

A Viselio White Paper



# HOW COVID-19 IS CHANGING IMMIGRATION AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION

by Niklas Zeller

April 2020



<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Which travel restrictions are in place today?</b>	<b>5</b>
How are governments restricting travel today?	5
New borders appeared out of nowhere	6
<b>What is the goal of the respective governments?</b>	<b>7</b>
What are the recipes?	7
<b>What are the challenges for business travel?</b>	<b>8</b>
Managed Travel	8
Duty of care & travel risk management	8
Paperwork required for travel	9
Internal documentation:	9
Health documentation:	9
Travel documentation:	9
Challenges with travel documentation	9
Travel insurances will change	10
<b>What are the challenges for international tourism?</b>	<b>10</b>
Hotspots need foreign tourism most	11
<b>Implications for air travel</b>	<b>12</b>
Air crews	12
Free middle seats forever?	13
Direct flights favoured over hub/spoke-system	13
Airports	13
<b>How could international travel start again?</b>	<b>14</b>
How will international travel change with COVID-19?	15
Phase 1 – travel history, health-form, negative COVID-19 test and Quarantine	15
Phase 2 – better testing with the proof of antibody	16
Phase 3 - Vaccination	16
<b>Conclusions for Viselio</b>	<b>17</b>
Travel volumes will be much lower, but need for travel documentation will explode	17
Complexity will massively increase	17
Automation and integration in major booking-systems are key to travel documents	18

## **Executive Summary**

### **Borders will open gradually, but slowly**

Gradually, borders between neighbouring countries will open again. Smaller countries with similar infection rates and close relations are more likely to open fast. Overseas destinations will not open fast and travellers will still be limited to travel from/to infection hotspots. Ethnic and business travel will open before tourism.

### **Immigration authorities have a new focus on health**

Until now, governments and border forces mainly fought illegal immigration and terrorism. Now, a new focus on health issues with the priority not to re-import the coronavirus will be added. This leads to a period of new rules and procedures at the border and the related uncertainties in the beginning.

### **Travel preparations will be key, while paperwork explodes**

Instead of open borders and visa-free travel, many countries will introduce special health requirements for international visitors. Those may include negative corona tests, proof of antibody or (once available) the proof of vaccination. These requirements will constantly change and not every test and certificate will be accepted by all governments.

### **Global standards are missing**

It will take some time, until international bodies such as the WHO, ICAO or the Schengen countries will establish new health standards/requirements and the respective documentation. In a comparable case, the WHO developed the well known yellow fever vaccination certificate. A similar document can be expected in due time.

### **Air travel will become complicated and more expensive**

Airlines will constantly need to monitor the health of their crews and change the current operations with a strict focus on health issues and safety. This involves double cockpit crews, personal protection gear and less human interaction and service during flights. Less frequent and direct flights with empty middle seat, will be the new (safer) standard. Hub/spoke-airlines such as Emirates or Etihad will be challenged.

### **Airports have to adapt**

Finally, airports will need to adapt their infrastructure to the new health requirements, starting with simple temperature measurement, but also medical examination areas and zones for passengers arriving from risk/non-risk countries. Adapting these new rules will create more costs and consequently, airport-taxes will rise.

**Business travel restarts first**

Before tourism, business travel will be the first to restart. Visiting subsidiaries, sending technicians to clients and having experts in factories, will be a top priority for international travel. The volume, however, will be reduced, since MICE will not be possible and video-conferencing replaces many aspects of business interaction.

**Business travel will be even more standardised**

We will see a sharp increase in the number of boxes that must be ticked before a business trip is approved. Trips will be planned in greater detail, in order to ensure the employee has the proper knowledge and documentation, in order to travel - both for the traveller's and the company's sake.

**Tourism will first be domestic, then regional**

Despite the suffering hospitality industry in many countries, international tourism will not be the first priority for governments. Main goal will be to limit the spread of the virus and therefore mass travel will be paused in 2020. The focus will be on domestic travel, individually, land based and non-urban. Neighbouring countries may open for tourism eventually. Mass air travel will need to wait until 2021 and/or a vaccine is available.

**Immunity passports may be introduced**

Many countries are considering the introduction of "immunity certificates" for people who have been positively tested for COVID-19-antibodies. However, many antibody-tests did not prove to be accurate and it will take additional studies and discussions to agree on approved test methods and products, as well as the respective documentation.

