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US immigrant visa appointment pause clouds Indians' travel plans

The latest action only applies to those who have been approved for green cards or lawful permanent resident status



Immigration attorneys said the move had created another layer of uncertainty among aspiring legal immigrants

Gulveen Aulakh Deepak Patel/Avik Das | [New Delhi/Bengaluru](#)

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The US' decision to pause immigrant visa appointments globally has added further uncertainty around travel to the country, with industry executives expecting some Indian travellers to defer trips or switch to alternative destinations. The uncertainty increases pressure on airlines operating the route.

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The US State Department said it has launched a global training initiative at its embassies and consulates and that visa-service appointments would be adjusted to accommodate the training. The exercise is aimed at assessing whether an applicant may be deemed a “public charge” — under US immigration law, someone likely to become primarily dependent on government financial support.

The latest US action specifically applies to individuals who have already been approved for green cards or lawful permanent resident status. It does not cover employees seeking to move to the US on non-immigrant visas such as H-1B or L-1, immigration attorneys said.

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It, industry watchers said, does not cover non-immigration categories.

In travel industry, India remains an important source market for the US. More than 2.06 million Indian residents travelled to the country in 2025, making India the second-largest overseas source market. But outbound travel has weakened this year, with about 966,000 Indians travelling to the US between January and June 2026, down more than 10 per cent from 1.08 million in the same period last year, according to Ministry of Tourism data.

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The US ranked third by departure volumes in 2024, with 2.14 million departures, up from 2.05 million in 2023, the data showed. Leisure, diaspora, business and education were among the main travel categories.

Travel industry executives said Indians planning trips to the US could become more cautious amid confusion over the scope of the latest measures.

“One important clarification is that the reported US action is not a blanket cancellation of all US tourist visas. It pertains to those who are primarily seeking immigration, still the impression goes that the US is cancelling all visas and this is most likely to cause deferred bookings,” said Rajiv Mehra, general secretary of the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH), the umbrella body for travel, tourism and hospitality associations in India.

“The immediate impact will likely be a slowdown in US-bound travel bookings. So, destination substitution is likely,” said Bharatt Malik, senior vice president, Flights and Hotels Business, Yatra Online. “Travellers with planned international holidays facing uncertainty around the US will likely consider regions with easier visa processes, such as Southeast Asia, West Asia, and parts of Europe, depending on connectivity and airfare. Domestic destinations are also expected to benefit, particularly among leisure travellers with flexible plans.”

However, Manjari Singhal, chief growth and business officer at Flipkart-owned Cleartrip, said it was too early to assess the impact on travel demand and that any change in behaviour was unlikely to be immediate. She pointed to double-digit growth in domestic destination bookings, while Southeast and Central Asian destinations have also seen stronger demand over the past couple of years.

Executives said travellers may increasingly seek refundable air tickets and flexible hotel bookings, while families travelling for holidays or to visit relatives and business travellers could exercise greater caution. Students planning to pursue higher education in the US could also be affected if uncertainty persists.

Southeast Asian countries and domestic destinations could emerge as beneficiaries if some US-bound leisure demand is diverted. “Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Sri Lanka are particularly well placed because of shorter flying times, comparatively affordable packages and easier visa processes,” Mehra said. “Domestic destinations could pick up some of the displaced demand, particularly premium leisure, family holidays, weddings, MICE and experiential travel.”

Several Southeast Asian markets have also eased visa norms to attract travellers.

The uncertainty could add further pressure to India-US air travel, which has already been significantly disrupted by geopolitical developments since early 2025.

The timing is particularly important for airlines because India-US traffic typically picks up from September as students travel for the academic year. November and December also bring demand from the Indian diaspora travelling home for Christmas and New Year, as well as foreign tourists travelling to India, a senior airline executive said.

Airlines were operating 42 nonstop flights a week between India and the US in August 2026, down from 97 a week in August 2025, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium. Weekly seat capacity has fallen 58.1 per cent to 12,096 from 28,860 a year earlier.

The decline is entirely attributable to Air India, whose weekly flights have fallen to 14 from 69 a year earlier. American Airlines and United Airlines continue to operate 14 weekly flights each.

Immigration attorneys said the move has introduced another layer of uncertainty for aspiring legal immigrants.

“If an individual is found likely to become a public charge, they may be denied an immigrant visa or green card. This assessment considers factors such as age, health, income, assets, family size,

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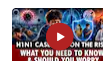
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and financial affidavits submitted by the sponsoring petitioner,” said Poorvi Chothani, managing partner of immigration law firm LawQuest.

Rajiv Khanna, managing attorney at the Law Office of Rajiv Khanna in Virginia, said the current ambit of the rule is broad and could allow a visa or adjudication officer to deny a case based on factors that were not covered as broadly under previous rules. “We have clients who went to green card interviews and were handed letters saying those were cancelled. This is absolutely careless of US immigration officers and appears to be a deliberate design to bring in uncertainty, fear and outright confusion,” he said.

While students and technology-sector employees are outside the ambit of the latest immigrant visa measure, US embassies and consulates in India are currently making very few interview slots available across non-immigrant visa categories, affecting applicants for H, F, B, L and other visas.

