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Career Support Software for International Students Navigating H-1B

Introduction

International students on F1 visas in the United States frequently face significant challenges securing employment due to visa sponsorship complexities. Limited access to reliable resources exacerbates their struggle to identify suitable employment opportunities. To address this critical gap, this project aims to develop an automated job support system that ethically aggregates information from approved data sources. The central argument of this paper is a critical examination of the technical design, ethical considerations, and sociotechnical implications involved in deploying an automated system within the broader context of the U.S. H1B employment and immigration system.

Technical overview

System Configuration

The current implementation employs a React 19 single-page application generated with Vite, styled with Material UI (v5) components and theming utilities, while data visualisations use Recharts. This client communicates with an ASP.NET Core 9 Web API written in C#. The API layer mediates all external calls, applies business rules, and exposes JSON endpoints consumed by the front end. Job data are ingested from the RapidAPI endpoint:

<https://rapidapi.com/fantastic-jobs-fantastic-jobs-default/api/linkedin-job-search-api>

which returns postings published during the previous seven days. An hourly hosted service deserializes the payload, normalises fields, removes duplicates, and persists records to a SQL Server database (JobSupportSystem) hosted on SQL Server Express 2022 in development.

Core User Features

The platform centers on two current core user features and two upcoming features. First, a preference dashboard allows students to define filters, such as job title, location, minimum salary, and whether a role explicitly offers visa sponsorship, and stores these settings in a server-side `UserPreferences` table so they remain consistent across devices. Second, a real-time job feed delivers paginated, searchable listings that match each student's saved criteria, with the React client continuously pulling fresh postings. Looking ahead, a sponsorship guide will accompany every listing with a concise, plain-language overview of the H-1B process, wage data links, and a step-by-step filing checklist tailored for small employers. Finally, forthcoming activity analytics will use `Recharts` to visualize which filter combinations generate the most matches, enabling users to fine-tune their search strategy for higher-yield results.

Data Flow

Every hour, the back-end ingestion worker queries `RapidAPI` to retrieve job postings from the past seven days. The incoming records are standardized into a unified `JobPosting` format, deduplicated to eliminate repeats, and saved to the database with their source metadata. When students log in and adjust filters, such as job title, location, or visa-sponsorship status, the API applies those preferences and delivers a personalized feed of matching roles.

Security Concerns and Solutions

This application deals with highly sensitive personal information. International students use this system to search for jobs, set filters like visa sponsorship, and receive alerts about potential opportunities. These actions indicate their immigration intentions and status. This app's data could become legal evidence if immigration authorities like ICE or USCIS issue subpoenas or requests for information. Recognizing that international students represent a particularly vulnerable demographic whose data could become targets of lawful but

potentially harmful government requests, our security strategy prioritizes user safety and data minimization over mere compliance with standard web security practices. The design therefore distinguishes end-to-end encryption (E2EE)—data that only the users can read—from ordinary encrypt-at-rest measures applied to non-critical fields:

E-mail address information is considered low-risk. Because it is already public for most users and needed for account verification, it is stored in plaintext, but always carried over TLS 1.3 and protected by database encryption-at-rest. Visa-sponsorship preference, salary floor, keyword filters, and clickstream data are highly sensitive because they reveal immigration plans and could be subpoenaed. Each value is encrypted in the browser with a per-user key K_{user} that never leaves the client. Only the ciphertext is sent to the API, so even a lawful demand yields unreadable data. The job-posting catalogue is public information and remains in plaintext on the server.

With this split, the backend is structurally incapable of revealing the most sensitive data, even under legal compulsion.

