



GLOBAL IMMIGRATION TRENDS – January 2026

Introduction

Globally, governments continue to review, amend, and introduce immigration rules in response to evolving priorities such as security considerations, revenue generation, the attraction of foreign talent, and administrative capacity, among others. The updates below highlight recent regulatory reforms, and updates to immigration policies across the globe.

North America

United States of America

DEPARTMENT OF STATE ANNOUNCES TEMPORARY PAUSE ON CERTAIN VISAS FOR NATIONALS OF SEVENTY-FIVE (75) COUNTRIES

On January 14, 2026, the Department of State (“DOS”) announced a pause on the issuance of **immigrant visas (tourist visas and non-immigrant visas are not affected)** for nationals of seventy-five (75) countries, effective January 21, 2026. DOS stated that it is undergoing a full review of all policies, regulations, and guidance to ensure that immigrants from the listed countries do not utilize welfare in the United States or become a financial burden to Americans.

The affected countries include Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, The Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Republic of the Congo, Russia, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

Applicants from these countries may attend their visa interviews, and the DOS will continue to schedule applicants for appointments, but no immigrant visas will not be issued. However, a dual national applying with a valid passport of a country that is not listed above is exempt from this pause.

Find More: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/immigrant-visa-processing-updates-for-nationalities-at-high-risk-of-public-benefits-usage.html>

Canada

CANADA EXTENDS PAUSE OF PARENT AND GRANDPARENT PROGRAMME (“PGP”)

The Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (“IRCC”) on its official website confirmed that as of January 1, 2026, no new applications will be received for the intake of the Parents and Grandparents Program (“PGP”). The decision extends last year’s pause that was introduced to tackle a backlog that had topped forty thousand (40,000) cases by late 2023.

It was also confirmed that applications that were submitted in 2025, based on invitations issued from the 2020 interest-to-sponsor pool and those counted within a cap of ten thousand (10,000) sponsorship applications will continue to be processed in 2026.

With the PGP paused, the Canada Super Visa is now the primary option for parents and grandparents who want to spend extended time in Canada. The Super Visa is a 10-year multiple-entry temporary resident visa designed specifically for parents and grandparents of Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

CANADA INCLUDES THIRTEEN (13) COUNTRY TO IT’S VISA FREE ENTRY LIST

The Canadian government has officially added thirteen (13) countries to its list of countries eligible for visa-free entry starting in 2026 thus significantly reducing travel costs for citizens of eligible countries.

The newly added countries are Philippines, Thailand, Argentina, Costa Rica, Morocco, Panama, Seychelles, Uruguay, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

As a result, travellers from these countries may now use the Electronic Travel Authorization (“ETA”) system and will be required to pay only Seven Canadian Dollars (CAD \$7) instead of the standard One Hundred Canadian Dollars (CAD \$100) visitor visa fee.

The visa free access is limited to “known travellers” who meet specific criteria. Applicants must have either held a Canadian visitor visa in the past ten (10) years or currently hold a valid United States non-immigrant visa. In addition, applicants must possess a valid passport, an email address, and a credit or debit card to complete the online application.

It should be noted that the ETA applies only to those entering Canada by air. A regular visitor visa is still required for those arriving by cruise ship or other sea and land crossings.

Canadian officials noted that the move is intended to make travel more efficient and affordable while maintaining security standards.

Asia

China

CHINA EXTENDS FINGERPRINT EXEMPTION POLICY UNTIL DECEMBER 31, 2026

China has extended its fingerprint exemption policy for short-term visa applicants until December 31, 2026. The policy covers tourist (L), business (M), family visit (Q2) short-term study (X2) and transit (G) visas for stays of up to 180 days.

Fingerprint collection will also continue to be waived for children under the age of 14 and adults over the age of seventy (70); holders of diplomatic passports, or those eligible for diplomatic, service or courtesy visas of China; and applicants who are missing all ten fingers or whose fingerprints cannot be collected.

However, for long-term stay (D), foreign journalists (J1), family members of Chinese citizens or permanent residents (Q1), accompanying a foreign worker or student (S1), long-term study (X1) and work (Z) visas, which require the application for a residence permit after entry into China, fingerprint collection will still be required.





South Korea

SOUTH KOREA EXTENDS TEMPORARY EXEMPTION PERIOD FOR E-KTA

The South Korean Ministry of Justice has extended the temporary K-ETA (“**Korea Electronic Travel Authorization**”) exemption for nationals from twenty-two (22) countries from January 1, 2026, until December 31, 2026.

This extension applies to countries that are currently exempt from K-ETA, including: Hong Kong, Japan, Macao, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America.

However, nationals of the above listed countries who have already obtained a K-ETA can use it until its expiration date and the application fee paid is non-refundable.

Since September 2021, nationals of 112 countries who are eligible for visa-free entry need K-ETA approval in advance to board a flight or ship bound for South Korea. The K-ETA approval is generally valid for three years within the passport expiration date, unless the personal information, such as name, nationality or passport number, changes. Approved K-ETA holders may use the authorization multiple times within its validity period, provided they do not exceed the period of stay granted upon arrival.