**Visa facilitation will experience a boost**

Over the past decades, the requirements for travel have been reduced and a visa was either no longer required or replaced by simple e-visas. The new health requirements for travel will change this overnight. It will take 2-3 years until new international standards for travel health are created and implemented on a global scale. Until then, many countries will have their own, often changing, paper-based rules and regulations.

## Which travel restrictions are in place today?

With the spread of COVID-19, we have seen rapid closures of borders around the world, the reintroduction of [Schengen border controls](#) and the introduction of strict quarantine measures for those still arriving from abroad. At the time of writing, at least nine-tenths (93%) of the world's population, or 7.2 billion people, live in countries with restrictions imposed on people arriving from other countries who are neither citizens nor residents, such as tourists, business travellers and new immigrants. Roughly 3 billion people, or 39%, live in countries with borders completely closed to non-citizens and non-residents, according to [a Pew Research Center analysis](#).

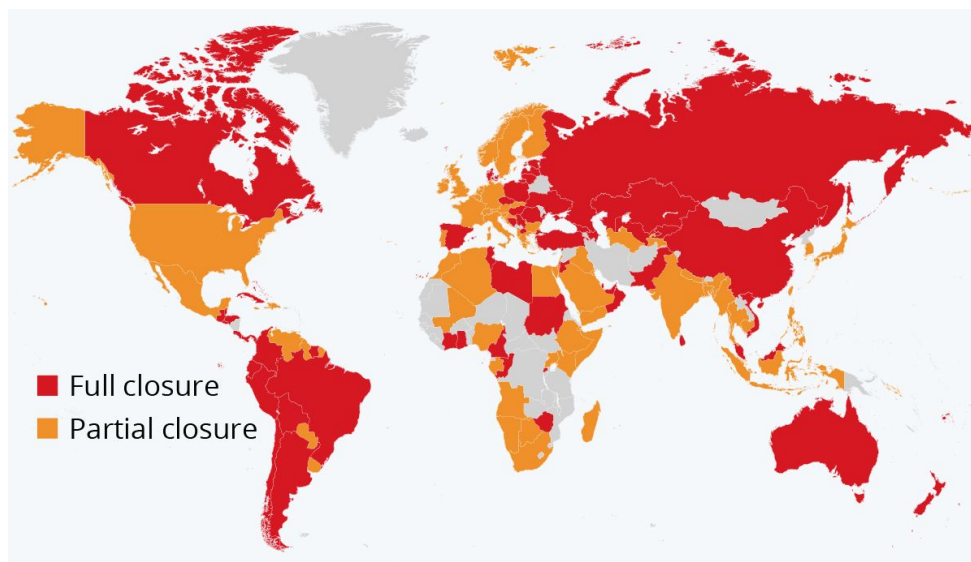


Illustration 1: Countries that have closed borders to noncitizens and nonresidents, as of 31.03.2020. Source: [Statista](#)

## How are governments restricting travel today?

Governments around the world have implemented various levels of restrictions on travel and movement in general. Citizens in Italy, Spain and other countries have been ordered to stay in their homes for weeks now, just stepping outside for work or essential activities. Many vast countries, such as Canada or Australia have introduced restrictions on domestic travel, in order to protect remote communities with limited or difficult access to high-end medicine. Most governments have updated their travel warnings, initially advising against non-essential travel and in most cases now advising against or forbidding all international travel, calling their citizens to return home. With a global reduction of commercial flight capacity by more than 70%, governments were forced to repatriate their citizens. [The German government's return programme](#), for example, has evacuated more than 200'000 travellers from 57 countries since it was launched on March 16th.

