



# Global Immigration Trends and Highlights

**April to June 2023**



# Overview

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This document provides a snapshot of corporate immigration developments worldwide. It is designed to support conversations regarding policies that have been proposed or implemented in key jurisdictions in the Americas, Asia-Pacific and EMEIA (Europe, Middle East, India, Africa) regions.

Policy changes across the globe are being proposed and implemented daily. This document is updated on a quarterly basis. Not all jurisdictions are reflected in this document. The contents of the articles linked herein are true and accurate as of their publication dates and have not been updated from the time of publication.

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For the latest immigration updates, see [here](#). For further guidance or information regarding immigration policies and/or requirements in specific jurisdictions, contact the EY professional with whom you work.

# At a glance

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**Shawn Orme**  
EY Global Immigration Leader

Immigration laws and policies worldwide are becoming increasingly complex due to a shifting geopolitical landscape, protectionism and a pervasive sense of uncertainty. The accelerating rate of regulatory changes globally has transformed workforce dynamics and made immigration a critical focus area for leading organizations that are intent on acquiring and retaining top talent.

The last quarter saw the introduction of **new immigration laws and policies** worldwide. Australia is embarking on a long-term project to reform and simplify its immigration system and make it more business-friendly. Canada and Singapore announced new measures to attract tech talent and foreign workers in shortage occupations. Albania and Montenegro started issuing visas and permits to digital nomads and remote workers for the first time.

Multiple governments implemented **heightened requirements for employers** that rely on foreign labor. Singapore increased the minimum medical insurance coverage that employers must provide to foreign employees, while Sweden increased the minimum salary threshold for third-country nationals. In the US, employers will no longer be able to review employees' identity and employment authorization documents remotely, and they will be required to physically inspect these documents when completing their Form I-9.

Meanwhile, several jurisdictions **streamlined processes for individual applicants**. Hong Kong simplified the application process for several schemes and moved them online, Slovenia relaxed its requirements for obtaining residence authorization, and the US expanded premium processing for certain nonimmigrant visa applicants. Greece, Spain and Sweden proposed or enacted relaxed requirements for EU Blue Card applicants. The UK's first post-Brexit trade deals with Australia and New Zealand went into effect, facilitating the movement of individuals among these locations.

*For more information on global immigration trends and developments, read about [how national self-reliance and "near-shoring" will impact global mobility going forward](#) and the [US Department of State's plans for a pilot program](#) that will allow for the renewal of nonimmigrant visas domestically from within the US.*



# Americas

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## New immigration laws/policies

- ▶ [Panama](#) amended its regulations governing the issuance of work permits, created a new category of work permits for investors and citizens of “friendly nations” (among other groups), and updated the notification requirements for business visitors.
- ▶ [Canada](#) announced its new Tech Talent Strategy, which introduces new measures to attract and retain tech talent in Canada. These include STEM-specific invitation rounds under the Express Entry program, the introduction of a new temporary work permit stream that allows H-1B speciality occupation visa holders in the United States to apply for a Canadian open work permit, the creation of a new Innovation Stream and the launch of a digital nomad visa.

## Employer obligations/benefits

- ▶ In the [United States](#), COVID-19-related flexibilities for employers who complete Employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9) procedures that have been in effect since March 2020 will sunset soon. A recent announcement from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) clarified that all employers who have been relying on these flexibilities in completing Form I-9 will be required to physically inspect and review employees’ identity and employment authorization documents and update their I-9s accordingly.

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Several countries in the Americas region implemented changes to attract specific categories of foreign nationals, including tech talent (Canada), investors and citizens of “friendly nations” (Panama), and nonimmigrants seeking student and exchange visitor status (US).

– George Reis, EY Americas Immigration Leader





- ▶ In [Canada](#), government workers, including those within the immigration department (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC) and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), went on strike, impacting already backlogged processing of applications by IRCC and ESDC/Service Canada. The strike was called off two weeks later, after the workers reached an agreement with the government.

### Individual obligations/benefits

- ▶ [Brazil](#) introduced a new visa-free policy for seafarers that allows certain crew members of international vessels to enter Brazil without visas for up to 90 or 180 days in the 12-month period starting from the individual's date of first entry into the country, provided they comply with other requirements.
- ▶ The [United States](#) Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that it will be expanding premium processing for certain nonimmigrant visa applicants. Applicants filing Form I-539, Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status, to change to F-1, F-2, M-1, M-2, J-1, or J-2 nonimmigrant status will now be eligible for premium processing.

