

Limitations for non-Japanese nationals on re-entering Japan.

With the current COVID-19 situation, governments all over the world have introduced a number of measures, in particular restrictions on who can enter a country or a region. Both the European Union (EU), or more broadly the European Economic Area (EEA) region plus Switzerland, and Japan have done so.

This places severe restrictions not only for individuals but also for companies, whose personnel cannot travel. While the EBC fully understands the reasoning behind these restrictions, we would still like to highlight the non-reciprocal situation and the impact on European residents in Japan.

The European industry in Japan creates numerous employment opportunities for both Japanese and non-Japanese nationals, as well as an influx of capital and technology. The efforts made by the Japanese Government to increase Foreign Direct Investment are positive. Since the implementation of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement more than one year ago, EU exports to Japan went up by 6.6% compared to the same period the year before and Japanese exports to Europe grew by 6.3%. Some of these capital and technologies can only be transferred by personnel from Europe or other countries. These persons are often living in Japan with a proper visa and have the right to be in Japan, in many cases for an unlimited period, as in the case of holders of permanent residency.

Additionally, it is not uncommon for companies to manage Korea or Taiwan from Japan. Under normal circumstances, CEOs would travel to such countries from Japan on a regular basis. This has currently come to a complete halt. These restrictions are therefore unfortunately working as a disincentive to use Japan as a regional hub, as international travel is practically only possible for Japanese nationals. It is not out of the question that the Japanese Government uses the current implemented measures as a blueprint for measures in case of future pandemics.

The EEA region and Switzerland also have restrictions on entering the area. However, these restrictions are focusing on persons who do not have a working or residency visa for the said region. Consequently, Japanese nationals living in Europe under a visa can exit and enter the region in the same way as EEA and Switzerland nationals. Unfortunately, there is no reciprocity, as non-Japanese nationals holding a proper visa, with some exceptions, are forbidden to enter or re-enter Japan.

The EBC believes that this puts too strenuous restrictions on visa-holding European nationals allowed to reside, in many cases permanently, in Japan. The EBC believes that Japan should introduce similar measures to that of the EU regarding visa-holders, meaning that people living and working in Japan should be allowed to leave and re-enter the country, just as Japanese citizens holding an EEA or Swiss visa are in Europe.

The EBC is aware that some EU member states have already pointed out this unbalance. It would be very unfortunate if this non-reciprocity did anything to negatively affect the excellent relationship between our two regions.



As a side note, we are aware that airports are looking into the possibility of implementing on-site or on-spot checks for COVID-19. Together with other measures, this could be one way to deal with this problem and ensure maximum health security.

The EBC is as always prepared to elaborate and discuss this issue further with Japanese authorities to come up with a satisfactory solution.