WORLDWIDE IMMIGRATION TRENDS REPORT:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As 2025 begins, employers face intensified challenges in the immigration and mobility space, made more complex after a year of political change and increased conflict in many regions. This report analyzes the most critical of these challenges and provides global employers with actionable solutions, drawing on Fragomen's unparalleled expertise and direct engagement in over 170 countries. With a global network of more than 6,000 immigration professionals across 60 offices, Fragomen delivers unmatched insights and strategies, leveraging its position as the world's preeminent authority on immigration and workforce mobility.

First, geopolitical instability—stemming from conflicts, political unrest, environmental disasters, and health emergencies—demands that businesses build workforce resilience to address crises effectively. To prepare, companies must develop robust crisis management plans, monitor regional risks, and ensure emergency readiness for employees. Comprehensive planning, including the use of alternative travel routes and remote work arrangements, will be critical to navigating current day unpredictable challenges while safeguarding workforce stability and business continuity.

Next, economic pressures and acute labor shortages are creating significant obstacles to global mobility. Further, rising immigration fees, stricter local hiring mandates, and procedural delays are complicating the movement of talent. To overcome these challenges, businesses are adopting innovative strategies such as targeting specific skills, exploring alternative talent pools, streamlining immigration pathways, and implementing flexible work options like remote and hybrid models. By aligning workforce planning with these creative solutions, companies can remain competitive despite the growing complexity of global mobility.

Lastly, compliance risks are intensifying as global business travel returns to pre-pandemic levels. Stricter government enforcement, rising penalties for noncompliance, and advanced technologies like AI-driven systems and digital entry/exit processes are reshaping immigration requirements. Businesses face enhanced right-to-work rules, stricter labor market testing rules, and increased border controls, among other administrative hurdles to moving talent. To address these challenges, companies must prioritize proactive compliance strategies, including rigorous tracking of employee status, maintaining accurate documentation, and fostering interdepartmental collaboration to mitigate risks and avoid penalties. Staying informed about regulatory changes and leveraging technology will be key to ensuring compliance.

This report is intended to help organizations navigate the complexities of today's global immigration landscape and equip key stakeholders with the tools needed to adapt to the evolving geopolitical landscape, optimize workforce strategies, and maintain a competitive edge in today's quickly-changing environment.

The data in this report is current as of January 10, 2025. For more recent developments, please visit Fragomen.com.

GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL CONDITIONS DEMAND WORKFORCE RESILIENCE

Much of the world is currently grappling with instability, armed conflict, and geopolitical uncertainty, all of which made migration policy a central issue in many 2024 election campaigns—a year when over half of the global population went to the polls. This instability has been compounded by the rise of coalition governments in several countries, often resulting in prolonged leadership voids and an inability to enact meaningful policies. In Europe, for example, the political fragmentation suggests that significant immigration policy developments were stalled. Meanwhile, President Trump's influence on global politics will add another layer of complexity, with potential ripple effects on international relations and immigration strategies worldwide.

More broadly, businesses must come to terms with a constantly changing landscape of crisis. The growing interconnectedness of the world means that a single issue on one continent can quickly escalate into a crisis on the other side of the planet. In response, crisis management and resilience have become top priorities for global business.

RELATED IMMIGRATION AND MOBILITY CONSEQUENCES

ARMED CONFLICT

OUTFLOW: FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND VOLUNTARY EMIGRATION
During periods of instability, large numbers of people—both local and foreign employees—may either voluntarily emigrate (often following advice from their home country) or be forcibly displaced. This creates a significant challenge for employers, who must adapt to a suddenly uprooted workforce. Potential solutions include remote work arrangements, as observed with the Russia-Ukraine war. However, industries that rely on on-site operations, such as the oil and gas sector, often find remote work solutions inadequate. Businesses may need to consider short-term talent attraction programs (including the possibility of increased 'hazard pay') to reduce employee outflows.

IMMIGRATION BANS; INCREASED HURDLES
States may introduce substantial barriers to movement. First, countries may introduce travel bans or restrictions. In the **United States**, the Trump Administration is expected to execute entry bans in its initial months. This includes a likely reimposition of a ban on the entry of foreign nationals from several majority Muslim countries—a key action of President Trump's first administration—but could also take the form of bans on entry of nonimmigrants in key employment visa categories, public health bans, and retaliatory bans on nationals of countries deemed to be uncooperative in accepting their deported nationals. Additionally, much of Europe introduced significant travel restrictions on Belarussian and Russian nationals amid the war in Ukraine. Such barriers may force businesses to look for foreign talent elsewhere.

Second, countries may increase screening procedures for nationals from certain countries. Per Fragomen internal data, Lebanese nationals, for instance, have faced increased screening procedures in certain parts of the Middle East in the wake of the escalating conflict in the region. Heightened screening requirements can lead to unanticipated mobility delays, increased administrative challenges—such as new and unforeseen documentary requirements—and even unexpected rejections of immigration applications. As a result, employers may face disruptions to their talent management schedules and strategies.

