

AIRC Visa Processing Survey

The Alliance for International Exchange partnered with AIRC to conduct a survey of AIRC members on visa processing issues. Respondents equally represent educational institutions as well as educational agencies abroad. The survey was conducted July 20 – August 9, 2021.

Respondents indicate a number of countries where student visa processing has been difficult or impossible. See below for a breakdown of most affected countries:

Country	Number students affected	Percentage students affected	Most cited embassy/consulate
India	1,334	42%	Mumbai
China	1,014	68%	Beijing
Sweden	367	100%	Stockholm
Nepal	179	57%	Kathmandu
Ghana	71	70%	Accra
Nigeria	58	65%	Abuja and Lagos
Bangladesh	58	45%	Dhaka
Iran	41	90%	Ankara and Islamabad
Vietnam	36	73%	Ho Chi Minh City

Respondents cite various issues contributing to their visa processing difficulties.

Summary of visa processing issues by country:

India:

Embassy closures and limited visa processing have resulted in major backlogs for students seeking appointments in India. Respondents report that the nearest available appointments are three to four months away which is after program start dates. Some students were able to resolve visa challenges by requesting emergency appointments, but others had to travel to other countries or defer to a later semester.

China:

Several respondents reported visa appointment challenges with the Beijing Embassy. Respondents stated that the embassy in Beijing was closed, was not offering nonimmigrant visa interview appointments, or was requiring additional materials which were not relevant to the student. Students were unable to obtain visa appointments in their home country, resulting in some travelling to Hong Kong or Singapore if they were willing and able to devote a total of four weeks to quarantining (two weeks in neighbor country, two weeks upon return to home country).

Sweden:

All respondents who reported visa challenges in Sweden state that the Stockholm embassy is not offering visa appointments and cancelled all previously scheduled appointments for the summer. With no appointment options in the country, students have travelled to neighboring European countries. However, embassies where Swedish students had success in obtaining appointments recently, such as Poland, Germany, and Spain, are now stating that they will only process domestic applications or are not granting National Interest Exceptions for students. Respondents worry this will result in further cancelled appointments and Swedish residents needing to travel outside of Europe to seek visa interview appointments.

Nepal:

Respondents state that there have been no or very limited visa interview appointments available to students in Nepal. Some students have travelled to India to seek appointments with varying degrees of success.

Conclusion

Backlogs and ongoing limited visa processing have resulted in significant challenges for students seeking visa interview appointments. Many students found that there were no appointments available until after their program start date. Faced with these challenges, respondents report that many students travelled to neighboring countries to seek visa appointments. In certain cases, students were successful in obtaining visa appointments by scheduling an emergency appointment or waiting until an embassy resumed operations, but, in others, emergency appointments were refused, National Interest Exceptions were ignored, and embassies remained closed. The lack of readily available visa appointments and interview alternatives have resulted in a considerable number of application deferrals and withdrawals.