

Upcoming Meetings & Events

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF INTERPRETERS IN ASYLUM CASES – MAR 26

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area is hosting a webinar on March 26 from 12-1 PM PST that will provide an overview about understanding the role of an interpreter, identifying challenges and limitations interpreters and attorneys may encounter, and pointing out the numerous ways providers can assist an interpreter to deliver a great performance. More information can be found [here](#).

IMMIGRATION AND EQUITY – APR 14

Children's HealthWatch will host a webinar on April 14 from 12-1:15 PM EST. The webinar will be hosted by Dr. Jackie Vimo, a policy analyst and immigrant rights expert who oversees the Economic Justice Program at the National Immigration Law Center (NILC). The webinar will focus on recent, harmful immigration policies and proposals, how they impact children, and what we can do about it. More information can be found [here](#).

WEBINAR: TAX ISSUES FOR IMMIGRANT FILERS – MAR 24

On Tuesday, March 24 at 2 pm EST, the National Immigration Law Center will hold their webinar "2020 Tax Issues for Immigrant Filers: ITINs Renewals, New ITIN Rule for Dependents, Tax Credits, and More." For more information, including registration, click [here](#).



Backdoor Policy by Pandemic Response: Border Closure as Reaction to COVID-19

By Mario Bruzzone

The national and international response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been forceful, far-reaching, and extremely fast. Just in the United States, one-fifth of the population is under orders to shelter in place or stay at home, including the states of California and New York. The U.S. has suspended refugee resettlement and resettlement travel is suspended worldwide. Immigration courts are closed for hearings for non-detained individuals (most are still open for those in U.S. custody). Immigration and Customs Enforcement has announced changes to its enforcement activities, essentially reverting to Obama Administration priorities. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has closed its field offices to the public, including naturalization services and ceremonies. Outside of immigration, the economic repercussions are enormous. BuzzFeed counted 693,000 new claims for unemployment insurance between just Monday and Wednesday last week, from just 15 states. Goldman Sachs released a report anticipating a 24% economic contraction in the second quarter of 2020.

As part of the U.S. response, the Trump Administration has made deals with both Canada and Mexico to restrict border traffic, partially closing both U.S. land borders. He was not alone in this impulse, which has seized countries on every continent. This week, USCRI counts at least 44 countries with fully closed borders—stronger than what the United States has implemented. Last week, we counted 12. (A list may be found in the left column of page 2 of the main report.) Many more countries have partial closures, which may include measures to limit which nationalities can enter or closures of ports-of-entry. In a full border closure, countries close their borders to non-resident foreigners. Citizens can return, as can residents. The exceptions are nearly identical across the 39 countries—government officials, medical professionals, cargo. Some countries went further. Both Ecuador and Sudan closed their borders to everyone, including citizens. Sudan's snap decision stranded about three dozen Sudanese in Istanbul and unknown numbers elsewhere.

Read this week's full brief [here](#).

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FEDERAL REGISTER ANNOUNCEMENT, COMMENTS DUE – APR 28

The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) to the Federal Register regarding some EOIR forms, including instituting a \$50 fee for an asylum application. Fees for other forms could increase by up to 900%. Submit comments [here](#).

COMPREHENSIVE GLOBAL LIST OF FULLY CLOSED BORDERS – ENACTED OR ANNOUNCED

North America and Caribbean (8):

1. Canada
2. Costa Rica
3. El Salvador
4. Guatemala
5. Haiti
6. Honduras
7. Panama
8. Trinidad and Tobago

South America (7):

9. Argentina
10. Bolivia
11. Chile
12. Colombia
13. Ecuador
14. Peru
15. Suriname

Africa (5):

16. Cameroon
17. DPR Congo
18. Kenya
19. Lesotho
20. Sudan

Asia (8):

21. Georgia
22. Kazakhstan
23. Malaysia
24. Oman
25. Singapore
26. Taiwan
27. UAE
28. Uzbekistan

Europe (14)

29. Cyprus
30. Czech Republic
31. Denmark
32. Finland
33. Hungary
34. Latvia
35. Lithuania
36. Montenegro
37. North Macedonia
38. Poland
39. Russia
40. Serbia
41. Slovakia
42. Ukraine

Oceania (2):

43. Australia
44. New Zealand

• ICE Temporarily Halts Enforcement

On March 18, in response to the spread of COVID-19, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) [notified](#) Congress that they will “temporarily halt enforcement across the United States, except for efforts to deport foreign nationals who have committed crimes or who pose a threat to public safety.” ICE stated also that it will not arrest individuals “at or near health care facilities” so as not to discourage people from seeking medical care. However, it has no [plans](#) to release migrants in detention.

• Guatemala to Resume Receiving Deportees from the United States

The government of Guatemala has [reversed](#) its March 12 decision to suspend reception of deportation flights from the United States. Under the agreement to accept deportees, the U.S. government agreed not to deport anyone with symptoms of COVID-19. The Guatemalan government expects to receive 99 deportees, and will quarantine all of them. On March 20, the government of Guatemala received a flight of 99 deportees.

