

## PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS BY CONSULAR INSTITUTIONS DURING COVID-19: FOREIGN STATES EXPERIENCE

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### *Abstract*

The following article aims at studying the consular assistance in particular countries in the period of coronavirus pandemic. The article investigates to what extent they have functioned well, what actions they have taken with the citizens.

*Key words:* COVID-19, coronavirus, consular institutions, consular assistance, social protection, healthcare, citizens.

**Introduction.** COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China. Unfortunately, it is subsequently spread worldwide. The coronavirus was officially named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or in an acronym form SARS-CoV-2 by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses based on phylogenetic analysis. The original source of viral transmission to humans remains unclear, as does whether the virus became pathogenic before or after the spillover event. Traditionally, coronaviruses are a group of related viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, coronaviruses cause respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal. From very beginning of its outbreak, it has proven to be drastically jeopardizing. As of March 2020 only, the virus has reached 120 million cases and caused over 2.66 million deaths worldwide [Zoppi, 2021, p. 1]. During this pandemic, social protection of citizens is of high importance. Social protection, as defined by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being [UNRISD, 2010]. Social protection consists of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to manage economic and social risks, such as unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability, and old age [World Bank, 2001] It is the third goal of 17 SDG after no poverty and zero hunger. These statements prove that social protection of the rights of citizens is urgently important. One of the organs that deal with this sort of protection is via consular institutions. That is perhaps because, during pandemic, there has been seen disconnection between countries closing their entrances and departures. We should define the terms consular institutions and consular assistance. Consular institutions are the bodies who help and advice to provided by the diplomatic agents of a country to citizens of that country who are living or traveling abroad. The diplomats may be honorary consuls, or members of the country's diplomatic service. These organs provide replacement travel documents, assist in the case of an accident, serious illness, or death by supporting and advising. In the same vein, they support victims of serious crime overseas, inform relatives about these incidents, inform to nationals about missing or death cases, sometimes they even offer loans to distressed travelers, they help civil unrest (Pandemic of coronavirus) and natural disasters, they can register births abroad providing healthcare and legalization.

**Methods and materials.** The article uses the method of reviewing the obtained materials regarding the consular systems of various countries. Method of comparison is also applied to compare the specific features of these countries in terms of consular assistance systems. The article uses statistics, articles and news boards as the main materials to rely on.

**Research findings.** We have investigated the consular assistance systems of consular institutions of the world's several countries. Every consular institution has applied different approaches to assist citizens [IOM issue brief].

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**Australia's** consular institution waived the requirement from student visa holders to attend classes. They also let them to work more than 40 hours per two-week period to cater themselves with their primary needs. **Thailand** consular bodies have let foreign nationals apply for visa extensions directly in automatic way than through the Immigration Office. **Chile** has approached innovatively and has set up an online system to deal with visa requirements. Visas and stay permits are extended for six months. Friendly approaches between bordered or close countries physically has been experienced as well. As an illustration, **Ecuador** has extended the deadline for Venezuelan migrants on its territory to apply for a humanitarian visa until the end of the state of emergency. A bilateral agreement was signed between **Brazil** and **Chile** to facilitate return zones. They allowed citizens of both countries as well as permanent residents to cross the border freely. **Kuwait** consular organs reviewed its visa renewal conditions. Just as Chile it set up an online system to renew select permits online. This country allowed citizens to renew visas from abroad and also applied extensions. Qatar is another country whole consular organs performed humane measures. They have declared that expatriates currently out of the country with expired permits will be able to re-enter the country once travel restrictions are lifted irrespective of the fact that they have been away for more than the standard six-month period. **Kenya's** consular and immigration services created a contact and call centre providing information to migrants. **Uganda** has waived the usual fines from visa overstayers in the lockdown period. South Africa has waived the requirement of deadlines to renew visas. In **Mauritius**, all residence permits set to expire during the curfew period have been extended for three months. In **Quebec, Canada**, migrants have been given access to the medical clinics dedicated to COVID-19 diagnosis regardless of their migratory status or insurance. Under certain conditions, **the United States** has allowed holders of the J-1 visa for medical residents to extend their program without being interviewed in person, facilitating regularization processes so they can assist with the COVID-19 medical response. **Costa Rica and Panama** have signed a bilateral agreement in order to coordinate migrant flows through their common border, including provisions for medical examinations. "Green corridor" out of **Kyrgyzstan** facilitated orderly mobility. It allows foreign nationals or stateless people to leave the country without exit visas. All foreign nationals residing in **Russia** have been successful to be granted automatic visa. And Russian consular organs have permitted extensions. **Israel** implemented a multi-lingual phone hotline for foreign workers, providing information about visa extensions and regularization. **British** consular services collaborated with partners to ensure the return of more than 4,000 British travellers on their charter flights, and supported more than 8,000 of their nationals in return. These actions worked in favor of citizens. Yet there are several consular institutions that implemented several actions that made citizens have difficulties. Even the above mentioned countries functioned unwell until they have corrected the way of servicing. For instance, Mexican, Dominican, Ecuadoran and Colombian residents, representing the largest Latino communities in the New York city suffered a daily "agony" at the doors of their respective diplomatic sites for appointments to pick up, renew or apply for passports. To top it off, assistance by phone is lacking [Diario, 2021, p. 1]. Some people might have been unassisted by consular institutions as they have no registrations in such organs. For instance, 13 million EU citizens did not have a consulate or embassy of their Member State of nationality to ask for consular assistance in third countries according to data available on the website of the European Commission. **Discussions.** COVID-19 outbreak has been attributable to the crises in the global health. It tested national consular representations to be checked to what extent they are sustainable and strongly-enough organized to serve citizens. The citizens in different places from their citizenship motherlands were in need of urgent consular assistance services, namely, repatriation and help with accessing health care in third countries. It is remarkable that, initially, countries have issued measures to total closures, 109,591 movement restrictions were implemented around the world. At the same time, 201 countries, territories or areas have issued 998 exceptions to these restrictions. As a result, they enabled mobility. The mobility were highly related with the policy of consular organs. **Conclusions.** As we have investigated, different countries have approached differently. They have issued regulations in favor of citizens one after another. As we have seen above, at first they

all had difficulties to determine the upcoming set of rules to apply with immigrants, they have found their directions in the long run. Life, dignity, safety of people is of highest importance and consular institutions have been organized to protect these rights.

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