### Looking ahead

- ▶ In [Canada](#), the government is expected to begin STEM-specific invitation rounds under the Express Entry program and introduce its new work permit stream for US H-1B specialty occupation visa holders in July 2023, while the new Innovation Stream is expected to be launched later in 2023.
- ▶ In the [United States](#), COVID-19-related flexibilities for employers who complete Form I-9 procedures will sunset on 31 July 2023. Employers have until 30 August 2023 to physically inspect and review employees' identity and employment authorization documents and update their I-9s accordingly.

# Asia-Pacific

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Governments in the Asia-Pacific region continue to look to technology to enhance their processing of immigration applications. Australia is working on expanding the use of automation in its immigration services, while Malaysia and Hong Kong launched online application systems for certain employers and applicants.

– Linda Rowe, EY Asia-Pacific Immigration Leader



## New immigration laws/policies

- ▶ The government of [Australia](#) is conducting a significant reform of the country's migration program. The report of the first comprehensive review of the migration program in decades, "A Migration System for Australia's Future," was handed to the government. The government responded to the report by publishing an [outline](#) of its migration strategy titled "A Migration System for a More Prosperous and Secure Australia." The outline is aligned with the Review's recommendations, and several key reforms will be implemented in the near future.
- ▶ [Singapore](#) released further details regarding the Qualifications, Shortage Occupations List and Strategic Economic Priorities (SEP) scoring criteria under the COMPASS framework. COMPASS is Singapore's upcoming points-based system for evaluating Employment Pass (EP) applicants based on a set of individual and employer-related attributes. Applicants must score at least 40 points across four foundational attributes (salary, qualifications, diversity, support for local employment) and two bonus criteria (SOL and SEP) to qualify under this framework.

## Employer obligations/benefits

- ▶ Companies in [Malaysia](#) that submit projection applications to the Expatriate Services Division (ESD) are now receiving instant approvals (down from 10 working days previously), provided they submit justifications for their projections and other relevant information.
- ▶ In [Malaysia](#), companies in certain industry sectors that sponsor Employment Pass applicants are now required to apply for support letters from approving agencies or regulatory bodies using the new online, centralized "Xpats Gateway" portal, which is accessible via the website of the Expatriate Services Division (ESD Online).
- ▶ Employers in [Singapore](#) that sponsor individuals to obtain or renew Work Permits and S Passes are now subject to enhanced medical insurance requirements. These enhancements are being implemented in phases, and employers must upload proof of compliance with the new requirements prior to the issuance of S Pass or Work Permit applications on their behalf.



## Individual obligations/benefits

- ▶ [China Mainland](#) removed COVID-19-related travel restrictions for all individuals seeking to enter, provided they test negative for a rapid antigen COVID-19 test no more than 48 hours prior to departure and meet other entry requirements. Individuals can take the pre-travel antigen test at home or in a laboratory. They are still required to report their test online prior to travel.
- ▶ [Japan](#) eliminated the requirement for inbound travelers to get tested for COVID-19 prior to arrival or provide proof of vaccination against COVID-19 to be admitted.
- ▶ [Japan](#) also expanded the Specified Skilled Worker (ii) route to foreign nationals working in nine additional industries, enabling impacted individuals to work in Japan for an indefinite period, sponsor qualifying dependents and apply for permanent residence.
- ▶ In [Hong Kong](#), individuals who seek to obtain new visas or entry permits under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS), Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS), Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG) and Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents (ASSG) are now required to submit their applications online via the website of the Hong Kong Immigration Department (ImmD). Those who apply to renew their documents must do so online no more than four weeks prior to their documents' expiry.

## Looking ahead

- ▶ [Australia](#) is working on finalizing a new migration strategy, which is expected to be released later in 2023.
- ▶ [Malaysia](#) will extend the new Xpats Gateway portal to all impacted sectors by 15 August 2023. Companies in these sectors will be required to begin using the portal to apply for support letters.
- ▶ [Singapore](#) is set to launch the points-based COMPASS framework for individuals who apply for initial Employment Passes on 1 September 2023.