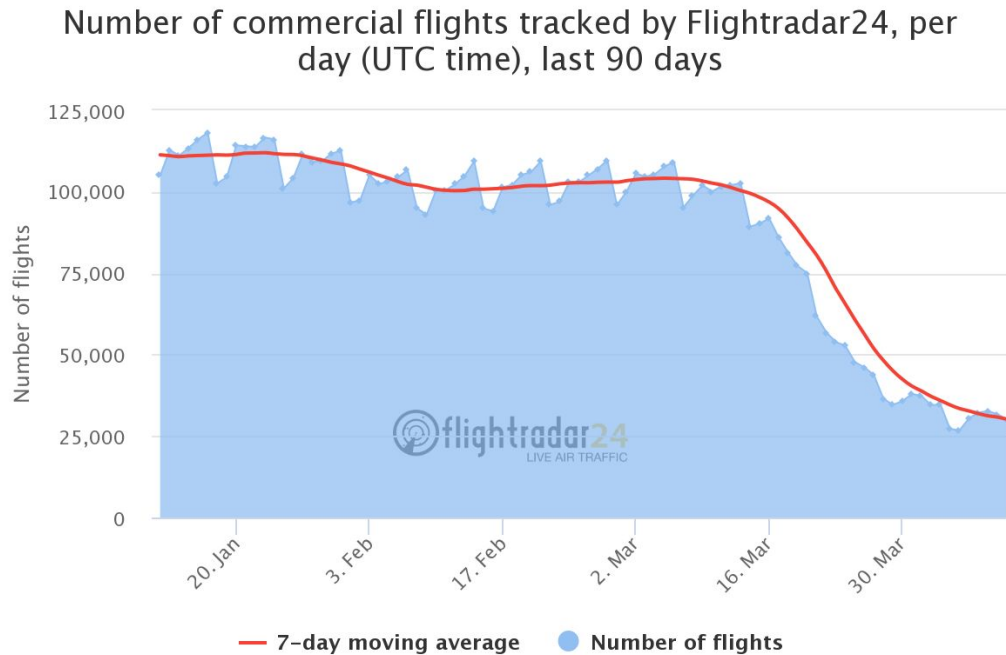


Illustration 2: Commercial flights tracked by Flightradar24, per day, last 90 days since April 11th. Source: [Flightradar24](https://flightradar24.com)

## New borders appeared out of nowhere

Many Europeans are used to the freedom of travel they have enjoyed during the past decades, their passports have been ranked on top of the [Henley Passport Index](https://www.henley.com/passport-index/) as some of the strongest passports in the world. And Schengen has enabled more than 420 million European citizens, living in 26 member states, the complete freedom of movement and de facto abolishment of any border restrictions.

This freedom to travel was seriously restricted for the first time, since the inception of the Schengen Area in 1995, when the first countries started to reintroduce border controls or closed them completely. Today, travel within the Schengen Zone is nearly impossible, except for residents, cross-border commuters and logistics personnel.

Apart from travel within the Schengen Zone, the EU also shut its door to any foreign visitors, introducing travel restrictions on all non-essential travel for at least 30 days and creating a “[security perimeter for all Schengen states](#)”. French President Emmanuel Macron even suggested that the EU’s external borders might be closed until the end of September, according to [Forbes](https://www.forbes.com).

## **What is the goal of the respective governments?**

In order to minimize the transmission of Covid-19, many countries have banned international travel. Travellers have “imported” the virus into many countries and consequently, governments first started to shut down flights to hotspots of the disease. Flights to China were banned in mid/late January, followed by travel to/from Italy in late February. Around the 15th March, after the US travel ban, most European countries closed their borders, even within the Schengen area.

The main goal of governments is to protect their healthcare system from being overwhelmed and to “flatten the curve”. Closing the borders serves this purpose in two ways: No virus carriers can import the disease, as it happened in many cases at the beginning of the pandemic with travellers from China or Italy. Secondly, developed healthcare systems want to prioritize their hospital capacity to their own citizens.

Beside the epidemiological necessity, many border closures were pushed by nationalistic parties in the various countries as it fits their agenda.

## **What are the recipes?**

Before the complete lockdown and in order to allow citizens to return to their home country, different measures were introduced at borders and airports, as early as January.

Many airports perform thermal screening of passengers to spot fever. Some have implemented strict screening measures for passengers arriving from high risk areas. These passengers are required to fill out a questionnaire to enable officials to identify any suspected cases.

Before the complete lockdown, authorities in India, for example, asked travellers to provide a certificate confirming a negative test for COVID-19 from an authorized laboratory or doctor.

Thailand requires a health certificate, stating that the traveler had no sickness related to COVID-19 in the past 14 days. This health certificate must be issued no earlier than 48 hours prior to flying and should be issued in English or Thai language. In addition the traveler must provide proof of health/travel insurance with a minimum of 100,000 USD cover in Thailand.

## **What are the challenges for business travel?**

Undoubtedly, before the return of tourism, we will see the return of business travel, as machines have to be maintained, deals to be made and relationships to be nourished. Business travel is essential for the survival and success of economies and many countries will, therefore, allow for business travel in a first series of border openings.

Many companies are dependent as well to have certain employees on the road, in order to keep customers happy and generate revenue. Companies will have to carefully plan for the gradual ramp-up of business travel while putting the focus even more on:

### **Managed Travel**

Most larger companies today already travel under a managed travel programme, but once business travel starts again, we will see corporate travel almost exclusively being booked and organised in a managed fashion. The times of open-booking policies will be over.