Applied Security

Drawing on collective privacy insights from recent studies on period-tracking apps post-Roe (Song et al., 2024; Malki et al., 2024), this app needs the following concrete privacy safeguards designed explicitly to protect user data even under subpoena or breach scenarios:

Every request between the browser and the ASP.NET Core API is forced through TLS 1.3 (`UseHttpsRedirection()`), so credentials and personal data cannot be read in transit. Secrets and connection strings are injected via environment variables (development) or Azure Key Vault (production), avoiding accidental exposure in source control. Authentication relies on ASP.NET Identity with BCrypt-hashed passwords. The server issues a fifteen-minute JWT and a seven-day refresh token, limiting the usefulness of any stolen credentials. The database stores only the essentials (email, hashed password, preference

filters). No passport or social security details are collected. Endpoints are protected by role policies (Student, Admin) so that one user cannot access another user's data.

Entity Framework employs parameterised SQL, and any non-public column that must be stored server-side uses SQL Server Always-Encrypted.

Future Enhancement

Looking ahead, several upgrades will harden both security and deployment. First, integrating OAuth 2.0 social login, using providers like Google or Microsoft, will offload password management to established identity platforms, lowering the project's liability for credential breaches. Second, once the database is migrated to Azure SQL, activating row-level security alongside Transparent Data Encryption will ensure that each user can access only their own records while keeping data encrypted at rest. Finally, containerising all services with Docker and adopting blue-green deployments through GitHub Actions will provide automated vulnerability scanning, roll-backs, and near-zero downtime whenever new versions are released.

Work Visa System Analysis

H-1B Visa System Explanation

The H-1B visa is a temporary (nonimmigrant) visa category designed for employers to petition highly educated foreign professionals to work in specialized occupations typically requiring at least a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. Occupations within mathematics, engineering, technology, and medical sciences commonly fall under this category. The standard duration for an initial H-1B visa is three years, extendable to a maximum of six years.

The petition process involves multiple stakeholders and regulatory safeguards. Employers must first file a Labor Condition Application (LCA) with the Department of

Labor (DOL), attesting that hiring the foreign worker will not negatively impact the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers. Employers are also required to notify existing workers of their intention to employ H-1B workers. Each year, Congress imposes a statutory limit of 65,000 regular H-1B visas, with an additional 20,000 reserved for foreign nationals who hold advanced degrees from U.S. institutions. Due to consistently high demand exceeding the annual cap, USCIS employs a lottery-based registration process, recently evolving into a beneficiary-centric system to mitigate fraudulent practices and abuses of the registration process.

According to the American Immigration Council, economically, research consistently shows significant positive contributions from H-1B visa holders. They complement rather than compete with U.S. workers by filling skill gaps, thereby enhancing job opportunities for all. The presence of H-1B professionals also leads to increased consumer spending, domestic business expansion, and innovation through entrepreneurship and patent creation. For example, between 2005 and 2018, increased proportions of H-1B workers within specific occupations correlated with lower unemployment rates among native-born workers in those occupations. Additionally, H-1B workers typically earn higher median wages than the general U.S. workforce, indicating minimal wage suppression and positive economic contributions.

Reasons Companies Hesitate to Sponsor H-1B Visas

Companies often hesitate to sponsor H-1B visas due to various economic and administrative considerations. Economic uncertainties significantly influence employer decisions, as seen during periods of inflation and economic downturn. For instance, recent layoffs at major technology firms such as Google, Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft highlight how market instability and financial pressures directly lead to reduced visa sponsorship (Kefford). In such environments, companies typically prioritize retaining domestic workers,

avoiding the complexities of international hires that could strain limited resources or exacerbate financial constraints.

Moreover, the inherent uncertainty surrounding the H-1B visa application process itself serves as a major deterrent. Due to annual statutory caps, significantly more applications are submitted than visas available, forcing employers into an uncertain lottery process (Kefford). The risk of losing valuable candidates in this lottery creates apprehension among employers, as significant investments of time and resources in preparing applications might ultimately yield no return.

