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Policy Brief: Severe Immigration Restrictions Will Waste Taxpayer Resources and Bring Hardship, Not Make America Safer

December 8, 2025

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In response to the November 26, 2025 shooting of two National Guard members in Washington, D.C., the Trump Administration announced sweeping new immigration restrictions, including a [halt on asylum decisions](#) for all nationalities, an [indefinite pause on decisions](#) for all immigration processes for nationals of the 19 countries¹ named in the June 4 travel ban (“travel ban countries”), the re-examination of hundreds of thousands of individuals in legal status, and the [suspension of all visas](#) for people traveling on Afghan passports.

The man accused of the shooting, [Rahmanullah Lakanwal](#), is an Afghan national who assisted U.S. forces in Afghanistan; as a result, he was screened, vetted, and then given protection in the United States, and ultimately granted asylum this April. The Administration has used this incident to claim that the new restrictions are based on national security. But these extensive, categorical restrictions cannot be justified as legitimate or effective measures to protect public safety or national security. Accepting this specious argument requires one to also accept that whole classes of people—many of whom have lived in the United States for years without incident and contributed to their communities—suddenly pose a serious threat. For example, this pause and reexamination also applies to people whom DHS has thoroughly screened multiple times over the course of many years for more than one immigration application, including those now eligible to become U.S. citizens.

These sweeping restrictions will not make our nation safer. Instead, they will impose time-consuming and wholly unnecessary extra work on DHS officials to repeat already completed processes. This will create backlogs and shift attention and resources away from USCIS’s statutory mission to fairly and efficiently adjudicate cases and identify actual security and safety threats. These restrictions compromise national security and government efficiency, waste taxpayers’ money, and harm people whose lives—along with their families and the businesses and communities that depend on them—are put in limbo. Finally, these directives are unquestionably motivated by retaliation and prejudice and designed to punish entire communities for the actions of one person.

Before these restrictions cause further harm to American communities, Congress should hold the Administration accountable and demand immediate reversal of the policies.

What are the new restrictions?

Following the shooting, USCIS announced the following policy changes:

- A halt on final [asylum decisions](#) for all nationalities.
- An indefinite pause on [all immigration processing](#) for people from the travel ban countries, including naturalization and adjustment of status; and a mandatory re-review of [all benefits](#) issued to the travel ban countries since January 20, 2021.

¹ The 19 travel ban countries include Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

- A [harsher standard](#) allowing officers to treat the fact that an individual is a national of one of the travel ban countries as a “significant negative [factor]” in discretionary adjudications. This includes adjustment of status, extension of nonimmigrant stay, and many work permit categories.
- [Reduced](#) the maximum validity period of employment authorization documents (EADs) from 5 years to 18 months for certain individuals, including asylees, refugees, and those with pending adjustment applications.

DOS also responded by stopping [all visa processing](#) for people traveling on Afghan passports.²

Prior to the shooting, on November 21, USCIS ordered the [re-examination and potential re-interview](#) of all refugee approvals issued under the Biden administration, including a pause on adjustment of status decisions for these refugees.

The justification for the indefinite pause is arbitrary and capricious.

The Administration justifies the indefinite pause in adjudications and reexamination of individuals by relying on the rationale provided in the [June 4, 2025 Presidential Proclamation](#) (“travel ban”). The administration justified the travel ban under INA section 212(f), which allows the president to “suspend the entry” of certain people if their entry would be “detrimental” to U.S. interests.

The justification for the travel ban does not hold up when you consider the cases included in these new restrictions. Section 1(e) of the travel ban outlines the justification for fully or partially banning the entry of nationals of certain countries, including “each country’s screening and vetting capabilities, information sharing policies, and country-specific risk factors — including whether each country has a significant terrorist presence within its territory, its visa-overstay rate, and its cooperation with accepting back its removable nationals.” However, this rationale falls flat when applying it to an indefinite pause of adjudications for **all form types** for **all nationals** of travel ban countries. For example, the consideration of overstay rates, which was the only rationale for banning the nationals of 7 of the 19 countries,³ is illogical to apply to individuals who are applying for or have already been granted permission to remain in the United States permanently, such as green card or naturalization applicants. Moreover, concerns that many countries lack adequate screening and vetting capabilities carry far less weight when used against applicants who have undergone screening and vetting in the United States—many of whom have been vetted multiple times throughout their immigration process.

The arbitrary nature of this justification is further highlighted when considering that USCIS is applying the pause not only to individuals whose passports were issued by one of the travel ban countries, but also to individuals born in those countries who hold passports from non-banned countries, such as an Iranian-born individual applying with a Canadian passport. Applying these sweeping rationales to individuals previously exempted from the travel ban is wholly unjustified.

The administration has failed to justify USCIS’s block on all asylum decisions.

The United States has the authority and responsibility to protect public safety and control migration into the country, but this single shooting incident is wholly insufficient justification to pause all asylum decisions indefinitely. Asylum seekers already undergo thorough background and security checks, commonly referred to as “vetting.” The administration has not explained how the existing vetting is insufficient or presented any plan to remedy any perceived insufficiencies. The only plan is halting pending cases, reviewing them,

² Although Afghan nationals are already subject to the June 4 travel ban, certain nationals, including Afghan SIVs, refugees, and green card holders were exempt from the travel. The DOS announcement now restricts visa processing of all Afghans, even if they are exempt from the travel ban.

