

Business Standard

US shuts immigration help desk in big setback for H-1B, green card hopefuls

Immigration lawyers say the closure will affect H-1B visa holders, F-1 international students, and green card applicants

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An H-1B Denial, Layoff Or Economic Downturn Could Mean Being Forced To Leave The Country Despite Years Of Residence.

The Trump administration has shut down the Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) Ombudsman, a department that helped thousands of immigrants resolve delays and disputes with the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), according to the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA).

Immigration lawyers say the closure will affect H-1B visa holders, international students on F-1 visas, and green card applicants—many of them from the Indian diaspora.

One less safeguard for immigrants

“The CIS Ombudsman wasn’t just another government department; for many immigrants, especially H-1B professionals and green card aspirants, it was a rare source of hope and accountability,” said Varun Singh, managing director at XIPHIAS Immigration, speaking to Business Standard.

The AILA said the office handled around 30,000 requests last year, helping individuals who were facing delays, administrative errors or stalled cases despite having followed official procedures.

Dan Rothfeld, managing director at K Altman Law, said the decision would have a direct impact on those navigating the US immigration system. “While the Office of the CIS Ombudsman does not set immigration policy or adjudicate cases, it plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in the USCIS process,” he told Business Standard in consultation with Keith Altman, founding partner of the firm.

“This office has historically acted as a vital independent resource for addressing case delays, identifying systemic issues, and assisting individuals—particularly international students and skilled workers—facing procedural challenges. Without it, many of these applicants lose an essential safeguard and advocate within the immigration system,” he said.

H-1B applicants face longer waits, fewer options

According to Rothfeld, the H-1B process is already complex and often marked by delays or arbitrary denials. “The loss of access to an ombudsman means there is one less avenue for addressing unreasonable delays or reporting issues with policy implementation. For green card applicants, the impact is similarly severe, especially for those experiencing backlogs or seeking to rectify administrative errors without sufficient recourse,” he said.

“At K Altman Law, we view this development as a step backward for due process. We urge continued oversight and the preservation of mechanisms that protect fairness and transparency in immigration—especially for those who contribute so meaningfully to American institutions and innovation,” he added.

OPT rejections, visa extensions stalled

Students were also frequent users of the office, especially when their optional practical training (OPT) applications were mishandled.

“Students frequently sought help when their optional practical training (OPT) applications were mishandled, threatening job offers they had already accepted,” wrote Rajiv S Khanna, an immigration lawyer based in Arlington, on [immigration.com](https://www.immigration.com).

He cited a case involving an F-1 student whose OPT application was wrongly rejected after USCIS misread her paperwork. “She had already missed her start date with a major tech company when we approached the CIS Ombudsman. They quickly identified the error and facilitated reopening of the case, saving both her job and legal status,” he said.

Delays with H-1B extensions were another common issue. “In one instance, an engineer from Bangalore had his H-1B extension pending for 11 months despite multiple service requests. His employer was considering termination, and he faced losing his home. After the Ombudsman’s intervention, approval came within two weeks,” Khanna wrote.

Indians still form largest H-1B group

Indian professionals continue to be the largest recipients of the H-1B visa. Around 191,000 visas were granted to Indians in the 2023 financial year. That number rose to about 207,000 in FY 2024.

But securing the visa is just the first step. The real challenge begins with the wait for permanent residency. For Indian nationals, that process often stretches across decades due to strict annual limits and per-country caps.

According to US government data, over one million Indians are currently stuck in employment-based green card backlogs. These delays, immigration lawyers say, can derail lives and make it harder for the US to retain skilled talent.

An H-1B denial, a layoff, or even an economic downturn could leave workers with no option but to leave the country—despite years of legal residence.

“From an Indian perspective, where a large volume of highly skilled professionals depend on the H-1B program and await green card approvals for years, this move adds another layer of uncertainty,” said Singh. “It emphasises the need for applicants to work with experienced immigration professionals who can help navigate these challenges and advocate effectively within the system.”

First Published: Apr 09 2025 | 3:51 PM IST