The complexity, length, and expense associated with the H-1B process further discourage companies from pursuing sponsorship. Employers are required to manage extensive documentation, adhere to strict procedural guidelines, and pay substantial filing and legal fees. These expenses are particularly burdensome for smaller companies or firms without specialized immigration expertise, making sponsorship appear disproportionately challenging compared to hiring domestic candidates who require no visa support.

Regulatory compliance poses an additional challenge, requiring employers to meet strict standards such as paying prevailing wages and ensuring suitable working conditions. Non-compliance can result in severe legal and financial penalties, further increasing employer reluctance. Such rigorous regulatory demands and the potential consequences of failing to meet them significantly raise the perceived risks associated with H-1B sponsorship.

Internal policies and misconceptions within companies also influence sponsorship decisions. Employers with abundant domestic applicants often adopt policies favoring permanent residents or citizens to simplify recruitment and minimize administrative overhead. Additionally, many employers hold misconceptions or incomplete information

about the visa sponsorship process, which can lead to exaggerated perceptions of complexity and difficulty, thereby discouraging engagement with H-1B visa procedures (Beaudry).

Lastly, concerns over employee retention significantly impact employer willingness to sponsor H-1B visas (Beaudry). Many companies express doubts about the long-term commitment of international workers, fearing that these employees might return to their home countries after acquiring a few years of experience in the U.S. This perceived lack of commitment makes employers hesitant to undertake the costly and complex process of sponsorship, as it potentially limits the long-term benefit to the organization.

Companies With Legal Restrictions On Hiring Foreigners

Some organizations and certain roles within them are legally restricted from hiring foreign nationals or sponsoring visas due to national security requirements or government contracting rules. For instance, defense contractors and government agencies in the United States commonly require employees to hold a security clearance, for which only U.S. citizens typically qualify (DCSA). In these contexts, hiring or sponsoring foreign nationals is either strictly prohibited or so administratively harsh as to be impractical. Furthermore, companies working under certain classified or sensitive projects may be legally bound to employ only U.S. citizens or green card holders. These legal restrictions arise from statutory mandates aimed at safeguarding sensitive information, ensuring that foreign nationals with no established stake in the U.S. are not granted access to classified or proprietary technologies. As a result, even if employers in these industries value the skills that international workers bring, they are often prohibited from sponsoring H-1B visas or other employment-based immigration avenues, effectively limiting the pool of sponsorship opportunities.

Sociotechnical Systems Theory Application

Sociotechnical systems theory emphasizes the deep interconnection between social and technical components (Franssen & Kroes). Technical components, such as APIs, database structures, and user interfaces, do not exist in isolation but are deeply influenced by and continuously interact with social structures, policies, practices, and human behaviors.

Within this automated job support system, technical aspects (such as data aggregation, user interaction) directly interface with broader social systems (such as immigration regulations, labor laws, cultural attitudes towards immigration, and employer hiring practices). For instance, strict visa regulations and annual visa caps shape how employers approach hiring decisions, thereby influencing the type and amount of data that must be gathered and presented through APIs and databases. User behaviors, particularly how international students perceive and respond to visa uncertainties, drive critical interface design choices, emphasizing transparency, trustworthiness, and usability.

Relevant Social Groups Analysis

Relevant Social Groups

Applying Pinch and Bijker's Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) framework, key stakeholders include 4 main social groups:

Pro-skilled immigration groups

Tech companies and immigrant advocacy organizations strongly advocate for skilled immigration policies because they view immigrant talent as essential for sustaining innovation, technological advancement, and economic growth. These groups argue that restrictive immigration policies harm America's global competitiveness by creating talent shortages in critical sectors like technology, healthcare, and research (DePillis and Smialek). Tech companies, in particular, rely heavily on skilled international professionals to fill

specialized roles that the domestic labor market often struggles to satisfy adequately. Advocacy organizations further emphasize the contributions of immigrants to innovation ecosystems, entrepreneurial ventures, and job creation, stressing that robust skilled immigration policies can drive economic dynamism and broader societal prosperity.