REDUCED INFLOWS; INCREASED COSTS
Concerned by rising security risks, many foreign nationals may no longer want to emigrate to countries involved in, or near, conflict zones. Some employees may only be willing to take the risk if offered a corresponding salary increase which raises costs for employers. Meanwhile, employers also face higher expenses for insurance and other risk-management measures.

DESTABILIZING METHODS OF TRAVEL
Conflict can disrupt established patterns of movement across a region, even impacting flights between or into countries that are seemingly unaffected by violence. Periodic declarations of no-fly zones can shut down flight pathways; while airlines may unilaterally opt to cancel flights owing to suddenly prohibitive costs, operational challenges or safety concerns. In addition, conflicts can render airports inoperable. Businesses therefore face profoundly uncertain mobility landscapes. This may affect efforts to evacuate staff from conflict zones, upend foreign national onboarding strategies and schedules, and mandate revised business travel protocols—even in countries removed from the violence.

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ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES

These may disable infrastructure (roads, airports, and communication networks); and shift habitable zones, leading to both temporary and permanent displacement. In the mid- to long-term, governments may introduce new regulatory changes such as pathways for climate refugees or stricter residency requirements in disaster-prone areas. Employers must reassess the physical locations of their workforces, review and potentially expand remote work options, and develop business continuity plans that address both short-term, single-impact environmental events (for instance, a single storm), and long-term environmental trends (e.g., rising sea levels) underlying tensions.

HEALTH CHALLENGES

These can trigger unpredictable travel bans targeting specific nationalities (for instance, due to a country-specific outbreak) or broader regional lockdowns. Individual employees may face quarantine restrictions or be prohibited from crossing borders. Vaccination requirements or health certifications may become mandatory for cross-border movement, requiring businesses to ensure their workforce complies with changing health-related immigration protocols.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Strikes, protests, and violent unrest can disrupt or halt immigration processing or cause sudden travel restrictions. Policy changes can be unpredictable, with the potential for sudden and unanticipated immigration barriers—complicating business mobility. Economic sanctions or changes in diplomatic relations can further restrict visa availability and lead to additional bureaucratic challenges for employers.

TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTION

Malicious actors can exploit new technologies to disrupt or damage immigration systems and databases, delay administrative processing, or compromise sensitive data. AI-driven disinformation can also politically destabilize countries or regions, indirectly affecting immigration policies and global mobility strategies.

ORGANIZED CRIME

Like armed conflict, high crime levels may deter talent from relocating to affected areas. Employers may face increased operational costs, including 'hazard pay' requirements, insurance considerations, and other risk-management overheads. Increased scrutiny of immigration applications in high-crime regions may result in longer processing times, burdensome administrative and documentary requirements, and higher rates of rejection—complicating talent acquisition.

SOLUTIONS –
MITIGATING RISK THROUGH PLANNING

Businesses should implement workforce resilience strategies, including developing both a business continuity plan and a crisis management plan, to effectively address current or potential crises.

FIVE STAGES OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT
CASE STUDY: WAR IN UKRAINE

01 SIGNAL DETECTION

Monitor events
- Detect warnings
- Initiate early response measures

Example: Businesses preemptively relocated employees before the war escalated in Ukraine

02 DECLARATION PHASE

Define and determine crisis
- Assess threat
- Decide on activating crisis protocols

Example: As the conflict in Ukraine intensified, businesses declared the situation a crisis after government infrastructure was targeted, disrupting transportation and communications

03 TRIGGER PHASE

Activate crisis team
- Create communication channels
- Establish leadership responsibilities

Example: When conflict escalated into full-scale violence, businesses activated crisis teams, coordinated with embassies, and updated employees on evacuation routes

04 RESPONSE PHASE

Invoke plan protocols
- Minimize damage
- Maintain operations

Example: Businesses swiftly shut down facilities, shifted to remote operations, and worked with relocation agencies to move employees to safer countries, providing temporary housing and short-term visas

05 RECOVERY PHASE

Wind down
- Evaluate response
- Improve future strategies

Example: Amid ongoing instability, businesses developed contingency plans for future disruptions, and diversified supply chains by establishing new facilities in neighboring countries

CHECKLIST

- ✓ **Establish internal working groups** with representatives from local offices and headquarters to coordinate decision-making during periods of instability, and deliver guidance and instructions to staff.

- ✓ Continually **evaluate and monitor any current or latent stability threats** in regions where employees are stationed. As part of this, confirm where employees are located and keep them updated on crisis developments.

- ✓ As security or stability decreases, advise employees to **register with their national consular** post for real-time updates and emergency assistance.

- ✓ **Provide guidelines** to employees on emergency protocols, including evacuation procedures, emergency contacts, and safety measures.

- ✓ In unstable periods, **instruct employees to keep original biographical and travel documents** (including passports, birth certificates, and marriage certificates) accessible. Store digital copies securely offsite or in a cloud-based system to ensure access if primary locations are compromised. Advise the same regarding important medical records or travel insurance documentation.

- ✓ Identify **potential exit routes, relocation destination countries and remote work possibilities**. Be aware of potential travel restrictions, and consider alternate land- or sea-based departure points, as flights and airports may become inaccessible without notice.

