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Technological Systems Issue

JUNE 24, 2015

Visa Systems Issues

The Bureau of Consular Affairs reports that 50 posts, representing nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of our nonimmigrant visa demand worldwide, are now online and issuing visas.

Posts overseas issued more than 60,000 visas on June 23. Mission China alone issued nearly 25,000 visas.

Posts overseas have issued more than 150,000 non-immigrant visas since June 9. For context, if systems had been operating normally, posts would have issued approximately 450,000 visas during the June 9-23 timeframe. We expect to close this gap rapidly over the next few days.

We will continue to bring additional posts online until connectivity with all posts is restored. All posts worldwide are now scheduling interviews with applicants, including those who applied after the systems problems began on June 9.

We deeply regret the inconvenience to travelers who are waiting for visas.

We continue to post updates to our website, travel.state.gov.

Q: Reports indicate that your backlog is 700,000 visas. Is this accurate?

No. While there is a large backlog of cases to clear, it never approached that level, and we have already made good progress issuing those visas. Many posts are working overtime this week, and we expect to eliminate the backlog in a week or less.

Q: How old is this equipment? And does the age of the equipment and the need to have so many repairs to the hardware mean that this equipment should have been replaced? Is this a funding issue at the base of it?

The hardware that impacted the biometrics system is several years old. The Department was working to move the biometrics system off of this hardware.

The operational requirements to keep this database running for domestic and overseas passport and visa issuances caused delays in upgrading the database according to our planned maintenance schedule.

We have been working to upgrade our systems over the past year.

We will move ahead with planned migration and systems upgrades as soon as we fully restore service.

Q: How did you restore service?

- We restored service using a redundant, secondary backup system and other sources. That data allowed us to begin to re-connect posts to the affected portion of the system and synchronize biometric data. This system is running on newer hardware, and has a synchronized standby system in a different Department data center.
- In parallel, we are continuing to restore data from backups and overseas post databases. This process is ongoing.

Q: Do you know whether this is equipment that was acquired directly by the State Department, or was this acquired through a third-party contractor?

- The equipment was acquired by the Department of State.

Q: What does this mean for travelers seeking visas?

- All posts are now interviewing applicants. Please check the website of the nearest embassy or consulate for interview appointment availability and up-to-date messages.

Q: How many people were affected by this outage?

- During the past two weeks, consular sections have continued to interview travelers who applied June 8 or earlier. Those posts reconnected to our system are now issuing visas for those applicants.

Q: How are cases being prioritized?

- Now that system functionality is being restored, case prioritization will follow our normal procedures.
- We apologize to travelers and recognize that this has caused hardship to some individuals waiting for visas.

Q: What about the foreign agricultural workers (H2A visa holders)?

- Nearly 1,700 temporary or seasonal workers have been issued new visas in Mexico. These are applicants whose biometric data was captured before the systems went down.
- An additional 250 received Port of Entry waivers from Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We are no longer asking CBP to provide port of entry waivers, as we are now able to issue visas at border posts.
- We are currently scheduling more than 1,500 H-2 visa applicants for visa interviews.
- Visa applicants, including agricultural workers, who have not received a visa should not report to the border. Please contact the nearest embassy or consulate.

Q: What about domestic passports?

- Domestic passport operations are functioning, with some processing delays.
- The technical problems have affected the intake of some mailed applications and same-day service at our passport agencies; however, we continue to issue routine and expedited passports to U.S. citizens for all overseas travel needs.

Q: What about overseas passports?

- Overseas passport applications are being processed. There have been delays in some cases, but posts overseas are able to issue emergency passports in urgent cases.

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1. Paris
2. Monterrey
3. Ciudad Juarez
4. Guangzhou
5. Beijing
6. Shanghai
7. Tijuana
8. Nuevo Laredo
9. Mexico City
10. Guadalajara
11. Mumbai
12. New Delhi
13. Sao Paolo
14. Chennai
15. Manila
16. Bogota
17. Buenos Aires
18. Rio de Janeiro
19. Tel Aviv
20. Merida
21. Hermosillo
22. Karachi
23. Seoul
24. Lima
25. Santo Domingo
26. Kingston
27. Shenyang
28. Chengdu
29. Lagos
30. Guayaquil
31. London
32. Brasilia
33. Moscow
34. San Salvador
35. Quito
36. Ho Chi Minh City
37. Hanoi
38. Kyiv
39. Djibouti
40. Cairo
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