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Significant Reductions in Nonimmigrant Visa Validity for Dozens of Countries

Insight — July 23, 2025

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) recently revised its visa reciprocity schedules for numerous countries, significantly reducing the duration of nonimmigrant visa validity to three months and a single entry in many cases. These changes affect a broad range of visa categories, including B (visitor), F (student), H (temporary worker), J (exchange visitor), M (vocational student), and O (extraordinary ability) visas.

The updated reciprocity terms apply to visas issued on or after early July 2025. Visas issued before these changes remain valid under their original terms. For example, a July 8, 2025, notice on the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria website confirms that visas issued prior to that date are not affected.

I. Background

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) §§ 221(c) and 281, visa validity periods (the length of time a visa holder is permitted to travel to a US port of entry after a visa is issued), entry limits (the number of times an individual is permitted to enter the country on that visa), and fees are determined based on reciprocal treatment of U.S. citizens. According to DOS, the goal is to promote fairness, ensure consistency with U.S. law and policy, and support legitimate international travel. Visa reciprocity schedules are maintained by DOS and published online.

A few basic principles may help to understand the significance of DOS's recent efforts to reduce nonimmigrant visa validity periods. Visas, which are typically issued by a consular officer serve only as a person's permission to apply to enter the United States. Status, on the other hand, is determined by an individual's I-94 (a document that is issued online when somebody enters the United States) that specifies the type of nonimmigrant visa a person holds and the length of permitted stay and any conditions. While the validity period of the visa stamps for affected nonimmigrant visa holders will be reduced, that shortened period will not affect the amount of time the person may lawfully reside and, where applicable, work in the United States. Rather, it will only affect the person's ability to travel internationally and return to the United States, using the visa stamp as a ticket to re-enter the country.

II. Affected Countries and Visa Categories

The changes impact a wide range of countries, including China (reducing the validity period of O-1 visas to three months, single entry), along with other parts of Asia, including Cambodia and Laos. Countries in Africa,

including Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, have also been affected. For the full and most current information, visit the DOS Visa Reciprocity Tables: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/Visa-Reciprocity-and-Civil-Documents-by-Country.html>.

III. Related Presidential Proclamation

These updates closely follow Presidential Proclamation 10949, which took effect on June 9, 2025, and imposes:

- A full entry ban on nationals of 12 countries (e.g., Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia); and
- A partial ban on seven additional countries (e.g., Cuba, Laos, Venezuela), suspending issuance of B, F, J, and M visas and requiring shortened validity for other categories.

While DOS has not explicitly tied the reduced time period of visa validity to this effort, there is significant overlap between the countries listed on the updated reciprocity schedule and those countries affected by the travel restrictions. In the coming weeks, other countries likely will be added to the full entry and partial ban lists.

IV. What Employers and Travelers Should Know

- Employers should confirm the visa validity and entry limitations for foreign national employees before international travel is planned.
- Travelers from affected countries may need to avoid international travel, with visa stamps being approved for substantially shorter periods than indicated in approved nonimmigrant petitions.
- Previously issued visas will remain valid unless otherwise revoked.

V. How Holland & Hart Can Help

As with other areas of immigration law, this area is in a continuous state of flux. Our immigration attorneys are closely monitoring these developments and will continue to provide updates on future changes and how they impact employers.

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