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RED TAPE, TALENT GAPS, AND ECONOMIC SHIFTS DEMAND INNOVATIVE MOBILITY SOLUTIONS

Global economic growth is predicted to be moderate in 2025 and potentially impacted by increased geopolitical risk. A global aging population combined with acute labor shortages in many industries make for the perfect storm, impacting business competitiveness. Faced with an uncertain economic landscape, businesses are focusing on costs, which often results in conservative workforce planning. There are other factors in the current immigration landscape that make it difficult to move talent:

PROCEDURAL DISRUPTIONS TO IMMIGRATION PROCESSES

Some governments are hindering immigration processes and disrupting labor mobility in more subtle ways:

- **By increasing immigration fees**, seeking to attract more highly skilled foreign nationals with sufficient economic means while blocking others (i.e., **New Zealand**, **Australia**, **United States**, **United Kingdom**).

- **By raising minimum salary levels** for foreign nationals, thereby impacting businesses' bottom line for attracting talent (i.e., **Canada**, **United Kingdom**).

- **By reducing funding to immigration departments**, slowing down government processing times for immigration applications, effectively slowing the pace at which foreign nationals can enter or work in the country (i.e., **Portugal**).

- **Through procedural or administrative hurdles**, like labor market tests, which effectively make it more difficult for foreign nationals to live and work in a country (i.e., in **Vietnam**, which recently implemented stricter labor market testing rules).

These obstacles also increase the cost of mobility, as the more administratively complex processes demand additional resources to manage and complete applications effectively.

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TALENT SCARCITY

To address sourcing challenges that began with pandemic-related disruptions and have now extended to geopolitical tensions, governments and companies are reconsidering their manufacturing locations and re-evaluating the cost-effectiveness of their supply chains. Unfortunately for employers, immigration policies often lag behind these objectives, and gridlock in legislatures has often thwarted much-needed legal reforms.

- For example, between 2022 and 2024, the **United States** took numerous steps to strengthen its semiconductor industry and broaden employer access to foreign STEM talent. The Biden Administration implemented the CHIPS Act, offering tax incentives to bridge the cost gap between manufacturing semiconductors in the United States and abroad. Additionally, the Biden Administration introduced expansions and clarifications of existing policies and regulations to help attract and retain foreign nationals working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in the United States. However, these initiatives did not resolve the U.S. immigration system's statutory limitations. President Trump has withdrawn the previous administration's AI policies and unveiled his own executive order to maximize the United States' AI competitiveness, but the prospects for pro-AI immigration policies in the new administration—whose advisors are engaged in a vigorous debate over whether to restrict or expand talent migration —are not yet clear.
- Similarly, companies expanding into **Africa** face not only challenging price competition with **China**, but also a scarcity of local talent.

Ongoing global tensions further complicate talent sourcing, with immigration restrictions targeting specific nationalities (e.g., Russian nationals); and stricter border checks, such as the reintroduction of internal Schengen borders.

TOP 4 SECTORS WITH LABOR SHORTAGES

MANUFACTURING

In the **United States**, 1.9 million workers are needed

TECHNOLOGY

In **India,** 14-19 million workers are needed

GREEN SKILLS

In the **EU**, 800,000 battery sector workers are needed

HEALTHCARE

In the **United States**, 124,000 doctors are needed

COST CONCERNS

Higher costs associated with the relocation of talent and the lack of affordable housing in job-rich areas are factors that give pause to businesses when considering new hires and international assignments. Recently, immigration fees in the **United Kingdom**, the **United States**, **Canada** and **New Zealand**, among other countries, have risen steeply.

BASED ON THE HIGHEST VOLUME OF COUNTRIES FROM WHICH FRAGOMEN CLIENTS HAVE SENT THEIR POPULATIONS TO AND FROM, GOVERNMENT INCREASES TO FILING FEES RAISED FRAGOMEN CLIENTS' OUTLAYS BY AN ESTIMATED USD 20 MILLION OR MORE IN 2024.

These and other growing economic pressures will continue to require pragmatic solutions. Effective global mobility planning is essential for organizations. Key stakeholders must understand how economic changes impact immigration policy and employment practices.

The solutions and tips on the next three pages can help educate your leadership and workforce, and can mitigate economic headwinds.

SOLUTIONS – CONSIDER INNOVATIVE STAFFING EFFORTS

ATTRACT AND TARGET SPECIFIC SKILLS

01
FOCUS ON SPECIFIC OCCUPATIONS/SECTORS
Some governments have focused on skill-specific pathways to attract talent for occupations where local talent is scarce. For instance, **Saudi Arabia** offers self-sponsored long-term residency permits for special talent individuals in targeted sectors (such as healthcare and scientific professionals), and **Brazil** is expected to soon facilitate visas and residence permits for foreign nationals seeking to invest in its green economy sectors.

