



We are delighted to bring you the first CIEE news and policy update for the New Year. In this edition, you will find a recap of the September 2025 third country non-immigrant visa application guidance, the December 2025 travel restriction announcement, clarity on the January 21 visa processing pause, and an overview of recent federal budget activity.

Non-Immigrant Visa Applications in a Third Country

In September of 2025 ([updated in December](#)), the Department of State issued guidance that impacts third country visa applicants. The U.S. Department of State requires all nonimmigrant visa applicants to schedule in-person interview appointments at the U.S. embassy or consulate in their country of nationality or residence. If the application is based on residency the applicant must be able to demonstrate their residence in the country where they are applying.

Nationals of countries where the U.S. does not conduct routine nonimmigrant visa operations must apply at the designated embassy or consulate unless their residence is elsewhere. The countries without routine visa operations are: Afghanistan, Belarus, Chad, Cuba, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Niger, Russia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen, and Zimbabwe. To find the designated embassy or consulate, use this [link](#).

The [U.S. Department of State's "Student Visa" page](#) advises that, "You may schedule your interview at another U.S. embassy or consulate, but be aware that it may be more difficult to demonstrate that you qualify for a visa outside of the country where you live." Applicants who schedule nonimmigrant interviews at a U.S. embassy or consulate outside of their country of nationality or residence likely will find it more difficult to qualify for a visa and will experience longer wait times for an appointment. Additionally, once paid, visa application fees are not refundable or transferable.

U.S. Travel Restrictions

In mid-December, President Trump issued a [Presidential Proclamation](#) that added 20 countries to the list of those with full or partial travel restrictions into the United States. The travel restrictions went into effect on January 1 and apply to nationals who are outside of the U.S. and who do not have a valid visa. Participants from the designated countries who have a valid visa but have not entered the U.S., may be denied entry at the border.

The full entry restrictions prohibit entry for both immigrants and non-immigrants. The partial entry bans prohibit entry for immigrants and those non-immigrants who are using B (1,2), F, M and J visas from 19 countries. For Turkmenistan, entry is suspended for immigrants only.

In finalizing the list of countries for restricted entry into the U.S., the President and senior officials considered visa overstay rates, each country's screening and vetting capabilities, information-sharing policies, and country-specific risk factors. The list of restricted travel countries will be assessed continually to determine if the suspensions and limitations should be modified.

Visa Processing Pause for Immigrant Visa Categories Only

Beginning on January 21, the U.S. Department of State will pause immigrant visa processing for nationals from 75 countries, including some of the countries who face travel restrictions as part of the Presidential Proclamation in December (see above). [This processing pause does not affect non-immigrant visa categories.](#) The U.S. Department of State provided [this visa processing update](#), with a list of the 75 countries who will be impacted, and stated, "...this pause is specifically for immigrant visa applicants."

To be clear, immigrant visas are for individuals who are seeking to live permanently in the United States. While, non-immigrant visas are for temporary stays, like tourism, studying, temporary work, or participating in the BridgeUSA program. Non-immigrant visas have a set length of stay and require the visa holder to have a purpose for being in the U.S.

As [reported](#) by the Associated Press on January 14, "The suspension, which will begin January 21, will not apply to applicants seeking non-immigrant visas, or temporary tourist or business visas, who make up the vast majority of visa seekers. Demand for non-immigrant visas is expected to rise dramatically in the coming months and years due to the upcoming 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympics both of which the U.S. will host or co-host."

Federal Spending Package -- Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Department of State Budget

On Wednesday, January 14, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a two-bill government spending package that included the federal budget for the U.S. Department of State. Since returning to work in January, the House has worked diligently to pass funding bills for the current fiscal year (FY26) to avoid a government shutdown, as spending bills passed in November 2025 will expire on January 30.

Currently, Congress has passed only three of the 12 annual spending bills that fund federal agencies. Failure to pass the remaining nine bills before the January 30th deadline risks another shutdown just weeks after the record-setting, 43-day shutdown that occurred in November last year.

The [spending bill to fund the Department of State](#) would support the agencies' operations through September 30, 2026. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs would be funded at US\$667 million (down compared to previous funding levels). Of that US\$667 million, US\$273.4 million would be used for the Fulbright Program, US\$99.75 million for the International Visitor Leadership Program, US\$35.6 million for the Young Leaders Initiatives, and US\$16.15 million for the Gilman International Scholarship Program.

Other provisions of interest include:

- Visa Wait Times: US\$513 million is allocated for Consular and Border Security Programs with purposes to include the reduction of passport backlogs and visa wait times. More specifically, State Department updates to the House on visa wait times should include

these additional details: the impact of new vetting procedures on visa wait times, preventing fraud, safeguarding security interests, the cost of visa operations, and how the Department is prioritizing the allocation of resources to posts with high visa wait times.

- The bill includes a provision that would prohibit any funds being used to modify the Exchange Visitor Program without going through the formal Congressional rulemaking process.

This Department of State funding package, as approved by the House, has moved to the U.S. Senate for consideration. Stay tuned as CIEE watches for any budget updates and news of a 2026 government shutdown. We will continue to update you as we learn more.

CIEE thanks you for your support and advocacy. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to your point of contact at CIEE.

Questions? Contact [Asenith Dixon Bell](#).

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