

**UNCLASSIFIED****SBU**

---

**MRN:** [20 STATE 65080](#)  
**Date/DTG:** Jul 08, 2020 / 082228Z JUL 20  
**From:** SECSTATE WASHDC  
**Action:** ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS COLLECTIVE *ROUTINE*  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** CMGT, CVIS  
**Captions:** SENSITIVE  
**Reference:** A) [20 STATE 30920](#)  
B) [20 STATE 28420](#)  
C) [20 STATE 42180](#)  
D) [20 STATE 32972](#)  
E) [20 STATE 40968](#)  
F) [20 STATE 37592](#)  
G) [20 STATE 41350](#)  
H) [20 STATE 50972](#)  
I) [20 STATE 46900](#)  
J) [20 STATE 55888](#)  
K) [20 STATE 61886](#)  
**Subject:** GUIDANCE ON THE PHASED RESUMPTION OF ROUTINE VISA SERVICES

1. (U) **SUMMARY:** On March 20, 2020, the Department instructed all posts to immediately suspend all routine visa services (Ref A) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 28, 2020, the Department sent updated guidance on the ongoing suspension of all routine visa services (Ref B) and instructed posts not to resume routine visa operations until given a specific instruction to do so. Beginning on July 15, 2020, posts may begin a phased approach to the resumption of routine visa services. This cable provides guidance to the field to inform post decisions on which visa services they choose to resume during each phase of Diplomacy Strong and depending on the specific conditions at each post. In addition, posts must adhere to restrictions laid out in any current or subsequent Presidential Proclamation, which may impact the visa services posts are able to provide. The five geographical COVID-19 Proclamations (P.P. 9984, 9992, 9993, 9996, 10041) and the two COVID-19 Labor Market Proclamations suspending entry on certain visa applicants (P.P. 10014 and 10052) remain in effect. Posts must carefully read the guidance below, which includes detailed instructions on how and when posts may resume routine immigrant and nonimmigrant visa services, as well as services performed on behalf of USCIS. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) The health and safety of consular teams, mission colleagues, and applicants for consular services should guide every decision and action in planning for the resumption of consular services at overseas posts. Consular section chiefs, in consultation with MED and RSO staff,

will determine which CA-authorized services for each Diplomacy Strong phase should be resumed at post, based on local health and safety conditions. While the below guidance details what services posts MAY provide, it does not require posts to provide particular services. As always, the provision of American Citizens Services comes first in priority among consular services.

3. ~~(SBU)~~ Posts are also encouraged to respect local and CDC social distancing requirements, including crowd sizes and facial coverings. Posts should review the flow of applicants in and out of waiting rooms, ensure proper spacing in queues and avoid crowds. Posts may want to remove or readjust spacing between seats or advise on spacing between groupings of applications in the waiting room. Consular managers should discuss ventilation of the office and waiting room spaces with the facility manager and apply sound operational practices (e.g., running restroom exhaust, covering service window openings when not in use, etc.) that optimize health benefits. The Department understands such adjustments may reduce total overall volume and capacity of your operations. The A Bureau [Best Practices Guide to Social Distancing](#) and the OBO COVID-19 Mitigation at Overseas Post Toolkit offer additional information to review and consider. Managers at GSS posts should communicate with GSS personnel to ensure they are aware of posts' planning and that they are prepared to meet posts' needs.

4. (U) Posts that issue both immigrant visas (IV) and nonimmigrant visas (NIV) will need to consider a balance between them, and this balance may vary depending on an individual post's needs and capabilities. Posts are encouraged to continue to cross-train staff in both IV and NIV services so that posts can meet changing demands. During all phases of the Diplomacy Strong framework, posts should continue to prioritize mission-critical and emergency cases in accordance with CA guidance in 20 STATE 42180 (Ref C).

5. ~~(SBU)~~ The Department recognizes that many posts will have a significant backlog for all types of cases once regular visa operations resume. The Visa Office is establishing guidelines regarding prioritization for scheduling of IV appointments to help posts, NVC, and KCC plan ahead, prioritize and allocate resources, and balance pent-up demand for NIVs with the need for continuity in IV processing. The Department expects significant interview wait times given both pent-up demand and staffing gaps at most posts. Mindful of budget restraints and the need for resilience of staff over the long-term, posts are not/not expected to schedule overtime to address backlogs (i.e., "Super Saturdays" or longer shifts).

