

Business Immigration Weekly for December 19, 2014

12/19/2014

Practices: Immigration

US EMBASSY IN MEXICO LAUNCHES NEW H-2 APPOINTMENT SYSTEM

On December 8, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico implemented a new visa appointment system for the H-2 Temporary Agricultural (H-2A) and Non-Agricultural (H-2B) Programs. The H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers program permits U.S. companies to employ foreign workers in the United States in temporary agricultural jobs while the H-2B Temporary Non-Agricultural Workers program is for non-agricultural fields. These procedures require group processing via group user accounts. Once a group user account is approved, each individual applicant is able to schedule their visa appointment. The new visa application procedures can be found at: <https://ais.usvisa-info.com/en-mx/niv/information/groups>

DHS EXPANDS COUNTRIES ELIGIBLE FOR H-2A AND H-2B PROGRAMS

Effective January 18, 2015, foreign nationals from five additional countries will be allowed to participate in the H-2A and H-2B programs. The H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers program permits U.S. companies to employ foreign workers in the United States in temporary agricultural jobs while the H-2B Temporary Non-Agricultural Workers program is for non-agricultural fields. This brings the total number of eligible countries to 68 countries. The newly eligible countries are: Czech Republic, Denmark, Madagascar, Portugal and Sweden. These will be added to the currently eligible countries: Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Nauru, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, The Philippines, Poland, Romania, Samoa, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay and Vanuatu. Exceptions can be made for approval of an H-2A and H-2B petition on behalf of a beneficiary from a country not on this list under limited circumstances.

PRESIDENT ISSUES NEW DIRECTIVE ON CUBA

Last week President Obama outlined a new directive in the relations between the United States and Cuba. This is the first serious rapprochement between the two nations since the end of diplomatic relations in 1961. The major elements of the President's initiative are summarized as follows:

1. Re-establishment of diplomatic relationship between the United States and Cuba.
2. Re-establishment of a U.S. Embassy in Havana.

3. Coordination between the two countries on issues relating to migration, counternarcotics, environmental protection, human-trafficking, etc.
4. Travel licenses for authorized travelers for the following purposes: family visits, official government business, press, research and professional meetings, education, competitions and performances, support for Cubans, humanitarian, private foundations or research institutions, export/import/transmission of information and/or information materials, and certain export transactions authorized under current laws. These travelers will be permitted to obtain travel authorization through a service provider complying with the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control.
5. Provision of business training for Cuban businesses and small farmers to promote the Cuban private business community.
6. Raising of the remittance level from \$500 to \$2,000 to Cuban nationals, for humanitarian projects and for private businesses as well as the abolishment of a special license for remittance forwarders.
7. Expansion of commercial sales/exports from the United States to invigorate the private Cuban sector.
8. Ease of restrictions on financial transactions, allowing for the opening of bank accounts and use of credit cards.
9. Measures to increase the level of internet and telecommunication available to Cubans.
10. Revision of U.S. sanctions on transactions between third countries and Cuba.
11. Further discussion with Mexico and Cuba on unresolved maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mexico.
12. Evaluation of Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.