

USCIS has significantly enhanced its vetting and screening procedures to bolster national security, public safety, and the integrity of the immigration system. The agency implemented a series of targeted measures focused on improving identity verification, deepening background checks, and ensuring more rigorous scrutiny across various immigration benefit categories.

Implementation of Hold-and-Review Procedures

USCIS issued multiple policy memoranda that placed specific categories of cases on hold pending enhanced review. These holds affected asylum applications, adjustment of status applications from diversity visa applicants, and benefit requests from individuals originating from high-risk countries. This pause allowed USCIS to conduct more thorough investigations before proceeding with adjudications.

USCIS findings from internal workload review

USCIS reports that it conducted a comprehensive review of pending workloads and benefit applications and concluded that prior screening and vetting measures were **wholly inadequate** in key areas.

According to USCIS, the review identified that:

- Many applicants for [naturalization](#) and **lawful permanent residence** were not sufficiently vetted.
- As a result, **applications were approved** and **individuals were naturalized** who should not have been.
- The gaps were characterized as posing significant [national security](#) and **public safety** risks, while also undermining **system integrity**.

USCIS has presented these findings as the basis for immediate holds on affected case types and for broader revisions to its screening and adjudication process.

Enhanced Screening Measures

Following the initiation of hold policies, USCIS introduced several key enhancements:

- **Shortened Validity Periods for Employment Authorization Documents (EADs):** By reducing EAD validity duration, USCIS mandates more frequent re-evaluations and security checks.
- **Stronger Identity Verification:** Updated photograph reuse policies now require biometric identity verification, including fingerprint checks, to prevent identity fraud.
- **Expanded Background Checks:** Operation PARRIS was launched by the USCIS Vetting Center to perform additional background investigations, re-interviews, and merit reviews specifically targeting refugee claims.
- **Increased Social Media and Financial Vetting:** Greater scrutiny is applied to applicants' social media presence and financial history as part of risk assessment.
- **Community Interviews:** Expanded use of community interviews provides additional layers of information gathering relevant to applicant screening.
- **Automated Alerts:** Systems were developed to notify USCIS automatically about biometric matches or new criminal information related to applicants.
- **Final Arrest Encounter Reviews:** Before final decisions are made, cases undergo mandatory reviews for any recent arrest records alongside Department of State database checks.

Country-Specific Risk Analysis

USCIS undertook detailed analyses of each country listed in travel ban proclamations, identifying fraud risks, public safety concerns, and national security threats on a country-by-country basis. This risk assessment informs tailored vetting approaches with adjudication resources concentrated where risks are higher.

Layered Enhanced Vetting Plan

A comprehensive layered vetting framework is being developed using classified and unclassified information sources. This plan incorporates expanded criminal history

evaluations, improved identity verification techniques, and ad hoc security checks triggered as needed to close existing gaps in screening protocols.

Guidance for Adjudicators

To maximize effectiveness of these enhanced procedures, USCIS is creating specialized guidance materials for adjudicators. These resources help prioritize investigative focus based on country-linked risks such as document reliability issues or associations with designated terrorist organizations. This ensures finite interview time and investigative tools target applications presenting heightened security concerns.

How a Law Firm Can Help with Enhanced Immigration Screening and Vetting Procedures

1. **Navigating Complex Procedures:** A law firm can guide clients through the intricate hold-and-review processes implemented by USCIS, ensuring all documentation meets heightened standards.
2. **Expert Risk Assessment:** Attorneys can provide country-specific risk analysis to anticipate potential challenges based on client origin and tailor application strategies accordingly.
3. **Preparing for Enhanced Vetting:** Legal experts help applicants understand and comply with layered enhanced vetting requirements, including biometric verifications and expanded background checks.
4. **Assistance with Holds:** Law firms can advocate for lifting holds on cases by navigating USCIS's internal review mechanisms, submitting compelling evidence to demonstrate eligibility.
5. **Representation in Adjudication:** Lawyers provide guidance aligned with USCIS adjudicator policies, improving case presentation and chances of approval.
6. **Policy Updates & Compliance:** Staying abreast of evolving executive orders, presidential proclamations, and USCIS policy memoranda ensures clients' applications remain compliant with current national security priorities.
7. **Appeals and Motions:** If cases are denied or delayed due to enhanced screening, law firms can file appeals or motions to reopen/reconsider based on updated information or procedural errors.

- 8. Communication Facilitation:** Law firms act as intermediaries between clients and USCIS, reducing misunderstandings and streamlining communication during prolonged vetting phases.

By leveraging specialized legal knowledge and experience with USCIS policies, law firms can significantly mitigate risks associated with stricter immigration screening and improve outcomes for applicants facing enhanced scrutiny.