### **Immigrant Visas**

6. ~~(SBU)~~ **IV-Processing Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Zero and One:**
- a. Since Presidential Proclamation (P.P.) 10014 suspending issuance of certain immigrant visas has been extended through at least December 31, posts should prioritize the cases that may fall under an exception to P.P. 10014. Posts in Phase One may continue processing only emergency and mission-critical IV cases, as resources and local conditions allow, including:
    - IR/CR1s, IR/CR2s, IR/IH3s, and IR/IH4s
    - SQ and SI SIVs

- Certain employment-based healthcare professionals
  - Cases involving applicants who may age out
  - Other emergencies or mission-critical purposes of travel as determined on a case-by-case basis by post management.
- b. Posts may continue processing any immigrant visa cases previously refused under INA 221(g) that are excepted under P.P. 10014 and can be issued without another personal appearance by the applicant(s), regardless of whether or not they are mission-critical or emergency cases. In addition, posts may continue issuing replacement visas for applicants who possessed a valid IV on April 23 in accordance with the guidance in 9 FAM 504.10-5, regardless of the immigrant visa category. Post **must** provide case specific information to the CA Fee Team ([CAFee-Team@state.gov](mailto:CAFee-Team@state.gov)) for a determination of whether a new fee must be collected before reissuing the IV foil; post may not unilaterally make this determination.

7. ~~(SBU)~~ **IV-Processing Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Two:**

- a. Planning Ahead for Phase Three: IV-processing posts will need to plan two months in advance to allow NVC time to schedule cases. They should also plan ahead for the resumption of routine IV services, considering issues such as outreach, messaging, team training and cross-training, workflow, and scheduling. Given that posts have varying backlogs and types of IV cases to manage, posts may submit specialty scheduling requests to NVC, while taking the IV prioritization guidelines set forth in this cable into consideration. In addition, GSS posts are reminded that GSS services apply to immigrant visa processing and posts should avail themselves of those services.
- b. Prioritizing Immediate Relative (IR) Cases: To reduce and eventually eliminate the currently growing IR backlog, IRs excepted under P.P. 10014 should be prioritized over most other IV categories, while recognizing that other types of IV cases still need to be scheduled and adjudicated each month. Ideally, every documentarily qualified IR case should be scheduled for the following month. Realistically, however, many posts will have a significant backlog in all categories of cases once routine visa operations resume. Therefore, once posts start to open again for rescheduled interviews and routine visa processing, posts should at a minimum take steps to try to prevent their IR backlog from growing either in absolute terms or relative to their Family Preference (FP)/Employment Preference (EP) backlog. For example, if IR cases constitute 25 percent of the total IV backlog, IR cases should be scheduled for no less than 25 percent of the new IV appointments.
- c. IV-processing posts may also schedule NIV cases taking into consideration the NIV prioritization guidelines below, while waiting for NVC to schedule more IV appointments.

8. ~~(SBU)~~ **IV-Processing Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Three:**

- a. During Phase Three, posts may resume routine services for all IV classes and cases excepted under P.P. 10014, at a level determined by the consular section chief based on local conditions and in consultation with post's EAC. Posts may begin to reschedule and process IV appointments for classes excepted under P.P. 10014, that were cancelled due to

the suspension of routine visa processing. This includes categories such as EB-5s and IVs for members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their spouses and children. K visas, which are nonimmigrant visas not subject to P.P. 10014, but processed by IV units may also be processed.

b. Posts may consider gradually increasing these appointments to give staff time to adjust to new and increased workflows. For this transition period, pending further notice, the Visa Office recommends IV cases be scheduled, whether by NVC, KCC, or locally by post, in the following order of priority, with some appointments made available in each category each month to prevent complete stagnation:

1. Appointments cancelled due to the suspension of routine visa operations
2. Adoptions, age outs, humanitarian cases, SIVs, V92/V93s, SB-1s and other cases as raised by the Visa Office
3. IRs/CRs
4. Ks (which are NIVs, but processed in IV units). Because I-129 petitions expire after four months, many I-129 petitions may have expired by the time post is able to begin processing K visa cases. Posts may follow the guidance in 9 FAM 502.7-3(B)(d) to revalidate I-129 petitions, even after they have expired. Posts are reminded that P.P. 10014 and P.P. 10052 do not apply to K visas.
5. Family Preference (FP)/Employment Preference (EP)/Diversity Visa (DV) cases excepted by P.P. 10014

c. Other Visa-related Services: Posts may resume routine visa-related services, including DNA collection for visa cases. For DNA collection, posts should consult with their MED unit before resuming this service to carry out this collection in the safest manner possible.

