Over 200,000 Indians could die in Green Card line: study

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Amid an increase in demand for health professionals due to COVID-19, a backlog exists of foreign doctors, researchers and other health professionals unable to receive legal permanent residence in the US.

And per-country limits on green cards force Indians to bear nearly the entire burden of a broken system, according to a new Immigration and Research Policy Brief released by a leading public policy research organization Monday.

Written and researched by policy expert David Bier, the brief by Washington, DC, - based CATO Institute takes an extensive look on the employment based green card backlog.

Skilled Indian workers make up 75 percent of the employment-based backlog, Bier finds, and recently backlogged Indian workers face an impossible wait of nine decades if they all could remain in the line.

The Indian EB-2 and EB-3 backlog is by far the longest, affecting lives of hundreds of thousands of skilled employees with advanced degrees.

More recent immigrants are facing lifetime waits for green cards, according to the brief. About 205,000 could die in line, even if they stay in line as long as possible.

More than one million immigrants are waiting for lawful permanent residence solely from outdated caps, it says.

Bier has carefully studied the green card backlog pattern while also looking at the projection of future wait times. He also deeply examines the Indian skilled worker backlog while also suggesting options for reform.

Explaining the green card backlog, he says,"Because the demand (for green card) has increased since Congress last updated the cap 30 years ago, the number of approved immigrants whom the cap is preventing from applying for green cards is skyrocketing."

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Bier finds that skilled Indian workers make up 75 percent of the employment-based backlog and recently backlogged Indian workers face an impossible wait of nine decades if they all could remain in the line.

The policy brief also says that more than 200,000 petitions filed for Indians could expire as a result of workers dying of old age before they receive green cards.

Outlining why Indians bear the brunt of longest wait times. Brier says, "Indians endure much longer waits because the law imposes limits on the number of green cards for immigrants from any single birthplace and because US employers file far more petitions for Indians than the limits allow."

"With recent skilled Indian workers facing a de facto ban on legal permanent residence based solely on their place of birth, Congress should prioritize the removal of these limits" he says.

"However, this reform alone would still leave unsustainable waits of more than a decade for every employer-sponsored immigrant and allow the backlog to escalate past 2.4 million by 2030."

"To avoid driving billions of dollars in investment and hundreds of thousands of skilled workers abroad," Brier suggests, "Congress must quickly increase the number of employment-based green cards before this problem worsens."