

# ***Doctors From Countries Under Travel Ban Now Allowed to Stay in U.S.***

In a reversal, the Trump administration has exempted foreign physicians from a visa application freeze that was pushing many out of jobs in underserved areas.

By [Miriam Jordan](#) – The New York Times

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Foreign doctors will be able to receive visas allowing them to practice in the United States, after the Trump administration quietly changed a policy to exempt them from a travel ban.

A Department of Homeland Security policy stemming from a travel ban that was put in place in January had [frozen decisions on visa extensions](#), work permits and green cards for citizens of 39 countries. As The New York Times reported last month, some physicians were subsequently placed on administrative leave by hospitals, and many others faced the imminent threat of being forced to stop working.

Late last week, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services updated its website, without a formal announcement, to indicate that physicians are no longer subject to the processing hold. In response to questions from The Times, D.H.S. confirmed in a statement that “Applications associated with medical physicians will continue processing,” meaning that the agency will resume issuing visas and work permits for the group.

The United States faces a shortage of about 65,000 physicians, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges, and the deficit is expected to surge over the next decade as Americans live longer and more doctors retire.

More than 60 percent of foreign physicians practice primary care, including family medicine, internal medicine and pediatrics, which many American doctors shun because of grueling workloads and lower pay compared with other specialties.

“I am glad that the administration took measures to ensure that we can keep our dedicated international physicians,” said Dr. Rebecca Andrews, chair of the Board of Regents for the American College of Physicians, which represents internists, the primary care doctors who treat adults.

“We need to recruit the most skilled doctors no matter where they are from,” she said.

Foreign physicians make up 25 percent of all doctors working in the United States. Physicians from Africa, the Middle East and Venezuela were among those displaced from their jobs.

Ezequiel Veliz, a family doctor from Venezuela who fell out of legal status and whose [new visa had not been processed](#), was detained by federal agents on April 6 at a checkpoint in Texas. [He was released 10 days later](#).

On April 8, more than 20 doctor associations, including the American academies of family physicians, neurology and pediatrics, [signed a letter to the secretaries of state and homeland security](#) expressing “urgent concern” about barriers preventing “qualified, vetted physicians” from entering and remaining in the United States, and calling for a national-interest exemption from the policy as well as expedited processing of their cases.

“Affected physicians have not yet been notified about any changes in their visa process, but we are hopeful after seeing this update,” said Sebastian Arruarana, founder of Project IMG, an organization that represents thousands of international medical graduates in the United States.

Dr. Arruarana, an Argentine internist who has practiced in New York for five years, said that roughly 1,000 doctors completing residencies and fellowships in U.S. hospitals next month were in jeopardy of losing placements in federally designated underserved areas.

Hundreds more accepted into residency programs starting on July 1 were also in limbo, unsure if they could report for duty at hospitals.

Last June, President Trump issued a travel ban covering 19 countries. An expanded order affecting 39 countries went into effect in January. The action mirrored a ban from his first term, which denied entry to people from several majority-Muslim countries. However, that iteration did not apply to people already living and working in the country.

Curtis Morrison, a lawyer who has filed about a dozen lawsuits in federal court to compel the government to process applications, described the exemption as “a great development for physicians and health care in the U.S.”

**[Miriam Jordan](#)** reports from a grass roots perspective on immigrants and their impact on the demographics, society and economy of the United States.