Today most approval workflows for business trips evolve about the necessity to travel (purpose), travel cost and travel compliance, in order to ensure budget compliance. With growing concern about health, duty of care and liability, we will see a major shift and an increased number of internal approvals required, in order to permit business travel. For some time, cost will be a smaller factor, as companies will only allow essential travel.

### **Duty of care & travel risk management**

Once travel comes back post-COVID-19, companies will further increase their focus on their duty of care and on how they will keep their employees safe, healthy and secure during their business trips. The moral and legal liabilities of not informing and safeguarding their employees will be so high, that we will see significant changes to travel policies.

Employees will be restricted to move between the airport, the location they are visiting and the hotel. Using public transport, going out to restaurants or anything else that is not necessary for fulfilling the mission will be discouraged or forbidden. Employees will be taking a car transfer and will hardly leave their hotel room. Room-service dinners will become the norm.

Companies will want to know where their travellers are allowed to go, where it is safe to go. Once the employees are travelling, employers will keep an eye on where their employees are and will, therefore, engage a travel risk management company with the accompanying technology.



## Paperwork required for travel

In the post-COVID-19 world, we will see a sharp increase in paperwork required in order to facilitate business travel.

### Internal documentation:

From our various talks with corporates around the world, we expect to see an increase in company internal documentation required in order to permit travel in the first place. Just making a request over the phone or the Self Booking Tool is not going to be enough, as companies will roll out complex approval processes, in order to weigh up and approve every trip (sometimes even up to C-Level) and in order to inform the traveller about the current health situation, entry requirements as well as entry restrictions in a verifiable manner (form, workflow, etc.). No company can afford not to inform their travellers about entry restrictions or quarantine measures.

### Health documentation:

Travellers will need to prove that they are healthy or immune and hopefully soon that they have been vaccinated. Obtaining and managing these documents are especially tricky, as depending from country to country, we have very strict local laws outlining what health data may be revealed to the employer.

### Travel documentation:

Many countries will significantly tighten their entry requirements, asking for proof of the traveller's health status, proof of advanced health insurance coverage and proof of the requirement to travel. In addition to those documents the standard entry documentation, such as a visa or evisa will still be mandatory.

Essentially two types of documentation will be required: visas & documentation required upon arrival/immigration. In both cases, it will be the employer's responsibility to ensure that their traveller is equipped with the proper documentation, upon departing for the respective trip.

## Challenges with travel documentation

With most companies today the travel documentation process is not well established or is not fully adhered to. In many cases, corporates have contracted a visa provider on a global or local level, either directly or through the TMC. However, whether the contracted provider is actually used, is often up to the traveller or his arranger. From our experience in the

market, we know that travel documentation (visas) is an area often neglected in a corporate travel programme, resulting in a high amount of leakage.

Companies will have to rethink their processes for travel documentation and make sure the solution fits together with their travel processes, as well as their technology. Equipping the traveller with the proper documentation is a key responsibility!

At the same time, companies are facing new challenges to handle and store their employee's health data in a secure and legal way. There will be moral and legal discussions if companies can force their employees to conduct tests and apply vaccinations.

### **Travel insurances will change**

The post-COVID-19 traveller will need travel insurance, covering both the health cost of a possible infection (2-3 weeks ICU-treatment) and the possible quarantine and repatriation to the home country. Current schemes are already covering this, but since the risk of getting sick abroad is much higher, insurance premiums will rise or even explode for certain destinations.

Besides the basic health insurances for travellers, corporates will face many liability-issues around travel. Insurance companies will limit their coverage for certain destinations, which will make business travel even more difficult. It might happen, that insurance companies finally determine, whether or not certain destinations can be visited.

### **What are the challenges for international tourism?**

Since governments are reluctant to open borders in the next few months, international tourism will be difficult in 2020. We should not forget, that international travel was the fuel, spreading this virus around the globe.

Therefore, in the first phase, the focus will be on domestic tourism, which will help both to limit the spread of the virus and to support the local hospitality industry, which is suffering heavily. [Poland has announced to distribute tourism vouchers in the value of PLN 1000 \(€ 218\) to their citizens, to be redeemed in polish tourism-establishments during 2020.](#)

A relaunch in tourism will include the well known rules of distancing, which will affect hotels and restaurants, beaches and mountains but also attractions like museums or sightseeing hotspots. Urban tourism will be very limited, while remote places with a focus on nature and sports will be a priority. Consumers will prefer holiday homes and apartments than overcrowded hotels.