Organizations such as tech giants, industry coalitions, and advocacy nonprofits typically have extensive resources, both financial and organizational. They are well-positioned to influence the direction of H-1B policy by working with policymakers: they share economic data and workforce analyses with policymakers, provide expert testimony, propose regulatory improvements, and support public-awareness campaigns that underscore the benefits of an inclusive H-1B system. These public campaigns often highlight how skilled immigrants drive entrepreneurship, patent creation, and job growth for U.S. workers. By engaging policymakers, these groups can help maintain or even raise visa caps, alter denial criteria, and simplify processes, ultimately molding the H1B framework in ways they view as mutually beneficial for industry and the national economy.

Anti-immigration groups

Critics, including certain labor advocacy groups, conservative politicians, and some segments of the American public concerned about job security and wage suppression, as described in "Strangers in Their Own Land" (Hochschild) and vocalized by conservative figures such as Steve Bannon, oppose immigration primarily due to economic insecurities and cultural anxieties. They argue that immigration, particularly skilled immigration facilitated by systems like the H1B visa program, contributes to job competition, wage stagnation, and perceived threats to cultural identity and national solidarity. These groups express fears that employers prefer hiring foreign workers due to lower wage expectations,

which they believe undermines job opportunities and economic stability for domestic workers.

Certain labor unions, conservative political factions, and public interest organizations leverage widespread media coverage and influential political alliances to promote more restrictive stances on skilled immigration. Their messaging often frames H1B visas as a threat to domestic wages and job security, appealing to segments of the electorate concerned about the economic and cultural impact. These groups engage in public campaigns such as televised interviews, print advertisements, and social media mobilization that generate political pressure. In polarized environments, their efforts can swiftly translate into shifts in policy, including executive orders or tightened enforcement measures.

International students

Primary users and direct beneficiaries of the job support system. These students frequently encounter substantial bureaucratic complexities and barriers when attempting to secure employment in the U.S., largely due to the rigorous requirements and limited availability of visa sponsorship. Additionally, international students often navigate significant uncertainties concerning their employment prospects, exacerbated by evolving immigration policies and market conditions. These factors contribute to heightened stress, anxiety, and insecurity, potentially affecting their academic performance and overall well-being. These barriers (lack of clear guidance on which companies sponsor, minimal insight into procedural steps, and intense competition for a capped number of visas) motivated my creation of a job support system. By aggregating verified postings from approved sources and the government's public information on visas, the app offers reliable, easily accessible information on sponsorship possibilities, thus equipping international students with an effective tool to better navigate the complexities of U.S. immigration policy.

Individually, international students possess limited direct power in setting U.S. immigration policy. However, their collective economic and academic impact can be substantial. Universities rely on the tuition and research contributions of international students, particularly in STEM fields, motivating academic institutions to advocate on their behalf. Moreover, large-scale enrollment trends can influence state-level funding allocations and congressional support for more inclusive visa rules, particularly if universities or state economies stand to benefit. International student organizations and alumni networks can also lobby indirectly by raising awareness, building coalitions with faculty and local businesses, or sharing personal narratives that highlight the value of international talent to regional innovation and economic growth.

Smaller businesses and startups

This group has limited experience in or knowledge of the H1B visa sponsorship process. Although they might need specialized skills offered by foreign nationals, these companies often lack the in-house legal and HR resources to navigate the extensive documentation, fees, and regulatory rules required for visa sponsorship. Their relative unfamiliarity with H1B procedures can lead them to avoid sponsoring visas altogether, thus missing out on talented international candidates. Consequently, these organizations can have difficulty competing with larger corporations for specialized labor.

