

Issue Overview: Skilled immigrants

By Kate Hunter, Bloomberg on 10.07.16

Word Count **696**



TOP: An employee in Bangalore, India, works on her computer in a small office. Photo by Ullstein Bild BOTTOM: Courtesy of Homeland Security.

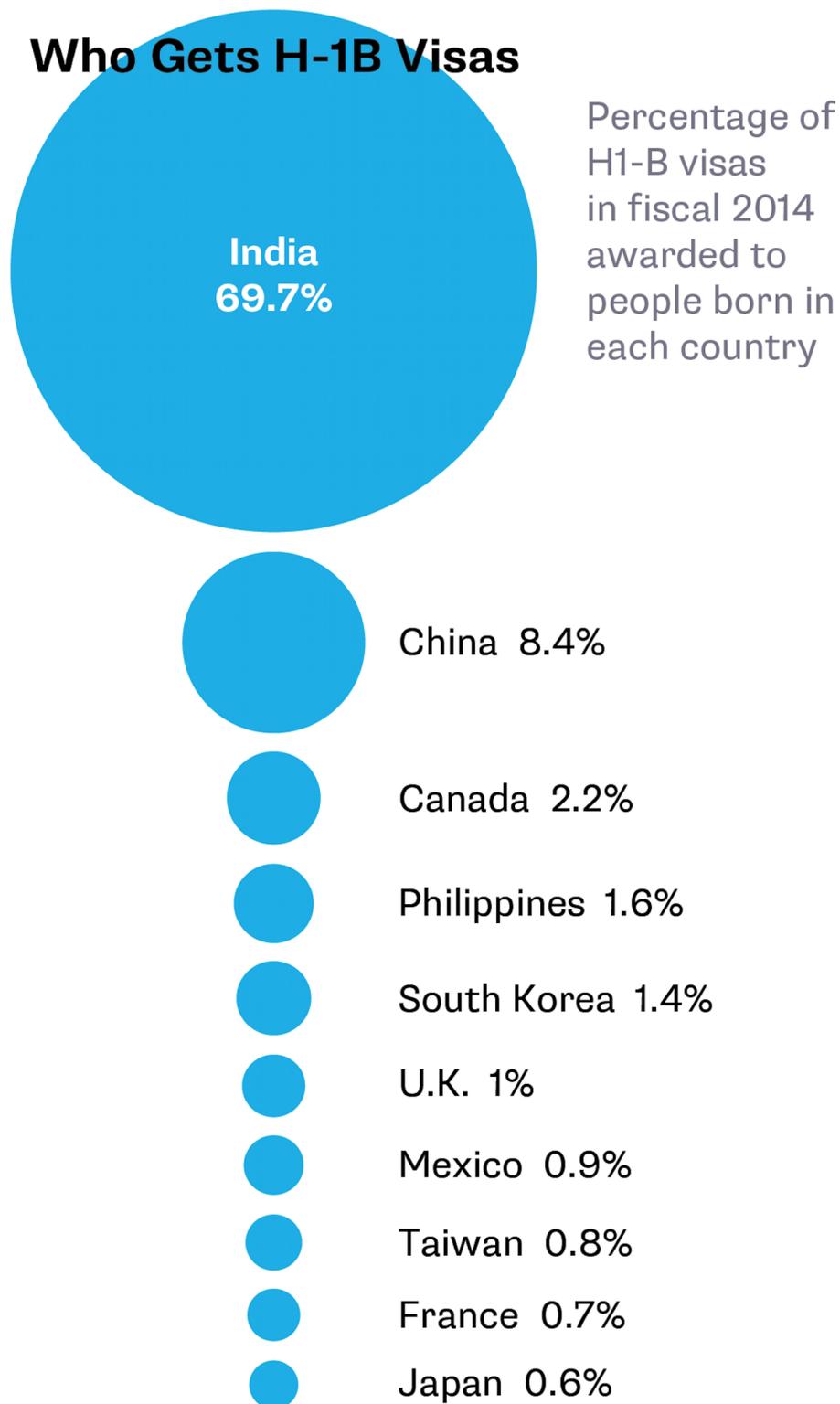
When some Americans talk about immigration, they picture those they want to keep out: undocumented people sneaking across the southern border. But when some U.S. businesses talk about immigration, they picture people they'd like to bring in: ones with science, math or technology skills, notable artists or those willing to pick tomatoes. The United States wants these workers. The problems come in deciding who and how many should be admitted.

The Situation

When the new accounting year began in April, it took less than a week for the U.S. government to exhaust the year's 85,000 allotted petitions for H-1B visas, which are generally used for technology workers. Facebook, Google, Intel and Cisco Systems are among the companies lobbying Congress to increase the number of these visas; Facebook more than doubled its lobbying spending in 2015 from 2012. In December, Congress doubled the fees for H-1Bs to \$4,000; India, the program's biggest beneficiary, is disputing the increase with the World Trade Organization, saying this constitutes protectionism. U.S. businesses also bring in seasonal agriculture workers under the H-2A visa program; these are limited to 66,000 per year.

