



Canadian Association of
Professional Immigration Consultants

L'Association Canadienne des
Conseillers Professionnels en Immigration

Global VAC Issues



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Preamble

Visa Application Centres were created to assist clients applying for Canadian visas, work and study permits, and travel documents. Their services include answering questions for new applicants, securely transmitting documents and identification, collecting biometric identification data for applicants (photos and fingerprints), and advising clients on completion of forms. They are often instrumental in bridging the language gap for foreign applicants who are not fluent in English or French. Since their inception in 2000, 60 VACs have been opened in 41 countries around the world with the purpose of helping Visa Offices (VOs) provide support for visa and immigration applicants. At first, they were limited to cities with high demand, but would soon grow in number.¹

In 2003 and 2011 a series of Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs) were conducted on one VAC in New Delhi and three in Mexico to assess the risks of creating a centralized VAC network. These assessments led to a Global VAC Network Request for Proposal (Global VAC RFP). Two contractors were then awarded regional contracts to implement and operate VACs, which helped to expand VACs, centralize their operation, and establish them in new locations. Another report was conducted in 2014, which found that while VACs posed no high-level privacy risks, they did pose some low- and medium-level risks.² Three years on, and with the help of RCICs who are connected to most VACs globally, it is possible to articulate such risks in greater detail.

In our numerous meetings with IRCC senior management, one of the topics consistently raised was the risks associated with VACs. Following a request by Mr. Raymond Gabin, CAPIC has conducted extensive research on issues and inconsistencies in the services offered by VAC offices globally. The below list is by no means exhaustive, but it provides a snapshot of issues currently hindering prospective immigrants who wish to come to Canada.

VAC Issues by Country

Albania

Asked for irrelevant documents (i.e. copy of previous U.S. visa submission).

Argentina

Advised client that if he/she submitted via the VAC they would secure a pre-approval.

Armenia

Client told to have VAC clerk fill out forms rather than an RCIC.

Bangladesh

Supplied a form to the client authorizing the VAC to act on his/her behalf.

¹ IRCC, "Global Visa Application Center Network PIA: Phase two," *Government of Canada*.

² Ibid.

Cambodia

Some of their employees get remunerated for filling out the immigration form.

China (Shanghai)

Picked out documents deemed unnecessary, and demanded that the person assisting in the application complete the IMM5476 and sign as Rep; asked client to get rid of IMM5476 and Rep's cover letter; asked client to remove documents deemed unnecessary.

Colombia

Clients asked to write a letter, while those written by Reps are not accepted.

Costa Rica

Informed the client that they offer the same services as Reps but for much less money.

Dominican Republic

Refused to accept an application for TRP for the following reasons: unable to process payments or accept payment; unable to accept TRVs (they did not know what a TRP was); passport required, even in the case of a stateless individual; took application from client, re-ordered entire application, then handed it back to client indicating that the file was "out of order"; refused to serve a Haitian person.

Ecuador (Quito)

Clients asked to submit documents based on a checklist not available online; clients told to get rid of their representatives.

Guyana

Fees are charged for additional forms that VAC clerks are paid to prepare; at times they try to advise clients.

India

Separate lines for travel agents and expedited services for them; RCICs never receive updates on what is coming from High Commission.

India (Chandigarh)

Clients advised to write given name where family name is requested; agents asked for completed forms to be re-printed to give business to local print shops; extremely long lines.

India (Hyderabad)

Clients are asked to remove the Rep form IMM5476 along with Rep's cover letter.

Jamaica (Kingston)

Clerks sometimes removed documents from the application package and provided advice to clients.

Lebanon (Beirut)

Instructed several clients to remove documents deemed unnecessary; refused online payment receipts and obligated client to repay cash at the VAC; tried to sell services to clients.

Mexico

Did not know what an intra-company transferee was and refused a client submission when an intra-company transferee was requested; removed documents deemed unnecessary.

Mexico (Mexico City)

Sent clients files without processing them correctly; lost client's passport for over one month and no explanation was provided; priority given to travel agencies and representatives are disrespected.

Nigeria

Entrance fees charged to do biometrics; VFS officers claimed not to recognize consultants and suggested applicants deal directly with them; applicants requested to get rid of IMM5476 and Rep's cover letter.

Pakistan

When client is rejected he/she must go to another country to apply again (once for biometrics and again for passport submission).

Pakistan (Lahore)

Staff refused RCIC's representation and removed Use of Representative form, claiming they have instructions from visa office to do so; removed most of the supporting documents, including bank and assets-related documents.

Philippines

Removed IMM5476 despite client's insistence that they do not; removed the passport for Open Work Permit, claiming it was not necessary.

Senegal (Dakar)

After submitting a Spousal Sponsorship application, it took 5 months and 3 complaints (including program manager and regional manager) and several physical visits to return the passport with the Visa and COPR.

Singapore

Discouraged applicants from using and communicating with immigration consultants.

Taiwan

Did not accept extension request, and a new letter from the mission was needed to start processing the application.

Thailand

Asked applicant to get rid of IMM5476 and Rep's cover letter, then asked for the Rep's passport as part of the submission.

Turkey (Ankara)

Discouraged use of a representative; told applicant trying to apply for voluntarily renunciation of PR status that "there is no such a thing," and that applicant can either apply for a visa or PR there.

Ukraine (Kiev)

Requested extra documents that were neither mandatory nor beneficial or applicable to the applicant.

United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi)

Queries made regarding clients received no response despite surpassing processing time for TRV applications; delayed return of physical passport of applicant in a TRP application; clients instructed to remove documents from submissions (including IMM5476 and Cover Letters).

United Kingdom (London)

Offers premium processing for expedited decision (1-day turnaround) if applicants pay a little extra; this is posted on their website.

USA (Los Angeles)

Contradicted many IRCC guidelines and its Document Checklist.

Vietnam

Some allege that money is inserted into documents to hide transactions from security cameras; some materials are purposely removed to extract additional payments.

Solutions

From this list it is abundantly clear that VAC-associated risks are not limited to a given region or city, and that they can take the form of privacy, information, or financial risks (sometimes all at once). To mitigate against these, CAPIC proposes the following solutions:

- Require all third parties to have an authorized representative if they want to give immigration advice
- Require all third parties to display a prominent notice in their office that immigration advice can only be given by authorized person X in their office
- Contact details for regulatory bodies should also appear on the notice
- Ask DFAIT to ensure that all third-party representatives they invite to meetings are authorized

In the future we hope to see IRCC implement some if not all of these solutions to prevent further harm to the immigrants who often depend on VACs as mediators in the long, complicated immigration process. CAPIC will continue to bring forward solutions-oriented submissions with feasible proposals and recommendations to IRCC, and



advocate for the integrity of the immigration system. We ultimately support any solutions that further the latter rather than hinder it.

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