Find More: [Notice Details < K-ETA Application Guide < K-ETA](#)

Philippines

PHILIPPINES ALLOWS FOURTEEN (14) DAY VISA FREE ENTRY FOR CHINESE NATIONALS

Effective January 16, 2026, Chinese nationals may enter the Philippines visa free for up to fourteen (14) days for tourism or business. The stay is non extendable and non convertible, and entry is permitted only through Ninoy Aquino International Airport (“**NAIA**”) in metro Manila and Mactan-Cebu International Airport (“**MCIA**”).

Travelers must present a passport valid for at least six (6) months, confirmed accommodation, and a return or onward ticket. All travellers will remain subject to standard security screening and checks against derogatory records. The visa free arrangement will be valid for one (1) year and reviewed before expiration.

This development is in line with the President's directive to facilitate trade, investments, and tourism, as well as strengthen people-to-people exchanges between Philippines visa China.

Find More: <https://shanghaipcg.dfa.gov.ph/newsroom/announcements/1148-philippines-to-allow-visa-free-entry-for-14-days-for-chinese-nationals>

Malaysia

MALAYSIA INCREASES SALARY THRESHOLD FOR EMPLOYMENT PASS

The Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs has announced revisions to the minimum salary requirements for Employment Pass (“**EP**”) categories. These changes will impact all new and renewal EP applications submitted on or after June 1, 2026.

The revised thresholds are as follows:

- EP Category I: from a current minimum salary of Ten Thousand Malaysian Ringgit (RM10,000), equivalent to approximately Two Thousand Five Hundred and Thirty-Six United States Dollars (\$2,536) to Twenty Thousand Malaysian Ringgit (RM20,000), equivalent to approximately Five Thousand Seventy-Three United States Dollars (\$5,073)
- EP Category II: from a current minimum salary of Five Thousand Malaysian Ringgit (RM5,000), equivalent to approximately One Thousand Two Hundred and Sixty-Eight United States Dollars (\$1,268) to Nine Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Malaysian Ringgit (RM9,999), equivalent to approximately Two Thousand Five Hundred and Thirty-Six United States Dollars (\$2,536) to a revised minimum salary of Ten Thousand Malaysian Ringgit (RM10,000),

equivalent to approximately Two Thousand Five Hundred and Thirty-Six United States Dollars (\$2,536) to Nineteen Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Malaysian Ringgit (RM19,999), equivalent to approximately Five Thousand Seventy-Three United States Dollars (\$5,073)

- EP Category III: from a current minimum salary of Three Thousand Malaysian Ringgit (RM3,000), equivalent to approximately Seven Hundred and Sixty-One United States Dollars (\$761) to Four Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Malaysian Ringgit (RM4,999), equivalent to approximately One Thousand Two Hundred and Sixty-Eight United States Dollars (\$1,268) to a revised minimum salary of Five Thousand Malaysian Ringgit (RM5,000), equivalent to approximately One Thousand Two Hundred and Sixty-Eight United States Dollars (\$1,268) to Nine Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Malaysian Ringgit (RM9,999), equivalent to approximately Two Thousand Five Hundred and Thirty-Six United States Dollars (\$2,536)
- Manufacturing Related Services (MRS): the salary threshold will be Seven Thousand Malaysian Ringgit (RM7,000), equivalent to approximately One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy-Five United States Dollars (\$1,775) to Nine Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Malaysian Ringgit (RM9,999), equivalent to approximately Two Thousand Five Hundred and Thirty-Six United States Dollars (\$2,536).

Employers should review and update Compensation & Benefits packages for expatriate hires to ensure that all new and renewal EP applications submitted from June 1, 2026, comply with these revised thresholds.

Middle East

United Arab Emirates

UAE REVISES REMOTE WORK VISA RULES

The United Arab Emirates (the “**UAE**”) has introduced stricter income documentation requirements for its remote working visa applicants.

Effective January 26, 2026, applicants must provide six (6) months of bank statements, doubling the previous requirement. In addition, a valid employment contract from an employer outside the UAE with at least one (1) year of validity is now required, effectively increasing the minimum employment period with the overseas employer. These measures aim to ensure that applicants demonstrate a stable work history and consistent salary flow before relocating under the UAE remote working visa.

The UAE remote worker programme was first launched in March 2021 to attract global talent and support the country's economy. It allows foreign nationals to reside in the UAE for up to one (1) year while working remotely for employers based outside the country.

Saudi Arabia

SAUDI ARABIA RESTRICTS KEY ROLES FOR EXPATRIATE WORKERS

Effective 29 January 2026, the government suspended changes to professional titles and job classifications for expatriates in senior and commercial positions through Qiwa, the official labour platform and central hub for labour services.

The four (4) roles now restricted to Saudi nationals are:

1. General Manager: strictly reserved for Saudi nationals.
2. Sales Representative: subject to heavy localization targets.
3. Marketing Specialist: subject to a new sixty percent (60%) Saudization rate.
4. Procurement Manager: restricted to ensure local oversight of supply chains.

