



## **Explainer: Impact of Travel and Immigration Restrictions on the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup**

### **Introduction**

This summer, the United States will serve as the primary host of the [2026 FIFA Men's World Cup](#), which is expected to be the [largest sporting event](#) in history, featuring 48 teams and 104 matches across North America. Analysts project that about [1.24 million international visitors](#) will travel to the U.S. specifically for the tournament, helping drive a massive surge in tourism and economic activity.

At the same time, more than [five million fans](#) are expected to attend matches across the three host countries – the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Globally, FIFA estimates that around [six billion](#) people will watch or engage with the tournament, making it the most-watched sporting event on the planet and surpassing previous World Cups and even the Olympics in total reach.

Against this backdrop of global attention and increased travel demand, U.S. [immigration and entry policies](#) will play a prominent role in determining who can participate in and experience the tournament firsthand. In particular, recent presidential actions [restricting travel](#) have introduced new legal and logistical [considerations](#) for prospective visitors, directly impacting the teams, their support staff, families, and fans.

On June 4, 2025, President Trump issued a [proclamation](#) suspending the entry of nationals from 19 countries, citing deficiencies in those countries' security screening and information-sharing practices. A [second proclamation](#), issued on December 16, 2025, expanded the restrictions to nationals of 39 countries. Both proclamations carve out an exception for athletes participating in the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The exception covers athletes, coaches, people in a "necessary support role," and the immediate relatives of athletes. It does not cover spectators, journalists, corporate sponsors, or extended family. Of the 48 countries participating in the FIFA World Cup, [four are subject to travel restrictions](#):

- Iran<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A further complication involves the escalating conflict between Iran, the United States, and Israel, which has raised uncertainty about Iran's participation in the tournament. On March 11, 2026, the Iranian sports minister said during a TV interview that the team "cannot have a presence" in the World Cup. See Francesco Porzio, "Iran sports minister says national team 'cannot' participate in World Cup hosted by United States," CBS Sports (March 11, 2026). <https://www.cbssports.com/soccer/news/iran-world-cup-america-trump-boycott/>. After the Iranian sports minister's comments, FIFA's president, Gianni Infantino, said that President Trump provided assurances that Iran is "welcome" to compete in the World Cup. See Tariq Panja, "Iran to Skip World Cup, Minister Says, Despite Reported Trump Assurances," New York Times (March 11, 2026). <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/11/world/europe/trump-iran-world-cup-fifa-infantino.html>

- Haiti
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Senegal

In addition to the travel bans affecting temporary visitors, the U.S. government has issued further restrictions that could affect World Cup-related travel, including [suspending immigrant visa processing](#) for nationals of 75 countries.<sup>2</sup> The list of countries includes at least 12 nations that have already qualified for the World Cup.<sup>3</sup> While the suspension does not affect temporary tourist visas used for World Cup spectators, the immigrant visa ban, alongside other [restrictions](#) such as new social media screening policies, could potentially [deter some travelers from affected countries](#) from attending the tournament.

### **Key Provisions of the Travel Ban Proclamations**

Both the June and December [proclamations](#) state that the suspension of entry does not apply to "any athlete or member of an athletic team, including coaches, persons performing a necessary support role, and immediate relatives, traveling for the World Cup, Olympics, or other major sporting event as determined by the Secretary of State."

The State Department [explained](#) that "only a small subset of travelers for the World Cup [. . .] and other major sporting events will qualify for the exception." While the proclamations also authorize the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of Homeland Security to grant case-by-case exceptions when an individual's travel would serve the national interest, it is not clear how someone from a restricted country would apply for such a waiver or how frequently a waiver might be granted.

### **Administration's Stated Rationale and Critics' Counterarguments**

The administration has [said](#) the restrictions were put in place due to national security concerns, including that the affected countries lack adequate identity-management systems, maintain unreliable civil documentation and criminal records, fail to share sufficient information with U.S. authorities, or have a significant terrorist presence. The other reasons given in the proclamations include high visa overstay rates, countries' refusal to accept deportees, and concerns about "Citizenship by Investment" programs

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<sup>2</sup> The policy, which applies even to spouses and children of U.S. citizens living abroad, was introduced based on the [alleged concerns](#) that some immigrants from these countries rely on public benefits. See Eric Bazail-Eimil and Nahal Toosi, "State Department halts immigrant visa processing for 75 countries," Politico (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/01/14/state-immigrant-visa-processing-pause-00728605> ("the pause is not expected to directly affect processing of tourist visas or the visas for those coming to the United States to attend sporting events, chiefly the World Cup" but "individuals could still face difficulties if their countries are subject to other Trump travel bans and restrictions.") See also Stewart Verdery, "A proposed Homeland Security rule could empty U.S. stadium seats," Washington Post (Jan. 20, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2026/01/20/homeland-security-world-cup-tourism-social-media/> (new vetting policies "could deter millions of qualified visitors without meaningfully improving security.")