Smaller firms typically lack the solid legal and lobbying infrastructure of large corporations, which constrains their direct political influence on immigration policies. Nevertheless, they hold an underrecognized yet collective power in the labor market. By hiring foreign workers or choosing not to, they cumulatively affect labor supply and demand. If these companies begin to see strong business cases for skilled immigration (e.g., unmet labor needs, competitive advantages, successful hires), their collective voice and examples of

positive outcomes can influence broader industry perspectives. Over time, this market-driven demand for specialized talent can place economic pressure on policymakers to revisit restrictive policies. Conversely, if small businesses opt to avoid visa sponsorship due to costs or misconceptions, they reinforce a trend that prioritizes the status quo, limiting opportunities for international workers and decreasing the urgency for H1B reform.

The politicization of the H1B visa system is evident in shifting legislative policies, executive actions, and public discourse, particularly heightened during politically polarized periods. As a result, the system is marked by considerable instability and frequent policy revisions, often leaving the relevant social groups navigating uncertainties that profoundly affect employment strategies and personal life decisions.

How the app interacts with relevant social groups

To international students

By consolidating publicly available H-1B case data and curated postings from verified sources, the application eliminates guesswork about which employers sponsor visas and what salary thresholds apply. This clarity reduces the anxiety that accompanies opaque hiring channels and enables students to target their efforts more strategically. Over time, transparent filtering and encrypted résumé-submission tools should also help students demonstrate their value to U.S. firms without oversharing sensitive immigration details.

To small companies and start-ups

The tool functions as a matchmaking service and a knowledge base to many young firms that lack in-house immigration counsel. By lowering administrative friction and by showcasing pre-screened STEM candidates who may fill critical skill gaps, the platform presents smaller

businesses with an expanded pool of qualified candidates, including foreign nationals who might otherwise overlook these less visible employers.

To large technology firms and industry coalitions

The application supports the goals of pro-skilled immigration groups by making visa sponsorship status a visible and searchable part of the job-hunting process. Through its centralized sponsorship filter, the app promotes transparency and normalizes sponsorship as a standard hiring practice. By helping students consistently engage with verified sponsoring employers, the app strengthens existing talent pipelines relied upon by tech companies and advocacy organizations. Over time, its widespread use may encourage more employers to disclose sponsorship availability, reinforcing broader efforts to expand access to skilled immigration pathways.

To anti-immigration groups

At the same time, the project consciously addresses the concerns of anti-immigration voices and organised labour. By making salary floors and prevailing-wage data explicit, the platform underscores that sponsored roles must meet or exceed local market rates, an approach that can help dispel the narrative that international hires necessarily undercut domestic wages. Maintaining a public methodology for data inclusion further deters accusations of preferential treatment or hidden bias.

Legal Risks

Developing and operating a visa-focused job-referral platform places the software at the intersection of several evolving legal regimes. First, anti-discrimination law applies to any service that facilitates matching between multiple employers and job-seekers. Because the site curates listings and offers filters such as “visa sponsorship” or “prevailing-wage level,”

regulators are likely to regard it as an employment-referral service. That designation carries two obligations: postings must be presented in a neutral, non-exclusionary manner, and the overall design must avoid creating disparate impacts on protected groups. An illustration of the stakes emerged in February 2025, when a federal judge allowed a class-action suit to proceed against Meta Platforms; plaintiffs claim that Meta’s recruitment workflow steered certain jobs toward H-1B candidates and away from equally qualified U.S. citizens, violating anti-bias statutes (Stempel). Courts have likewise permitted suits against intermediaries whose search features make it easy for employers to prefer or exclude specific nationalities. To avoid similar exposure, the platform should screen incoming ads for citizenship restrictions, requiring employers to certify equal-opportunity compliance.

A second layer of risk arises from state and municipal pay-transparency laws. An increasing number of jurisdictions now mandate that job advertisements disclose a bona-fide salary range and prohibit questions about prior pay. Regulators have fined job boards that republished non-compliant ads after these rules took effect. Because the platform redistributes employer content nationwide, a single posting lacking salary information could trigger enforcement wherever the ad is viewable. Incorporating an automated validator that blocks or flags salary-less listings in transparency states will be essential to remain on the right side of these mandates.

