



GLOBAL IMMIGRATION TRENDS – April 2026

Introduction

As the year 2026 progresses, countries continue to tighten immigration and workforce mobility frameworks, with a strong focus on workforce localisation, digitisation, compliance, and streamlined mobility policies. These developments underscore the importance for employers to remain aligned with evolving requirements that impact workforce planning, cross-border mobility, and overall compliance obligations.

Africa

Nigeria

US EMBASSY SUSPENDS VISA APPOINTMENTS IN ITS ABUJA OFFICE

On April 10, 2026, the United States of America Mission (the “U.S. Mission”) in Nigeria, announced the suspension of all visa appointments at its office in Abuja.

The development comes amid a broader security advisory issued by the United States, which authorised the departure of non-emergency staff from the U.S. Mission in Abuja.

The U.S. Mission has, however, clarified that visa processing services at the U.S. Consulate General in Lagos remain operational. Additionally, American Citizen Services are still available in cases of emergency and by appointment.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA DIGITISES AUTHENTICATION AND EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS

On April 15, 2026, the Federal Ministry of Education (the “Ministry”), announced the full automation of the authentication and evaluation process for academic credentials. This initiative forms part of ongoing efforts to strengthen transparency, improve data management and enhance public service delivery.

Following this development, all applications for authentication and evaluation of academic credentials are now to be processed exclusively via the Ministry’s official verification portal.

Applicants are also required to liaise with their respective issuing institutions to ensure that academic transcripts are transmitted directly from the institutions’ official email addresses to the designated Ministry email address for verification and processing.

This development eliminates the need for physical submission of documents at the Ministry and is expected to facilitate a more efficient and streamlined process.

Ghana

GHANA TO GRANT VISA-FREE ACCESS TO ALL AFRICAN PASSPORT HOLDERS

On April 2, 2026, the President of Ghana, John Mahama, announced a new policy granting visa-free access to all African passport holders (the “Policy”), to take effect on May 25, 2026, in commemoration of Africa Day 2026.

The Policy builds on an earlier initiative introduced by the former President of Ghana, President Nana Akufo-Addo during his final State of the Nation Address in January 2025 in furtherance of a broader pan-African vision. It also forms part of a wider reform of Ghana’s immigration framework, including the introduction of a new e-visa platform expected to be launched in May 2026.

The introduction of visa-free entry for all African nationals is anticipated to support Intra-African mobility with positive implications for tourism, business travel, and regional integration.

GHANA’S NEW E-VISA POLICY GETS APPROVAL FROM CABINET

On April 27, 2026, Ghana’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, announced that the cabinet has approved the new electronic visa policy which covers travel to Ghana for business and tourism.

This policy replaces the existing manual, paper-based process with a fully digital, trackable system aligned with International Civil Aviation Organisation (“ICAO”) standards. The new process will be as follows:

- a. Online Application: travelers complete forms, upload documents, and fees through a secure government portal. This does not require any embassy visits.
- b. Digital Processing: Ghana Immigration Service vets applications using biometric data and waitlist checks.
- c. Instant Notification: approved e-visas are issued by email with a QR code.
- d. Border verification: on arrival, officers scan the QR code and biometric data to confirm identity and admit the traveler.

This new system is set to reduce processing times from weeks to twenty-four (24) hours to seventy-two (72) hours. Additionally, it will allow for faster investor access, reduced logistics friction, border efficiency and increase in tourism amongst other advantages.

The e-visa policy is set to take effect from May 25, 2026.

Ethiopia

ETHIOPIA TO INTRODUCE NEW TRANSIT VISA FOR PASSENGERS OF ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES

In early April 2026, the Ethiopian Council of Ministers approved a landmark tourism policy introducing an Ethiopia Transit Visa which allows eligible passengers up to seven (7) days of visa-free entry into Ethiopia.

Under the new policy, passengers travelling with Ethiopian Airlines with layovers of over twenty-four (24) hours may exit the Addis Ababa Bole International Airport to explore the country without paying visa fees or completing the usual administration visa application process. Previously, transit passengers were required to obtain a short-stay visa in order to leave the airport.

This initiative forms part of a coordinated effort between the Ministry of Tourism and the Ethiopian Immigration and Citizenship Service to boost stopover tourism. The rollout of the policy is expected to coincide with the introduction of new tourism packages and curated city tours in Addis Ababa and beyond, enabling visitors to experience Ethiopia’s culture, heritage, and cuisine during transit.





