

Fact Sheet: Presidential Proclamation Suspending Certain Categories of J-1 Exchange Visitor Program

On June 22, 2020, the White House issued a proclamation suspending Intern, Trainee, Teacher, Camp Counselor, Au Pair, and Summer Work Travel (among other visa programs) through December 31, 2020, with the possibility of continuation. The Administration subsequently provided for J-1 visa programs a number of narrowly drawn national interest exceptions. Despite those exceptions, the proclamation is hurting the U.S. economy and diminishing our foreign policy objective of increasing mutual understanding between peoples. The best course of action for the Administration would be to exclude international exchange programs from the proclamation during its next review deadline on September 24. In the meantime, it should make the exceptions more meaningful by allowing entry for exchange visitors that support American jobs and advance our national security.

The U.S. Department of State oversees many educational and cultural exchange programs under the J-1 visa. These programs allow people from around the world to come to the United States and offset the cost of their cultural exchange through a work placement.

Cultural exchange programs positively contribute to the United States economy.

Exchange Visitor Program participants support American jobs in local communities. Participants also help support and create American jobs by enabling businesses to operate at full capacity and year-round. Without Exchange Visitor Program participants, many American host employers will have to cut back services to customers, reducing already diminished revenue, which could lead to lay-offs of American employees.* These programs are important to American businesses as many host employers have unique needs, such as being located in rural, low population areas. Cultural exchange programs such as Au Pair, Camp Counselor, Intern and Trainee, and Summer Work Travel combined contribute more than \$1.4 billion to the U.S. economy each year.*

The Presidential proclamation will cost, not save, American jobs. The impact from the pandemic alone is projected to result in losses to our economy of more than \$233 million and nearly 7,000 American jobs.* The proclamation will very likely lead to an increase in layoffs among program sponsors in the United States, which will have a negative ripple effect throughout our economy.

The Exchange Visitor Program addresses unique needs in the United States. Au Pairs fill a unique need in the United States for families that are seeking live-in child care and cultural enrichment simultaneously. Intern and Trainee participants experience an individualized training and cultural exposure, while increasing their career readiness. Teacher exchanges are one small part of broader efforts to address well-documented teacher shortages in some districts, but are not intended — and do not in practice — shape the U.S. teaching market. Camp Counselor and Summer Work Travel positions are typically

in locations that have challenges, such as a limited local workforce for entry-level positions. By law, these positions do not displace American workers and must work side-by-side with Americans.

The Exchange Visitor Program is a cultural exchange program. On average, 88 percent of Exchange Visitor Program participants cite the cultural exchange component, not the work component, as the primary factor in taking part in the program.* Exchange visitors develop a more positive view of the United States, maintain friendships here for years to come, and often come back for visits. As states and localities begin reopening their economies, reestablishing people-to-people diplomacy should be part of that effort for communities and host organizations.

The Exchange Visitor Program supports United States national security interests. The current exceptions to the June 22 proclamation include one for exchange visitors participating in a program that “fulfills critical and time-sensitive foreign policy objectives.” While this exception reflects the goal of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, it does not take into account the amount of time needed to achieve these objectives. As stated in a letter to the White House from 44 former U.S. Ambassadors, cultural exchange participants’ understanding and affinity for the United States supports our diplomatic efforts worldwide. In fact, 75 percent of cultural exchange participants, on average, developed a more positive opinion of the U.S. after their program experience.* That kind of change in viewpoints takes time to achieve and is especially important during a worldwide pandemic. The Administration should rescind the “time-sensitive” requirement in the foreign policy exception.

We urge the Administration to support American jobs, as well as our foreign policy objectives, by making meaningful exceptions to the June 22 proclamation for international exchange programs and by excluding them entirely after the next review period.

**Please see <https://www.alliance-exchange.org/info-and-issues/> for EurekaFacts reports and fact sheets on Camp Counselor, Intern/Trainee, and Summer Work Travel programs, as well as on the economic impact of the pandemic.*