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Over 800,000 Indian nationals in green card backlog in United States

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STORY OUTLINE

- Indians comprise 68% of the total employment-based green card backlog.
- Large companies use the employment based green cards to hold on to high-skilled workers.
- President-elect Joe Biden had made reforms in green cards an election agenda.

The green card backlog for employment-based immigrants in 2020 crossed 1.2 million applicants, the highest ever. Indians comprise about 68% of this.

Pune: Indian nationals in line for an employment-based green card in the United States number more than 800,000, according to in US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data.

The green card backlog for employment-based immigrants in 2020 crossed 1.2 million applicants, the highest ever. Indians comprise about 68 per cent of this.

According to a paper by US think tank CATO Institute, Indian employer-sponsored applicants face an eight-decade wait for green cards, and nearly 200,000 will die before they can even theoretically reach the front of the line. Chinese applicants comprised 14 per cent of the backlog, and the rest of the world, 18 per cent.

Employment based green cards, or the Permanent Employment Program (PERM), are often used by large companies to hold on to high-skilled workers by sponsoring their permanent residency in the United States.

There is currently a 7 per cent annual country cap or 140,000 PERM green cards that are issued annually.

In the paper, David Bier, immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, said that the backlog was a result of insufficient numbers under the green card limits and not a delay in processing applications.

As a result of the country cap, once a petition is approved, if the quota has been exhausted, the applicant moves to the backlog.

There was an increase in the number of green cards available in financial year 2021, as over 121,000 unused green cards (as a result of the Presidential Proclamation banning immigration in certain categories till December) from the family quota was added to this.

“The increases are almost entirely concentrated in the EB-2 and EB-3 category for employer-sponsored immigrants with master’s or bachelor’s degrees. The backlog for these categories increased 127,609,” said Bier.

There have been calls to reform the PERM process, with US President-elect Joe Biden making green card a part of his election agenda.

However, it would be a long-drawn process before this can happen, said policy watchers.

According to the paper, the EB-2 and EB-3 category backlog from India reached 741,209 in April and that, despite the spill over from the family-based categories, backlogged petitions still face an expected wait of 84 years.

Both categories are combined due to the potential for EB-2 workers to switch to the EB-3 category for advanced degree holders if wait times become more favourable there.