South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA ISSUES A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR EFFICIENT VISA PROCESSING

The Department of Home Affairs has launched the Meetings, Exhibitions, Events and Tourism Scheme (“MEETS” or the “Scheme”), a new visa framework designed to support South Africa’s role as a leading host of international conferences, exhibitions, sporting tournaments and cultural events.

MEETS provides a secure, centralised process for high volume and time sensitive group visa applications linked to major global events. By digitising and simplifying procedures, the scheme enables faster, more coordinated visa processing for large delegations travelling under strict timelines.

Under the Scheme, domestic event organisers with proven experience may submit expressions of interest through the Department’s website. Successful applicants will be required to enter a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department setting out the terms and conditions of participation.

The Scheme is applicable to a wide array of international events, including trade shows, sporting tournaments, music concerts and academic conferences. It is expected to support tourism, investment, and job creation by making South Africa’s visa regime a competitive advantage for attracting international events.

North America

United States of America

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR PROPOSES TO INCREASE WAGE LEVELS FOR EMPLOYMENT BASED IMMIGRATION

The United States of America Department of Labour (“DOL”) has proposed a rule that would significantly increase prevailing wage requirements for key employment based immigration programs, including H 1B, H 1B1, E 3 and the Program Electronic Review Management (“PERM”).

The proposal by the DOL redefines how wage levels are assigned within that data, resulting in materially higher required wages across all levels.

Under the proposal, each prevailing wage level would be shifted upward to a higher percentile within the same dataset. This would particularly affect entry level and mid level roles, which are commonly filed at Wage Levels I and II, and could require employers to offer wages closer to or above market median levels for relatively junior positions.

The table below illustrates the proposed shifts in percentile benchmarks across each wage level:

OEWS Wage Level	Current percentile levels for OEWS wage distribution	Proposed percentile levels for OEWS wage distribution	Percent increase over old prevailing wage
Level 1 (Entry)	17th percentile Seventy-Three Thousand Two Hundred and Seventy-Nine United States Dollars (US\$73,279.00)	34th percentile Ninety-Seven Thousand Seven Hundred and Forty-Six United States Dollars (US\$97,746.00)	Thirty-Three-point Three Nine Percent (33.39%)
Level 2 (Qualified)	34th percentile Ninety-Eight Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty-Seven United States Dollars (US\$98,987.00)	52nd percentile One Hundred and Twenty-Three Thousand Two Hundred and Twelve United States Dollars (US\$123,212.00)	Twenty-Four-point Four Seven Percent (24.47%)
Level 3 (Experienced)	50th percentile	70th percentile	Twenty-point Seven Nine Percent (20.79%)
Level 4 (Fully Competent)	67th percentile	88th percentile	Twenty-One-point Six Eight Percent (21.68%)

If implemented, the changes would likely increase compensation requirements across all levels, reduce flexibility in using lower wage levels, and potentially require wages that exceed those typically paid to similarly experienced U.S. workers.

The proposal is currently subject to public comment, expected to close around May 26, 2026. Following review of comments, a final rule could be issued as early as late June 2026.

Canada

CANADA REMOVES SEPARATE WORK PERMIT REQUIREMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WORK PLACEMENTS

Effective April 1, 2026, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (the “IRCC”) has removed the requirement for eligible post-secondary international students to obtain a separate work permit to participate in mandatory work placements, including co-operative education (co-op) placements and internships.

Student work placements are structured work experiences that form an integral part of a study programme and are approved by a Designated Learning Institution (DLI). These may include co-op placements, internships, practicums, and mentorship programmes.

To qualify under this framework, students must meet the following conditions:

- a. Hold a valid study permit with conditions authorising on-campus work;
- b. Provide a letter from their DLI confirming that the work placement is a mandatory component of their programme;
- c. Maintain a valid study permit or have applied for an extension prior to its expiry;
- d. Be enrolled as a full-time student at a DLI;
- e. Be undertaking a post-secondary programme of at least six (6) months’ duration leading to a degree, diploma, or certificate; and
- f. Ensure that the work placement constitutes no more than fifty percent (50%) of the overall programme duration.

This change simplifies the administrative process by allowing eligible students to rely solely on their study permit for both academic and required work components. IRCC has also confirmed that pending co-op work permit applications falling within this framework will be withdrawn automatically, and affected students are not required to take further action.

It should be noted, however, that international students at the secondary school level within a DLI will still be required to obtain a co-op work permit to participate in work placements.

Asia

Malaysia

MALAYSIA IMPLEMENTS MIDA EXPATRIATE SYSTEM

The Malaysian Investment Development Authority (“MIDA”) has launched a new one-stop digital system to streamline expatriate applications for companies in the manufacturing and selected services sectors.