The latest measure comes as the US government has taken a series of steps to tighten the skilled-immigration process. Eligible H-1B registrations fell 38.5 per cent to 211,600 for FY27 from 343,981 a year earlier, according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services. IT companies including TCS, Infosys and Cognizant have filed extensions for H-1B visas for onsite employees, while transfer petitions have increased.

Lawyers said the government has not announced specific dates for either the start or the anticipated conclusion of the public-charge training.

“The State Department’s own guidance simply advises affected applicants to rely on notices or emails issued for their individual cases rather than any general timeline,” Chothani said. “This unfortunately leaves applicants and attorneys in a difficult position with very little to plan around.”

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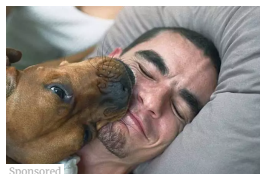
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H-1B shake-up: US plans tougher rules on cap exemptions, third party jobs

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has initiated the process to propose a new regulation that would revise the H-1B program



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The US H-1B visa programme could be heading for another major shake-up, with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) preparing rules that could tighten access to cap exemptions, put employers with past violations under greater scrutiny and bring tougher oversight to H-1B workers placed at third-party worksites.

The proposal, titled “Reforming the H-1B Nonimmigrant Visa Classification Program”, is now with the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review. The government received the proposal on August 24.

Three areas could see the biggest changes

According to DHS's regulatory description, the proposed rule would focus on three broad areas.

1. Cap exemptions could become harder to claim

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Certain organisations can currently hire H-1B workers without competing for one of the programme's annual 85,000 cap-subject slots.

These include qualifying institutions of higher education, nonprofit research organisations, governmental research organisations and certain affiliated entities.

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DHS is proposing to revise eligibility for these exemptions.

The government has not yet said exactly which organisations or employment arrangements could lose eligibility.

"Employers who rely on H-1B cap exemptions, particularly through affiliations with other cap-exempt entities, should review their affiliations to ensure they meet all current requirements and have appropriate documentation to evidence cap-exempt status," said immigration law firm Womble Bond Dickinson.

That could matter because losing cap-exempt status can fundamentally change an employer's hiring process: instead of being able to file an H-1B petition outside the annual numerical limit, the employer could have to compete for a place under the cap.

2. Third-party placements face more scrutiny

The second major area is third-party placement.

This refers broadly to arrangements in which an H-1B worker employed by one company performs services at another company's location—for example, a technology consultant working at a client's site.

The model has long attracted scrutiny from immigration authorities because the government wants to ensure that the petitioning employer maintains the required relationship with the worker and that the actual employment conditions match what was represented in the H-1B petition.

The forthcoming rule could introduce additional oversight and requirements around these arrangements.

That makes the proposal especially relevant to IT services and consulting companies that deploy employees to client locations.

The regulatory agenda said the changes are intended to strengthen the integrity of the H-1B programme and better protect US workers' wages and working conditions.

3. Employers with violations could face tougher treatment

DHS also wants to provide greater scrutiny of employers that have violated H-1B programme requirements.

The proposal does not yet spell out what that scrutiny would look like.

However, the concept fits into a wider push by the administration to increase H-1B compliance and enforcement.

For companies, that could mean that a past compliance problem becomes more consequential when filing future petitions.

The proposal itself is new, but immigration law firms have been tracking these changes since they appeared in the federal regulatory agenda.

Fragomen, which issued the latest alert, said the proposal could revise cap-exemption eligibility, increase scrutiny of employers with H-1B violations and increase oversight of third-party placements. It stressed that the actual details will not be known until DHS publishes the proposed rule.

And Womble Bond Dickinson has specifically warned employers that depend on cap exemptions to review their affiliations and supporting documentation before the new rules arrive.

Why this matters for Indian IT companies

The proposal lands at a particularly sensitive time for India's technology sector.

The US is already considering a separate \$103,265 fee for H-1B cap-subject petitions, while the Department of Labor has proposed changes that would increase minimum wage requirements for H-1B and other employment-based immigration programmes.

On Tuesday, Financial Times reported that the Donald Trump administration has halted immigrant visa processing worldwide to allow US consular officers to undergo additional training. The move aims to strengthen checks on whether applicants could become dependent on US government assistance.

Taken together, the proposals could make the traditional H-1B model substantially more expensive and compliance-heavy.

For an Indian IT or consulting company, the question may no longer simply be:

"Can we get an H-1B for this employee?"

It could increasingly become:

"Can we justify the cost, structure the employment arrangement correctly and demonstrate that the worker is genuinely needed in the US?"

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That could accelerate a trend already visible in the industry: greater use of local US hiring, nearshoring and offshore delivery models, alongside more selective use of H-1B workers.

This is NOT a new rule yet

Nothing in this proposal is currently in force.

The rule is still under OMB review. Once it clears review, DHS is expected to publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register. The public would then have 30 or 60 days to submit comments before DHS considers whether to issue a final rule.

The government itself described the measure as a proposed rule, and the OMB database currently lists it as pending review and economically significant.

That means employers should not yet assume that an existing cap exemption will disappear or that third-party arrangements will automatically become non-compliant.

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