

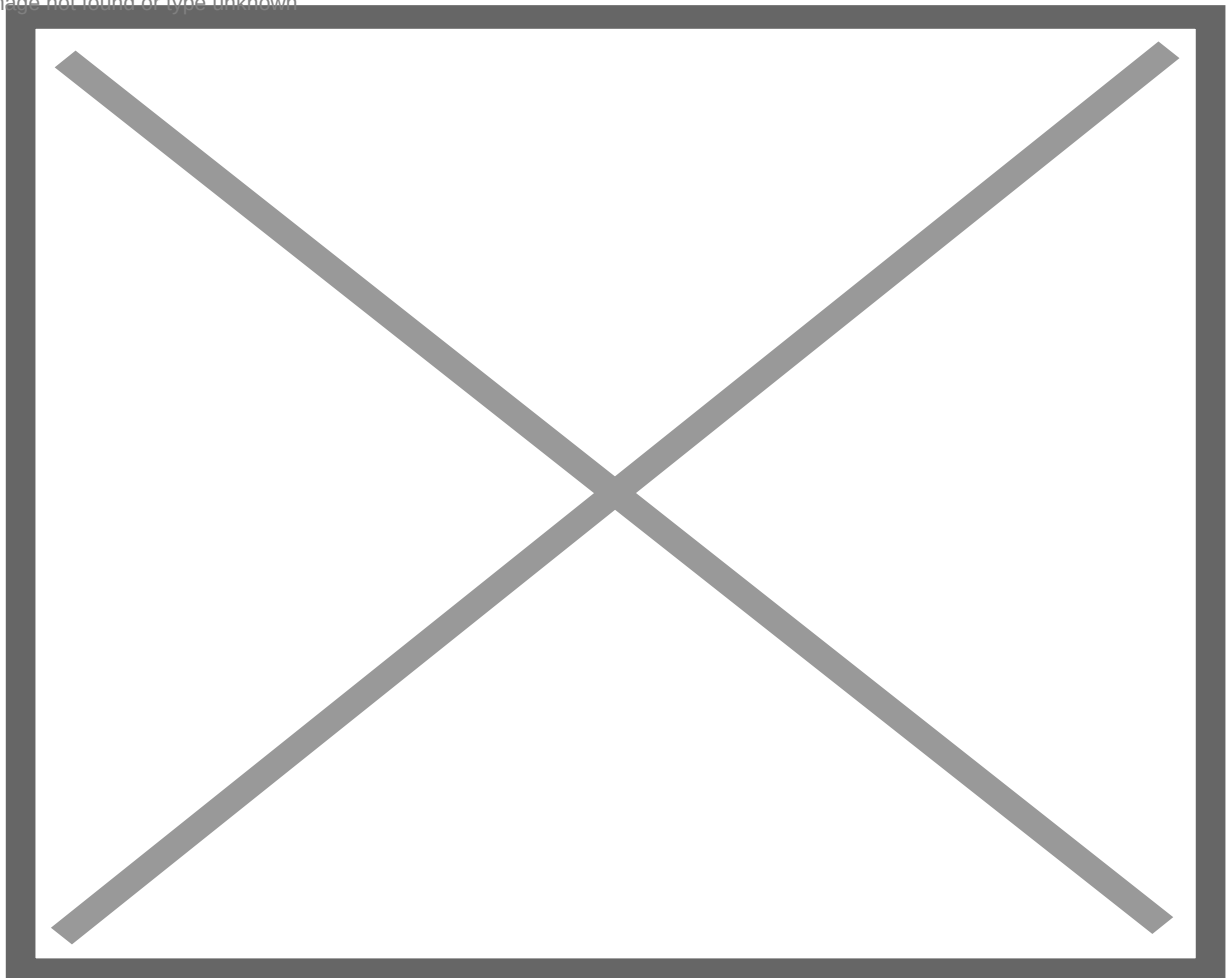
Trump Pauses Immigrant Visa Interviews Worldwide as Officers Retrain to Flag Applicants Likely to Depend on U.S. Benefits

The pause applies to immigrant visas used for permanent residency, not tourist or other temporary visas, while consular officers worldwide undergo training to identify applicants considered likely to become dependent on U.S. public benefits in America.

Federal / **Published On August 26, 2026 07:01 AM /**

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The Trump administration has paused immigrant visa interviews at U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide while consular officers undergo training aimed at identifying applicants considered likely to become dependent on public benefits, disrupting the final stages of the process for people seeking to move permanently to the United States.

The action applies specifically to immigrant visas, which are used for permanent immigration, and does not affect tourist visas or other nonimmigrant categories used for temporary travel, study or employment. Immigrant visas are generally issued to people abroad who have qualified to move permanently to the United States, often because a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident sponsored a qualifying family member, or through certain employment-based immigration programs. Once admitted through that process, the immigrant generally becomes a lawful permanent resident, commonly known as a green-card holder. H-1B and H-2B temporary-worker visas are not part of the pause.

Applicants whose immigrant visa interviews were already scheduled are being told that their appointments will be rescheduled, with new dates to be provided later. The State Department has not announced when normal scheduling will resume.

The development comes only days after a federal judge struck down a separate Trump administration policy that had suspended immigrant visa issuance for nationals of 75 countries, including 11 Caribbean nations: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

U.S. District Judge Jeannette Vargas in Manhattan ruled Friday that the 75-country policy exceeded Secretary of State Marco Rubio's authority under federal immigration law. The policy categorically prevented immigrant visas from being issued based on an applicant's nationality while the State Department reassessed screening standards intended to identify people it considered at greater risk of becoming a public charge. Judge Vargas ordered the policy set aside, restoring individualized consideration of affected cases.

The new worldwide appointment pause is different. The State Department has not described it as a nationality-based restriction, and available information does not establish that it was adopted in response to Friday's court ruling. Instead, the department says the scheduling disruption is necessary while consular officers receive additional training intended to make public-charge assessments more comprehensive and consistent.

Under existing immigration law, consular officers may find an applicant inadmissible if they determine that the person is likely to become a public charge. The State Department says officers consider factors including age, health, family circumstances, financial resources, education and skills, along with relevant benefit history. The department has also begun using public-charge bonds in selected immigrant visa cases as another means for some applicants to overcome such concerns.

The pause also reaches employment-based immigrant visas, which allow qualified foreign nationals to enter the United States for permanent employment. Federal law makes approximately 140,000 employment-based immigrant visas available each fiscal year across several preference categories, including professionals, skilled workers and certain other workers.

The timing creates an unusual sequence for applicants from the Caribbean countries covered by the previous policy. Friday's ruling removed a nationality-based barrier that had prevented immigrant visas from being issued to them since January. Days later, applicants of all nationalities are confronting appointment disruptions while consular officers undergo the new training.

How long those disruptions will last remains unclear. The State Department has not provided a completion date for the training or a timetable for restoring normal immigrant visa appointment schedules.

