

COVID-19 and Mobility – Global Travel and Immigration Impacts

The impacts of COVID-19 have affected nearly all facets of life around the world and further demonstrate how interconnected humankind has become. For the global mobility industry, the spheres of personal, professional, economic, medical, and immigration domains have condensed dramatically into a single concern as multinational companies rush to care for their personnel around the world. Even well-established and highly-organized global mobility programs have been challenged as COVID-19 restrictions halt international business travel, short- and long-term assignments, and compliance efforts around the world.

This white paper seeks to highlight what has happened so far, emerging trends, and actions and strategies that global mobility professionals can take during these unprecedented times.

The spread of COVID-19 swiftly affected global mobility programs beginning in January of this year. Business travel was one of the first areas to see significant impacts as many countries began significantly limiting access to visa availability and implementing partial or full closures of their borders. Barriers to longer-term moves were not far behind, however, as new quarantine measures, more extensive border closures, and eventual shutdown of many government offices responsible for fundamental immigration procedures were announced.

Key trends and events are stark evidence of how rapidly COVID-19 became a global concern –

Timeline of COVID-19 Impacts on Global Mobility Programs

Early- to Mid-January 2020

Global mobility programs start to see slight reduction in cases to China as companies began to monitor the foreign national populations in China and throughout the broader APAC region.

Mid-January to Mid-February 2020

Focus for companies begins to shift from starting new assignments in the APAC region to preparation and relocation of employees out of APAC epicenters.

Late-February to Present Day

As the pandemic spreads, global mobility programs scramble to answer key questions – Where are our employees located? Where do they need to go? How do they get there? What must they do upon arrival?

Immediate Client Concerns

As countries swiftly moved to restrict international and domestic movement, many of the announced changes were met with confusion on how they were to be enforced and a need for specifics around exceptions. The following are essential concerns that global mobility and global HR teams should consider –

- ② What is the impact on current applications for both new moves and extensions? More specifically: Will the activation window for permits be extended? Will supporting documentation like vital records or police clearances remain valid during any suspension of application adjudication?
- ② Are any of our employees “trapped” outside their country of assignment and unable to return? Will current authorizations be cancelled if they remain outside the country?
- ② Are sponsoring companies obliged to notify any authorities on changes in circumstances surrounding existing permits?
- ② How can HR teams onboard new employees and complete Right to Work checks remotely?
- ② What are the family reunification options for any employees who may be separated from their dependents?
- ② Are your global mobility providers and vendors open and operational? If any of your providers have temporarily closed or suspended services, how will this affect access to resources

such as visa and immigration updates, continuation of data security, and compliance concerns?

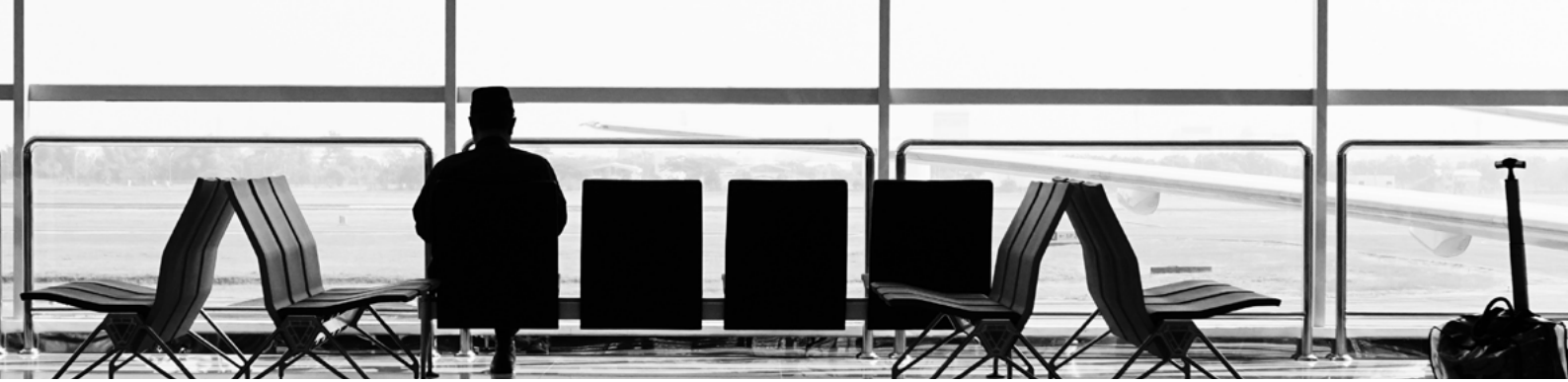
Working with your immigration provider to answer of these questions will help to give a comprehensive understanding of where your employees are in the world and next steps to ensure their safety and your company's continued compliance.

