



# GLOBAL IMMIGRATION TRENDS – FEBRUARY 2024

## Introduction

This article provides an overview of the latest updates and trends in immigration policies, highlighting shifts in various regions worldwide. Due to Global changes, immigration laws and policies are constantly reviewed to meet evolving needs effectively.

## Africa

### Nigeria

#### Online Passport Services

The Nigerian Immigration Services has expanded its online passport services for Nigerian nationals living in Nigeria and residing abroad. Applicants will be able to seamlessly apply for or renew their passports online. This streamlined process allows users to upload photos and supporting documents, make payments, schedule biometric appointments, and track their passport status—all from the convenience of their devices. According to the Nigerian Government, this is to take effect from January 8, 2024.

Previously, applicants were required to submit documents in person during a scheduled appointment. By transitioning to this digital platform, the Nigerian government aims to modernize and simplify passport services, ultimately reducing processing times for applicants.

### Rwanda

#### Visa Waiver for All Africans

On November 2, 2023, the President of Rwanda announced visa-free travel for Africans to take effect from 2024.

This move aims to enhance regional integration and trade, making Rwanda one of the few African nations to implement such a policy, following Gambia, Benin, Kenya and Seychelles.

### Kenya

#### New Electronic Travel Authorization for Travelers in Place of Visas

In December 2023, Kenya announced that it would be the first African country to be visa-free for all travelers. Further to this announcement, in January 2024, as part of its efforts to implement this policy, the Kenyan Government introduced a new requirement: instead of traditional visas, international travelers must obtain an Electronic Travel Authorization ("ETA") at least three (3) to four(4) days before their intended travel date to legally enter the country.

The ETA is facilitated through a semi-automated online system designed to assess visitors' eligibility for entry into Kenya. Each authorization costs \$34 per visitor, including infants and children, and is valid for a single entry, specifically tied to the flights and dates provided in the application. This authorization grants travelers a stay of up to Ninety (90) days in the country.

## South Africa

#### White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection

The Department of Home Affairs in South Africa has extended the deadline for public comments on the White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection to January 31, 2024.

The white paper was published for public comment in November 2023 and proposes that the South African government review and/or withdraw from the 1951 United Convention on Refugees, the 1967 Protocol and the 1969 African Union Refugee Convention, which the government said have inhibited its ability to deal with what it has deemed a "migration crisis."

## North America

### Canada

#### Decreased Percentage of Issuable Student Permits

The Canadian Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced a temporary two-year limit on the number of new international student permits. The limit is to have only 360,000 new international student permits issued in each year and this restriction will result in a 35% decrease in the number of issued study permits in 2024 compared to that of 2023. Renewal of existing permits and study permits for master's and doctoral degrees in addition to primary and secondary education are exempt from the restriction.

#### Increased Financial Requirement For International Students

The Canadian Government has announced an adjustment to the financial requirement for international students applying for study permits, effective for applications received on or after January 1, 2024. In addition to tuition fees, such applicants must provide proof of available funds for their dependents, amounting to Twenty Thousand Six Hundred and Thirty-Five (20,635) Canadian Dollars.

This represents a significant increase from the previous requirement of Ten Thousand (10,000) Canadian Dollars.

### United States

#### Pilot Program for Domestic H-1b Non-Immigrant Visa Renewals

United States announced a pilot program to resume domestic visa stamp renewal for qualified **H-1B visa** applicants who meet certain requirements. The H-1B visa permits employers in the United States, to employ foreign workers in occupations demanding technical expertise.

The pilot program will allow certain qualified individuals in H-1B status to receive an H-1B visa stamp in their valid passport in lieu of applying for the visa stamp at a U.S. consulate or embassy abroad.

## Asia Pacific

### South Korea

#### Work and Travel: South Korea's 'Workation' Visa Opens Doors For Travelers

South Korea has announced the introduction of a 'Workation' Visa, to take effect from January 1, 2024. This visa is designed for individuals who wish to engage in long-term travel while maintaining their work routine. It allows holders to stay in the country for up to a year from the date of entry, with the option to renew for an additional year.





