



An Overview of Border-Related Policies Introduced by the Russian Federation in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic during 2020

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Background

Immigration to the Russian Federation (Russia) is controlled by the Main Directorate for Migration Affairs, which replaced the Federal Migration Service in 2016. Travel policy in Russia is controlled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This report is part of the COVID Border Accountability Project (COBAP)'s series of reports on regional border closures introduced during the coronavirus pandemic. It provides an overview of the immigration-related policies implemented by Russia to combat COVID-19 in 2020. Russia responded early to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic with travel restrictions, beginning with a partial border closure and followed by a series of visa bans, international flight suspensions, and additional border closures. Many of these restrictions were lifted beginning in July 2020. The report concludes with a timeline visualization of Russia's border policies compared to those introduced by the United States (U.S.). We hope it serves as a useful guide for future research on both Russia's and the U.S. border responses to the pandemic. The global database covering 200+ countries is available [here](#).

Travel and Migration Policies

As early as January 2020, during the earliest stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia began restricting travel to slow the spread of the virus.

On 28-Jan, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin announced that Russia's land border with China was to be closed from 31-Jan until at least 1-Mar.

In the following months, the Russian Federation issued a series of travel, border, and visa restrictions as the pandemic worsened worldwide. Starting 19-Feb, the Russian government restricted entry access and suspended visa applications for Chinese Nationals. On 28-Feb, the country announced a ban on entry for Iranian citizens regardless of visa status.

On 4-Mar, the Russian government suspended its train service to Nice, France and on 9-Mar, air service to and from Hong Kong. And on 15-Mar, the Russian Railways halted service from Moscow to Berlin, Germany and Paris, France and closed land borders with Norway and Poland.

On 13-Mar, the government issued a visa suspension for Italian nationals. On 16-Mar, the government introduced a complete border closure against foreign travel, including a suspension of

international flights specifically targeting European Union member states. On 18-Mar, Russia announced a temporary ban on entry for all foreign travelers with exceptions made for Russian citizens, diplomatic staff, international truck drivers, airline crews, and visa holders entering the country on account of a relative's death. This restriction was set to expire on 1-May, but was extended indefinitely, effective 2-May. The policy ended on 1-Oct, 2020.

The following weeks featured the implementation of increasingly restrictive policies. On 20-Mar, Russia suspended all flights to the United States (U.S.), United Kingdom, and United Arab Emirates. On 25-Mar, several international flights were suspended, and those that were still operational were suspended on 31-Mar when Russia temporarily ended all commercial airline flights, allowing only limited charter flights to continue for repatriation purposes. On 30-Mar, Russia implemented an indefinite, complete border closure on passenger travel via its land borders.

Starting in June, the Russian Federation began to ease the border restrictions put in place to combat COVID-19. Foreigners requiring medical treatment in Russia and those seeking entry to take care of sick relatives were granted permission to enter from 13-June onward. Then, on 1-Aug, Russia resumed flights to Britain, Turkey, and Tanzania. And on 5-Aug, diplomatic visa holders were allowed to enter the country. These are recorded as end dates to the previous policies in the COBAP database, found globally here.

Russia began gradually resuming more flights toward the end of August, beginning with specific exceptions for foreign participants in the Russian Grand Prix (21-Aug) and other foreign athletes, coaches, and fitness specialists (26-Aug).

On 2-Sept, Prime Minister Mishustin implemented a directive with the governments of Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and the Maldives to steadily increase flight service. On 9-Sept, he further allowed Russian nationals to leave the country for medical purposes, like the earlier 13-June directive. On 1-Aug, flights to and from Britain, Turkey, and Tanzania resumed and flights to and from Britain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates resumed on 3-Sept. Seaports reopened on 15-Sept, and several days later, on 21-Sept, Russia resumed flights with service to and from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus. Service to and from South Korea resumed on 27-Sept.

Because Russia has high rates of international travel, a comparison between its response to the pandemic and that of other similar nations is of scholarly interest. Building on COBAP's U.S. Report, Figure 1 depicts a timeline of travel and migration-related policies introduced by the U.S. and Russia as a part of their respective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: A timeline of travel and migration-related policies introduced by the U.S. and Russia, respectively





In sum, this report provides a basic overview of Russian policies and a brief comparison with those of the U.S. The U.S. and Russia largely targeted the same countries in a similar timeline with their border closures introduced in 2020. In several cases, Russia introduced a restriction targeted at a specific country only for the United States to introduce a similar measure several days later. On 28-Jan 2020, for example, Russia closed their land border with China, and the United States barred the entry of foreign nationals who had been in China five days later. On 28-Feb, Russia suspended entry for Iranian citizens, and the United States introduced a travel history ban for those transiting through Iran on 2-Mar two days later. Though the policies implemented by the two countries often targeted similar countries, Russia was usually the first mover. Further work is needed to understand better the implications of the restrictions introduced by Russia, as well as the U.S. This report serves as a baseline of information for future research related to Russia's border closure policies introduced during 2020.

Mark A. Weiss is a founding team member of COBAP. He managed the Russia Portfolio and monitored the data for Russia, North Korea, Yemen, Central African Republic, Eritrea, India, Benin, Somalia, Malawi, Sudan, Ghana, Falkland Islands, Pitcairn (Islands), Latvia, Equatorial Guinea, Djibouti, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Weiss can be contacted at markweiss@alumni.emory.edu or via [LinkedIn](#).