02
SKILLS-BASED RECRUITMENT
Countries are increasingly accepting professional experience over academic qualifications. For example, **Germany**'s Opportunity Card, and **Canada**'s Global Talent Stream, which expand employers' recruitment efforts into a broader talent pool. However, in some jurisdictions, tensions remain between the growing trend toward skills-based hiring and legacy rules governing employer-sponsored immigration programs, which have typically limited eligibility to occupations for which a degree is required. Employers exploring skills-based hiring need to consider its intersection with their foreign labor needs and the regulations and policies governing existing immigration programs; careful analysis may be required to ensure that a company's skills-based hiring policies do not jeopardize its ability to access foreign talent.

03
FAST-TRACK OPTIONS
Businesses need to leverage all the streamlined and efficient application processes at a regional and national level (such as **Sweden**'s new four-tiered work permit application), facilitating a more transparent and straightforward mobility process, or **Argentina**'s expedited corporate process. The digitalization of immigration applications, as seen in **Qatar**, **Singapore** and **Australia**, enables employers to expedite the onboarding of foreign nationals while streamlining administrative processes.

04
ALTERNATIVE TALENT POOLS
An important emerging trend is collaborating with refugee-focused recruiting organizations (such as Talent Beyond Boundaries), which offer businesses another avenue to recruit foreign nationals. Skills Mobility Partnerships, which focus on in-demand skills or sectors, and youth mobility schemes, provide alternative routes for employers to attract skilled talent. Employers should also monitor ongoing discussions in **Greece**, **France** and **Spain** to regularize long-term irregular migrants as a means to address labor shortages.

05
LONG-TERM RESIDENCE OPTIONS
Governments worldwide are increasingly offering long-term residency options to attract global talent and encourage individuals to settle in their countries for extended periods. For instance, the **United Arab Emirates**' Golden Visa has emerged as a popular choice among professionals, offering a pathway to secure long-term residence. Similarly, **Saudi Arabia** is embracing this trend with its new Premium Residency Program, aimed at attracting skilled workers and investors to contribute to the country's economic growth and development.

ENGAGE WITH ALREADY-PRESENT FOREIGN NATIONALS

01

STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

Retaining recent foreign graduates through job seeker programs, as seen in **Germany**'s Opportunity Card, **Norway**'s Job Seeker Visa, **Qatar**'s 'Ouqoul' platform and **Brazil**'s residence permit for graduates of Brazilian institutions, is a viable pathway for companies seeking to expand or diversify their talent pool. Countries are increasingly offering foreign students the opportunity to switch to a work authorization pathway without leaving the country. However, in some jurisdictions, notably the **United States**, companies will need to be alert to the possibility of restrictions on graduate employment pathways. Some advisors to the Trump Administration have proposed plans to limit optional practical training (OPT) for new graduates, and recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings have made OPT program rules newly vulnerable to court challenges by opponents in the private sector.

02

DEPENDENTS

Allowing dependents of foreign workers to access the labor market, as observed in **Luxembourg**, **Iceland** and **Ireland**, expands the available talent pool. Some countries, such as **Germany**, go further by more broadly defining which dependents qualify for family reunification. Businesses can leverage these favorable regulations for dependents to tap into a previously underutilized talent pool.

03

UPSKILLING OR RESKILLING PROGRAMS

Programs available in countries such as **Sweden**, **Australia** and **Singapore** play a significant role in mobilizing foreign talent already in the country by connecting them to future employers via internships, traineeships or partnerships.

DID YOU KNOW?

MOST SURVEYED COUNTRIES ALLOW SWITCHING FROM STUDENT TO WORK AUTHORIZED STATUS WITHOUT LEAVING THE COUNTRY

86%

OF SURVEYED COUNTRIES

This data reflects responses from a survey of our top 50 countries by volume on policies allowing changing from student to work-authorized status without leaving the country. Information was gathered in October 2024 and may change over time. Special conditions, limitations, and eligibility requirements may apply.

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DEVELOP A FAVORABLE ECOSYSTEM FOR TALENT RETENTION

01

LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES

Supporting employees with permanent residency, family reunification, and naturalization options is crucial for retaining talent. Employers should consider countries with favorable long-term policies when developing their employee mobility strategies. Recent examples include **Denmark**, **Thailand**, **Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates**. Employers should also monitor jurisdictions in which employer-sponsored residency programs could be the subject of future restrictions. For example, in the **United States**, pro-STEM initiatives of the Biden Administration made the National Interest Waiver (NIW) program a fruitful and efficient pathway to permanent residence for highly qualified applicants. But it is not clear whether the Trump Administration —advisors to which are engaged in debate over the economic benefits of skilled migration—will continue to support the policies that have increased the NIW's value as a vehicle for retaining top foreign talent.

