
3. Impact of USA's Immigration Ban on Skilled Workers from India

Prelims Syllabus: International

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements Involving INDIA and/or affecting India's Interests.

Why in News?

- Recently, the United States President announced that there is a possibility of an executive order to suspend legal immigration into the U.S. for 60 days.

Highlights:

- With the toll of the novel coronavirus on the American population spiralling rapidly, the political pressure has been increasing on the country's leader to take effective action to bring the pandemic under control.
- It is in this backdrop, that the recent announcement has been made. According to sources, the time limit could be extended depending on conditions on the ground.

What does it mean for Visa Applicants?

- The order is not expected to halt visa processing for many thousands of temporary employees, including a sizeable number of Indian nationals in the H-1B skilled worker category, agricultural workers classified under the H-2A visa and seasonal workers, who fall into the H-2B category.
- With proper exemptions: According to the White House, the policy will also likely carveout exemptions for certain categories of essential workers, including those in health care and who have a critical role to play in fighting the pandemic.
- Immigration via relatives allowed: Exemptions are also being made for those who seek to immigrate via their immediate relatives.
- This includes spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens applying for green cards, or permanent residency.
- Also, those who have already been granted permanent residence will not be impacted by this executive order.

Other Exemptions:

- Members of the armed forces, those who are immigrating for law enforcement reasons and are already in the pipeline.
- Those on the EB-5 programme, which requires individuals to invest at least \$500,000 in U.S. real estate projects, will be considered.

Reason Behind Taking such a Step:

- U.S. economy in stress: Like many others across the world, the US economy has grounded to a virtual halt in the face of the pandemic.
- An electoral issue: Proposals to restrict immigration served well during the 2016 presidential election, particularly when they were situated in the context of protecting jobs for U.S. workers.
- To take electoral benefits: The deeper context to the announcement is the fact that the present president is seeking re-election in the upcoming election.

Impact on skilled workers from India:

- On tourism, there is little concern at the present juncture given that India has stopped commercial flights owing to the risks of coronavirus spread.
- Further, in many countries, quarantine procedures apply to international arrivals and this will dissuade many visitors from international travel.
- All are affected: U.S. visa issuance in all countries (not only in India) has ground to a halt.
- This has left many H-1B visa-seekers in the lurch in India, and that could have an economically debilitating impact on the Indian IT and Information Technology Enabled Service (ITeS) sectors.
- However, the visa restrictions are derived more from the overall impact of the pandemic, and not from USA's immigration ban.