

EBC statement on the changes to the (re-)entry ban for non-Japanese nationals

On 1 September 2020 the Government of Japan lifted the ban on non-Japanese residents to re-enter Japan. The European Business Council in Japan (EBC) very much welcomes this policy shift. The EBC has, together with other organisations, both foreign and domestic, called for a change to this very restrictive policy that made Japan the exception among the G7 countries. As a comparison the EU has never treated national and non-national residents differently.

With the lifting, non-Japanese residents are now able to come back to their home in Japan and can also leave Japan and come back for whatever reason. This decision puts all residents of Japan on equal footing in so far as the possibility to freely travel abroad. Naturally, the European business community in Japan considers this as a positive step in the right direction.

However, there are still some differences: non-Japanese residents have to register their leaving, ask for a re-entry permit and undergo COVID-19 testing in the overseas country where they have stayed before going back to Japan. This is not the case for Japanese nationals. The EBC can see no medical reason for this difference in treatments among Japanese residents.

This mandatory test will create problems, particularly for businesspeople residing in Japan and traveling abroad only for a few days and in some cases only for a day. It is under those circumstances difficult to set aside time for testing, obtain an appointment and get the test result before returning to Japan. Because of these and the above-mentioned reasons, we ask for the removal or the easing of this requirement.

Furthermore, the partial lifting of the (re-)entry ban does not address the fate of new arrivals, ‘new expats’, except in a few cases. Foreign and Japanese companies are waiting for new executives to take up their positions in Japan. These executives are often responsible for large and strategic investments into Japan, and without them, these investments are at risk of not being implemented, impacting not only foreign and Japanese companies, but also the Japanese economy in general and in particular the Japanese staff working in these companies. The EBC therefore asks the Japanese Government to lift the ban for visa holders that are not yet been registered as residents.

Lastly, the issue of short-term businesspeople: the changes do not seem to address this issue. The EBC would like to point out that there are examples in other countries where exemptions are possible, including policies on isolation exemptions. The EBC requests the Government to implement clear guidelines on how companies, while respecting health safety conditions, can support and ask for short-term business travellers to enter Japan as they are vital to support the trade between the EU and Japan. In this respect, the EBC would like to emphasise that domestic industry is as impacted as European companies.

As always, the EBC stands ready to discuss more in detail with the Japanese Government.