Movie stars, distinguished academics and professional athletes can get special U.S. work visas set aside for those with “extraordinary ability.” Extraordinary bank accounts allow the rich to receive visas if they are willing to invest at least \$500,000 in the United States and create at least 10 jobs within two years.

Who Gets H-1B Visas



The Background

The U.S. system of immigration categories and caps has its roots in a 1924 law meant to curb a wave of post-World War I immigration. The law established a quota system limiting immigration from any one country to 2 percent of the number of people from that country already living in the United States in 1890, though it excluded Asian immigrants. The new restrictions coincided with the start of the Border Patrol. Quotas tightened after World War II after the United States faced a flood of Europeans fleeing Hitler and Communism. Congress later carved out special visas for certain nationalities. In 1990, for example, Senator Ted Kennedy, great-grandson of an Irish immigrant, helped establish an annual visa lottery program that benefited Irish immigrants.

The U.S. Senate passed an immigration reform bill in 2013 that would have raised the annual H-1B visa limit to 135,000 from 85,000. It stalled in the House of Representatives because some Republicans didn't like that it included a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and instead wanted to move separate legislation for technology worker visas. Democrats who then controlled the Senate resisted; they wanted to use the promise of more H-1Bs as the sweetener to help enact broader immigration reform. In 2014, President Barack Obama used executive authority to expand a program that allows foreign graduates in science, technology, engineering and math to work in the United States for up to 29 months. Opposition to immigration tends to rise and fall with the state of the economy.

In tough times, Americans desperate for work are none too happy to see businesses import laborers. Bad behavior can also sour Americans on immigrants: Canadian-born pop star Justin Bieber, living in the United States on an "extraordinary ability" visa, was arrested in 2014 for drunken drag racing, prompting non-Beliebers to petition the White House calling for the singer to be deported.

The Argument

Employers in both the tech industry and agriculture say there are not enough Americans able to fill all the available jobs. Food producers say crops are rotting in fields because there aren't enough farmworkers after immigration crackdowns.

U.S. tech employers say American universities aren't producing enough mathematicians and engineers to keep pace with an economy producing 120,000 new jobs a year. They also worry that stiffer global competition will make it more difficult to hire skilled workers in the future.

Opponents point to an increase in U.S. students seeking degrees in science and technology-related fields and say the companies are just trying to avoid paying higher wages to American workers. They also say offshore outsourcing firms receive half of the H-1B visas, allowing workers to be trained in the United States who then take these tech jobs back to their home countries.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following sentences from the article implies the original intended purpose of visas?
- (A) Extraordinary bank accounts allow the rich to receive visas if they are willing to invest at least \$500,000 in the United States and create at least 10 jobs within two years.
 - (B) The U.S. system of immigration categories and caps has its roots in a 1924 law meant to curb a wave of post-World War I immigration.
 - (C) In 1990, for example, Senator Ted Kennedy, great-grandson of an Irish immigrant, helped establish an annual visa lottery program that benefited Irish immigrants.
 - (D) In 2014, President Barack Obama used executive authority to expand a program that allows foreign graduates in science, technology, engineering and math to work in the United States for up to 29 months.
- 2 Which sentence from the article BEST shows who benefits from H-1B visas?
- (A) Facebook, Google, Intel and Cisco Systems are among the companies lobbying Congress to increase the number of these visas; Facebook more than doubled its lobbying spending in 2015 from 2012.
 - (B) Democrats who then controlled the Senate resisted; they wanted to use the promise of more H-1Bs as the sweetener to help enact broader immigration reform.
 - (C) Employers in both the tech industry and agriculture say there are not enough Americans able to fill all the available jobs.
 - (D) U.S. tech employers say American universities aren't producing enough mathematicians and engineers to keep pace with an economy producing 120,000 new jobs a year.

3 Read the following sentence from the section "The Argument."

They also worry that stiffer global competition will make it more difficult to hire skilled workers in the future.

Based on this sentence along with information in the chart, which of the following predictions is MOST reasonable?

- (A) Increasing the number of visas for technology workers from other countries will benefit tech companies in the U.S., but not the global economy.
- (B) Increasing the number of visas for technology workers from other countries will enable tech companies in the U.S. to increase global expansion.
- (C) If more technology workers from other countries are unable to get visas to work in the U.S., the tech companies in the U.S. will struggle to fill jobs.
- (D) If more technology workers from other countries are unable to get visas to work in the U.S., the tech companies in the U.S. will offer higher pay to American workers.

4 Who would find the information in the chart most useful?

- (A) someone interested in the number of H-1B visas allotted each fiscal year
- (B) someone concerned with the distribution of H-1B visas by country
- (C) someone trying to pinpoint the percentage of American workers that have H-1B visas
- (D) someone looking for an explanation of how H-1B visa recipients are selected

Answer Key

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