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Trump slams the door on legal immigration

The Trump administration's sweeping visa suspension for 75 countries, framed as a "pause," effectively halts legal immigration for millions and strains diplomatic and humanitarian ties.



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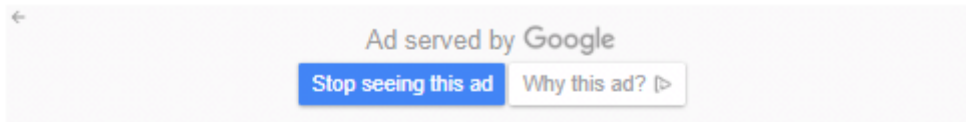
In a move that has sent shockwaves through immigrant communities and diplomatic circles, the Trump administration has abruptly suspended visa processing for nationals of approximately 75 countries, dramatically constricting pathways for lawful entry into the United States. Although framed as a temporary "processing pause," the policy has the practical effect of slamming the door shut on legal immigration for millions.

On Jan. 14, 2026, the Department of State announced an *indefinite* pause on the issuance of all immigrant visas (green cards), for nationals of 75 countries, primarily in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the

Caribbean. Ostensibly, this action is part of the Trump administration's effort to implement stricter "public charge" screening to ensure that new immigrants are financially self-sufficient, but, in fact, it is part of his so called "paper wall" - making legal immigration more difficult.

Significantly, the suspension applies only to immigrant visas (green cards) processed at U.S. Embassies and consulates abroad, including family-sponsored, employment-based and diversity visas.

However, the ban does not apply to nonimmigrant visas, such as those for tourists (B-2), students (F-1), or temporary workers (H-1B), at this time.



Significantly, it does not apply to individuals already in the US who are applying for adjustment of status (Form I-485) to obtain permanent residence status--green card.

Unlike the travel bans of Trump's first term, which were formalized through executive orders and litigated extensively in federal court, i.e., the so called "Muslim Ban," this new action operates largely through internal State Department directives. Consular posts around the world have reportedly been instructed to halt the issuance of immigrant visas for affected countries, even where applicants are otherwise fully eligible under existing law. For many, interviews have been canceled, applications frozen and cases placed in indefinite limbo.

The State Department's stated rationale

According to administration officials, the suspension is rooted in what the State Department describes as a "comprehensive security and integrity review" of foreign governments' information-sharing practices. The central claim is that certain countries fail to provide adequate identity verification, criminal history data or passport security standards necessary for U.S. vetting procedures. Until those deficiencies are "remedied," visa processing will remain paused.

In public statements, State Department spokespeople have emphasized three primary justifications:

- **National security vetting gaps**

The administration argues that U.S. consular officers rely heavily on cooperation from foreign governments to verify an applicant's identity, travel history and potential security risks. Where a government lacks reliable civil registries, biometric systems or criminal databases--or refuses to share such data--the State Department claims it cannot confidently adjudicate visas.

• **Fraud prevention and document integrity**

Officials have cited concerns over passport fraud, identity substitution and inconsistent issuance practices in certain countries. According to the State Department, suspending visa processing creates leverage to pressure foreign governments into modernizing their documentation systems.

• **Diplomatic leverage**

Less explicitly acknowledged, but widely understood, is the use of visa restrictions as a foreign-policy tool. By cutting off access to U.S. visas, the administration seeks to compel compliance with broader U.S. demands--ranging from repatriation of deported nationals to cooperation on counterterrorism and migration enforcement.

Critics call it collective punishment

Immigration advocates, former consular officials and legal scholars see the policy very differently. They argue that the suspension amounts to collective punishment--penalizing millions of individuals for alleged governmental failures entirely outside their control.

Critics also note that U.S. immigration law already grants consular officers broad discretion to deny visas on security or fraud grounds, as well as on the basis of likelihood to become a "public charge" in individual cases. Halting all processing, they argue, is not a measured security response, but a blunt political instrument, especially since the consulates already thoroughly vet for security, fraud, financial ability and health.

Legal but opaque

From a legal standpoint, the administration is likely on firmer ground than during Trump's earlier travel bans. Because visa issuance abroad is considered a core executive function and because foreign nationals generally lack constitutional rights to a U.S. visa, courts traditionally afford the executive branch extraordinary deference in this area.

Economic and human costs

Ironically, many of these visas are for categories that promote lawful, orderly immigration--the very system politicians across parties have long claimed to support. By freezing legal channels, critics warn, the policy risks encouraging irregular migration rather than preventing it.

It appears that at the present time, those aliens from the 75 effected countries who are already present in the United States in "legal status" can still adjust status to become permanent residents (using Form I-485) at local U.S. Immigration Offices, to obtain a green card through family or employment-based pathways.

Conclusion: A door closed, not a pause

No one has a crystal ball to project how long this "pause" on legal immigration will last. For now, the message to much of the world is unmistakable: Even legal immigration to the United States is no longer guaranteed, predictable or welcome. Whether justified as security policy, avoidance of future welfare obligations or diplomatic pressure, the result is the same--America's doors have narrowed, and for millions, they appear firmly shut.