



February 22, 2023

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## Policy Alert

SUBJECT: Special Student Relief for F-1 Nonimmigrant Students

### Purpose

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is issuing policy guidance in the [USCIS Policy Manual](#) to clarify the validity period of employment authorization for F-1 students experiencing severe economic hardship due to emergent circumstances (also known as special student relief (SSR)).

### Background

The Secretary of Homeland Security may suspend certain regulatory requirements for F-1 students from a particular region who are experiencing severe economic hardship as a direct result of emergent circumstances (also known as SSR). DHS designates SSR by publication of a Federal Register notice, which provides the start and end dates of the suspension of those requirements, which may include any or all requirements for on-campus or off-campus employment.<sup>1</sup>

USCIS previously issued off-campus SSR employment authorization for up to 1 year, consistent with the regulatory limitations to employment authorization due to severe economic hardship.<sup>2</sup> However, the Secretary may suspend that temporal limitation due to emergent circumstances by notice in the Federal Register.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, USCIS is clarifying that it may grant off-campus SSR employment authorization for the duration of the Federal Register notice validity period, not to exceed the F-1 nonimmigrant student's academic program end date.

This guidance, contained in Volume 2 and Volume 10 of the Policy Manual, is effective immediately. The guidance contained in the Policy Manual is controlling and supersedes any related prior guidance on the topic.

### Policy Highlights

- Provides general information about SSR, including eligibility and documentary requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> See [8 CFR 214.2\(f\)\(5\)\(v\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [8 CFR 214.2\(f\)\(9\)\(ii\)\(C\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> See [8 CFR 214.2\(f\)\(9\)\(ii\)\(A\)](#). See [8 CFR 214.2\(f\)\(9\)\(ii\)\(D\)](#).

- Clarifies that USCIS may grant SSR off-campus employment authorization for the duration of the Federal Register notice validity period, not to exceed the F-1 nonimmigrant student's academic program end date.

### **Summary of Changes**

Affected Section: Volume 2 > Part F, Students (F, M)

- Adds new Chapter 6 (Employment), reserving Section A (On-Campus Employment) and Section B (Severe Economic Hardship), and adding new Section C (Severe Economic Hardship Due to Emergent Circumstances).

Affected Section: Volume 10 > Part A > Chapter 4 > Section C > Subsection 1, Approval

- Revises seventh row and adds new eighth row in the second table (Noncitizens Who Must Apply for Employment Authorization).

### **Citation**

Volume 2: Nonimmigrants, Part F, Students (F, M), Chapter 6, Employment [[2 USCIS-PM F.6](#)].

Volume 10: Employment Authorization, Part A, Employment Authorization Policies and Procedures, Chapter 4, Adjudication [[10 USCIS-PM A.4](#)].