Unique Challenges Emerge

As the world moves into the fourth month of the COVID-19 crisis, several unique challenges have emerged. These two developments will be important to monitor in the upcoming months –

1. Challenges of e-Visa Schemes and Tracking Frequent Business Travelers –

e-Visa application programs were some of the first schemes to be restricted as COVID-19 affected increasing numbers of communities and countries. These online application platforms have soared in popularity over the last several years by providing a fast, inexpensive, and “Do-It-Yourself” approach to tourist and sometimes business visa applications. However, the disadvantages to e-Visa systems for corporate travel became quickly apparent as companies rushed to locate their frequent business travelers, and travelers themselves dealt with sudden, often confusing, and quickly changing announcements from immigration authorities.



2. Transit Visas Take the Main Stage –

Often an afterthought for many travelers focused on their final destinations, Transit Visas became increasingly important as companies attempted to move expats and business travelers through tightening borders and shrinking travel options. Being forced to amend travel plans through uncommon transit countries meant that companies and travelers alike struggled to understand and plan for unexpected Transit Visa requirements. To make matters more complicated, as COVID-19's spread expanded, travelers who had transited through certain countries then faced significant quarantine measures when arriving in their final destination country.

Looking Forward – Possible Upcoming Trends to Watch

It's safe to say that COVID-19 has already significantly changed the world in which we live and possibly irrevocably so. Effects of the pandemic will be felt for years to come in most facets of life, including global mobility and immigration. So what might be in store for the industry once borders are re-opened and the global economy begins to recover?

In the short-term, will countries and companies look to China as a model of what's to come socially and economically? After two months of essentially a "full stop" to everyday life and commerce, China has now begun rolling openings of government operations, borders, and flights.

- ✔ *Tip – Plan ahead and start early! Make sure your program is as ready as possible to file for new assignments and extensions. Being at the head of the line will give your company and applicants an advantage.*

In the medium-term, global mobility professionals will need to remain flexible and anticipate changes to processing times, supporting document requirements, and medical eligibility criteria.

- ✔ *Tip – Remaining nimble will be key. Don't put all your hopes on one person to fill a critical role, and understand that start dates and onboarding plans may need to be adjusted.*

In the long-term, some big picture concepts of traditional business travel and global immigration may see both significant and subtle changes. Possible reforms include increased medical examination requirements for foreign nationals and travelers, larger restructuring of visa and immigration categories, and a potential shift in the current nationalism vs. globalism balance.

- ✔ *Tip – As we move into the long-term implications, it becomes harder to anticipate exactly what trends will emerge. Staying in close contact with your global mobility and immigration providers and ensuring clear communication with your mobile population will be crucial.*

Best Practices and How to Effectively Utilize this Period

The following are several areas where companies and global mobility professionals can focus their time and energy –

- ✔ Keep informed of changes throughout the world and in all jurisdictions where you are active.
- ✔ If your organization will furlough or layoff visa holders as a result of COVID-19, make sure your program is completing immigration assessments ahead of time to ensure you understand any required immigration steps.
- ✔ Work with your global and local providers to review other compliance responsibilities like Posted Worker Notifications and Social Security implications.
- ✔ Perform internal reviews and possible updates of your own global mobility program including your internal processes, Right to Work documentation maintenance, training to expand your team's mobility knowledge base, and thorough examination of your Business Traveler Program.

The next several weeks will be a crucial period for employers to ensure they have a plan in place once the global economy and borders begin to re-open. As we move into a post-COVID-19 world, Newland Chase and CIBTvisas remain at your side for all global visa and immigration needs, advice, and support. Our teams throughout the world continue to work virtually and in offices where appropriate and allowed. Not only have we maintained all operations and full services to clients, but our knowledge and advisory teams are at the forefront of the industry providing country- and program-specific updates as they are announced.

[Contact us](#) to schedule a consultation to learn how we can support your business during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, keep up-to-date with the latest COVID-19 travel and immigration updates on our dedicated online resource – [COVID-19: Latest Travel and Immigration Disruption](#).

*This white paper was prepared by **Jason L. Rogers**, Vice President and Senior Global Immigration Counsel, **Nan Piao**, Director of Global Account Management, and **Soo Gurtcheff-Smit**, Senior Researcher.*

This publication is not intended as a substitute for legal advice. Readers are reminded that immigration laws are subject to change. We are not responsible for any loss arising from reliance on this publication. Please contact Newland Chase should you require any additional clarification or case specific advice.

Newland Chase, a wholly owned subsidiary of **CIBT**, is the leading global provider of immigration and visa services for corporations and individuals with over 1,700 expert immigration and visa professionals, attorneys and qualified migration consultants located in over 70 offices in 25 countries.

With thirty years of experience, CIBT is the primary service provider to 75% of Fortune 500 companies. CIBT offers a comprehensive suite of services under two primary brands: Newland Chase, focused on global immigration strategy and advisory services for corporations worldwide and CIBTvisas, the market leader for business and other travel visa services for corporate and individual clients.