Tourism across borders will start into neighbouring countries by private car, train or ferries. Countries with similar exposure to the virus and comparable health-standards are more likely to relax border regulations. It's to be expected that smaller countries with similar politics, culture and language will be first to open their borders for tourism. We expect the following countries to open rather quickly:

- Australia / New Zealand
- DACH (Germany / Austria / Switzerland)
- Nordics (Denmark / Norway / Finland / Sweden (depending on development in Sweden))
- Finland & Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)
- Croatia/Slovenia

When it comes to rules of border-crossing, there will be many unilateral regulations, with many details and exceptions, changing at a fast pace. This makes planning difficult and flexibility will be needed from all parts of the tourism ecosystem.

At the same time several forms of tourism will be almost impossible:

- Cruises
- Group tourism of any form
- Bus tourism
- Mass tourism on beaches

### **Hotspots need foreign tourism most**

The three main European hot spots of COVID-19 are depending most on foreign tourism, especially Spain (15% of GDP), Italy (13%) and France (10%). While France will have the chance to offset the drop in tourism arrivals with domestic travellers, Spain and Italy have a much smaller potential in the domestic tourism market.

The economic situation will lead these countries to receive foreign guests as quickly as possible. The question will be, if travellers to these hotspots will be welcomed back home or if they have to self-quarantine themselves during a certain period.

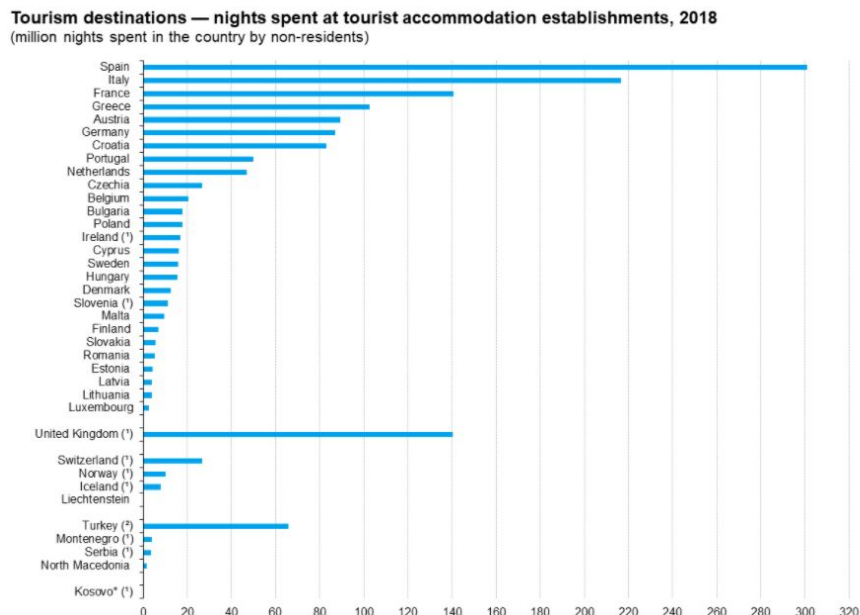


Illustration 3: Nights spent at tourist accommodations, source: [Eurostat, Tourism Statistics, 2018](#)

## Implications for air travel

Airlines are facing very big challenges when it comes to restarting their business after/during COVID-19:

### Air crews

Under the current circumstances, the members of flight crews are potential “superspreaders”, which could distribute the virus fast to many people across countries and continents.

It will be essential to test flight attendants on a very frequent basis. At the same time, crew-members should not rotate, as they have done in the past and they will have to protect themselves and passengers by wearing a facemask and other personal protective equipment. Service to passengers will be at a minimum with no food/refreshments served. The time spent at a destination will be kept to a minimum and crew-hotels (if needed) will be under lockdown. On long-haul flights, double cockpit crews might become standard as there needs to be a back-up in case a pilot becomes ill. Authorities will keep a close eye on air crews, both in their home countries and at their destinations, which will involve many tests, monitoring and paperwork.

## **Free middle seats forever?**

During the current lockdown-situation, many airlines fly only a limited schedule with very low occupancies. This enables many of the carriers to practice social distancing during the flight, by keeping the middle seats free. If this becomes the new normal, airfares will increase a lot!