02

REMOTE AND HYBRID WORK

Flexible work environments and innovative pathways cater to the modern employee's need for advancement opportunities and work-life balance. Digital Nomad Visas offer a creative (though risk-prone) solution. Setting up such innovative solutions requires mobility departments to work closely with other departments within their company (social security units, labor and employment, etc.).
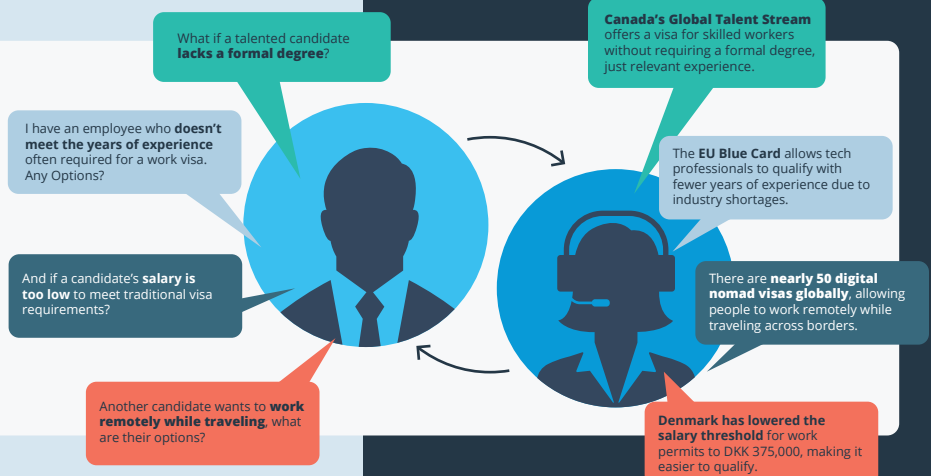
03

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Leveraging data to better plan and forecast talent pipelines can equip mobility teams to inform workforce planning strategies. This includes industry benchmarking to identify best practices from peers, as well as analyzing immigration data, such as processing times and the time required for an employee to start working in their destination country.
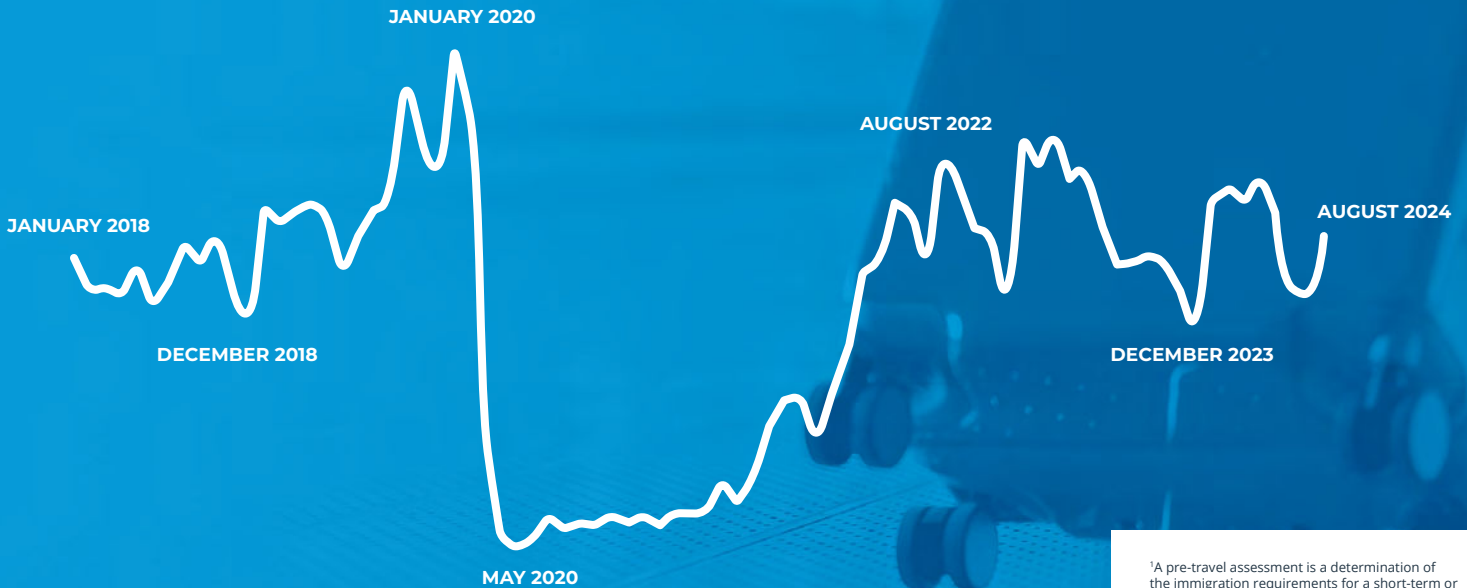
CHECKLIST

- ✓ **Review** creative workforce hiring and mobility strategies with your immigration counsel to expand your talent pool.

- ✓ **Be aware** of prolonged processing times in some countries and review available fast-track options to expedite urgent mobility needs.

- ✓ **Educate** your remote workers about risks associated with digital nomad visas and remote work visa programs.

- ✓ **Review** your remote work policies against relevant laws (e.g., immigration, tax, labor, social security) and other operational considerations.

- ✓ With the increasing costs of mobility, **travel rationalization decisions are more crucial**. Your immigration counsel can help prioritize your travel decisions.

IMMIGRATION HURDLES AND SOLUTIONS*

*These are policy examples. Other countries have similar rules.

What if a talented candidate **lacks a formal degree**?

I have an employee who **doesn't meet the years of experience** often required for a work visa. Any Options?