All expatriate-related processes which include company registration, expatriate post approvals, employment pass approvals and ePass endorsements are now to be handled through the MIDA Expatriate System (“MES”). The system consolidates previously separate processes into a single platform, utilising one portal, a unified login, and a single set of submitted documents.

The MES is intended to significantly reduce administrative complexity and improve transparency for employers and foreign professionals.

Europe

Spain

SPAIN FORMALLY OPENS ITS EXTRAORDINARY MIGRANT REGULARISATION

After the Royal Decree (the “Decree”) published in the Official State Gazette on April 15, 2026, the extraordinary regularization (“regularizacion extraordinaria”) formally opened on April 16, 2026.





This process will allow foreign nationals who can prove that they were already living in Spain before January 1, 2026, and who have remained in the country continuously for at least five (5) months to file applications online through the new digital immigration platform or in person for residency and work authorisation. Successful applicants will receive a one (1) year residence and work authorisation that can be converted into the standard two (2) year residence card under Spain's general immigration regulations.

The Decree also fast tracks family reunification requests filed within the next twelve (12) months and waives certain labour-market tests for sectors suffering acute shortages such as elder-care and logistics.

To qualify under the extraordinary migrant regularization, applicants must present proof of presence, a clean criminal-record certificate both from Spain and their country of origin, and evidence of integration (typically completion of a short civic orientation course run by regional government).

This process is geared towards bringing long-term residents out of the grey economy to close skill gaps, broaden the social-security base and reduce exploitation.

Belgium

BELGIUM INCREASES CITIZENSHIP APPLICATION FEES AND THRESHOLD FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Effective April 16, 2026, Belgium has increased the cost of lodging a standard citizenship application to One Thousand Euros (€1,000.00), which is approximately equivalent to One Thousand One Hundred and Eighty United States Dollars (USD\$1,180.00). The new amount payable represents an increase of more than six-fold on the previous One Hundred and Fifty Euros (€150) (approximately equivalent to One Hundred and Seventy-Seven United States Dollars (USD\$177)), which was the application fee for over a decade.

In addition, a new income threshold has been set for family-reunification visas. Sponsors must now prove net earnings of at least one hundred and ten percent (110%) of Belgium's monthly minimum wage of One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty Euros (€1,820) (approximately equivalent to Two Thousand One Hundred and Forty-Five United States Dollars (USD\$2,145.00)). The threshold increases by an additional ten percent (10%) for each dependent.

Further, refugees must now submit applications for family reunification within six (6) months of recognition, reduced from the previous timeframe of one (1) year, in order to benefit from exemption from the income requirement.

According to the Migration Minister - Annleen Van Bossuyt, the reforms are aimed at protecting public resources and addressing potential abuse within the immigration system.

BELGIUM TO DIGITISE SHORT-WORK PERMIT APPLICATIONS

Effective May 1, 2026, the Belgium government has announced that all applications for short-term work permits and commuter permits will transition to a fully digital application system.

Under the new directive, employers and their authorised representatives will be required to submit applications exclusively through the country's official online portal, replacing the long-standing email-based submission process. This marks a significant shift in how foreign worker documentation is processed.

According to the authorities, the move is intended to improve efficiency, reduce administrative errors and eliminate challenges associated with lost or incomplete email submissions.

This development reflects Belgium's broader efforts to modernise its immigration processes and streamline employer compliance obligations.

Poland

POLAND SET TO LAUNCH E-RESIDENCE PERMIT PORTAL

The Office of Foreigners in Poland has confirmed that its Case Handling Module (the "MOS") will be open to applicants on April 27, 2026, marking the completion of the country's digital transformation of its residence-permit process.

From April 27, 2026, all applications for temporary residence, permanent residence and EU long-term resident permits must be filed electronically via the MOS portal. Paper-based submissions will only be accepted until April 26, 2026. Applicants will be required to authenticate using a trusted profile e-ID or a qualified e-signature and will be able to upload supporting documents, pay applicable fees and track case status online.

Access to the MOS system will be free of charge. However, statutory fees will still apply, including stamp duty ranging from Three Hundred and Forty Polish Zloty (PLN 340) (equivalent to Ninety-Five United States Dollars (USD\$95)) to Six Hundred and Forty Polish Zloty (PLN 640) (equivalent to One Hundred and Seventy-Eight United States Dollars (USD\$178)), as well as a residence card issuance fee of One Hundred Polish Zloty (PLN 100) (equivalent to Twenty-Eight United States Dollars (USD\$28)).

