The USCIS filing fee structure is about to change significantly. Beginning in 2026, all immigration applicants will face annual fee increases based on inflation rates, as recently announced by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

For applicants across various immigration categories, there's a significant opportunity here: applications postmarked on or before December 31, 2025, can still use current fee amounts. With inflation measured at approximately 2% for the relevant period, these increases will impact thousands of people across employment-based and humanitarian immigration categories.

In this article, we'll examine which forms face price increases, how to ensure your application beats the deadline, and why acting early might save you more than just a few dollars. We'll also explore who should prioritize filing before the cutoff date and what this new annual adjustment system means for future immigration planning.

Why USCIS Fees Are Increasing in 2026

The upcoming USCIS filing fee increases stem directly from federal legislation. Unlike previous fee adjustments that occurred irregularly, the 2026 changes represent the first in a new annual cycle mandated by law. Let me explain what's driving these increases and how they're calculated.

The role of H.R. 1 in annual adjustments

H.R. 1, sometimes called the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” fundamentally changed how immigration fees work. This legislation established specific fees for various immigration forms, benefits, and applications administered by multiple government agencies.

H.R. 1’s most consequential provision requires the Department of Homeland Security to adjust these fees annually for inflation, beginning in fiscal year 2026. This represents a significant shift from past practices, where fee adjustments happened irregularly after comprehensive reviews of USCIS funding needs.

Furthermore, it’s important to understand that these new H.R. 1 fees don’t replace existing fees – rather, they’re charged in addition to current fees outlined in 8 CFR part 106. Each fee must be submitted separately, effectively creating a dual fee structure for many immigration benefits.

How inflation data is used to calculate new fees

The methodology for calculating these increases follows a precise formula. USCIS uses the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Consumers (CPI-U) from July of the current year compared to the previous year.

Specifically, between July 2024 and July 2025, the CPI-U increased from 314.540 to 323.048, representing approximately a

2.70% increase. USCIS then applies this percentage to current fees and rounds according to specific rules.

Most fees are “rounded to the next lowest multiple of $10.00” as required by H.R. 1. Consequently, when the inflation adjustments are applied:

1. Some fees increase by $5, $10, or $20
2. Others remain unchanged if the inflation-adjusted amount equals the current fee when rounded
3. Certain fees are rounded down to the nearest dollar instead of $10 increments

These methodical adjustments ensure USCIS services keep pace with economic conditions while following the precise statutory requirements. The final adjusted fees become effective January 1, 2026, and will apply to all benefit requests postmarked on or after that date.

Which Forms Are Affected by the 2026 Fee Hike

Several key immigration forms will see price increases starting January 1, 2026. These adjustments primarily affect humanitarian-based applications, with modest increases reflecting the 2.7% inflation rate measured between July 2024 and July 2025.

I-765: Employment Authorization (Asylum, Parole, TPS)

Employment Authorization Document (EAD) applications face varying increases based on category:

- Initial asylum applicant EADs will increase from $550 to $560
- Initial parole EADs will rise from $550 to $560
- Initial TPS EADs will increase from $550 to $560
- Renewal/extension of parole EADs will increase from $275 to $280
- Renewal/extension of TPS EADs will increase from $275 to $280

Notably, asylum EAD renewals will remain at $275, exempt from the annual inflation adjustments.

I-821: Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

The TPS application fee will rise from $500 to $510. This affects both initial registrations and re-registrations for Temporary Protected Status. Remember that TPS applicants typically need to submit both Form I-821 and Form I-765 if seeking work authorization.

I-131: Parole and Re-parole

Form I-131 applications for re-parole will see fees rise from $275 to $280. Moreover, a separate $1,000 immigration parole fee took effect October 16, 2025, for most individuals granted parole into the United States. This additional fee applies to initial parole, parole-in-place, re-parole, and parole from DHS custody.

Annual Asylum Application Fee

The Annual Asylum Fee (AAF) is set to increase from $100 to $102. Nevertheless, this fee is currently stayed by a court order from the District Court of Maryland. USCIS has paused issuing AAF notices pending litigation developments, though applicants should retain receipts if they've already paid.

