

These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.

Immigration policies following the COVID-19 outbreak

Immigration policies refer to [government positions](#) concerning the entry, stay, selection, settlement and deportation of foreign citizens in the country, covering a [range of fields](#), including family migration, labour migration, and refugee/asylum migration. While recent years have seen a trend toward more complex, and often more restrictive, policies in [more highly-regulated contexts](#), the COVID-19 outbreak represents a significant fork in the road—the pandemic could reinforce restrictive immigration policies, but it could equally mark an inflection point towards policies that better reflect the need for forms of mobility.

Policy flexibility and agility in action

In light of closures to immigration office and service providers that make compliance with requirements for status determination difficult, many countries have granted [flexibility](#) on immigration processes. Among other countries, [France](#), [Russia](#) and [the UAE](#) have automatically extended, or simplified extension procedures for, visas in a move to prevent [widespread irregularity](#) due to the pandemic. [Portugal](#) has temporarily regularized all migrants who applied for a residence permit before the pandemic to ensure that migrants have access to social security and healthcare, while a similar program is being discussed in [Italy](#). [Jordan](#) has waived labour-related fines and fees for migrant workers wanting to return to their home countries and has created an online platform to facilitate processes.

Tracking immigration policies

Fragomen has provided a summary of the confirmed immigration restrictions and concessions that global jurisdictions are currently imposing to contain COVID-19. You can view the summary, which is regularly updated, [here](#).

Longer term impacts?

The pandemic has drawn attention to the fact that migrants are vital to many sectors in developed countries—[healthcare](#) and seasonal [farm work](#), for example—while driving a [decline](#) in migration and mobility at the same time.

The longer-term impacts are not yet clear but the implications of reduced mobility are the subject of growing attention. For example, [Singapore's](#) “hub city” model is under increasing threat. Within Europe, harvest season has required [new flexibility and agility](#).

International migration and mobility are deeply intertwined with labour markets and [globalization](#), so as we start to see the economic downturn take hold, the changes to [long-term migration patterns](#) will only then emerge. It won't be uniform globally.

Rethinking skills & labour migration

In a recent Migration Policy Centre webinar, Prof. Martin Ruhs, Prof. Bridget Andersson and Dr. Friedrich Poeshcel discussed how the COVID-19 outbreak has changed the way countries measure skills and the value they place on low-skilled migrants in policymaking. Click [here](#) to watch the webinar.



Mobility bubbles

The notion of a “[trans-Tasman](#) bubble”, whereby border restrictions between Australia and New Zealand would be relaxed, has been raised by the respective governments following both countries relative [success](#) in containing the spread of COVID-19.

The idea is seen as one way of boosting the countries’ economies, with the New Zealand to Australia migration corridor the [third most popular](#) involving Oceanic countries.

Similarly, the idea of a [Singapore-New Zealand](#) bubble has also been raised.

UK post-Brexit immigration policy

In February 2020, the UK government unveiled plans for a [points-based](#) immigration system to be implemented following the country’s exit from the EU that would limit migration, particularly of low-skilled individuals. However, since the pandemic the proposal has come under criticism, with [MPs](#) and [think tanks](#) noting that many of the workers who have garnered praise during the pandemic would not have been [permitted entry](#) under the proposed system.

“*One of the things this current crisis is teaching us is that many people we consider to be low-skilled are actually pretty crucial to the running of our country, and are in fact recognized as key workers.*

[Steve Double](#), UK Member of Parliament

Suspending immigration to the US

On 22 April the US President signed an executive order to [temporarily halt](#) the provision of green cards for those immigrating to the US. The suspension, which will initially last for 60 days but could be extended ‘based on economic conditions at the time’, has been introduced with [the aim](#) of stopping imported infections and reducing competition to US-born workers for jobs. The Migration Policy Institute estimate that based on the categories included in the executive order, approximately [52,000 green cards](#) will be blocked over the 60 day period, although they note that the order may have little practical effect in the short term as the State Department has largely [suspended](#) in-person interviews for visa applicants as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

This COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot has been produced by [IOM Research](#) (research@iom.int).

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