³ Per sections 2 and 3 of Presidential Proclamation the only rationale provided for banning nationals of Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Burundi, Laos, Togo, and Turkmenistan was the visa overstay rate of their nationals.

and “re-reviewing” finalized decisions, as specified in the December 2 USCIS memorandum. This would not improve upon the existing adjudication process and make Americans safer. Moreover, Congress enacted the asylum statute that requires the Administration to ensure a fair and meaningful process by which people can seek asylum. USCIS’s pause on asylum decisions compounds the many actions the current Administration has taken to block asylum since January 20, including the complete closure of asylum access at the border (for a more thorough review of asylum policy changes, see [AILA’s policy brief](#)). The Administration is exploiting this incident as a pretext to further its ongoing effort to ban asylum outright in violation of the asylum statute. A full shutdown of asylum access is an unnecessary, unjustifiable, and unlawful departure from America’s humanitarian values that endangers lives without improving public safety.

The unnecessary extra reviews of highly vetted cases waste government resources.

Instead of processing green cards for the spouses of U.S. citizens or work permits needed by American businesses, USCIS is now embarking on a wasteful plan to repeat adjudications of four years’ worth of applications. USCIS is primarily funded by fees paid by applicants for the processing of their immigration benefits requests. Specifically, [INA § 286\(m\)](#) provides that “adjudication fees” should be set for “providing **adjudication** and naturalization services” (emphasis added). By instituting a pause on the adjudication of hundreds of thousands of benefits requests, USCIS is abdicating its clear statutory mandate to adjudicate immigration benefit requests. The fees paid by U.S. employers, U.S. citizens, and other U.S. residents to adjudicate their cases are instead being expended on an unnecessary and unjustified fishing expedition. Failure to adjudicate these cases will result in significant backlogs and processing delays for all applicants, not just those subject to the recent restrictions.

Now USCIS will stop its work to re-examine potentially millions of already approved cases. These cases were already thoroughly vetted—in the case of refugee applicants, they already went through what is “considered the [gold standard](#) in vetting.” Individuals who were about to take the oath of citizenship have been vetted numerous times by multiple different government agencies over the course of many years. These delays will in turn be felt by Congressional offices as more constituents reach out for constituent services on immigration matters. While USCIS is fee-funded, Congress rightfully steps in when backlogs accumulate due to mismanagement of resources. In FY2023, [Congress appropriated](#) \$133 million to address backlogs created due to the hiring freeze combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, and in FY2024 Congress appropriated \$160 million for application processing. While USCIS made great strides to address these backlogs with Congressional appropriations, that work is rapidly coming undone. USCIS backlogs will only grow under these new policies, forcing Congress to appropriate more taxpayer funds to ameliorate them.

Already these sweeping policies are hurting immigrants with longstanding ties to American communities.

The policies punish and cast doubt upon whole groups based on the actions of one individual. While the Administration [claims](#) it will continue to make case-by-case decisions, as required by statute, DHS officers are contradicting that assertion. In less than a week, AILA received dozens of reports of cases being affected by the new policies at USCIS offices across the country.

- Numerous naturalization and green card interviews and oath ceremonies were cancelled in several cities. These ceremonies were for people from Venezuela, Guinea, Afghanistan, Iran, Libya, Haiti and Sierra Leone, Yemen, Sudan.
- Spouses of U.S. Citizens were unable to receive green cards, throwing U.S. citizen families into uncertainty.

- USCIS cancelled green card interviews for people who served with the U.S. military in Afghanistan and for a domestic violence survivor who was eligible based on the Violence Against Women Act.
- USCIS officers have told green card applicants, after conducting an interview and doing a full review of the case, that they would have granted the adjustment of status but are forbidden to do so under the new restrictions.
- Someone who entered the United States as a child, has lived here her whole adult life, and is eligible for naturalization nonetheless had her ceremony cancelled.
- The halt to processing of religious worker visas whose faith organizations paid for premium processing.

These examples demonstrate that final grants are being held up by the restriction despite the officers having engaged in an individual case review—which includes reviewing the case file, screening for criminal history and other security concerns, and conducting an in-person interview.

Moreover, AILA has received reports that even though these new policies are directed to USCIS personnel only, other DHS departments may be acting under similar orders. For example, ICE arrested Afghan nationals at their check-ins and CBP refused to process the TN application of a Canadian citizen born in Iran.

Recommendations to Congress

Congress must ensure that USCIS, DOS, and other agencies faithfully execute their statutorily mandated duties and rescind these unjustified new policies immediately. AILA asks that Congress:

- Hold USCIS accountable to fulfill its statutory mission to adjudicate benefits requests in a timely and efficient manner.
- Demand that USCIS, DOS and DHS rescind arbitrary and capricious policies which punish the collective for the actions of a single individual and are not reasonably related to the stated justification.
- Demand a plan from USCIS on how they will carry out re-adjudication, and with what resources.
- Ensure that any reexamination or pause does not impact the timely adjudication of other benefit requests filed by other nationalities.
- Affirm the statutory responsibility of USCIS as a benefits adjudication agency and not law enforcement.