

Global Immigration alert

January 2026

United States

Department of State announces pause on immigrant visa processing for 75 countries

Executive summary

On 14 January 2026, the Department of State (DOS) announced that it will “pause all visa issuances to immigrant visa applicants” who are nationals of 75 countries “at high risk of public benefits usage.” The pause is effective as of 21 January 2026.

Background and analysis

The *Immigration and Nationality Act* (INA) provides that an applicant for a visa, admission to the United States, or adjustment of status (a “green card”) is inadmissible and may be denied the benefit they are requesting if they are likely to become a “public charge” at any time. DOS has determined that it will undergo “a full review of all policies, regulations, and guidance to ensure that immigrants from [the 75] countries do not utilize welfare in the United States or become a public charge.”

The pause affects only immigrant visa applicants, i.e., foreign nationals seeking a visa that permits them to take up permanent residence in the United States, and will *not* apply to nonimmigrant visas applicants (e.g., business visitors, international students, H-1B and L-1 workers), although many of the listed countries are already impacted by the travel restrictions that went into effect on 1 January 2026 and last year. DOS has not advised when the pause will be lifted as of the date of publication for this alert.

The 75 countries that will be subject to the immigrant visa processing pause are:

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|---------------|--------------|-----|
| ▪ Afghanistan | ▪ Albania | |
| ▪ Algeria | ▪ Antigua | and |
| ▪ Azerbaijan | ▪ Barbuda | |
| ▪ Armenia | ▪ Bangladesh | |

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ▪ Bahamas | ▪ Barbados |
| ▪ Belarus | ▪ Belize |
| ▪ Belize | ▪ Bhutan |
| ▪ Bosnia and Herzegovina | ▪ Brazil |
| ▪ Burma | ▪ Cambodia |
| ▪ Cameroon | ▪ Cape Verde |
| ▪ Colombia | ▪ Cote d'Ivoire |
| ▪ Cuba | ▪ Democratic Republic of the Congo |
| ▪ Dominica | ▪ Egypt |
| ▪ Eritrea | ▪ Fiji |
| ▪ Ethiopia | ▪ Georgia |
| ▪ The Gambia | ▪ Grenada |
| ▪ Ghana | ▪ Guinea |
| ▪ Guatemala | ▪ Iran |
| ▪ Haiti | ▪ Jamaica |
| ▪ Iraq | ▪ Kazakhstan |
| ▪ Jordan | ▪ Kuwait |
| ▪ Kosovo | ▪ Laos |
| ▪ Kyrgyz Republic | ▪ Liberia |
| ▪ Lebanon | ▪ Moldova |
| ▪ Libya | ▪ Montenegro |
| ▪ Mongolia | ▪ Nepal |
| ▪ Morocco | ▪ Nigeria |
| ▪ Nicaragua | ▪ Pakistan |
| ▪ North Macedonia | ▪ Russia |
| ▪ Republic of the Congo | ▪ Saint Kitts and Nevis |
| ▪ Rwanda | ▪ Saint Vincent and the Grenadines |
| ▪ Saint Lucia | ▪ Sierra Leone |
| ▪ Senegal | ▪ South Sudan |
| ▪ Somalia | |
| ▪ Sudan | |

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What this means

Immigrant visa applicants who are nationals of one of the 75 impacted countries will still be permitted to submit their DS-260 Immigrant Visa Electronic Application and supporting documentation to the DOS National Visa Center as well as attend immigrant visa interviews. No immigrant visas will be issued by DOS, however, to impacted individuals during the pause.

DOS has confirmed that dual nationals applying for an immigrant visa with a valid passport of a country other than one of the 75 are exempt from the pause. DOS has also confirmed that the pause does will not impact immigrant visas previously issued to nationals of the 75 countries.

Impacted foreign nationals who are in the process of pursuing an immigrant visa and are physically in the United States may wish to consult an immigration professional to determine whether they are eligible to file for adjustment of status rather than continuing the immigrant visa process given that the pause is currently indefinite. For additional information, or if you wish to discuss this further, please contact your EY Law LLP professional or Mehlman Jacobs LLP professional.

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EYG no. 000251-26GbI

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