

H1B Visa Admissions by Occupation

Occupations in Systems Analysis and Programming	38%
Occupations in College and University Education	8%
Accountants, Auditors and Related Occupations	5%
Electrical/Electronics Engineering Occupations	4%
Computer-Related Occupations	4%

Home Country of H1B Visa Admissions

India	34%
Canada	6%
United Kingdom	6%
Mexico	4%
China	4%
Japan	3%
France	3%
Germany	3%
South Korea	2%

The H1-B visa is the traditional immigration tool used by US firms desiring to hire high-skilled foreign workers to work in the United States. This visa allows the worker to work in the United States for up to six years. The worker receiving the H1-B visa must have skills in a “specialty occupation” requiring “both theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge ... and attainment of a bachelor’s degree or higher.” The US Congress places a limit on the number of new H1-B visas that can be issued every year. When the H1-B visa was created in 1990, the cap was set at 65,000.

In response to a concern about shortages in the IT workforce, Congress raised the cap to 115,000 in 2000 and later to 195,000 in 2001. The cap reverted back to 65,000 in 2004. Also in 2004, an exemption was provided to allow 20,000 additional foreign workers with master’s degrees and higher to enter the United States under the H1-B program. Therefore, as of 2008, the effective H1-B cap was 85,000. The total population of H1-B workers expanded to nearly 0.5 million workers by 2008. The most recent estimates of the occupational breakdown of H1-B admissions are for 2005. Of the top five admitted occupations, three are NIT occupations. Systems analysts and programmers, electrical and electronic engineers, and other computer-related occupations comprised 46 percent of H1-B admissions in 2005.

This is consistent with earlier studies indicating that the H1-B visa is utilized primarily for NIT workers. If we assume that 50 percent of the H1-B population is NIT workers, then we estimate the number of H1-B workers in the United States to be about 250,000 in 2008. The largest proportion (34 percent) of H1-B admissions come from India with more than five times as many admissions as the next country. Canada and the United Kingdom are the next most represented countries, followed by Mexico, China, Japan, France, Germany, and South Korea. The H1-B program requires at least a bachelor’s degree for admission. Almost half of H1-B admissions have only a bachelor’s degree, although this number declined from 50 percent in 2002 to 45 percent in 2005. This decrease occurred at the same time as the increase in the fraction of H1-B admissions with master’s degrees, which grew from 30 percent in 2002 to 37 percent in 2007. In 2005, the fraction of doctoral degrees decreased as the fraction of professional degrees increased.

Data Source: *Networking and Information Technology (NIT) Workforce Study Final Report* – May 29, 2009, “Five Reasons Why China Will Rule Tech” – Bloomberg Businessweek, July 9, 2010