## **Direct flights favoured over hub/spoke-system**

Undoubtedly, governments will first allow direct flights from A to B, minimising the risk of further spread of the virus. The “hub and spoke system”, mixing passengers from various origins in the same plane, will create an additional risk of infection and will be hard to maintain until a big part of the global population is either immune or vaccinated.

This will put a lot of pressure on airlines in the middle east, like Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways and others like Turkish Airlines or Copa, which rely completely on this concept.

## **Airports**

As implemented in Asia, temperature measuring will be standard at various airport checkpoints. Every arriving passenger will be screened and questioned upon arrival, but the focus is shifting from immigration and terrorism to health.

Furthermore, airports will have to distinguish between medically checked/non-checked passengers and will need to establish “clean zones”. The use of terminals and gates could be reallocated, depending on the origin of the arriving passengers. Transfer passengers will create a special challenge.

Airlines will have to ensure their passengers have the respective health-certificates for their destination ready and check them before boarding. Despite much fewer passengers, check-in times will be 2h+ to do all these checks and airport-taxes will rise to cover the extra costs associated with these additional efforts.

To keep human interaction to a minimum, special “health-machines” could be used, to cover both the checking in process as well as the health checks at the same time. Australian company Elinium Automation has created such a [machine](#) and is testing it with Etihad Airways in Abu Dhabi. The new machine is touchless detecting temperature, heart-rate and respiratory rate, but also helps to identify the passenger for check-in. [Video](#).

## How will international travel change with COVID-19?

Governments will be very cautious and limit free travel at the beginning. We believe that lifting travel-bans will happen gradually, in several phases. It will be driven by the further development of the pandemic in the various countries and regions and the possibilities of testing and monitoring. There will be many different ways governments will handle international travel in the months to come.

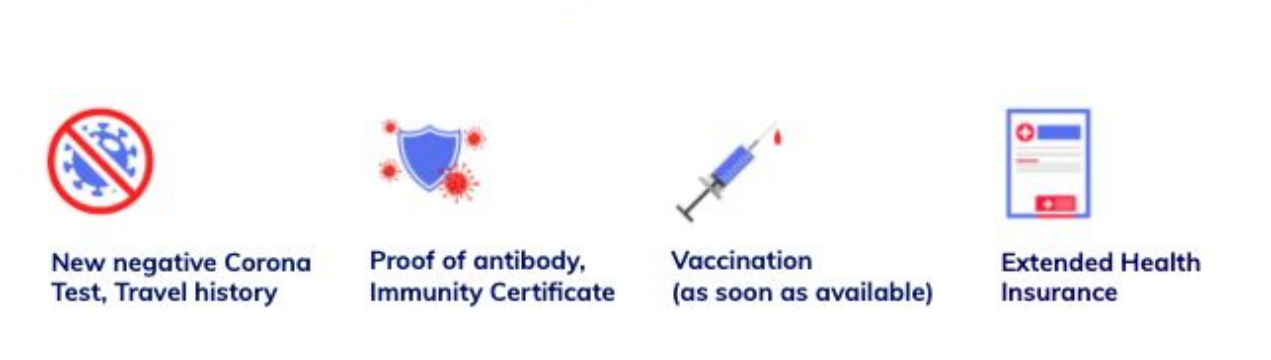


Illustration 4: Future health requirements, Source: Viselio

### Phase 1 – travel history, health-form, negative COVID-19 test and Quarantine

In the first phase, travellers will need to present their travel history and self-declare their health condition on a form (which can vary from country to country). If passengers have been staying in hotspots of the pandemic (currently Italy, Spain, UK, USA), they might be excluded from travel already at this stage.

Some countries (like Thailand) may ask for a negative Test on Covid-19, conducted by an authorized laboratory or doctor and not older than 2-3 days.

Finally, many countries will still insist on a phase of quarantine (we see everything from 7-29 days) after arriving at the destination, followed by another negative test on Covid-19 at the end of this period.

Of course, neighbouring countries could even open their borders without any health checks, just doing random checks. Especially within Schengen (DACH, Nordics, Benelux), this could be the case.

## Phase 2 – better testing with the proof of antibody

A new phase could start, once antibody tests become available and reliable. This simple blood test will identify if a person was infected and has developed immunity. Individuals who have tested positive, will be issued an immunity certificate, proving the presence of antibodies for COVID-19 in their blood. As soon as the antibody tests are approved, the countries will start with an aggressive campaign to test the population and issuing immunity certificates for those tested positive for antibodies.

