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## USCIS Plans Closure of International Field Offices

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U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is planning to close all 22 of its international field offices over the next year. The agency is expected to shift its international workload to the U.S. Department of State and to USCIS offices within the United States; USCIS believes the closures will allow the agency to reallocate its resources to better address the increasing immigration backlogs.

Functioning as an extension of U.S.-based USCIS field offices, international field offices provide key services to U.S. citizens and their family members. These offices support immigrant and non-immigrant visa applications through providing technical immigration advice and fraud detection support to other U.S. officials. Many of the core functions of international field offices do not pertain to employment-based matters as these offices primarily process refugee applications, applications to abandon status as a lawful permanent resident, and citizenship applications for members of the U.S. military, as well as provide support with international adoptions. As the primary responsibilities of USCIS international field offices fall outside the scope of employment-based immigration, these closures will have a very narrow, limited impact on most employment-based visa petitions.

The workload transition from USCIS to the State Department is expected to be a smooth one considering the State Department already performs a number of similar duties in areas where there is no USCIS international field office. While these changes are expected to save millions of dollars according to U.S. officials, there is some concern that the self-funded agency may see a decrease in revenue due to the suspension of services abroad. Further, individuals utilizing these services may experience delays due to the transition of responsibility between the two departments.

This will not be the first time USCIS has closed international field offices. Until recently, USCIS hosted 23 offices overseas in locations throughout Latin America, Europe, and Asia, but that number decreased to 22 following the closure of the Moscow field office at the end of March 2019 due to a decrease in demand for services.

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Article By  
[Tieranny L. Cutler](#)  
[Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, P.C.](#)  
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