

# Big Demand for Skilled-Worker Visas

By

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A U.S. visa program for foreign skilled workers has attracted more applications than there are visas available, triggering a lottery for their allotment and suggesting employers feel optimistic about the country's economy.

The latest round of applications for H-1B visas, which began being accepted April 1, exceeded the annual limit of 65,000 within a week, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which administers the program. Requests for an additional 20,000 visas issued each year to people who have earned a master's degree or Ph.D. in the U.S. also surpassed that cap, the federal agency said.

"A computer-generated process will randomly select the number of petitions needed to meet the caps," the USCIS said. "USCIS will reject and return filing fees for all...petitions that are not selected, unless found to be a duplicate filing."

Companies apply for H-1B visas with specific candidates in mind. The visa is granted for three years but can be renewed for six.

The agency expects to announce in coming days the total number of visa applications received, and when the lottery will be held. The H-1B visas are issued to individuals for jobs with a starting date of Oct. 1 or later.

U.S. companies, especially in the technology field, say H-1B workers fill jobs for which there aren't enough qualified Americans.

Critics argue that some qualified U.S. workers are being displaced by cheaper foreign hires through the program.

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