### **Nonimmigrant Visas**

9. ~~(SBU)~~ **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Presidential Proclamation 10052 suspended the issuance of nonimmigrant visas in the H-1B, H-2B, L, and J-1 (for six specific program categories: au pair, intern, trainee, summer work travel, teacher, and camp counselor) classifications until December 31, 2020, with certain exceptions (see Ref H). Posts should NOT resume routine processing of these visa classifications, unless the applicant qualifies for an exception under this or any subsequent Proclamation, until given a specific instruction to do so; however, in accordance with Ref H, posts may, in their discretion, accept cases that may qualify for an exception. Whether the applicant qualifies for the exception will be determined by the consular officer who adjudicates the application. END NOTE.

### **10. ~~(SBU)~~ NIV-Processing Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Zero and One and All Posts Impacted by a Presidential Proclamation Restricting Travel from a Country or Region Related to an Outbreak of COVID-19:**

- a. Visa processing remains restricted to emergency or mission critical only, in compliance with CA guidance (Ref C).
- b. The exceptions to the Presidential Proclamations may also be used as a guide for additional mission-critical or emergency travelers, even in those areas not covered by the Proclamations.

- c. As resources and local health and staffing conditions permit, visa units may also process interview waiver (IW) cases. If a case falling within an IW category is found to require an interview, it should be treated as a normal NIV application, which may mean the case cannot be processed further until post can bring the applicant in for an interview. Posts should not process IW cases for applicants of nationalities with an overstay rate of four percent or higher per DHS FY19 Entry/Exit report.
- d. In addition, as resources and local health and staffing conditions permit, posts may process cases previously refused under section 221(g) as long as they do not require an interview.

11. ~~(SBU)~~ **NIV-Processing Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Two:**

- a. As staffing resources and local health and safety circumstances permit, posts may open routine appointment slots for F-1 applicants, M-1 applicants, and J-1 (consistent with guidance provided in Ref K) applicants. Posts may also open routine appointments for E, I, O and P applicants. Posts should utilize their expedite appointment queue to identify and prioritize those F-1, M-1, and J-1 applicants described above whose program start dates are quickly approaching. Posts may also process urgent applications for E, I, O, and P visas as conditions and resources permit.
- b. Posts with GSS appointment scheduling services should work with their local GSS managers to request any necessary modifications to their appointment scheduling platforms that will permit them to identify these applicants. The GSS vendors are aware of this guidance and are prepared to add additional appointment buckets tailored to posts' needs.
- c. Keep social distancing guidelines in mind when creating appointment schedules; do not open more appointments than can safely be accommodated in your waiting room. Appointment schedules are most effective when they are enforced. The Department understands and is aware that appointment wait times may increase as a result.
- d. Posts in Phase Two may also process visa referral cases and priority appointment requests.

12. ~~(SBU)~~ **NIV-Processing Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Three:** Consular sections may resume routine visa processing at a level determined by the consular section chief based on local conditions and in consultation with the EAC and consistent with CA guidance. During Phase Three, routine visa services can resume in full. Appointments for all nonimmigrant visa categories can be made available, although posts may consider phasing in these appointments gradually to give staff time to adjust to new workflows and schedules. As posts work through their backlogs, they should continue to prioritize mission-critical and emergency cases (Ref C) and also should consider prioritizing F-1, M-1, and J-1 Alien Physicians, Government Visitors, International Visitors, Professors, Short-Term Scholars, Research Scholars, Students, and their dependents, followed by E-1/E-2, I, O1/O2, and P1/2 NIV categories. For information on student visa applications for Fall 2020 Semester, please review the "New Guidance for F, M, and J Visa Adjudications" ALDAC that will be released separately. Routine B1/B2 applicants are the lowest priority as posts work through significant backlogged demand, but posts should

ensure emergency and mission critical B1/B2 applicants have a functioning mechanism to request an emergency appointment.

13. ~~(SBU)~~ **NIV-Special Request Process for Posts in Phase Zero or One:** Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Zero or Phase One who wish to seek an exception to resume additional visa services outside the guidance listed in paragraph 10 of this ALDAC must seek permission from Washington via Front Channel Cable, with the Chief of Mission describing in detail post's plans for protecting both staff and applicants from the risk of COVID-19 exposure, and certifying that the necessity of processing such visa cases outweighs the potential risks to Embassy staff and the public. Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Zero or Phase One must receive specific approval from Washington to begin processing certain additional cases.

14. (U) **Public Websites:** Posts in all phases of Diplomacy Strong should have clear language on their public facing websites about their current operating status. Posts websites should clearly state whether they are still closed for routine processing, or if they are only open to limited appointment categories, in order to avoid confusion before applicants pay their MRV fees.

15. (U) **MRV Fee Receipt Validity:** CA is working to finalize procedures for addressing MRV fee receipt validity in the context of the pandemic. CA will notify posts of those procedures via Septel.