The main challenge is that there are around 60 Antibody-Tests on the global market, but none of them has gone through proper testing and none of them has been approved by any authorities. In addition, there are no clear benchmarks on what level of antibodies immunity is achieved and for how long. The result will be many national solutions and certificates but a huge uncertainty, if they will be recognized internationally. In mid/long term we expect international standards by WHO, similar to Yellow Fever and other diseases.

## Phase 3 - Vaccination

The immigration process will further change, once a vaccine for COVID-19 is developed and applied on a large scale. People who will get vaccinated will be protected from the infection. They will receive a vaccination card proofing that they got the necessary shots. It will however also take time to approve the various vaccine products and to find international standards.

Once a vaccine is widely available, this will be a precondition for any international travel and be part of national passports and immigration procedures, often even before boarding a plane.

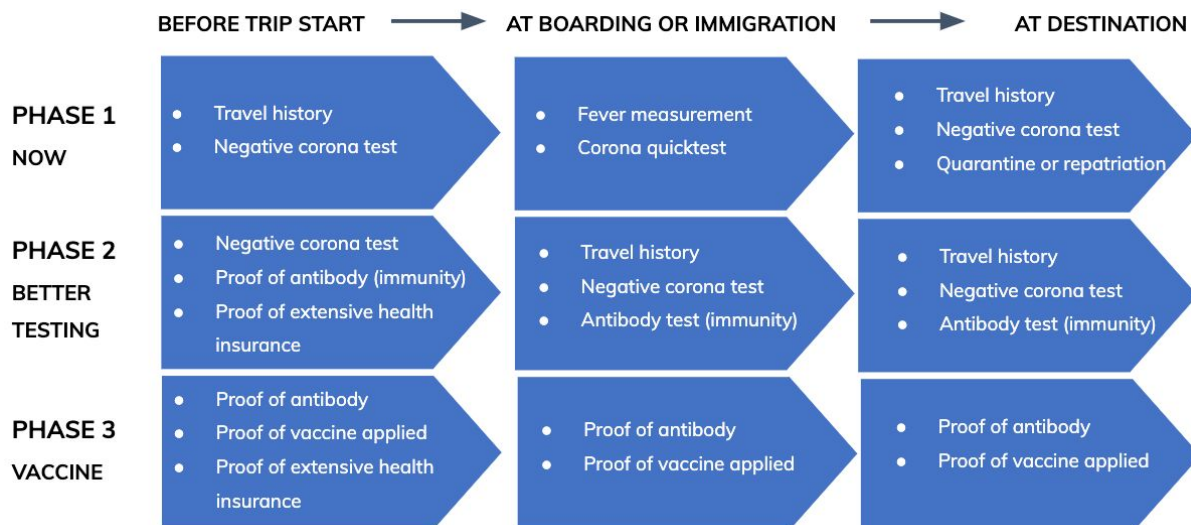


Illustration 5: Immigration Scenarios, source: Viselio

## Conclusions for Viselio

### Travel volumes will be much lower, but need for travel documentation will explode

Once travel is restarting, there will be many different rules, regulations and documentations to be taken care of, when planning a trip. Despite a steep decline in overall travel-volume, we expect that an average of 50% of all international trips will need some type of travel documentation. But still after easing border-regulations within continents, proof of (the proper) vaccine will still be needed for long haul destinations in mid/long term.