Middle East

United Arab Emirates

DUBAI MERGES ALL REAL ESTATE-LINKED RESIDENCY SERVICES INTO A SINGLE DIGITAL SYSTEM

On April 15, 2026, Dubai announced the integration of all real estate-linked residency services into a unified digital system operated jointly by the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (the "GDRFA") and the Dubai Land Department (the "DLD").

The reform consolidates visa pathways linked to property ownership, including the ten (10) year Golden Residency for high value investors, the renewable retiree visa and the standard property-owner visas that grants two (2) to five (5) year residency permit.

Under the new system, applicants including investors, retirees, and Golden Visa applicants will be able to submit documents, pay fees, verify property ownership and track approvals through a single integrated platform as opposed to navigating multiple government portals. Authorities will also be able to confirm property values and ownership structures in real time thus reducing processing times that previously stretched to several weeks.

This reform aligns with the "D33" economic agenda which aims to double Dubai's GDP within a decade by attracting sixty-five thousand (65,000) new investors and high-skilled professionals.

Saudi Arabia

SAUDI ARABIA INTRODUCES NEW WORKFORCE LOCALISATION AND LABOUR COMPLIANCE MEASURES

In March 2026, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia introduced a series of regulatory changes aimed at strengthening workforce localisation, enhancing labour compliance and expanding training obligations across the private sector.

The reforms include the expansion of Saudisation requirements to sixty-nine (69) additional administrative roles, mandating full localisation for those positions. This development forms part of the government's broader labour market strategy to increase the participation of Saudi nationals in the workforce. In addition, authorities have introduced stricter penalties for non-compliance, particularly in relation to improper job classification and violations of labour regulations.

As part of the new framework companies employing fifty (50) or more staff are now required to meet a minimum trainee quota of two percent (2%), reinforcing the government's focus on skills development and workforce sustainability. Employers are also expected to comply with enhanced reporting and operational requirements, which continues to serve as the central system for labour-related services and compliance monitoring.

Separately, Saudi Arabia has introduced a visa-free travel arrangement with Russia, permitting short-term visits of up to ninety (90) days for business and tourism purposes. While this measure facilitates cross-border mobility, it maintains clear restrictions on engaging in employment activities without appropriate work authorisation.

These developments signal a heightened regulatory environment, with increased financial and operational implications for employers.





Organisations operating in Saudi Arabia are therefore expected to proactively reassess their workforce structures, internal policies, and compliance frameworks to align with the evolving legal and regulatory landscape.

Oceania

New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND ANNOUNCES NEW POST STUDY WORK VISA OPTION

Immigration New Zealand (“INZ”) has announced a new Short Term Graduate Work Visa which eligible international graduates who have completed study in New Zealand will be able to apply for from late 2026.

The new Short Term Graduate Work Visa provides up to six (6) months of open work rights, allowing time to look for work and, where appropriate, transition to an Accredited Employer Work Visa (“AEWV”). To be eligible, applicants must have:

- a. have a minimum of Five Thousand New Zealand Dollars (NZD 5,000.00) which is approximately equivalent to Two Thousand, Nine Hundred and Fifty United States Dollars (USD\$2,950.00) available for personal support;
- b. has not held a Short-Term Graduate Work Visa or Post Study Work Visa before;
- c. written approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade or Education New Zealand, if their study was supported under the New Zealand Scholarship Program
- d. a valid medical certificate and chest X-ray, dependent on their intended length of stay in New Zealand.

It should be noted that Short Term Graduate Work Visa holders must work for an employer under an employment agreement or contract for services. Business ownership is not allowed. Additionally, Short Term Graduate Work Visa holders cannot support a partner for a work visa or children for a Dependent Child Student Visa. Short Term Graduate Work Visa holders cannot also apply for a second Short Term Graduate Work Visa or extend the initial visa granted.

INZ also announced that a holder of a Short-Term Graduate Work Visa will not be granted a subsequent student visa unless their proposed study is a bachelor's degree or a program of study at a higher New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework (“NZQCF”) level than the level of the qualification or qualifications that their Short-Term Graduate Work Visa was based on, and it is a qualification that makes them eligible for a Post Study Work Visa.

Applications for the Short-Term Graduate Work Visa must be submitted within three (3) months of the individual's New Zealand student visa expiring.

Conclusion

These early-year developments underscore the evolving immigration and labour landscape, as jurisdictions continue to balance national workforce priorities with global mobility needs. So far, there has been a clear shift towards increased localisation requirements, digitisation of processes, stricter compliance frameworks, enhanced training obligations, and selective measures to facilitate short-term travel.

These trends highlight the importance of closely monitoring regulatory changes to ensure ongoing compliance and informed workforce and mobility 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.

DISCLAIMER

