



Important Federal Lawsuit Challenging USCIS Immigration Benefit Holds and Delays

A Legal Victory with Limits:

What the Dorcas v. USCIS Decision Means for Afghans and Nationals of 38 Other Travel Countries

What Is This Case About?

A coalition of immigration service organizations, refugee advocacy groups, and labor unions filed a federal lawsuit against USCIS and DHS challenging several immigration policies implemented in late 2025 and early 2026 that have caused widespread delays, freezes, and re-review of immigration cases. The case is known as Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island v. USCIS and is currently pending before a federal judge in Rhode Island.

The lawsuit argues that USCIS has unlawfully stopped or delayed adjudicating many immigration benefits, particularly affecting nationals of countries subject to the current travel restrictions. According to court filings and related USCIS guidance challenged in the lawsuit, the policies have primarily affected nationals from countries subject to Presidential Proclamation 10949 and subsequent expanded review measures. These countries include Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burma (Myanmar), Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Mali, Niger, Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Palestinian Authority-issued travel documents, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominica, Gabon, The Gambia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Why This Case Matters

Since December 2025, many immigrants and refugees have reported that USCIS is accepting applications but not issuing decisions. Applicants have experienced:

- Delays in the adjustment of status (green card) applications
- Delays in naturalization applications
- Delays in employment authorization renewals
- Delays in asylum decisions
- Increased requests for additional review
- Re-review of previously approved benefits
- Uncertainty regarding immigration status and future eligibility

For many families from the travel ban countries, this has resulted in prolonged separation, inability to obtain permanent status, uncertainty regarding work authorization, and delays in obtaining immigration benefits for which they may otherwise qualify.

USCIS Policies Being Challenged

1) Global Asylum Hold

The lawsuit challenges what plaintiffs call a "Global Asylum Hold." According to the complaint, USCIS has effectively halted decisions on affirmative asylum applications nationwide. While asylum interviews may continue, final decisions are not being issued in many cases. Asylum applicants are left waiting indefinitely without approval or denial.

Impact on Applicants

- No final asylum decisions
- Continued uncertainty for asylum seekers
- Delays in obtaining permanent protection
- Delays in family reunification benefits that may follow asylum approval

2) Benefits Hold

The lawsuit also challenges a USCIS policy that places immigration benefit applications on hold for nationals of countries covered by Presidential Proclamations 10949 and 10998, including Afghanistan.

3) Benefits Reportedly Affected

The complaint alleges that USCIS has delayed or suspended adjudication of:

- Adjustment of Status (I-485)
- Naturalization applications (N-400)
- Employment Authorization Documents (I-765)
- Humanitarian applications
- Other immigration benefits requiring USCIS adjudication

Many applicants have received receipt notices and attended biometrics appointments but have not received final decisions.

4) Comprehensive Re-Review Policy

Another policy challenged in the lawsuit requires USCIS officers to re-examine immigration benefits that were previously approved.

What Does This Mean for Applicants of 39 countries Right Now?

At this time:

USCIS continues to accept filings.

Many applicants continue to receive receipt notices and biometrics appointments.

The lawsuit remains active and is one of the most significant challenges to the current USCIS "hold and review" policies.

There has been no court order requiring USCIS to resume adjudications for all affected applicants.

There is currently no automatic relief for individuals with pending cases.

Applicants should continue monitoring their cases, maintain valid immigration status whenever possible, and consult with qualified immigration counsel regarding case-specific strategies.

Key Points from the Court's Decision

- The ruling may have significant implications for pending USCIS applications, including:
 - o Adjustment of Status (Green Card) applications
 - o Naturalization (Citizenship) applications
 - o Employment Authorization Documents (EADs)
 - o Asylum-related applications and benefits
 - o Other immigration benefits that were delayed or placed on hold as a result of the challenged policies

Limitations of the Court Decision:

- The decision does not eliminate or invalidate the travel ban. The presidential proclamation and travel restrictions remain in effect unless modified by the administration or struck down through separate litigation.
- The ruling does not restart consular processing at US Embassies around the world, including refugee processing, family-based petitions, or other overseas resettlement programs.
- Additional litigation and appeals are likely. The federal government may seek appellate review, and further court proceedings could affect the scope and implementation of the decision.