



New USCIS Policies Impacting Asylum Applicants, Refugees, and People from “High-Risk” Countries

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has implemented new policies that will significantly impact the processing of various immigration applications, including pausing processing for various benefits requests and ordering the re-review and potential re-processing of previously approved applications. The new policies will likely cause processing delays not only for these specific applications, but for all applications submitted to USCIS.

Who Is Affected?

1. Individuals from 19 “High-Risk” Countries:

- **Some restrictions apply to individuals who were born in or are citizens of countries identified as “high-risk” in the June 4 Presidential Proclamation (updated December 16):** Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burma, Burundi, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Cuba, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, The Gambia, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, People with Palestinian Authority-Issued travel documents, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
 - More countries may be added to the travel ban list in the future, and by extension may be subject to the policies below.
- **USCIS paused final decisions of most currently pending USCIS applications for applicants from these countries, regardless of entry date.** These include, but are not limited to:
 - Nonimmigrant visa applications (ex. H-1B, TN, O-1 visas)
 - Green card applications
 - Applications for citizenship (including already scheduled oath ceremonies)
 - Note that limited application types will continue to be decided, despite the pause. Speak to your attorney to determine if you fall into one of the exceptions.
- **USCIS has also stated they will re-examine all approved applications for individuals from these countries.** USCIS has not provided guidance on the scope of this review yet, but individuals may be called in for another interview.
- When USCIS adjudicates or re-reviews applications from these countries, they may consider the fact that an individual is from one of these countries as a significant negative discretionary factor in

certain applications, like requests to extend, change of status, or green cards.

2. Asylum Seekers and Applicants for Withholding of Removal

- USCIS has paused final processing of all I-589 asylum and withholding of removal applications, regardless of the individual’s nationality or country of birth.
- This includes approvals, denials, and closure of cases.
- USCIS may still review these files and schedule interviews, but they will not issue final decisions.
- Individuals can still seek asylum but should speak to an immigration attorney to see how this recent policy change will affect their case.

3. Refugees

- USCIS has paused processing of all pending green card applications for refugees admitted to the U.S. between January 21, 2021, and February 20, 2025.
- USCIS plans to re-review and potentially re-interview all refugee applications for those admitted to the U.S. during that period.
- The pause and re-review includes derivative family members and follow-to-join refugees who arrived in the U.S. during the same period.

When Will These Pauses End?

No end date has been announced as of February 27, 2026.

What Should I Do If I Think I Will Be Affected by Policy Changes?

Contact your immigration attorney to discuss the policy changes and their possible impacts. If you do not have one, you can find a licensed attorney at www.ailalawyer.com.

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