Privacy and data-security obligations form the third legal pressure. Immigration intent, location preferences, and click-through history now fall under the expanded definition of sensitive personal information in California’s CCPA, which, since AB 947 (effective 1 Jan 2024), expressly covers citizenship and immigration status (Akin Gump). Regulators have also filed deceptive-practice actions when companies touted “end-to-end encryption” while leaving data exposed, the FTC’s Zoom order for misleading encryption claims (FTC).

Aligning public statements with the platform’s actual technical safeguards, implementing aggressive data-minimisation, and offering users clear deletion controls help contain this exposure.

Broader Societal and Ethical Implications

By providing more convenient access to visa-friendly job openings, the platform alters the landscape between employers and job-seekers. Larger firms with dedicated immigration counsel can take advantage of granular filters (e.g., “STEM master’s, willing to relocate, accepts Level 1 prevailing wage”) to curate a hyper-specific talent funnel, potentially suppressing wages or excluding candidates who do not match a narrow profile. Meanwhile, smaller employers may still struggle to compete for attention, inadvertently concentrating labor power in the very corporations that already dominate H-1B sponsorship. Over time, this dynamic could deepen wage stratification between visa holders and domestic workers performing similar roles, exacerbating existing inequities in tech and other high-skill fields.

Even with client-side encryption protecting individual preferences, the ranking logic and default filter ordering implicitly shape who is seen first, and who is never seen at all. If relevance scores privilege metropolitan hubs or “elite” degree keywords, the model may systematically reduce priority for candidates from regional universities, community colleges, or historically marginalized backgrounds, reinforcing prestige bias. Furthermore, the visibility of sponsorship status could invite “visa-first” hiring heuristics in which employers screen for immigration status before assessing skill. Although sensitive fields are end-to-end encrypted, the platform still logs metadata: time stamps, IP ranges, device IDs that can reveal usage patterns. In an era of increased data sharing between tech providers and government agencies, metadata alone can map social networks or infer immigration status. High-stakes

users may self-censor (e.g., avoiding salary filters that would trigger “high-wage” labels), creating a chilling effect that undermines the platform’s utility.

Making sponsorship practices easily searchable can cut both ways. Advocacy groups may cite aggregate statistics from the platform to demonstrate the economic contributions of H-1B workers, reinforcing pro-immigration narratives. Conversely, anti-immigration activists could mine the same data to claim that foreign labour is displacing domestic workers, fuelling polarised media cycles. As the Meta lawsuit shows, high-profile litigation can quickly shift from a single defendant to an industry-wide debate.

Therefore, ethical responsibility is an ongoing task. In practice, that means bringing international students, local job-seekers, and small-business owners into early design talks so we can spot problems before they grow. It also means running regular, independent checks on how the site ranks jobs and sharing the results, broken down by gender, race, school type, and region, so hidden bias does not go unseen. We should also keep our ranking code open so outside experts can test it. Finally, staying in touch with lawmakers and labour economists helps make sure our data is read in the right context. With these steps, the application will not just work, it will work fairly. Real success is measured by whether the tool widens opportunity without adding to existing power gaps, and that takes constant attention and regular updates.

Conclusion

This paper examined the technical, social, and ethical dimensions of building a job support system for international students seeking visa-sponsored employment. By combining strong security practices such as client-side encryption and minimal data retention with a

clear understanding of stakeholder needs, the system aims to provide reliable, privacy-respecting support in a highly politicized and uncertain immigration landscape.

Beyond functionality, the platform recognizes its ethical responsibility to prevent misuse, protect user autonomy, and engage thoughtfully with both supportive and critical social groups. As the system evolves, continued attention to privacy, fairness, and transparency will be essential to ensuring it truly serves its intended purpose: expanding access to opportunity while respecting the complexities of the H-1B system and those navigating it.

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