



A Message from the U.S. Department of State

In response to significant worldwide challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic the Department of State has temporarily suspended routine visa services at all U.S. Embassies and Consulates. Understanding concerns about the impact on "H2A" Temporary Agricultural Workers, the Secretary of State has made the temporary adjustments in processing H2A visa applications described below.

H-2 Visas and COVID-19

We are aware of the importance of the H-2 program to the economy and food security of the United States. Secretary Pompeo, in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, has authorized consular officers to expand the categories of H-2 visa applicants whose applications can be adjudicated without an in-person interview.

Consular officers can, if they so choose, now waive the visa interview requirement for first-time and returning H-2 applicants who have no apparent ineligibility or potential ineligibility. This expansion also increases the period in which returning workers may qualify for an interview waiver. Applicants whose previous visas expired in the last 48 months, and who did not require a waiver of ineligibility the last time they applied, do not need to be interviewed in-person if they are applying for the same visa classification as their previous visa.

We anticipate the vast majority of otherwise qualified H-2 applicants will now be adjudicated without an interview. All applicants undergo the same security checks, regardless of whether they are interviewed or processed via interview waiver. If the screening process determines an applicant may have a possible ineligibility for the visa, the applicant must have an in-person interview.

In light of the current drawdown in services and the inability to interview these applicants in person, cases with associated derogatory information will be suspended and refused under INA 221(g) until the resumption of visa interviews. Consular resources and local government restrictions vary widely, and each consular section is reviewing its capacity to adjudicate visa applications during this worldwide pandemic.

Consular officers may still require an in-person interview for H-2 applicants in their country, based on circumstances in their country. Consult with the relevant embassy or consulate in order to confirm the level of services currently offered.

The Department intends to continue processing H-2 cases as much as possible, but will need to modify our procedures in order to facilitate the social distancing recommended by health authorities. This is a temporary action due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures will end no later than December 31, 2020. This action has been taken because we are aware of the importance of the H-2 program to the economy and food security of the United States.

For those having issues, USDA has requested that inquiries be sent to: aglabor@usda.gov

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