions or changes of status, and travel benefits such as advance parole. USCIS may issue requests for additional evidence, require biometrics, or schedule interviews or re-interviews. Even applications that are otherwise approvable may remain pending for an extended period. Benefits approved on or after January 20, 2021, may also be reopened for further review.

USCIS has indicated that within 90 days of the memo (by April 1), it will prioritize certain cases for review and interviews. USCIS has acknowledged that this policy will cause delays but states these measures are necessary for national security. There is adjudicative hold will remain in place until it is formally lifted or modified, and there is currently no timeline for when this will occur. While limited exceptions may exist, they are rare and require high-level approval.

If you believe this policy may affect you or have questions about your situation, please contact our office for guidance.

This USCIS pause is **not related** to the Department of State's separate pause on immigrant visa processing for 75 countries at US embassies and consulates. That policy only affects immigrant (non-immigrant visas like J-1 and H1-B are not impacted) visa issuance abroad and does **not** apply to USCIS applications inside the US. However, some countries are subject to **both** policies. Please refer to the list of countries listed above to determine if you are impacted.

Sincerely,

Office of the International Student & Immigration Services