



POSITION STATEMENT

ENSURING A STRONG HIGH-TECH WORKFORCE THROUGH EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT-BASED IMMIGRATION REFORMS

*Adopted by the IEEE-USA
Board of Directors, 15 June 2007*

Balanced reforms in the United States' immigrant and non-immigrant admissions programs are urgently needed to help U.S. employers and U.S. workers compete and be successful in knowledge-based, technology-driven global markets. Instead of increasing our national dependence on temporary visa programs, IEEE-USA recommends that permanent (immigrant) admissions programs be the preferred source of supply for professionals in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields who may be needed to satisfy labor market demands that cannot be met through enhanced education and training opportunities for American workers.

Priorities for reform should include:

- Increasing the availability of permanent employment-based (EB) visas and streamlining the immigrant admissions (Green Card) process in order to make these visas the preferred path to citizenship for foreign professionals in STEM fields.
- Allowing foreign students with advanced degrees in STEM fields from U.S. schools and job offers from U.S. employers to transition directly from student visas to Green Cards.
- Reforming the H-1B temporary work visa program to ensure that U.S. and foreign workers are treated fairly by requiring all participating employers to make good faith efforts to recruit U.S. workers, to use the program to augment, not replace, their American workforce, and to pay H-1B workers fair market-based wages.
- Expediting short-term visitor visa processing to enable foreign professionals to periodically enter the United States to attend conferences and meetings.

This statement was developed by the Career and Workforce Policy Committee of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers - United States of America (IEEE-USA) and represents the considered judgment of a group of U.S. IEEE members with expertise in the subject field. IEEE-USA is an organizational unit of the IEEE, created in 1973 to advance the public good and promote the careers and public policy interests of the more than 220,000 electrical, electronics, computer and software engineers who are U.S. members of the IEEE. The positions taken by IEEE-USA do not necessarily reflect the views of the IEEE or its other organizational units.

Background

Research indicates that the foreign born make the U.S. economy more diverse, productive and innovative and its workforce younger and more creative. This characterization is especially true in professional fields like science and engineering, where immigrants currently hold 7 percent of the bachelor's degrees, 29 percent of the master's degrees and 39 percent of the Ph.D. degrees. Their contributions are expected to become even more important as demographic trends push older U.S. workers into retirement.

Permanent Employment-Based Visas – Foreign professionals seeking legal permanent resident status can be admitted as immigrants on family or employer-sponsored visas or Green Cards. Because employment-based (EB) admissions are limited to 140,000 per year, worldwide demand for Green Cards always exceeds the available supply. Per country limits and visa processing inefficiencies result in substantial backlogs and long waits, especially for applicants from high-demand countries like China and India.

Temporary Student Visas – Foreign students who come to study at U.S. educational institution are admitted on temporary student (F) visas. Student visas are available in unlimited numbers. Under current law, foreign students must return home upon completion of their studies, unless U.S. employers agree to sponsor them for Green Cards or temporary work visas.

Temporary Work Visas – Specialty occupation (H-1B) visas allow foreign professionals with bachelor's or higher degrees to work for sponsoring employers for six years and are available in limited numbers. H-1B workers are effectively tied to their sponsoring employers. Weak worker safeguards coupled with lax oversight and enforcement by government agencies can result in abuses that harm U.S. and foreign workers.

Temporary Visitor Visas - Unlimited numbers of temporary visitor for business (B-1) visas allow foreign nationals to enter the United States for short periods to attend conferences, conduct business (but not work) and travel. Security screening and other administrative inefficiencies frequently prevent the timely issuance of these visas.