Eligibility for the visa is limited to individuals affiliated with foreign companies. Holders of the visa are prohibited from seeking employment with local companies or engaging in profit-generating activities during their stay in South Korea.

## China

### Visa-Free Arrangements with Thailand and Other Countries

China and Thailand recently entered a bilateral agreement to mutually waive visa requirements for its travelers effective from March 2024. The implication is that citizens from both countries enjoy freedom to travel without the difficulties of visa requirements.

In addition, China launched a unilateral visa-free trial for visitors from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia to run from December 2023 until November 30, 2024. Individuals bearing passports from the listed countries are permitted to enter China visa-free for business, tourism, visits and transit for a maximum duration of Fifteen (15) days.

## Europe

### United Kingdom

#### Expansion of the Youth Mobility Schemes

Effective January 31, 2024, the UK expands its Youth Mobility Scheme (YMS), welcoming nationals of Uruguay and extending the age range for Australian, Canadian, and South Korean nationals from 18–30 to 18–35. Additionally, Australian, and Canadian nationals can now extend their visas by up to one year, with increased visa allocations for Japanese and South Korean nationals.

#### Changes to Family and Work Visas

The UK government, aiming to curb illegal immigration and lower net migration, announces several changes effective from April 2024:

- Social care workers are prohibited from bringing dependents on their visa.
- The minimum salary requirement for the Skilled Worker visa rises from £26,200 to £38,700, excluding health and care workers.
- The shortage occupation list is revised to reduce sponsorship of overseas workers below the baseline minimum salary.
- Minimum income for sponsoring a spouse/partner visa increases incrementally.
- The Migration Advisory Committee reviews the Graduate visa.

#### Illegal Working Penalties Tripled

Effective February 13, 2024, penalties for employers and landlords hiring or renting to foreign nationals without proper documentation triple, with fines ranging from £15,000 to £60,000 per worker.

#### Changes to Business Visitor Rules

Effective January 31, 2024, the UK relaxes rules for business travelers, allowing more flexibility in client interactions and remote work. Some highlights on these changes;

1. **Current Rule:** An employee of a company based outside the UK may come to the UK to 1) advise and consult; 2) troubleshoot; 3) provide training; and 4) share skills and knowledge.

This must be on a specific internal project with UK employees of the same corporate group, and crucially **no work can be carried out directly with clients.**

2. **New Rule:** the restriction on working directly with clients will be removed. Employees of a linked group company outside the UK will be able to advise and consult, provide training, and share skills and knowledge with clients as well as colleague so long as any client facing activity is incidental to their employment outside the UK; and these activities are required for the delivery of a project or service by the UK branch to the UK client (not by the group company based outside the UK)
3. Under the amended rules, visitors are permitted to engage in remote work while in the UK; however, it emphasized that remote work cannot be the primary reason for the visit. Therefore, individuals traveling to the UK solely for the purpose of remote work, such as digital nomads or those seeking temporary employment due to expired immigration permissions in another country, are still prohibited from doing so under visitor status.
4. **Current Rule:** The existing rules allow lawyers based outside the UK to advise a UK based client on specific international litigation and/or an international transaction alone.
5. **New Rule:** An overseas lawyer may provide the following legal services: advice; appearing in arbitrations; acting as an arbitrator or mediator; acting as an expert witness; appearing in court in jurisdictions which allow short term call or where qualified in that jurisdiction; conferences, teaching; providing advocacy for a court or tribunal hearing; litigation; and transactional legal services, including drafting contracts.

#### Conclusion

These updates reflect a nuanced response to the challenges and opportunities presented by global migration.

For most countries in the African region, as seen the recent policies, governments are relaxing their immigration policies to attract talent and foreign company investment in the region. The Africa Visa Openness Index 2023 reveals that Africa is making strides in its visa openness policies boding well for cross border travel, ease of movement and trade in 2024 and beyond.

On the other hand, regions like United Kingdom and the United States are implementing more stringent measures to control migration flows and prevent abuse of their systems.

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