Additionally, companies with three (3) or more employees in marketing and sales must ensure that sixty percent (60%) of the team are Saudi nationals. Furthermore, this updated policy requires local employees to be paid a minimum monthly salary of Five Thousand Five Hundred Saudi Riyal (SAR 5,500), equivalent to approximately One Thousand Four Hundred and Sixty-Six United States Dollars (\$1,466) for sales/marketing roles, or Eight Thousand Saudi Riyal (SAR 8,000), equivalent to approximately Two Thousand One Hundred and Thirty-Three United States Dollars (\$2,133) for engineering/technical roles, to count toward the company's localization quota.





The practical implication of these changes is that employers cannot offer or update these job titles for non-Saudi workers. When a job category is fully nationalized, the work permit process cannot proceed for foreign candidates in those roles.

Europe

United Kingdom

UNITED KINGDOM TO ISSUE ONLY E-VISA

The United Kingdom (UK) Visas and Immigration (UKVI) is transitioning to a fully digital immigration system, replacing physical visa sticker with electronic visa (eVisa).

Effective February 25, 2026, successful applicants will no longer receive a visa sticker. Instead, they will need to access their eVisa through their UKVI account to view the permission granted before travelling to the UK. Applicants must create a UKVI account, and if they are accompanied by a partner and/or children as dependents, each dependent must also create their own UKVI account to access their eVisa.

It should be noted that all successful applicants will be issued eVisas. Individuals who do not currently require an eVisa include those:

- Visiting the UK with an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA),
- Exempt from immigration control, or
- Granted permission to stay in the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

UKVI has highlighted the following benefits of the eVisa system:

- a. eVisas are more secure and cannot be lost, stolen or tampered with, unlike a physical document.
- b. It eliminates the need for physical collection of the applicant's documents after application has been decided.
- c. eVisas will lead to quicker processing time at the UK border.

Find More:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/updates-on-the-move-to-evisas/updates-on-the-move-to-evisas>

Poland

POLAND REQUIRES BIOMETRIC PASSPORTS FOR RUSSIAN NATIONALS

On January 22, 2026, the Polish Office for Foreigners issued a notice announcing that Poland will no longer recognize non-biometric (five-year) Russian passports for entry and stay, effective.

Under this new policy, Russian citizens holding older, non-biometric passports will not be permitted to enter or remain in Poland. Only biometric (ten-year) passports with an electronic chip will be valid for border crossing and lawful stays.

According to the government, these changes align Poland with broader European Union (EU) security measures and follow similar restrictions already implemented in several Schengen countries. Russian nationals are therefore advised to obtain a biometric passport to avoid travel disruptions or potential immigration violation.

Switzerland

SWITZERLAND INTRODUCES FREE MOVEMENT FOR CROATIAN NATIONALS

Earlier in January 2026, Switzerland confirmed that Croatian nationals will benefit from full free movement in 2026, as the country will no longer apply quotas to Croatian workers.

This decision follows the observation that permit numbers for Croatian nationals in 2025 remained below the thresholds required to trigger quota restrictions. According to the Federal Council, the number of B residence permits and L short-stay permits issued to Croatian nationals in 2025 stayed below the safeguard-clause thresholds set out in the Agreement on Free Movement of Persons (AFMP). As a result, Croatia now enjoys full free movement of persons in line with other European Union and European Free Trade Association (EU/EFTA) member states.

France

FRANCE IMPLEMENTS MANDATORY CIVIC EXAMINATION FOR FIRST-TIME RESIDENCE PERMIT APPLICANTS

As of January 1, 2026, the French authorities have implemented a mandatory civic examination for individuals applying for a Pluriannual Residence Permit (Titre de séjour/ Carte de séjour) and a Residence Card (Carte de Résident) for the first time. Applicants must successfully complete the examination before submitting application.

The examination is made up of forty (40) questions with different levels of difficulty depending on the type of residence permit applied for. It includes twenty-eight (28) knowledge questions and twelve (12) role-playing questions covering five (5) themes. The themes are:

- a. The principles and values of the Republic
- b. The institutional and political system of France
- c. Your rights and duties
- d. The history, geography, and culture of France
- e. Life in French society

The examination will be conducted in French and will last for forty-five (45) minutes. It is free of charge and applicants must answer at least thirty-two (32) questions correctly to pass the exam.

To support applicants, a civic training programme is available, delivered over four (4) days from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. across four (4) months. The Ministry of the Interior has also launched an online platform providing over two hundred (200) thematic sheets and practice questions to help applicants prepare for the civic exam.

Conclusion

January 2026 has seen significant changes in immigration policies worldwide, reflecting evolving priorities such as security, workforce localization, talent attraction, and digital modernization. Many countries introduced new visa-free arrangements, stricter documentation requirements, and digital processing systems, while others aligned entry rules with broader international standards. Staying informed of these developments is essential for employers, HR professionals, and travelers to ensure compliance, smooth cross-border operations, and effective workforce planning.

This alert is for general information only. It is not offered as advice on any particular matter, whether legal, procedural or otherwise.

Foreign currency values are subject to fluctuations, and it is advisable to verify current rates for updated fees.

For additional information, please contact Bloomfield LP Email- immigration@bloomfield-law.com or your usual contact at Bloomfield LP.

