Indians bagged highest employer-sponsored green cards issued by US in 2019

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Indians bagged the highest number of green cards issued by the United States government based on employment in 2019. However, Indians also were the largest group of people who were waiting to be accepted.

According to data from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a total of 1,48,415 applications were made for the green card based on employment, of which 1,15,458 were approved.

The application for the green card is the I-140, known as the Immigrant Petition for Alien Workers. These are allotted in three levels of preference — the first comprises those with extraordinary ability, outstanding professors or researchers and multinational executives or managers. The second tier has professionals with advanced degrees and the third preference is for skilled workers, professionals with baccalaureate degrees and unskilled workers. For employment-based categories, the employer is required to sponsor the visa.

Out of the total number of applications, 64,906 applications were from Indian nationals across all categories, of which 56,608 were approved and 1,352 were denied. However, pendency rates shot up in 2019 across the board, and India saw a huge spike as well. 2019 was also the first year in the last decade where the number of applications pending was a lot higher than the number of applications denied.

26,939 applications were kept pending by the USCIS in 2019, of which 6,946 were from India.

In comparison, 3,150 applications were kept pending in 2018, of which just 239 were from India. However, the reason for the sharp spike in the number of pending applications is not known.

For Indians, the number of applications approved for Indian nationals has been decreasing since 2016 with a marginal increase in 2019, after a spike from 2015 to 2016. The number of approvals sharply increased to 67,204 in 2016 from 45,435 in 2015. However, since then, 59,797 were approved in 2017, 56,119 in 2018 and 56,608 in 2019. While the trend for the rate at which the applications were filed corresponds from 2015 to 2018, approval rates in 2019 went down despite applications increasing.

From 2009 to 2019, applications from Indian nationals went from 15,060 to 64,906.

There is a country limit for the card, and no country can receive more than 7% of the total green cards issued by the United States. This has created a backlog of applicants, with long waiting periods to obtain a green card.

Overall, applications of 25,281 nationals are pending. Across applicants from all countries, 82,848 applications are pending.

Of the top 10 companies which file permanent residency applications for Indian nationals, a majority were US-based companies in 2019, and the only Indian companies to feature on the list are Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services.

Based on 2018 figures, American thinktank CATO Institute stated that it would take 49 years to process the backlog of applications by Indians.

This comes as the H-1B visa, issued to those working in the United States, has seen an increase in denials. The rate of denial for H-1B petitions for initial employment increased from 6% in FY2015 to 24% in the first three quarters (October to June) of FY2019. The US financial year starts from October 1 and ends on September 30.

In May last year, the US administration under President Donald Trump had proposed a "merit-based immigration system" increasing the number of merit-based legal immigrants from 12% to 57%. While this hasn't moved forward and has been heavily criticised, the administration is still trying to make this work.

The Fairness for High Skilled Immigrants Act, which sought to remove country caps was introduced and passed through the US House of Representatives, but failed to pass in the US Senate.