# EMEIA

## New immigration laws/policies

- ▶ [Albania](#) began accepting applications for Single Permits from eligible foreign nationals, including digital nomads, and introduced new residence permits for real estate investors and retirees.
- ▶ [Azerbaijan](#) introduced new regulations governing the issuance of permanent residence permits.
- ▶ [Cyprus](#) implemented changes for investors seeking to become permanent residents. The government later clarified that investors who hold permanent residence permits must produce police clearance certificates every three years, and not annually.
- ▶ The [Czech Republic](#) and [Sweden](#) are currently debating amendments to their EU Blue Card regulations.
- ▶ [Greece](#) approved a new Immigration Code, which will update the rules governing the issuance of Blue Cards, Digital Nomad Visas and work rights for managers.
- ▶ [Greece](#) updated its rules governing the issuance of Golden Visas based on the purchase of property.
- ▶ [Lithuania](#) has suspended the issuance of National Visas to several categories of individuals.
- ▶ [Montenegro](#) is now issuing temporary residence permits and D Visas to digital nomads.
- ▶ [Poland](#) implemented amendments to the Act on Foreigners, which impact third-country nationals applying for EU Long-Term Residence Permits and displaced Ukrainian nationals, among other groups.
- ▶ [Poland](#) extended the authorized period of stay for certain Ukrainian nationals.
- ▶ [Serbia](#) is currently debating the possibility of introducing a Single Permit, which would eliminate the need to obtain separate work and residence authorizations and relaxing the requirements for individuals to acquire permanent residence.
- ▶ [Sweden](#) is considering several changes to tighten the requirements for obtaining Swedish citizenship.
- ▶ The [UAE](#) plans to introduce a new work permit in late 2023 that will allow foreign nationals of all skill levels to conduct work on a freelance basis.



Several jurisdictions in the EMEIA region introduced new visas and permits, including for remote workers (Albania), digital nomads (Montenegro) and freelancers (the UAE). Others (including the Czech Republic, Greece, Spain and Sweden) implemented or proposed rules that make it easier to obtain EU Blue Cards.

– Ben J Willis, EY EMEIA Immigration Leader



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## Employer obligations/benefits

- ▶ [Sweden](#) is considering several changes to tighten the requirements for obtaining Swedish citizenship.
- ▶ The [UAE](#) plans to introduce a new work permit in late 2023 that will allow foreign nationals of all skill levels to conduct work on a freelance basis.
- ▶ [South Africa](#) opened a consultation period for companies to provide feedback on the planned pilot of the Trusted Employer Scheme.
- ▶ [Spain](#) implemented major changes relating to EU Blue Cards, including eliminating the requirement for employers to conduct a labor market test.
- ▶ [Sweden](#) announced that third-country nationals will soon be required to earn at least 80% of the median annual salary to be eligible for a work permit.
- ▶ [Sweden](#) announced plans to implement a new system for processing work permit applications, which will eliminate expedited processing.
- ▶ The [UK](#) updated the guidance regarding sponsor duties and compliance and incorporated additional reporting duties in the “change of work location” category to include remote and hybrid work.

## Individual obligations/benefits

- ▶ [Denmark](#) extended the deadline for eligible individuals to submit applications to reside in the country pursuant to the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement until 31 December 2023.
- ▶ [Denmark](#) sent a proposal for public consultation to allow third-country nationals to work for certain Danish entities (with at least 50 employees) for a limited period without obtaining a Danish work permit.
- ▶ The [European Council](#) and European Parliament provisionally agreed upon rules to digitalize the Schengen Visa application process, which will allow individuals to apply for a visa online.
- ▶ [Slovenia](#) simplified the immigration process for holders of Single Permits and residence permits and introduced new language requirements.
- ▶ [South Africa](#) extended the validity of Long-Term Visas until 31 December 2023 for individuals who submitted waiver or renewal applications and did not receive a decision regarding their application by 31 March 2023.
- ▶ [South Africa](#) also extended the deadline for Zimbabwe Exemption Permit holders to change to another immigration status until 31 June 2024.
- ▶ In [Spain](#), the government recently clarified the conditions under which certain study visa holders may work in the country without obtaining a separate Spanish work authorization document.
- ▶ The [UK](#) announced new restrictions to the Student Visa route, including limits on the ability of most students to bring family members to the UK.
- ▶ The [UK](#) recently implemented amendments to its Expansion Worker and Service Supplier routes and the [Youth Mobility Scheme](#), which benefit applicants from Australia and New Zealand.

## Looking ahead

- ▶ [Denmark](#) may soon allow third-country nationals to work in the country for a limited period without work permits.
- ▶ [Greece's](#) new immigration law, which impacts Blue Card and Digital Nomad Visa holders, is expected to go into effect on 1 January 2024.
- ▶ [Serbia](#) and the [UAE](#) are expected to launch new immigration permits in the months ahead.
- ▶ [South Africa](#) is expected to announce the launch date of the Trusted Employer Scheme in the near future, which would introduce priority processing for qualifying companies, among other things.
- ▶ [Sweden](#) is debating changes to its Blue Card framework, which, if adopted, would go into effect in November 2023.

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