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Asylum Update

UPDATE: On March 30, 2026, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued a [public update](#) regarding its indefinite pause on adjudicating affirmative asylum applications. After implementing “enhanced screening and vetting practices”, USCIS stated the hold had been lifted on asylum applications submitted by people from “non high-risk countries.”¹ USCIS noted that it continues to work with the U.S. Department of State to assess risk factors for the countries still subject to an adjudication hold to recommend improvements to the screening process.

What is the status of asylum adjudications by USCIS?

On November 28, 2025, the Director of USCIS [announced](#) that USCIS had “halted all asylum decisions”.² An unsigned policy memorandum (hereinafter “Memo”) was subsequently [released by USCIS](#) on December 2, 2025, stating that, effective immediately, USCIS personnel were instructed to place an indefinite hold on the adjudication of all Forms I-589 (Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal), regardless of nationality. Additionally, the Memo instructed USCIS personnel to place an indefinite hold on adjudicating all benefit requests from nationals of the [countries listed in President Trump’s proclamations from June and December 2025](#),³ and it further requires a comprehensive re-review of approved benefit requests for noncitizens from those same countries who entered the United States on or after January 20, 2021.

The Memo mandates that all noncitizens subject to the guidance “undergo a thorough re-review process, including a potential interview and, if necessary, a re-interview, to fully assess all national security and public safety threats along with any other related grounds of inadmissibility or ineligibility. An individualized, case-by-case review and assessment will be done of all relevant information and facts.” Within 90 days of the issuance of the Memo, it requires USCIS “to prioritize a list for review, interview, re-interview, and referral to ICE and other law enforcement agencies as appropriate” and to issue operational guidance.

These measures followed, among other events cited in the Memo, the [tragic shooting of two West Virginia National Guardsmen](#) on patrol in Washington, D.C., on November 27, 2025.⁴ The alleged gunman was identified as an individual from Afghanistan who entered the United States on humanitarian parole during Operation Allies Welcome in 2021.⁵

¹ “High-risk countries” refers to those listed in Presidential Proclamation 10998.

² @USCISJoe, X (Nov. 28, 2025, 6:12 PM), <https://x.com/USCISJoe/status/1994545007588774347?s=20>.

³ See USCCB, THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S TRAVEL BAN AND RESTRICTIONS FOR NATIONALS OF CERTAIN COUNTRIES (last updated Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/The%20Trump%20Administration%E2%80%99s%20Travel%20Ban%20and%20Restrictions%20for%20Nationals%20of%20Certain%20Countries.pdf>.

⁴ Press Release, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, Bishop Brennan’s Statement Regarding the Shooting of Two West Virginia National Guard Soldiers in Washington D.C. (Nov 27, 2025), <https://dwc.org/11-27-25-bishop-brennans-statement-regarding-the-shooting-of-two-west-virginia-national-guard-soldiers-in-washington-d-c/>.

⁵ Tara Suter, What to Know About Rahmanullah Lakanwal, Suspect in National Guard Shooting, HILL (Dec. 2, 2025), <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/5630231-afghan-refugee-white-house-shooting/>.

Does this pause on the adjudication of asylum claims apply to noncitizens in immigration court proceedings?

No. The immigration courts fall under the U.S. Department of Justice’s Executive Office for Immigration Review, not USCIS. Therefore, immigration judges can still grant asylum for those found eligible in the course of proceedings before an immigration court.

How long will the pause of these adjudications last?

No clear end date was provided in the Memo, simply that the actions are “pending a comprehensive review” and “in effect until lifted by the USCIS Director through a subsequent memorandum.”

The [update provided via the USCIS website](#) on March 30, 2026, indicates the general pause on affirmative asylum adjudications has been lifted,⁶ though a subsequent memorandum has not been publicly released.

Have any other measures been implemented recently?

In addition to the pause on USCIS’ processing of affirmative asylum applications and review of requests submitted by those from the 19 travel ban countries, the U.S. Department of State has also announced that it is halting visa issuance for individuals traveling on an Afghan passport, including special immigrant visas (SIV), which are available to Afghan nationals who aided the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.⁷ The suspension on visa issuance will remain in effect until further notice.

It is important to note that Afghan nationals were generally already subject to restrictions under the travel ban from June 2025. While SIV holders were previously exempt, that exemption is no longer in effect.

The Trump Administration also recently announced that it would be reviewing all individuals who entered the United States through the [U.S. Refugee Admissions Program](#) in recent years.⁸

⁶ *Update on USCIS’ Strengthened Screening and Vetting* (Mar. 30, 2026), <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/update-on-uscis-strengthened-screening-and-vetting>.

⁷ *Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans - Who Were Employed by/on Behalf of the U.S. Government*, U.S. Dep’t of State, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html> (last visited Dec. 5, 2025).

⁸ *See generally* USCCB, *UPDATE ON THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM* (last updated Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Update%20on%20USRAP.pdf>.