

Progress: Movement of Business Persons within the Greater Caribbean



The journey towards the facilitation of the movement of business persons within the Greater Caribbean Region began with the creation of the Working Group on the Issuance of Business Visas in the Greater Caribbean mandated by the 26th and 27th Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS). After its establishment the Working Group held two successful meetings in January 2013, and September 2013, which identified the obstacles to the movement of business persons in the Region, as well as exploring avenues through which these challenges could be addressed.

Since then, efforts in the facilitation of business persons have made considerable progress. During the recently concluded 29th Special Committee Meeting on Trade Development and External Economic Relations of the ACS held on 23rd September 2014 at the ACS Secretariat, representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) presented to ACS Member States a proposed “Standardized System for Facilitated Business Visa Issuance in the Greater Caribbean,” which offers to the ACS Region a viable solution for meeting the challenges posed to investor and business person mobility in the Greater Caribbean.

Why is this issue of Business Visas of such importance within the ACS Region? The issue of trade facilitation is an important one for the Member and Associate Member States of the Greater Caribbean. It involves the entire trade chain process, including all activities involved at all stages. Trade facilitation is primarily focused on reducing the complexities and barriers to trade, with a view to ensuring that all activities take place in an efficient and transparent manner.

Trade facilitation largely covers all the steps that can be taken to smooth and facilitate the flow of trade. The term has been used widely to cover all sorts of non-tariff barriers, including product

testing and impediments to labour mobility. It is in this regard that the subject of the issuance of business visas to investors and business persons within the ACS Region becomes most vital. Within the Greater Caribbean Region a number of trade facilitation concerns relate directly to the large differences and discrepancies in requirements and costs of business visas. The Region is also characterized by large migration flows however, focus has been placed more on the regulation for tourist rather than attending to the needs of business persons. The addressing of this issue proves necessary if the consolidation of an enhanced economic space for trade and investment is to be realized within the Region.

“The extent to which countries allow for the flow of immigrant business persons can have a profound impact on the formation, innovation and development of certain industries.” (IOM, 2014)

The existence of a Business Visas lends itself to:

The creation of a business environment that is focused on opening and facilitating trade.

Greater employment creation

Supporting the identification and development of new areas/sectors of Trade and Investment Interest,

Promoting the development of better policies for new areas of interest and emerging sectors for opportunity.

Providing a mechanism for better migration control

The mobility component is not a stranger to Regional Trade Agreements. Regional economic cooperation and integration is designed, generally, to strengthen the participating economies through liberalized trade. In recent decades, we have found that some agreements, while still focusing on trade-related movement, have also included chapters on investors and the movement of business persons. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) provides for the movement of persons within the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas; the North American Free Trade Area; the Pacific Alliance; as well as the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) have all viewed the movement of investors and business persons as a crucial factor/ component in their Agreements.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) provides a good example of facilitating business travellers while maintaining security. Although APEC does not grant any right of entry, it has established a scheme to facilitate the entry of business visitors under the APEC Business Travel Card Scheme. The APEC Business Travel Card is valid for three years and provides multiple short-term business entries, with stays of two or three months on each arrival. Cardholders are required to present their passports, but receive expedited airport processing and are not required to submit separate applications for business visitor visas. Participating governments commit to implement the scheme on a best endeavours basis and are free to maintain existing visa requirements for business

visitors. All governments retain the right to refuse an individual without providing reasons or to refuse entry to APEC Business Travel Card holders at the border.

Using this example as a guideline, and in order to achieve the objective of improving migration management for trade enhancement in the Greater Caribbean Region, IOM proposes the creation of an “ACS Business Travel Card Scheme.”

This project proposes to adapt previous good practices and facilitate the entry of business visitors under the “ACS Business Travel Card Scheme”. Under this scheme, an ACS Business Travel Card would be valid for three years and provide short-term business entries, with stays of maximum three months upon each arrival. Cardholders would be required to present their passports, but would receive expedited airport processing and would not be required to submit separate applications for business visitor visas. Participating governments would commit to implementing the scheme yet would be free to maintain existing visa requirements at their discretion. All governments would retain the right to refuse an individual without providing reasons, or to refuse entry of Card holders at the border.

The proposal for the creation of an ACS Business Travel Card signifies major advancement in the levels of cooperation that can be undertaken within the Greater Caribbean. It speaks directly to the ACS mandate of Cooperation and concerted action to the benefit of all Members. It affords Member States of the Association the opportunities for increased economic growth and development through the establishment of an operating environment that supports business and investment creation, and facilitates the ease of doing business.

Such an initiative also makes the Greater Caribbean Region more attractive to regional investors, and raises its competitiveness internationally. Closer to home, these strides make possible effective trade relations among ACS Member States, thus stimulating national and regional economic growth.

The ACS will continue to support and provide these initiatives, in an effort to improve regional cooperation and development, and consolidate the enhanced economic space for trade and investment within the Greater Caribbean.

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