

Go easy on H-1B, STEM pupils to win against China: US think tank

ET economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/visa-and-immigration/go-easy-on-h-1b-stem-pupils-to-win-against-china-us-think-tank/articleshow/71191571.cms

September 18, 2019

US should remove curbs on H-1B visas to help retain edge against China, a US-based think tank has said.

By

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Updated: Sep 19, 2019, 06.20 AM IST

PUNE: The Council on Foreign Relations, a US-based think tank, has asked the Trump administration to offer "green cards" to students with advanced US degrees, besides removing restrictions on H-1B visas, to boost the country's effort to compete against China in new technology areas.



The independent think tank has asked the US government to allow foreign students qualified in science, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM) to work and stay on in the country to help retain its edge against China. "The United States needs to make it easier for foreign graduates of US universities in scientific & technical fields to remain and work in the country.

Congress should "staple a green card to an advanced diploma", granting lawful permanent residence to those who earn a STEM master's degree or doctorate," said the think tank in a report authored by a team led by a McKinsey executive and a former admiral of the US Navy.

"The administration should reverse measures that have created new obstacles for many foreign students and foreign workers on temporary work visas, such as the H-1B," according to the report, which has inputs from former CEO Eric Schmidt, Yahoo founder Jerry Yang, Jim Breyer of Breyer and executives from Apple and Facebook. Indians account for a majority of H-1B visa holders, who have traditionally gone there to work on technology projects for US clients.

Over 300,000 Indians are in the queue for a green card, which allows them to permanently reside in the US. Chinese nationals, around 67,000, come second on the list of people waiting for the coveted green card, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service in December last year. The US has, however, increased restrictions on H-1B visas after President Donald Trump rode to power on his Buy American, Hire American policy.

Nearly a fifth of all H-1B visa applications were rejected in the first quarter of 2019 as against only 4% in 2016, according to US government data. The

US has put in place a new rule that favours candidates with US master's degree for its work permit. It has also moved plans to rescind an Obama-era rule that allowed spouses of H-1B work permit holders to work there.

Indian nationals, the majority of them qualified women, have been the primary beneficiaries of the H-4 EAD, receiving over 90% of the 120,000 visas issued since 2015. "Other countries, such as Australia and Canada, are using these developments to lure talent," the think tank said in a report.

In a 2019 survey of 400 US hiring professionals from big and small companies, 63% said they were increasing their presence in Canada, either by sending more workers there or by hiring foreign nationals, because of US immigration policies, it pointed out.

"Technology is our only edge in the commercial world and if we lose that, we fall behind. In order to maintain and enhance this, we need a system to attract and keep STEM graduates," Rajiv S Khanna, managing attorney at law firm Immigration.com, said. Congress should pass legislation that permits immigrants to live and work in the United States if they can raise funds to start new companies, the think tank said in its report.
