



FAQ - DHS Visa Sanctions on Laos

What does the recent Department of Homeland Security visa sanction on Laos mean? These are the most frequently asked questions from community members below. The FAQ is information gathered from partnering sources and our immigration policy and legal experts.

[Link to Full DHS Announcement](#)

- **What does this announcement mean?**

On the July 10th, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) sanctioned the first level of visas from Laos. This prohibits specific high ranking individuals from Laos from traveling to the U.S.

- **What are the specific visa sanctions?**

Right now, the visa restriction is just on B-1 visas (for short term Business visitors), B-2 visas (for short term Tourists visitors), B-1/B-2 visas (combination visa for Business & Tourist visitors) for **current Lao government officials** at Director General level and above from the Lao Ministry of Public Security as well as their immediate families; and all A-3 (attendants, servants, & personal employees of Diplomats) and G-5 (personal employees, attendants, servants of & employees of international organizations). However, this may change.

- **Who does it impact?**

While the visa sanction are against Lao government officials, it is meant to pressure Laos to take back nationals of Laos (including those born in refugee camps in other countries) who have orders of removal. The administration has discontinued the issuance of all B1, B2, and B1/B2 nonimmigrant visas for current officials at the Director General level and above from the Lao Ministry of Public Security (MPS) as well as their immediate families; and all A3 and G5 nonimmigrant visas to individuals employed by Lao government officials, with limited exceptions.

- **Who does it not impact?**

This specific announcement does NOT affect Lao and Hmong US Citizens or valid green card holders who do not have or not at risk of a order of removal. Be mindful that green card holders with criminal histories who may not currently have an order of removal may still get flagged if they try to become citizens, as we have seen in previous cases.

- **Why are there visa sanctions on Laos?**

These visa sanctions may pressure the Lao government to give in and accept Lao nationals with an outstanding order of removal.

- **What's the current situation with Laos and the deportation issue?**

As the only Southeast Asian American country with no repatriation agreement with the United States in place, Laos has been able to keep its deportation numbers relatively low, compared to Vietnam and Cambodia. If a "repatriation agreement" is signed, it would allow the U.S. to deport Lao nationals (anyone who is not a U.S. citizen) back to Laos, because Lao government has agreed to accept the deportees from the U.S.

- **As a Lao and Hmong permanent resident/green card holder, am I able to travel?**

This current visa sanction does not apply to Lao & Hmong US citizens. Lao & Hmong US citizens don't need any visa to travel back into the US. US citizens will still use their US passports to reenter the US. Lao & Hmong green card holders usually can travel back to the US using their current and unexpired Lao passport and their green card. In

the future, if the Lao government decides to cancel some or all visas for US citizens traveling to Laos as a retaliation, then traveling between countries may become difficult. If you are a permanent resident or green card holder and believe that your documents may be or is expired, **it is not recommended** that you travel outside the US, especially those who have criminal convictions.

- **As a Lao or Hmong US citizen, am I able to travel?**

This sanction does not affect US citizens.

- **What should I be aware of when it comes to my rights as a US permanent resident (aka Green Card holder)?**

First, always consult with a legal counsel. You always have the right to remain silent, right to an attorney, and right to not open the door for ICE or police officers unless they show you a warrant. If they do not have a warrant, you may refuse to let them in. Ask for an interpreter if you can't understand them. Different rules apply when you are in public spaces, at work, or at the airport. For more information, know your right trainings, and resources, refer to the list down below.

- **What should we expect in the near future following this announcement?**

The Department of State may change the covered visa applicants or visa categories at any time. An expansion to other visa categories is likely. Laos could reciprocate and ban visas for US citizens.

- **How many individuals have final orders of removal to Laos?**

Since 1998, 4,568 individuals have been issued deportation orders to Laos. Of that number, there have been a total of 206 deportations, with 4,362 still waiting in limbo (SEARAC).

- **What can we learn from previous sanctions on Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Vietnam, etc)?**

These visa sanctions are a foreign policy move to pressure the Lao government to sign a repatriation agreement with the U.S. If an agreement is signed, this could begin a slope of large-scale deportations of Lao nationals. Last year, the United States sanctioned Cambodia, which led to the biggest mass roundup of Cambodians for detention and deportation. Deportations to Cambodia are rumored to double this year.

- **What should Lao and Hmong communities be most concerned about?**

If possible, all Lao/Hmong Americans should apply for U.S. citizenship. This will eliminate the possibility of any deportation, you will have the right to vote, and won't have any travel restrictions. Anyone who is not a U.S. citizen without proper valid paperwork about their legal status and individuals who have been convicted of a crime may be at risk for deportation.

What can I do?

- Immigration policies are complicated and confusing. Make sure you are getting and sharing accurate information (such as the list of trusted resources below).
- If you have questions or concerns about your legal status, get legal counsel right away.
- [Know your rights if you're detained.](#)
- [Know Your Rights](#) during an ICE encounter.
- Contact non-profit immigration groups that can provide educational resources and/or legal services ([SEARAC](#), [National Immigration Law Center \(NILC\)](#), [Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota](#), [Immigration National Network](#) or [UMN Center for New Americans](#))
- Read SEARAC's [Resource Guide for Southeast Asian Americans Facing Criminal Deportation](#).
- For more pro-bono legal options, check out SEARAC's [directory](#) of individuals and organizations with expertise in criminal deportation of Southeast Asian Americans.

For more updates on this announcement, contact Tigana Van Le at tigana@theseadproject.org.