Forms with unchanged fees

Several forms maintain their current pricing:

- I-589 initial asylum application fee remains $100
- I-765 renewal/extension for asylum applicants stays at $275
- I-360 Special Immigrant Juvenile fee remains $250

These changes represent the first in what will become annual fee adjustments based on inflation data. Applications

postmarked before December 31, 2025, can still use current fee amounts.

How to File Before the December 31, 2025 Deadline

Filing your immigration forms before the deadline requires understanding USCIS rules and careful preparation. With the price increases taking effect January 1, 2026, knowing how to properly submit your applications is essential.

Understanding the postmark rule

The postmark date—not when USCIS receives your application—determines which fee applies. Applications postmarked on or before December 31, 2025, can use current fee amounts, whereas those postmarked January 1, 2026, or later must include the new higher fees. For commercial couriers like FedEx, UPS, and DHL, the shipping label date serves as the postmark. Without a shipping date, USCIS uses the label print date or considers it postmarked 10 days before receipt.

Steps to prepare your application early

First, verify your eligibility dates and application timelines. Many forms allow early filing—typically 180 days before expiration for EAD renewals. Subsequently, begin gathering required documentation immediately to avoid rushing. Finally, review all forms carefully for completeness before submission to prevent rejection.

Avoiding common mistakes in fee submission

Submitting incorrect fees is among the most common reasons for rejection. Pay each filing fee separately for multiple applications—this ensures that if one application has issues, others can still proceed. Furthermore, never combine different payment methods for a single benefit request.

Payment methods accepted by USCIS

USCIS accepts electronic payments through credit cards, debit cards, or prepaid cards using Form G-1450. Alternatively, ACH withdrawals from U.S. bank accounts can be made using Form G-1650. Importantly, effective October 28, 2025, USCIS will no longer accept paper checks or money orders except under specific exemptions.

Who Should File Early and Why It Matters

With USCIS fee increases looming, certain applicant groups have compelling reasons to file before the December 31, 2025 deadline. Understanding who should prioritize early filing can help maximize savings and secure benefits.

Asylum seekers applying for EAD

Asylum applicants must wait 180 days after filing before becoming eligible for work authorization. Indeed, applicants can submit their EAD application after their asylum case has been pending for 150 days. For initial asylum-based work permits, fees will increase from $550 to $560. Besides cost considerations, upcoming changes will limit EAD validity periods for certain asylum seekers to just 18 months starting December 5, 2025.

Families filing multiple applications

Families submitting several applications concurrently will experience cumulative impacts from these increases. Primarily, this affects those with pending family-based petitions, especially since fee waivers have been eliminated for certain categories. Plus, family reunification parole programs for several countries will terminate by January 14, 2026.

Employers managing employee filings

Companies sponsoring immigrants face budget impacts, particularly those employing numerous F-1 STEM OPT students, H-4 spouses, or TPS beneficiaries. Undeniably, employers must update cost-sharing policies and mobility allowances, especially for dependent EAD renewals that employees often pay out-of-pocket.

Conclusion

The 2026 USCIS fee increases represent a significant shift in how immigration costs will be managed moving forward. These changes mark the beginning of an annual adjustment system rather than the irregular updates we've seen previously. Therefore, understanding this new approach becomes essential for long-term immigration planning.

Filing before the December 31, 2025 deadline offers clear financial benefits, especially for applicants submitting multiple forms or families managing several applications simultaneously. Though many increases seem modest at $5-10 per form, these costs add up quickly for households juggling multiple renewals or applications.

USCIS has clearly outlined the postmark rules and payment methods, giving applicants ample opportunity to prepare. Smart applicants will gather their documentation early, double-check all requirements, and ensure their submissions reach USCIS before the deadline.

Ultimately, these fee increases reflect broader economic realities, but they also create a more predictable system for budgeting immigration expenses. Despite the challenges, careful planning and timely filing can help mitigate the financial impact of these new fees.

The clock is ticking toward December 31, 2025. Anyone considering filing USCIS forms should evaluate their eligibility

windows, gather necessary documentation, and submit well before the deadline. This proactive approach will not only save money but also provide peace of mind during your immigration journey.