And if a candidate's **salary is too low** to meet traditional visa requirements?

Another candidate wants to **work remotely while traveling**, what are their options?

Canada's Global Talent Stream offers a visa for skilled workers without requiring a formal degree, just relevant experience.

The **EU Blue Card** allows tech professionals to qualify with fewer years of experience due to industry shortages.

There are **nearly 50 digital nomad visas globally**, allowing people to work remotely while traveling across borders.

Denmark has lowered the salary threshold for work permits to DKK 375,000, making it easier to qualify.

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GROWING COMPLIANCE RISKS REQUIRE INCREASED VIGILANCE

As global business travel patterns return to pre-pandemic levels, businesses must focus on compliance. This is crucial as immigration costs rise, immigration noncompliance fines and penalties increase, and governments get more adept at enforcement.

BUSINESS AND SHORT-TERM TRAVEL RETURNS TO NORMAL

VOLUME OF PRE-TRAVEL ASSESSMENTS[1] PER FRAGOMEN'S BUSINESS TRAVEL SOLUTIONS FROM 2018 TO 2024

JANUARY 2020

AUGUST 2022

AUGUST 2024

JANUARY 2018

JANUARY 2018

DECEMBER 2018

DECEMBER 2023

MAY 2020

[1]A pre-travel assessment is a determination of the immigration requirements for a short-term or business trip before travel, which is an indicative of the volume of trips.

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RISING FEES & FINES

In recent years, the penalties for noncompliance have risen steeply. In 2024, a number of countries including **France**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United Arab Emirates**, raised fines for employing foreign nationals without adequate right to work. In mid-2024, **Hungary's** fines for illegally employing foreign nationals increased massively.

HOW MUCH IMMIGRATION FINES INCREASED IN 2024

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

11%

Annual increase of fine for employers who do not comply with Emiratization rules

UNITED KINGDOM

200%

Fine for illegal employment of foreign nationals

LUXEMBOURG

300%

Fine for illegal employment of foreign nationals

TAIWAN

400%

Fine for foreign nationals who overstay their Alien Resident Card

MONITORING, AUDITING, AND TECH-POWERED ENFORCEMENT

Governments are becoming more rigorous in their immigration compliance efforts, and better at it. Governments are more actively deploying artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technologies across immigration processes—from assessing applications (**Canada**, **Sweden**, the **United Kingdom**), to post-decision monitoring (**Finland**), to chatbot services (**Finland, Ireland**, **Japan**), and "Smart Gates" at entry ports (the **United Arab Emirates**). Expect such engagement to increase exponentially as states become more confident and experienced with rapidly advancing AI systems.

HOW IS AI USED IN IMMIGRATION SYSTEMS?

84%

58%

42%

42%

30%

14%

12%

This graphic shows the most common uses of AI in immigration systems around the world, according to a survey of Fragomen's top 50 countries by volume. Figures represent the total count of countries that answered "yes" or "sometimes" for each category. Information was gathered in October 2024 and may change over time.

IDENTIFICATION & VERIFICATION

Example: Iris scanners at airports

BORDER MONITORING & SURVEILLANCE

Example: Drones to monitor borders

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Example: Chatbots, translation tools

PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS

Example: Data analysis to forecast trends

ASSISTED DECISION MAKING

Example: Automated approvals

INTEGRATION & RESETTLEMENT

Example: Job placement assistance

RECRUITMENT & RESKILLING

Example: Resume review

Governments are also boosting their ability to track travelers and adding checkpoints to mitigate process gaps. Electronic travel authorization systems and digital, automated entry/exit systems are becoming more common worldwide, joining the likes of the **United States**, **Thailand** and **Kenya**, which have recently implemented electronic travel authorization systems. The **United Kingdom** plans to expand its system throughout 2025 as part of broader digitalization efforts, including the full digitalization of all Biometric Residence Cards, Biometric Residence Permits and visas. **Japan** aims to have a similar system in place by 2030. **The European Union** hopes to implement such a system in 2025, alongside an automated entry/exit system (a project that has faced repeated delays).

In addition to offering convenience for travelers, digitalization enhances governments' monitoring and tracking abilities. Entry and exit information can be accessed in seconds, and government agencies can share data more quickly. Foreign nationals who overstay—accidentally or otherwise—now face a higher risk of getting caught.

More traditional government inspections and auditing efforts are also on the rise. Notably, many **EU Member States** continue to extend internal border controls despite the Schengen Area principle of free movement, raising concerns about the long-term viability of the zone's foundational tenets. These extensions are often justified by citations of security threats, migration pressures, or public health concerns, but they risk undermining cohesion within the Schengen framework. Furthermore, onsite inspections have increased in **Indonesia** and **Norway**; while **South African** authorities have announced a recent increase in immigration-related inspections in restaurants, farms and mines. In **Saudi Arabia**, compliance enforcement actions, including immigration and labor inspections, are on the rise. The **United Kingdom** has flagged potential forced business closures (among other sanctions) for employers that employ workers without the right to work.