<sup>3</sup> Algeria, Brazil, Cape Verde, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Egypt, Ghana, Haiti, Iran, Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia.

that allow individuals to obtain passports from third countries and potentially conceal their identities.

Critics [argue](#) that these justifications are overly broad and fail to account for the existing vetting processes that govern U.S. visa issuance and border screening, which include biometric checks, in-person interviews, interagency intelligence sharing, and layered background reviews. Critics also argue that rather than improving security, blanket travel bans based on nationality risk [exclude low-risk travelers](#), such as students, tourists, journalists, and business visitors, while offering little evidence of enhanced public safety outcomes.

## **How the Restrictions Will Affect the 2026 World Cup**

Under the athlete exceptions in both the June and December 2025 proclamations, players, coaches, and necessary support staff from Iran, Haiti, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal should be able to enter the United States for their matches. Still, the restrictions will apply to other categories of individuals.

- **Delegations and the "necessary support role" question.** A national team delegation typically includes medical doctors, physiotherapists, equipment managers, translators, media officers, security personnel, and team chefs. The proclamation does not define which of these qualify as a "necessary support role." For instance, in November 2025, Iran's soccer federation [applied](#) for visas for a nine-member delegation to attend the World Cup draw in Washington, D.C., but only four were approved. Those denied included the president of the Iranian soccer federation. The U.S. did not publicize the reasons for denying the visas; however, following a [boycott](#) threat, a last-minute [resolution](#) allowed Iran's full delegation to attend. Teams from other affected countries may face similar uncertainty about which administrators, medical staff, translators, and other personnel will receive visas.
- **Extended family and personal support staff.** While "[immediate relatives](#)" are also exempt from the June and December 2025 travel bans, the term is typically defined to mean spouses, unmarried children under 21, and parents. Under U.S. law, the term usually does not include siblings, grandparents, adult children, and other family members who commonly travel to support athletes at major competitions. It is also unclear whether the "immediate relative" exception applies only to athletes or to the families of coaches and support staff.
- **Fans and spectators.** The World Cup is expected to draw more than a [million](#) international travelers. Unfortunately, the travel bans will prevent fans from affected countries from being able to travel to the United States to attend the matches. Local officials, diaspora groups, and foreign governments have [requested](#) the administration to create an exemption for ticket holders or registered fans traveling to the tournament. However, the administration has not indicated that such an exception will be granted.

It is important to note that while fans traveling from abroad will not be able to enter the United States, diaspora communities and others with ties to the affected countries will be able to attend the games without limitations.

- **Host Cities:** The travel restriction is expected to reduce economic benefits flowing to the cities hosting the games of Iran, Senegal, Haiti, and the Ivory Coast, including Atlanta, New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Considering that the average visitor to the United States spends approximately [\\$4,000](#) per visit, limiting travel from these countries would represent a significant negative impact for host cities, as well as the U.S. as a whole.

### **FIFA Pass and Visa Facilitation for World Cup Travelers**

Earlier, on November 17, 2025, the Trump Administration [announced](#) a new system to streamline consular appointments for visa applicants with tickets for the World Cup in the United States. The system, called the "[FIFA Pass](#)," allows ticket holders to receive priority interview appointments for a U.S. visitor visa. While the program may aid some travelers in obtaining a visitor visa more expeditiously, it does not [guarantee](#) a visa issuance. All FIFA Pass applicants remain subject to the same vetting procedures and restrictions that are in place for others. In other words, fans from countries subject to a travel ban or other restrictions [will not be able to come to the United States](#) to watch a game, even if they already have a World Cup ticket and have attempted to utilize FIFA Pass.

### **Conclusion**

The 2026 FIFA World Cup offers the United States an opportunity to host an event of unprecedented global scale. The current travel restrictions introduce legal, logistical, and economic challenges that might affect participation and attendance. While the athlete exemption ensures that teams can compete, the exclusion of fans, extended family, media, and other stakeholders limits the full realization of the tournament's international character and may reduce tourism-related benefits for host cities. How these policies are implemented in practice will shape not only the experience of millions of visitors and viewers but also the broader economic and diplomatic impact of hosting the world's largest sporting event.

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