

# U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION®

July 13, 2021

President Joseph Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We commend your leadership to strengthen our nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to safely rebuild our economy as soon as possible. Enabling the safe and full resumption of international travel will play a critical role in these efforts—with the potential to restore more than \$150 billion in lost annual travel exports and 1.1 million travel-supported jobs. However, international travel cannot fully recover until visa processing resumes at full capacity. We respectfully urge your administration to take immediate action to safely restart routine visa processing.

We applaud your administration for establishing expert working groups to plan for a safe reopening of international travel from Canada, Mexico, the European Union, and the United Kingdom (U.K.). However, visa issuance from these countries combined to just 25% of total visas issued in 2019, leaving 75% of visa seekers outside the scope of these working groups.<sup>1,2</sup> Moreover, of the 124 million overseas visitors who came to the U.S. for business or leisure in 2019, nearly 60% traveled to the U.S. with a temporary visa.<sup>3</sup> For potential visitors from countries outside the scope of these working groups, the barriers to obtaining a visa are significant and serve as a de facto border closure to much of the globe.

As of April 8, 2021, just 57 of 237 visa processing sites were fully operational, while the other 76% of consulates were either partially or completely closed to routine visa processing. Those consulates that remain partially or completely closed are responsible for processing 71% of all visa applicants. For visa processing sites that are open, average wait-times have skyrocketed to more than three months (95 days), with 53% of these sites projecting wait times exceeding 4-months.

Until visa processing is fully restored, consulate closures and excessive visa interview wait-times will serve as a drag on our nation's economic recovery and global competitiveness. If international travel remains stagnant, whether due to border closures, other restrictions, or lack of visas, the U.S. can be expected to lose an additional \$90 billion in export income in the second half of the year—for a total loss of \$175 billion in 2020 alone—and more than 1 million American jobs will not be restored.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2019AnnualReport/FY19AnnualReport-%20TableI.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/AnnualReports/FY2019AnnualReport/FY19AnnualReport-TableIII.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/nonimmigrant\\_2019.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/nonimmigrant_2019.pdf)

We strongly support remaining vigilant in the fight against COVID-19. As vaccination rates increase and infection rates decrease, we urge your administration to take the following science-based and data-driven steps to resume routine visa processing:

**Develop a Plan to Restore Routine Operations at U.S. Embassies and Consulates.** While on-the-ground conditions of the pandemic vary for each visa processing location, developing a risk-based plan on how and when to resume routine operations will ensure all U.S. Embassies and Consulates are reopened in a clear, consistent, and predictable manner.

**Take Steps to Streamline and Modernize Visa Adjudication.** The State Department is already waiving in-person interviews for certain visa classes and applications. These waivers should be temporarily expanded to additional low-risk, visa renewals to support visitation. The State Department should also begin using video conferencing technology to satisfy interview requirements, which will help keep consular officers safe, increase processing capacity in high demand locations, and reduce the backlog of applications across all visa classes.

**Ensure Priorities for Visa Processing Support U.S. Economic Recovery Efforts.** America's travel industry was the hardest hit sector of the economy due to COVID-19—accounting for 35% of all jobs lost during 2020. Restoring travel jobs and spending to pre-pandemic levels cannot happen until international inbound travel fully resumes, which economists predict could take four years or more. To help accelerate economic recovery in America's travel industry, the State Department should prioritize visa processing for visas in high demand regions and for large international group tours. This can help reduce future visa processing backlogs and spur increased demand for international travel to the U.S., as your administration works to ease country-specific entry restrictions.

As your administration continues to take bold action to help the country recover, we encourage you take these additional steps to ensure the U.S. can again be a welcoming beacon to all travelers. We look forward to working with you on these efforts, and we remain hopeful that all pandemic-related travel restrictions can soon be lifted to jumpstart our nation's economic recovery, restore American jobs and reconnect our country to the world.

Thank you,