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# Young Immigrants Pause on 'Deferred Action' Offer

By [MIRIAM JORDAN](#)

The flow of applications for a program allowing undocumented immigrants to remain in the U.S. and work legally has been slowed by concerns about what they must disclose and uncertainty about who will be the next president.

During the first three weeks that the government accepted requests for "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals," as the program is known, nearly 40,000 individuals submitted applications, according to government officials and others familiar with the situation. The government began accepting requests on August 15.

Chris Bentley, press secretary for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the agency adjudicating the requests, said the government will release official numbers later this week. He declined to comment further.

The level of activity so far is a fraction of the potential number of eligible immigrants.

As many as 1.7 million immigrants, 30 years old and younger who have lived continuously in the U.S. for five years, could benefit from the program, according to Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank.

About 1.2 million foreign-born people are eligible to apply immediately, with another 500,000 children reaching the minimum eligibility age of 15 in a few years, the institute estimates. The largest number of potential applicants—460,000—is in California. Florida, New York and Texas also have many undocumented youth.

Successful applicants have been assured they won't be deported and will receive a Social Security number and work permit. They will not be entitled to a green card, or permanent U.S. residency, and must reapply every two years to remain in the U.S. and work legally.

Administration officials said they had expected a flood of requests, creating in turn a large caseload for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, a unit of the Department of Homeland Security. But several issues have prevented potential applicants from submitting forms, according to immigration attorneys and advocacy groups.

Immigration attorneys say the outcome of the election is a source of concern for potential applicants, because Republican candidate Mitt Romney has taken a tough stance on illegal immigration.

"Some people have asked if I will let stand the president's executive action. The answer is that I will put in place my own long-term solution that will replace and supersede the president's temporary measure," Mr. Romney said in a June speech.

"A lot of people are waiting to see what happens Nov. 6 before deciding whether to take the plunge," said Maurice Goldman, an immigration attorney in Tucson, Ariz. Mr. Goldman has filed only 20 applications, or only about a third of the prospective applicants who have come to his office seeking consultations.

President Barack Obama announced the immigration policy shift, a significant exercise of executive authority, after failing to convince Congress to pass an overhaul of the immigration system, which risked alienating Hispanic voters who will be crucial to his re-election. His administration has deported record numbers of illegal immigrants.

The government has said application information will not be shared with immigration enforcement. But "many people aren't applying because they fear their families could be at risk of being deported," said Tabbata Castillo, a 26-year-old undocumented Venezuelan in Nashville who has helped run information sessions for the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition.

Laura Lichter, an immigration attorney in Colorado, said that the application form is simple, but can pose problems in some cases. To prove recent residence in the U.S., older applicants, in particular, might need to show work rather than school records. The problem is, undocumented immigrants typically use false identification to secure jobs, which could raise red flags.

"We still don't have answers to issues like, if you borrowed your cousin's name and Social Security number for a job," which means the applicant's real name isn't the one on the pay stub, says Ms. Lichter.

Crystal Williams, executive director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, isn't surprised the influx of applications has been relatively thin. "It's not out of lack of interest," she said.

AILA is seeking clarification from the government on several issues related to the application process. "Nobody has done this before, so we don't know what works for sure," she said. Attorneys volunteering at clinics have managed to assist fewer than half of those who need help.

During the first few days that applications were accepted last month, young immigrants jammed nonprofit organizations where individuals could get help completing forms.

The cost is another barrier for families who sometimes have several eligible children. The application costs about \$500, before attorney fees, which can surpass \$1,000 apiece.

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