• European Union Closes External Borders

On March 17, Schengen Area European leaders [agreed](#) to close the external borders of the European Union (EU) for 30 days while still allowing internal EU travel in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new rules will apply to 26 members of the EU, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Ireland has not yet decided whether to implement the restrictions. Of Ireland, [Ursula von der Leyen](#), President of the European Commission said, “It’s up to them now to implement it. They said they would immediately do that.” She also suggested that the United Kingdom was not applying restrictions to its external borders, and its citizens would still be allowed to travel into the EU. The travel restrictions do not apply to medical staff, medicines or goods.

• United States Temporarily Suspends Refugee Admissions

On March 18, the State Department [issued](#) a decision to temporary halt refugee admissions between March 19 and April 6 in wake of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee’s (UNHCR) [suspension](#) of resettlement travel. “The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program coordinates refugee arrivals with its international humanitarian implementing partners, IOM and UNHCR,” a State Department spokesperson said in a statement. “The temporary suspension of resettlement travel programs globally will impact the arrival of refugees in the United States and other countries with refugee resettlement programs.”

• Executive Office for Immigration Review Postpones Non-Detained Hearings

On March 18, the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) [announced](#) that all non-detained hearings are postponed until further notice. Several immigration courts have recently closed including some in Atlanta, Charlotte, Memphis, New York City, and Sacramento, among others. The National Association of Immigration Judges has [called](#) for a nationwide closure of all immigration courts.

• Countries on the African Continent Begin to Close Borders

As cases of COVID-19 have increased on the African continent, several countries have started to place travel restrictions of varying degrees and [close](#) borders. As of March 20, these include Algeria, Egypt, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, and Tunisia.

• Malaysian Government Hunting Rohingya Refugees for COVID-19 Testing

Malaysian authorities are trying to [track](#) down an estimated 2,000 Rohingya refugees who attended a Muslim gathering at a mosque that allegedly led to a spike in coronavirus cases across Southeast Asia. More than 100,000 Rohingya live in Malaysia after fleeing Myanmar, but they are considered illegal immigrants, making them hesitant to come forward for medical attention. UNHCR in Malaysia said it was working with the Ministry of Health to ensure that all refugee and asylum-seeking communities were included in government response measures.

Issue Updates (cont'd)

• United States Closes Southern Border with Mexico

On March 20, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [announced](#) that it would close the southern border with Mexico to all “non-essential travel” until April 20, 2020. According to the directive, essential travel includes U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents returning to the United States as well as members of the Armed Forces, among others. In addition, increased measures to halt undocumented immigrants from crossing the border has been enacted at the [direction](#) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Department of Homeland Security will suspend entry of all immigrants “seeking to enter the US without proper travel documentation.”

• Canada to Turn Back Asylum Seekers at U.S. Border

On March 21, Canada implemented 30-day [restrictions](#) on asylum seekers and “non-essential travel” across its border with the United States. “We will now be returning irregular migrants who attempt to cross anywhere at the Canada-US border,” said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Asylum seekers were already returned to the United States when they attempted to claim asylum at official border crossings, but not unofficial ones, in Canada under the Safe Third Country Agreement prior to these restrictions.

USCRI Time Machine

This week’s Time Machine comes from Australia in January 2002, where USCRI investigated the then-new system of halting unauthorized boat arrivals, mostly full of asylum seekers.

“In August and September 2001, the international community witnessed a dramatic example of Australia’s efforts to prevent unauthorized boat arrivals to its shores. The Australian government refused to allow the entry of more than 400 persons—mostly believed to be from Afghanistan—aboard a Norwegian freighter, the Tampa, that had rescued them at sea and attempted to bring them to Australia’s Christmas Island. Eventually, Australia struck a deal with Nauru—one of the world’s smallest republics—to house the asylum seekers while their claims were processed, in exchange for U.S. \$10 million in aid.”

In addition, the Australian government instituted a media campaign to deter asylum seekers from trying to come to Australia:

“One controversial component of the government’s plan is an ‘overseas information campaign.’ Along with posters and other materials, the campaign has included video spots showing the shark-infested seas around Australia, the crocodiles closer to shore, and the snakes further inland—where, as it happens, some of the detention centers housing unauthorized migrants are located. The title, and the message, of the campaign: ‘Pay a people smuggler and you’ll pay the price.’”

Today, Australia continues to block boat arrivals of asylum seekers. Instead, they are transferred to detention facilities on Nauru, Christmas Island, or Papua New Guinea. The majority never make it to Australia. Recently, the United States has followed suit with the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which force those seeking asylum at the southern border to wait in Mexico for adjudication of their claim.

Global Gigabyte

Refugee camps are not excluded from the spread of COVID-19.

In response to the pandemic, refugees in the Moria Camp on the Greek island of Lesbos have created a crisis awareness team to spread the word about handwashing and hygiene. In addition, a group of four Afghan women have volunteered their time to sew face masks for the camp’s population. The refugees are working quickly and made approximately 500 masks on their first day. The masks, which will be given out for free, will initially only be distributed to camp residents who start to feel unwell or exhibit symptoms of the virus.

“The conditions were out of control and so we knew that we needed to do something by ourselves,” said Deen Mohammad Alizadah, a refugee originally from Afghanistan.

Read more about the refugees’ efforts [here](#).

**If you have any questions
or comments, please
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