

FACT SHEET: Modernizing and Streamlining Our Legal Immigration System for the 21st Century

As part of his immigration executive actions on November 21, 2014, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum on [“Modernizing and Streamlining the U.S. Immigrant Visa System for the 21st Century.”](#) In this Memorandum, the President directed the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security to lead an interagency effort to develop recommendations, in consultation with stakeholders and experts, to:

- (1) reduce government costs, improve services for applicants, reduce burdens on employers, and combat waste, fraud, and abuse in the system;
- (2) ensure that policies, practices, and systems use all of the visa numbers that Congress provides for and intends to be used, consistent with demand; and
- (3) modernize the information technology infrastructure underlying the visa processing system with the goal to reduce redundant systems, improve the experience of applicants, and enable better oversight.

To develop these recommendations, the Departments of State (State) and Homeland Security (DHS), working in consultation with the White House and other federal agencies, conducted a thorough review of options to modernize and streamline our legal immigration system within existing authorities.

Building on November’s Immigration Executive Actions

These recommendations are part of the President’s efforts to modernize, streamline and strengthen the immigration system within existing executive authorities. These steps are enhancing the integrity of our immigration system and national security while contributing to our economy. According to the Council of Economic Advisors, the President’s executive actions, if fully implemented, [would be expected](#) to boost our nation’s gross domestic product (GDP) by between \$100 billion and \$250 billion, expand the size of the American labor force, and raise average annual wages for U.S.-born workers by 0.4 percent, or \$220 in today’s dollars, over the next 10 years. The President’s actions would also cut the Federal deficit by [\\$30 billion in 2024](#).

Today, USCIS also published a notice of proposed rulemaking regarding one of the executive actions announced last November. This proposed regulation would expand an existing process to provide provisional waivers to certain family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents seeking to obtain lawful permanent residence, thereby reducing family separation. Currently, the process is only available to relatives of certain U.S. citizens. This notice of proposed rulemaking is one of several executive actions that continues to move forward.

Highlights of Report Released Today

Modernizing Our System for Efficiency and Accessibility: Currently, the immigration application and adjudication process is mostly paper-based, requiring documents to change hands and locations among various federal actors at least six times for some petitions. These recommendations will make our system more accessible to applicants, bring our technology into the 21st century, and enhance data transparency:

- Create a cross-agency digital services team to support the implementation of the modernized immigrant visa project, which is aimed at improving the visa applicant experience and increasing efficiencies in the adjudication process through digitization;
- Redesign systems with an eye towards a human perspective and accessibility for users;
- Convene a communications task force to create clearer, plain-language instructions;
- Adopt best practices for software development and modernize technology stacks to improve content management; and
- Create an interagency task force to enhance data collection and publication in order to increase transparency.

Streamlining Our Legal Immigration System: Our legal immigration system provides numerous options for individuals to obtain status, temporary or permanent, in the United States, as governed by existing law. Many of these programs are backlogged as a result of statutory caps, which can only be addressed through legislation. However, the following recommendations serve to improve existing programs, making our system more efficient and effective for the applicant as well as our agencies and their teams:

- Improve the issuance of employment-based immigrant visa numbers;
- Increase efficiency for international arrivals through enhanced technology and an increased focus on high-risk travelers;
- Implement the “Known Employer Program,” which will allow employers meeting strict criteria to pre-establish certain requirements as petitioners, by creating a prototype, publishing a report upon completion of the pilot, and creating an implementation plan for a permanent program;
- Improve integrity and increase the minimum investment for immigrant investor visas; and
- Enhance opportunities and provide greater clarity for certain nonimmigrants, including the circumstances under which U.S. employers may directly sponsor students on F-1 visas for lawful permanent residence.

Strengthening Our Humanitarian System: There are numerous avenues for humanitarian relief provided to vulnerable individuals in our immigration system. However, many of our existing policies and regulations do not reflect the most recent laws. These recommendations will improve our system for individuals seeking humanitarian relief:

- Allow certain family members of Filipino veterans, who are currently in the family immigration backlogs, to seek parole so they can care for these aging veterans;
- Simplify systems for domestic violence survivors who seek immigration relief through the VAWA self-petitioner process;
- Implement statutory provisions for victims of crime and trafficking; and
- Provide guidance and consistency for vulnerable populations seeking immigration relief.

These recommendations are concrete steps forward that will improve our legal immigration system. However, they do not offer the permanent, more robust solutions that are vitally needed to address our broken immigration system. President Obama is acting within his legal authority to fix what he can, but only Congress can finish the job by passing comprehensive, commonsense immigration reform that fully brings our legal immigration system into the 21st century. The President remains committed to working with Congress to pursue legislative reform.