On the horizon, given the increasing prevalence of immigration-restrictive platforms in certain parts of the world—including the success of restrictionists in elections in **Austria**, **France**, **Germany**, the **Netherlands** and the **United States** —we may see increased labor protections and stricter right-to-work rules. Employers must be more deliberate in ensuring all employees have a valid right to work before they start work and in checking the outcome of the verification in the event of an audit. In many jurisdictions, the enforcement of ensuring employees' right to work has increasingly shifted from government to employers. From **Australia**, to **Canada**, to the **United Kingdom**, and elsewhere, employers can face significant penalties for failing to meet this obligation.

LABOR MARKET TESTING

There has been a recent tightening of labor market testing (LMT) across some jurisdictions (especially recently in **Singapore**, where the government introduced stricter criteria for assessing the eligibility of foreign workers, prioritizing the hiring of local talent through COMPASS (Complementarity Assessment Framework)). This system evaluates Employment Pass applicants based on factors such as the employer's support for local workforce development, the job's alignment with Singapore's strategic priorities, and the applicant's qualifications, making it more challenging for employers to bypass local labor. Other countries, including **Malaysia**, **Switzerland** and **Ireland**, have recently amended their LMT rules to account for labor and skills shortages and to modernize their LMT processes. These evolving LMT rules reflect governments' efforts to prioritize local talent but add layers of complexity and potential delays to the recruitment of foreign workers. As countries continue to strengthen their immigration and labor monitoring systems, businesses must remain agile and diligent to avoid costly missteps.

SOLUTIONS – PLANNING AND PREPAREDNESS LEAD TO BETTER RESULTS

In an era of rising mobility costs and increasingly stringent government monitoring and enforcement, businesses must implement industry-leading governance and compliance programs to stay ahead. Key considerations include:

01

MONITOR REGULATORY CHANGES
Immigration regulations are constantly evolving, making it crucial to stay on top of the latest information updates to remain compliant. Regularly check for regulatory changes or consult with Fragomen to stay ahead of potential challenges.

02

DETERMINE RIGHT TO WORK
Businesses must be diligent in ensuring that their employees have a right to work in the destination country. Businesses should verify that all employees prove their right to work before they start employment (some governments also check right to work during continued employment through audits). In some jurisdictions, employers may need to use formal, government-mandated procedures or systems for verifying an employee's right to work.

03

TRACK EMPLOYEES
Businesses should adopt technology (or establish relationships with trusted tech vendors) to track employee's work locations, visa and work permit expiry dates and other visa conditions, including the accumulated stay period in certain countries or regions. This due diligence will reduce the risk of accidental employee overstay.

04

BE AWARE OF REPORTING OBLIGATIONS
In most jurisdictions, employers are subject to reporting obligations, including notifying authorities when an employee commences or finishes a period of employment, or various changes of employment status (for instance, a change in salary or role).

05

BE 'AUDIT READY'

Maintaining required documentation is vital for compliance. Use digitalized systems to maintain accurate and complete employee immigration data. As part of this, maintain copies of relevant immigration, tax, and social security documentation. As an example, employers should keep meticulous records of the hiring process and related paperwork, ensuring they are prepared for any audits or inquiries related to LMT requirements.

06

ANALYZE AND OFFER REMOTE WORK OPTION

Despite offering exciting possibilities, the remote work landscape varies considerably depending on the jurisdiction. Some countries allow some range of work under a visitor visa (generally the scope is limited); while elsewhere, any work or business is wholly restricted. While digital nomad visa programs are proliferating, they come with compliance risks and important immigration considerations that businesses must address.

07

STRENGTHEN INTERDEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

Effective collaboration among legal teams, global mobility and human resources teams is critical as governments tighten enforcement measures. Coordinated efforts to navigate legal and regulatory frameworks—especially when managing visa processes, work permits, and compliance requirements—are essential to mitigate the risk of noncompliance and ensure that employees maintain the necessary authorizations to work abroad.

08

PLAN ONBOARDING

To navigate the increasing complexities of immigration application processes, businesses should adopt a well-crafted mobility strategy that prioritizes compliance and accounts for potential disruptions, including anticipating extended government processing times (expected and unexpected), additional documentation requests from government authorities, and technical system delays, among others.

09

REVIEW BUDGET AND COST CONTAINMENT CONCERNS

With mobility fees increasing markedly, businesses may need to reassess whether both short- or long-term international assignments are worth the new price tag. This is especially the case given that increased mobility costs exist alongside substantial cost-of-living increases worldwide (which create additional salary pressures for employers).

CHECKLIST

- ✓ Work with immigration counsel to understand the fast-paced immigration law and traveler technology changes (both mandatory and optional online systems).

- ✓ Educate your traveling workforce about the risks of using digital systems before travel, at immigration checkpoints and in the destination country, as the rate of immigration online systems continues to grow.

- ✓ Be aware of your compliance obligations to prepare for a likely increase in audits and investigations.

