

H-1B workers stranded in India

Traveled from US this month to renew visas

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NEW DELHI — Indian H-1B visa holders who traveled back to India this month to renew their American work permits are now stranded far from home after their appointments were abruptly canceled by US consular offices and rescheduled for months later, according to three immigration lawyers who specialize in H-1B cases.

Hundreds, possibly thousands, of highly skilled workers had their appointments canceled between Dec. 15 and 26, the lawyers said. In emails viewed by The Washington Post, the State Department told visa holders their interviews were being delayed after the implementation of the Trump administration's new social media vetting policy, "to ensure that no applicants . . . pose a threat to US national security or public safety."

The H-1B immigration program has been a source of controversy during Trump's second term. Some of his most influential far-right backers have called for the program to be eliminated, arguing it takes jobs from US citizens. But tech executives in Silicon Valley have pushed back, saying H-1B workers are vital for their industry.

The sudden cancellations have upended lives, the lawyers said, leaving workers on expired visas fearful of losing their jobs. Emily Neumann, a partner at the Houston-based immigration firm Reddy Neumann Brown PC, said she had at least 100 clients stranded in India.

Many of those affected are tech workers in their 30s and 40s, the lawyers said, who have lived in the United States for years. They are now scrambling to find alternative work arrangements with their US companies. Some who traveled to India with their kids must now decide whether to keep them out of school or send them home alone; others are separated from their families entirely.

Asked for comment, the White House and the US Embassy in India referred The Post to the State Department.

A spokesperson for the State Department said that "while in the past, the emphasis may have been on processing cases quickly and reducing wait times, our embassies and consulates around the world, including in India, are now prioritizing thoroughly vetting each visa case above all else."

India has long been the biggest beneficiary of the H-1B program, accounting for 71 percent of visa holders, according to a report from US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). As of September, Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft were the three largest sponsors of H-1B workers, the USCIS data shows.