

# Global Immigration alert

March 2026

## United States

### DOS announces expanded screening and vetting for visa applicants

#### Executive summary

Effective 30 March 2026, the US Department of State (DOS) will expand its online presence review to additional non-immigrant visa categories, beyond the existing H-1B, H-4, F, M, and J visa applicants already subject to the review. Under this expansion, visa categories for diplomats or government officials, trainees, fiancé(e)s of US citizens, cultural exchange visitors, religious workers, and humanitarian visa applicants will be impacted. The expanded screening is expected to increase vetting for visa applications and contribute to longer processing timelines at US consulates. Employers and individual visa applicants should anticipate potential delays in visa application processing, increased vetting at interviews, and possible administrative processing.

#### Background and analysis

On 25 March 2026, DOS announced the expansion of its existing online presence review. The expanded policy builds on earlier initiatives that already subjected certain visa applicants to an online presence review and now extends those requirements to additional non-immigrant visa categories.

DOS first implemented its online presence review on 18 June 2025 for visa applicants in the F, M, and J non-immigrant visas. On 15 December 2025, DOS expanded this online presence review to H-1B and H-4 visa applicants.

Effective 30 March 2026, DOS will now further expand its online presence review of visa applicants to the following additional non-immigrant visa categories, in addition to F,

M, J, H-1B, and H-4 visa categories:

- A3
- C3 (domestic workers only)
- G5
- H3 and H4 dependents of H3
- K1, K2, and K3
- Q
- R1 and R2
- S
- T
- U

Under this expanded framework, visa applicants in all the above visa categories are instructed to adjust the privacy settings on all their social media profiles to “public” or “open”.

Consular officers will complete an online presence review to vet each visa applicant to the agency’s satisfaction. In addition to eligibility for the specific visa category, the DOS must assess and verify that visa applicants intend to engage in activities consistent with the category sought and that they do not intend to harm Americans or the national interest.

#### What this means

The expansion of online presence review is likely to result in longer and less predictable visa adjudication timelines across a broader range of non-immigrant visa categories. Visa applications may now be subject to increased vetting, including additional questioning at interview or referral for administrative processing, even for cases that have historically been considered routine. The wait-time for a view

appointment availability may also increase. For example, when DOS had expanded its online presence review to H-1B and H-4 visas in December 2025, Mission India cancelled and rescheduled visa appointments in these categories, delaying visa application processing and new appointment availabilities.

As a result, employers should anticipate potential delays to visa issuance and exercise caution when relying on near-term approvals for workforce planning, hiring, and global mobility decisions. Employers are encouraged to build flexibility into onboarding and project deployment timelines for foreign national employees whose start dates depend on consular visa issuance. Where possible, contingency planning should be considered, including delayed start dates, remote work arrangements where permissible, or alternative immigration strategies. Increased coordination between mobility, HR, legal, and business teams may be necessary to manage expectations and mitigate disruption caused by extended processing times or unexpected delays.

Visa applicants should anticipate longer processing timelines following visa interviews, particularly at high-volume consular posts or for visa classifications newly subject to online presence review. Visa applicants should frequently check the email address listed on their Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application (Form DS-160) to monitor any notices from DOS regarding scheduling or canceling of previously scheduled interviews. Applicants should be prepared for the possibility of follow-up requests, additional screening, or administrative processing. Individuals are advised to remain flexible in travel and relocation planning and avoid making irreversible commitments until visa issuance has been confirmed.

Further expansion of DOS' online presence review remain possible. Anecdotal reports from visa applicants indicate that consular officers are advising that the "public" setting is necessary when adjudicating applications for other visa categories as well. Any non-immigrant visa applicants (beyond those listed above) who have an online social media presence with a "private" setting may therefore experience delays or refusals in the application process. Operational impacts may vary by consular post and are subject to change without advance notice.

We will continue to monitor and review future developments. For additional information, or if you wish to discuss this further, please contact your EY Law LLP professional or Mehlman Jacobs LLP professional.

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