#### **Services Performed on Behalf of USCIS:**

16. ~~(SBU)~~ **USCIS Services at Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Zero and One:**

- Processing of services on behalf of USCIS remains restricted to emergency or mission critical only, in compliance with CA guidance (Ref J).
- Posts should continue printing boarding foils for parole cases upon receipt of a parole authorization from USCIS, unless local conditions do not allow for travel. In that case, post should inform USCIS as soon as travel is again possible, so that they may consider reissuing the parole authorization at that time.
- In addition, as resources and local health and staffing conditions permit, posts may process cases previously refused under section 221(g), as long as they do not require an interview. However, posts should keep in mind that V93 cases require IOM to arrange travel so cannot be completed until IOM reopens their offices. If you have a V93 case that seems to be an emergency, contact the V92/V93 portfolio holder in VO/F.

17. ~~(SBU)~~ **USCIS Services at Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Two:**

- As staffing resources and local health and safety circumstances permit, posts may resume processing routine I-131A LPR Boarding Foils for LPRs who have lost/stolen/mutilated LPR cards in Phase Two.
- Posts may also accept petitions on behalf of USCIS for mission-critical cases such as I-130s for IR-1/IR-2 dependents of military personnel or I-600s related to adoption cases.
- If staffing and resources allow, posts may also resume the delivery of USCIS

travel documents received at post.

18. (SBU) **USCIS Services at Posts in Diplomacy Strong Phase Three:** Consular sections may resume routine processing on behalf of USCIS at a level determined by the consular section chief based on local conditions, in consultation with the EAC, and consistent with CA guidance. During Phase Three, processing of all USCIS services can resume in full including V92/V93s, DNA testing, ink fingerprinting, cashiering services, document verifications, and acceptance of petitions that did not meet Phase Two requirements. Since ink fingerprinting involves direct contact between a consular employee and the individual being fingerprinted, please consult with your MED unit on steps you can take to mitigate the risk involved before resuming this service. As posts work through their backlogs, they should continue to prioritize mission-critical and emergency cases (Ref J) as well as LPR boarding foils.

19. (U) Posts should continue to review the [Coronavirus page on InfoCentral](#) and the [Consular Affairs section](#) of the [Coronavirus Global Response Coordination Unit](#) for the latest information, guidance, and talking points related to COVID-19.

20. (U) Please reach out to your VO/F analyst with any questions or for additional guidance on special circumstances.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

**Signature:** Pompeo

---

**Drafted By:** CAVO/F/ET: [REDACTED] CAVO/F/IE: [REDACTED] CAVO/F/OI: [REDACTED]

**Cleared By:**  
CONS/AG: [REDACTED]  
CA: [REDACTED]  
CAVO:Ramotowski, Edward J  
CAVO/F: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/F/ET: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/F/IE: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/F/IE: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/F/OI: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/L: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/L: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/L/A: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/L/A: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/DO/NVC: [REDACTED]  
CAVO/DO: [REDACTED]  
CA/P: [REDACTED]  
CA/P: [REDACTED]  
CA/FPP: [REDACTED]  
CA/C: [REDACTED]  
CA/C: [REDACTED]  
CA/C: [REDACTED]  
CA/C: [REDACTED]

CA/EX: [REDACTED]  
 CA/OCS:King, Karin M  
 L/CA: [REDACTED]  
 AF/EX: [REDACTED]  
 EUR-IO/EX/PMO: [REDACTED]  
 EUR/PGI: [REDACTED]  
 WHA/EX: [REDACTED]  
 NEA-SCA/EX: [REDACTED]  
 EAP/EX: [REDACTED]  
 ECA/FO: [REDACTED]  
 M: [REDACTED]  
 M/PRI: [REDACTED]  
 HR: [REDACTED]  
 P: [REDACTED]  
 D: [REDACTED]  
 GPA: [REDACTED]  
 R/PPR: [REDACTED]  
 R: [REDACTED]  
 S/P: [REDACTED]  
 MED: [REDACTED]  
 OBO/FO: [REDACTED]  
 DS/ICI/CI: [REDACTED]  
 DS/IP: [REDACTED]  
 A: [REDACTED]  
 SES: [REDACTED]

**Approved By:**  
**Released By:**  
**XMT:**

CA:Risch, Carl C  
 CA\_FO: [REDACTED] S  
 BASRAH, AMCONSUL; CARACAS, AMEMBASSY; SANAA,  
 AMEMBASSY; ST PETERSBURG, AMCONSUL; VLADIVOSTOK,  
 AMCONSUL; ALEXANDRIA, AMCONSUL

---

**Dissemination Rule:** Archive Copy

**UNCLASSIFIED**  
 SBU