

Indian women get maximum H-4 visas in the US, get paid like H-1B holders

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The Donald Trump administration has been trying to stop work permits for spouses of H-1B visa holders. Cato Institute says, if the Trump administration succeeds, it will have a serious impact on the US economy.

New Delhi: Indian women are an integral part of US workforce and without them, the US economy may contract by at least \$7.5 billion annually, says a study by Cato Institute in the US. The Donald Trump administration has been trying to stop work permits for spouses of H-1B visa holders. Cato Institute says, if the Trump administration succeeds, this will have a serious impact on Indian women and the US economy.

The *Times of India* cited David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at Cato Institute's Centre for Global Liberty and Prosperity, who wrote in a blog that nearly 90% of H-4 workers (spouses of H-1Bs get the H-4 visa) are highly paid women from India with college degrees. He said if Trump succeeded and if the move encouraged their H-1B families to leave the country, the impact would be more than double the \$7.5 billion estimated for women ceasing to work.

Worth mentioning here is that the Obama administration had created an employment authorisation document (EAD) provision for H-4 in 2015 to encourage those on H-1Bs to stay on in the US as it becomes difficult for H-1Bs to stay in the US for long if their spouses find it difficult to work. EADs are given to H-4s only if their H-1B spouses are being sponsored by their employers to obtain permanent residence in the country

Cato Institute estimates that out of about 500,000 spouses who are in the US on H-4, some 90,000 have work authorisations. Bier said nearly two-thirds of H-4 visa holders sponsored by employers for permanent residence from 2015 to 2020 worked in computer and math occupations. And nearly two-thirds of those were software developers. Indian male engineers on H-1Bs are clearly tending to marry equally qualified women who then join them in the US on H-4 visas.

The daily citing Bier mentioned that the median wage for H-4 visa holders sponsored by employers for permanent residence in 2019 was \$111,632. This compares to the median wage offer of \$113,022 for H-1B workers in the same position and \$53,490 for all US workers. His estimate of the loss of \$7.5 billion is based on these salary and work-authorisation numbers.

Another reason why Indians dominate H-4s is that nearly 70% of the H-1Bs go to Indians. In 2020, the Indian share of H-4s was even higher at 87%. This, Bier says, may be because Indian H-1Bs receiving permanent residence in 2020 spent at least a decade and, in many cases, as long

as 15 years before receiving green cards. Indians wait longer because of the country quota for green cards. There are far more Indians applying for it relative to the quota for India.