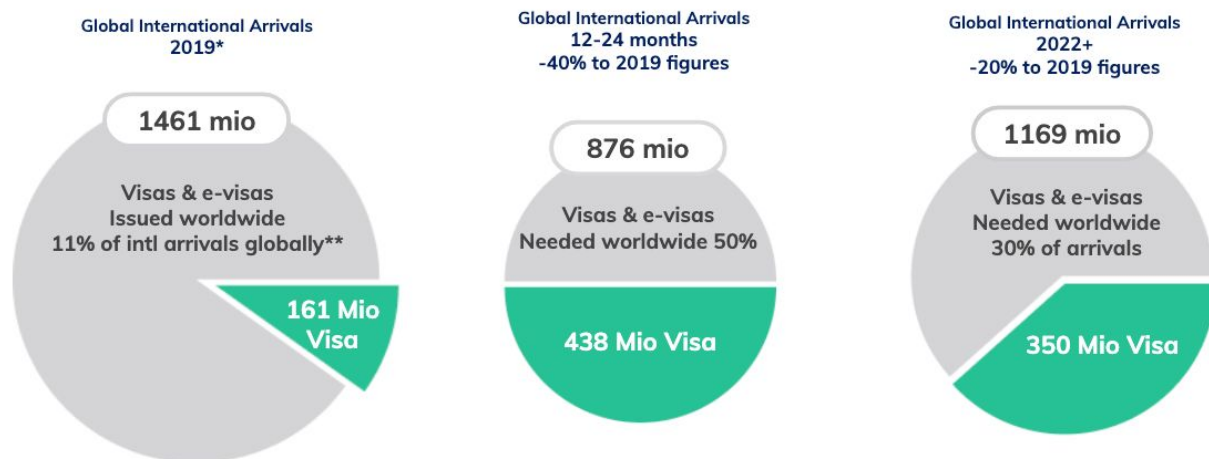


Illustration 6: Number of global arrivals requiring visas, source: Viselio

### Complexity will massively increase

The complexity to arrange and book a trip will massively increase, with more complex and ever changing entry requirements. OTA sales and direct airline bookings will decrease. Travellers will want the confidence of being taken care of a professional - a unique opportunity for travel agents to position themselves in the market.

The average traveller or travel arranger will have serious difficulties to arrange the required travel documentation by themselves, The regulations and procedures will become too complex to handle on the side.



## Automation and integration in major booking-systems are key to travel documents

Many destinations will require different travel documentation, which will change at a fast pace. Consequently, only a fully automated process can detect the need for a respective document. Viselio is integrated with major GDS and further systems in the travelspace. This enables Viselio to scan all flight bookings, provide the documentation needed for the respective trip. Furthermore Viselio's solution is monitoring flight bookings between booking and departure and alerts travellers in case any new travel documents should be needed.

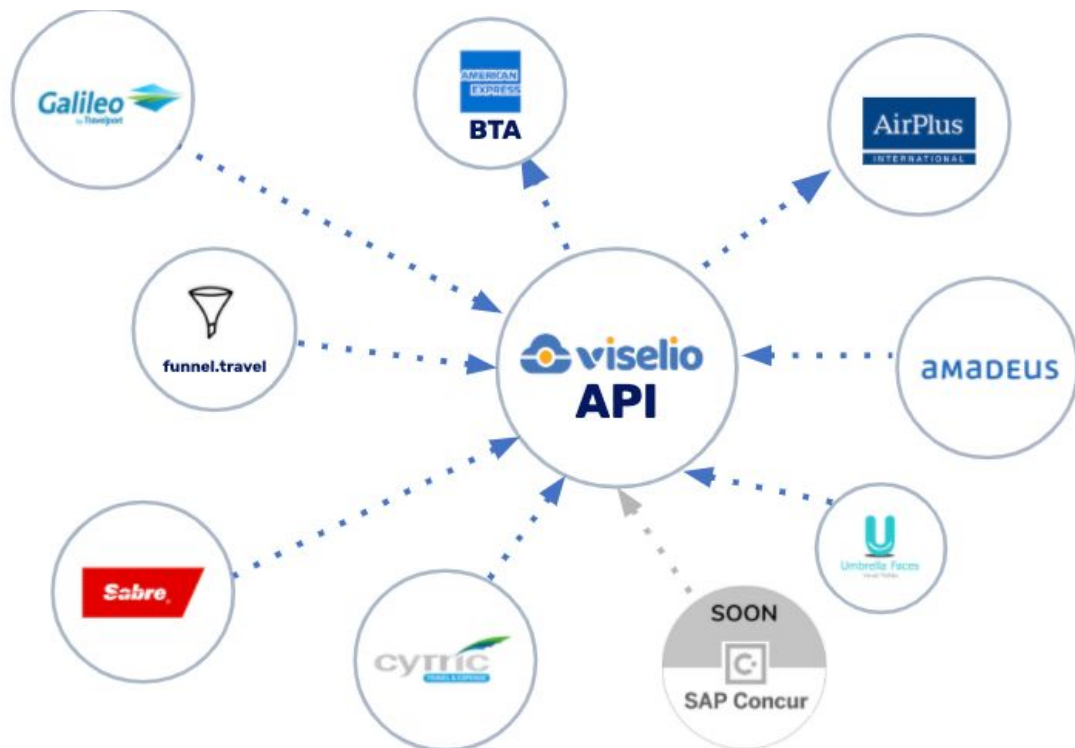


Illustration 7: Viselio Integration, source: Viselio

**Contact me for the latest in travel  
documentation and visas!**



Niklas Zeller  
CEO & Co-founder

[niklas@viselio.com](mailto:niklas@viselio.com)

[www.viselio.com](http://www.viselio.com)

