U.S. immigration agencies are expanding social media screening and related data collection across additional visa categories as part of a broader security focused immigration framework. The changes follow a November attack on National Guard members in Washington, D.C., and align with new travel restrictions, increased vetting, and operational shifts affecting visa processing and immigration benefits adjudications.

This update summarizes key federal actions announced or implemented in late 2025 and early 2026, including the expanded travel ban, enhanced social media review for certain nonimmigrant visas, new and proposed biometrics collection, and related processing impacts for employers and foreign nationals.

Expanded travel ban under Presidential Proclamation

On December 16, 2025, President Trump issued a Presidential Proclamation expanding travel restrictions to cover 39 countries, effective January 1, 2026. The Proclamation extends full entry bans to 19 countries identified as having deficient vetting standards or inadequate security cooperation with the United States. Countries cited in reporting include Afghanistan, Iran, and Yemen.

In addition, partial entry bans continue for four countries, and partial restrictions are added for 13 new countries. Countries identified in the partial restriction lists include:

- Continuing partial bans: Burundi, Cuba, Togo, Venezuela
- Newly added partial bans: Angola, Nigeria, Tanzania (among others)

The stated rationale is risk mitigation through tighter screening and limiting entry where identity verification, information sharing, or security cooperation is deemed insufficient.

Exceptions and waivers

The Proclamation includes categorical exceptions and a discretionary waiver process.

Exceptions identified include:

- U.S. lawful permanent residents (LPRs)
- Dual nationals traveling on a passport from a country not subject to restrictions
- Athletes participating in major sporting events

Waivers: Case by case waivers may be available for individuals whose entry is determined to be in the U.S. national interest, subject to the standards and procedures applied by the relevant agencies.

USCIS adjudications freeze for “high risk” countries

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has frozen adjudication of certain immigration benefit applications for applicants from “high risk” countries. While scope can vary by form type and internal guidance, the operational effect is that filings linked to designated countries may experience suspension of action or extended holds pending additional review, interagency vetting, or policy updates.

For employers and foreign nationals, the practical risk is that case timelines may become indeterminate, particularly where adjudication depends on background checks, security clearances, or confirmation of identity and travel history that is difficult to verify through partner governments.

Enhanced social media vetting expanded to additional visa categories

Enhanced screening of online presence has been implemented for H-1B and H-4 visa applicants, with consular officers reviewing social media platforms for potential inadmissibility issues and national security concerns. The operational change is consistent with the broader shift toward expanded data collection and risk based screening at the application stage.

Although public descriptions often refer to “social media vetting,” the review is generally part of an overall assessment of eligibility and admissibility, including potential security related grounds, misrepresentation indicators, and other risk signals.

The extent of review may vary by post, country of nationality, travel history, or other risk factors.

Operational constraints and visa appointment disruptions

Consular operations have reported constraints linked to implementing expanded screening and national security processing measures. As a result, some H-1B and H-4 visa appointments have been rescheduled. The stated basis is the additional time and resources required to process visas under the enhanced vetting framework.

Monitoring and scheduling updates

Visa applicants should monitor email accounts and appointment portals for scheduling changes, including cancellations, rescheduling notices, and requests for additional documentation or administrative processing steps.

Employer and employee travel risk

Employers and foreign employees should evaluate travel risks associated with visa stamping and reentry, particularly where:

- Appointments may be rescheduled with limited notice
- Administrative processing may become more common or prolonged

- Travel ban restrictions or partial limitations may apply based on nationality, dual nationality, or travel document used
- Entry and exit data collection has expanded, increasing the likelihood that inconsistent travel history or documentation discrepancies trigger additional review

Mandatory biometric entry exit system for non U.S. citizens

A mandatory biometric entry exit system for non U.S. citizens is scheduled to begin on December 26, 2025. The system is intended to improve identity verification and strengthen the government's ability to track entries and exits, detect overstays, and support enforcement and national security screening.

Implementation details may differ by port of entry and traveler profile, but affected travelers should expect expanded biometrics capture and additional processing steps as systems are rolled out.

USCIS proposal to expand biometrics collection for benefit cases

USCIS has proposed expanding biometrics collection for immigration benefit cases. This proposal is consistent with the broader policy direction emphasizing more data collection and risk mitigation. If implemented broadly, additional applicants for benefits may be required to appear for biometrics, submit more identifiers, or complete screening steps even in case

types that historically required limited biometrics.

For employers and foreign nationals, expanded biometrics requirements can increase adjudication time and create additional appointment scheduling dependencies, especially in high volume jurisdictions.

USCIS vetting center in Atlanta using advanced technology including AI

USCIS has established a vetting center in Atlanta, Georgia that uses advanced technology, including AI, to support screening and adjudication functions. While specific models, inputs, and decision workflows are not typically disclosed in operational detail, the center reflects a formal expansion of centralized vetting infrastructure.

In practice, increased use of automated tools may:

- Broaden the range of data sources reviewed
- Increase consistency in flagging patterns across cases
- Expand referral of cases for further review where risk indicators are detected
- Contribute to longer processing times where manual follow up is required after an automated flag

CBP changes to I-94 and ESTA data collection and a possible mobile exit pilot

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is seeking public comments on revisions to I-94 and ESTA data collection, including a voluntary pilot program allowing exit information submission through a mobile app. These revisions align with the broader effort to strengthen entry exit tracking and modernize traveler data systems.

While described as voluntary in pilot form, program elements may later inform broader changes. Travelers and program participants should expect that CBP may request additional information fields, updated attestations, or different submission methods to support identity verification and compliance monitoring.

Visa Waiver Program changes

Reported Visa Waiver Program (VWP) changes include:

- Removal of Romania from the VWP
- Decommissioning of the ESTA website in favor of a mobile application

These changes affect VWP travelers and may require updated internal travel procedures for companies whose employees rely on ESTA based travel. Organizations should ensure travelers are using the correct platform and that travel authorization is obtained through the current required channel.

Practical compliance considerations and planning points

The combined effect of expanded travel restrictions, enhanced social media screening, expanded biometrics, and centralized vetting is a higher likelihood of:

- Longer visa issuance timelines and rescheduled appointments
- Increased administrative processing
- More frequent document requests and security related follow up
- Greater scrutiny of inconsistencies across applications, prior filings, and travel history
- Higher travel disruption risk for nationals of restricted countries or those with travel to or residence in higher risk jurisdictions

Key planning considerations include:

- Build longer lead times for visa stamping and international travel

- Evaluate whether a traveler could be impacted by full or partial entry bans and whether an exception or national interest waiver may apply
- Monitor consular communications and appointment systems closely
- Maintain consistent records across immigration filings, including prior DS-160 submissions, petition filings, and travel history documentation
- Prepare for expanded biometrics requirements and possible additional in person appointments
- Consider contingency planning for urgent business travel where visa processing delays are likely

Outlook

The current administration’s immigration posture is security centered, with an emphasis on expanded vetting, increased data collection, and risk based screening across the visa lifecycle. The December 2025 Proclamation expanding travel restrictions, coupled with enhanced social media review for additional nonimmigrant categories and expanded biometrics and entry exit tracking, indicates that heightened scrutiny and processing impacts are expected to continue into 2026.