Global Immigration Trends In 2019 And Projections For 2020

This year has showed a continued trend toward digitised immigration processes and encouraging foreign highly-skilled talent to compensate for brain-drain. Many countries' government overhauls resulted in immigration administration shifts and in turn, immigration rule and process changes and delays. Certain regions' concerns about skilled foreign workers replacing their local working population led to increased compliance efforts. Below is a summary of the main global immigration events in 2019 and Fragomen's projections.

AFRICA
Main Immigration Events
Workplace audits by immigration officials increased in 2018 and have stayed at a consistent level since then, focusing still on the oil and gas industry. A new identification number system in Kenya allows foreign nationals access to national government services but is yet another way for the government to track foreign nationals, since it requires biometric information and proof of residence. Many countries moved to online systems (Nigeria, Mozambique and Zambia), but implementation has been slow and there have been issues due to poor infrastructure to support online platforms. South Africa is in a waiting period as draft regulations have forewarned of a major reduction of occupations on the Critical Skills List and other major changes, but the government has not published official information.

Projections
The influx of low-skilled immigrants could push governments to continue to increase scrutiny for work permit applications to attract higher-skilled workers. On the other hand, continued brain-drain in some economies (especially Nigeria) will likely increase localisation efforts such as the use of training/succession plans to educate the local population. Even more African countries will move procedures online to streamline immigration processes for foreign workers and employers and to reduce workload for overwhelmed authorities. The

developing immigration landscape, including integration across government departments in many countries, provides an ideal platform to improve technology.

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LATIN AMERICA
Main Immigration Events
Due to the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, many countries in Central and South America have continued to relax entry and immigration documentation rules. New government structures or closures of government agencies have significantly slowed processing in the region. Numerous online systems have been introduced to attempt to increase efficiency. Colombia's new administration implemented restrictive immigration laws in February that will likely create stricter rules for several visa categories.

Projections
Policies allowing entry with expired documents and passports will likely continue to expand as the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela continues, though countries that have been most welcoming to Venezuelans are calling upon the international community for assistance to sustain the mass migration. Delays due to government transitions in Mexico should slow down once positions are

filled and government officials gain experience and create better policies. Continued digitisation of immigration processes should make processes more efficient and attractive to foreign workers and employers, which should help the economy in light of the high local unemployment rate. Latin America's growth in the technology industry will be a driver for immigration rules that favour nationals from countries where highly-skilled technology specialists are seeking opportunities abroad, such as those from India. Further restrictive immigration laws can be expected from conservative governments in Latin America that run on nationalistic/anti-immigration platforms. On the other hand, due to a potentially increasingly qualified workforce in Colombia (where laws are becoming more restrictive), salaries for local workers may rise since local workers must be paid at least the same amount as foreign nationals in the same position.

CANADA
Main Immigration Events
The federal Canadian government is focused on attracting immigrants to rural areas through the creation of programmes like the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot. However, the Quebec government is seeking to restrict the amount of English-speaking foreign nationals to reduce immigration levels to the province. This conflict creates mismatching laws next to Canada's overall vision to attract immigrants.

Projections
Divergent policies between the Canadian federal government and Quebec's provincial government are likely to remain as long as a liberal federal government and a conservative provincial government remain in power. The Quebec government will likely continue to focus on limiting immigration efforts to French-speaking foreign nationals. Other provinces are likely to continue following the federal government's lead in increasing immigration levels due to a need for workers.

APAC
Main Immigration Events
Efforts to attract foreign workers to the region are resulting in improved immigration application systems and lower standards for work authorisation (i.e. in Japan, two new visa types opened for semi-skilled foreign

workers). An outlier is Singapore, which is restricting quotas and encouraging access to the labour market to local workers. An effort to consolidate government administrative systems has led to increased use of online platforms, especially in Japan, Indonesia and China, where in the recent past, numerous government agencies had to interact in the immigration process, often causing delays and administrative hurdles for applicants and employers.

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Projections
Immigration system streamlining efforts are likely to continue as countries with high unemployment rates in the region aim to increase their workforce with skilled workers. Singapore will likely continue its restrictive approach by raising qualification requirements for foreign workers. In Australia, there likely will be a continued focus on immigration into rural regions to address skills shortages and to reduce pressure in cities. Also in Australia, a demand for transportation and construction workers is likely as the new Coalition Government recently committed to invest AUD 100 billion into transport infrastructure. Lastly, the Prime Minister of Australia has expressed budget concerns in the many government departments, which suggests that the digitalisation and automation of visa processing may become a higher priority.

EMEA
Main Immigration Events
Ongoing Brexit negotiations have caused EU Member States and the United Kingdom to create contingency plans for UK or EU workers, respectively, if a no-deal Brexit occurs. If the United Kingdom and the European Union ratify a Withdrawal Agreement before October 31, 2019, the United Kingdom would leave the European Union the first day of the following month. Many European countries have either implemented online processes or streamlined processes. Increased border security has been a major topic of interest in European immigration. Six Schengen area countries extended internal border controls in 2019, despite internal border controls not being allowed per EU law. In opposition to this, the European Parliament reconfirmed its position that EU countries should limit temporary border checks to two months initially and limit extensions to one year. Such border controls beyond the two-month limit could be eliminated if the EU Parliament votes on this issue, which is scheduled to happen in the next few months. Many EU Member States have been updating their immigration laws to comply with EU Directives, showing increased efforts to coordinate immigration approaches.

Projections
Contingency planning for a no-Deal Brexit will continue until an agreement is seen as likely to pass in the UK Parliament. Stricter border controls are likely to continue until the migrant flow from outside Europe subsides. Border controls will create administrative burdens for frequent intra-EU travellers. EU Member States will continue to implement EU Directives, which should create more cohesive compliance systems, making it easier for employers to stay compliant with laws and reducing the possibility of fines and penalties. Online systems will continue to be implemented to counterbalance increasing processing times due to high volumes of applications and understaffing in many countries' immigration departments. Online system proliferation will on one hand increase immigration security, but on the other hand should improve travel efficiency where the systems work well (i.e. a pre-travel authorisation system is forthcoming in 2021 that will require visa-exempt nationals to obtain advance electronic approval but should make travel more efficient for non-risky travellers).

MENA
Main Immigration Events
Middle Eastern countries are creating long-term and permanent residence programmes to boost investment while economies in the area are faltering. Specifically, the United Arab Emirates implemented two long-term residence programmes for investors and other highly-sought-after foreign nationals. Saudi Arabia approved a draft law that would introduce residence permits for highly-skilled and wealthy foreign nationals without a sponsoring employer, an unusual approach in this region. Kuwait has introduced fees and Bahrain has increased fees for employers who are noncompliant with local worker ratios, showing a more restrictive approach than the rest of the region. Tensions continue in the region following the severance of diplomatic ties with Qatar by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Yemen, the Maldives, and Libya. Pakistan has introduced an e-visa system and the United Arab Emirates has launched an online application system for foreign nationals who will apply for long-term residence permits.

Projections
The political tensions in Qatar will likely continue to cause immigration issues for Qatari nationals travelling to Gulf Cooperation Council countries and vice-versa. Continued digitisation of immigration processes will likely make the area more attractive to foreign workers and help employers to fill high unemployment rates. The continued focus on attracting foreign investors will likely counterbalance the dip in oil prices, which is hurting the economy.

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