- ✓ Implement a proactive global automated system that verifies and monitors employees' work authorization status, quickly flagging any potential work readiness violations for prompt resolution.
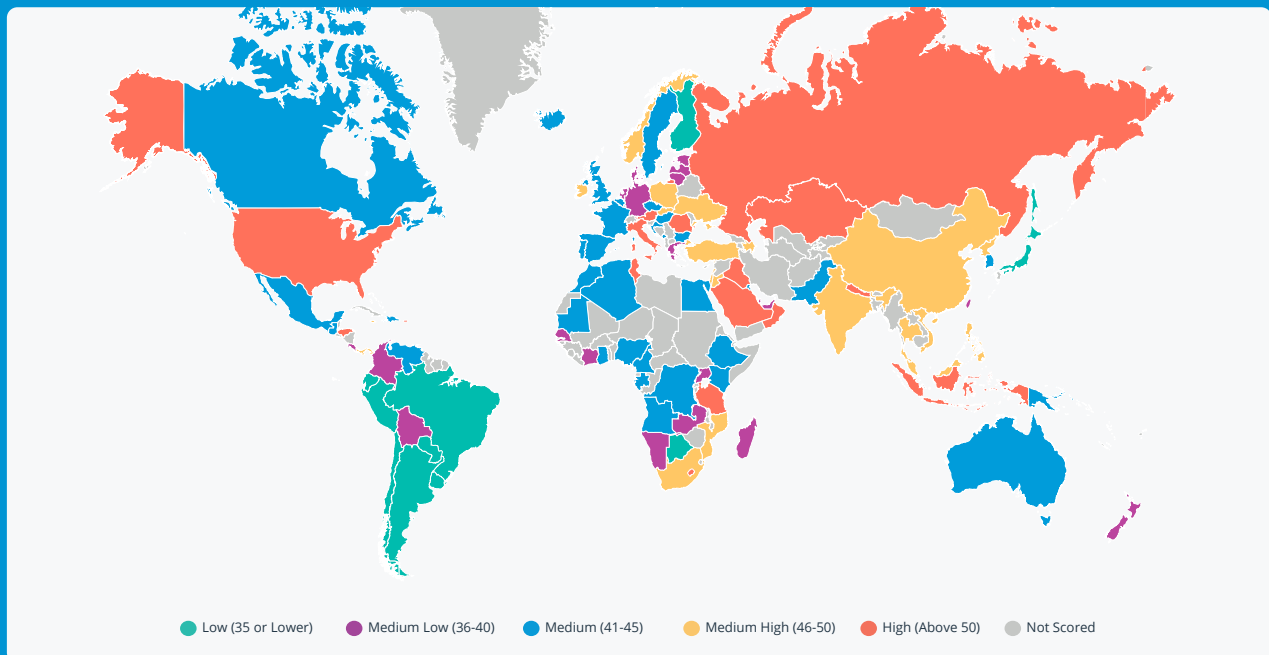
THE LAST WORD: FRAGOMEN'S TALENT MOBILITY INDEX FOR 2024

Fragomen's Talent Mobility Index, which is the reference standard for comparing counties' immigration policies, remained remarkably stable from 2023 into 2024, with the average worldwide score remaining at 42 (out of 100, with a lower score indicating fewer barriers to leveraging foreign talent). This was true at the regional level as well, as the average score for Africa, the Americas, and Asia-Pacific remained largely unchanged. However, from 2020-2024, the average worldwide score increased by 8%.

This result shows that despite all the elections in 2024 (with immigration and security issues being at the top of many campaign promises), the world's immigration restrictiveness stabilized this year, after becoming more restrictive over the past four years.

Over 40 countries saw their scores improve in 2024, largely by processing improvements, such as shortening the time needed to obtain work authorization, introducing new online application processes, and removing in-person filing steps. Meanwhile, more than 50 countries grew less open for talent in 2024, largely due to increased application fees, longer government processing times, and expanded labor market testing requirements.

We will monitor and track these scores over time to provide insights into how countries' policies evolve.

Legend: ● Low (35 or Lower) ● Medium Low (36-40) ● Medium (41-45) ● Medium High (46-50) ● High (Above 50) ● Not Scored

HOW WE DEVELOP THE SCORES

To create a score in the Talent Mobility Index, we first assign a rating to each jurisdiction across nearly 100 different factors including business-based immigration rules, policies, and procedures. We then combine those ratings using a proprietary algorithm to provide a comparative measure of the extent to which different countries restrict a company's ability to transfer or hire a foreign national to work temporarily. Factors include eligibility requirements for the company and the foreign national, limitations on the types of positions that qualify for visas and permits, the degree of certainty that authorization will be approved, government processing time and fees, the complexity of the process, the rights attached to the authorization including the length of stay and hidden costs or risks such as penalties, and the level of corruption.

FRAGOMEN

This report offers guidance, planning and decision support and should be considered alongside advice from an immigration professional.

For more information on current trends in the mobility and immigration space, access Fragomen reports here.

We also have industry reports available in the following sectors: Construction, Energy, Healthcare, Hospitality, Transportation, Fintech, and Manufacturing, among others.

This is a small snapshot of our report library. For additional reports, contact your Fragomen professional.

We are interested in your feedback about the new format of this report. **Please complete this 2-question survey.**