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The IBA Global Employment Institute

The Digital Nomad Report

An introduction

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The Digital Nomad Report: An introduction

Jelle Kroes, Kroes Advocaten Immigration Lawyers, Amsterdam

With the help of Ann Harten (Haworth), Marco Mazzeschi (Mazzeschi) and Gemini Deep Research

Introduction

The confluence of technological advancement and evolving work paradigms has given rise to a distinct category of worker: the digital nomad. The digital nomad is a fascinating, multifaceted phenomenon; with the *Digital Nomad Report*, the IBA Global Employment Institute intends to:

- explore a common definition of the digital nomad; and
- enable multinational companies to better understand and navigate the opportunities and issues associated with digital nomads.

The report explores the topic from three legal angles:

1. employment law;
2. tax law and social security; and
3. immigration law.

In this article, we will focus on the last aspect: immigration law. First, we will introduce the aims of the *Digital Nomad Report*.

Aim of the Digital Nomad Report

Digital nomads leverage digital technologies to perform their work remotely, often combining their professional responsibilities with the pursuit of international travel, leisure and a multi-local existence. However, the very term ‘digital nomad’ often functions as a broad label, frequently applied with a degree of looseness that belies the lack of a universally clear and consistent set of contexts, actions, practices and identities associated with this lifestyle.

When a phenomenon is not clearly defined, legislative bodies and institutions may find it challenging to categorise and address it in a systematic manner. This can result in piecemeal solutions or attempts to fit digital nomads into pre-existing, and often ill-suited, regulatory frameworks, such as the use of tourist visas for work-related activities.¹ The subsequent emergence of specific digital nomad visa schemes can be seen as a governmental response to the growing number of individuals operating within this somewhat nebulous legal space.² Furthermore, this definitional variance complicates international cooperation on issues pertinent to digital nomads, such as the harmonisation of tax regulations and social security agreements, as different jurisdictions may conceptualise and target slightly different groups under the umbrella term ‘digital nomad’.

1 Charlotte Will, Dominic Dietrich and John Lee, ‘Remote Work: Navigating Digital Nomad Visas & OECD regulations’ (Fragomen/Work From Anywhere, 27 June 2024), see <https://wfa.team/blog/remote-work-2024-digital-nomad-visas-oecd/>.

2 Mary Hanley, ‘Top 21 countries offering digital nomad visas’ (Rippling, 21 April 2025), see www.rippling.com/blog/countries-with-digital-nomad-visas.



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The *Digital Nomad Report* aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted challenges confronting digital nomads. The primary focus is on the significant hurdles encountered in navigating international work visas, understanding and complying with complex tax obligations, and managing employment law-related issues and employer responsibilities. The scope of the report encompasses an examination of these challenges, drawing upon academic research, insights from industry reports, and analyses from legal perspectives to present a thorough overview of the current landscape for digital nomads.

Academic and practical definitions and characteristics

Digital nomads are fundamentally characterised by their reliance on the internet to perform work remotely, coupled with a lifestyle of ongoing international travel and multi-local living.³ This work style is often underpinned by a quest for autonomy and self-determination, frequently manifesting as a rejection of traditional nine-to-five work schedules, daily commutes and fixed office environments.⁴ While definitions vary, some incorporate a mobility criterion. For instance, MBO Partners, in its research, stipulate a minimum of three location changes per year (excluding visits to family or friends) for an individual to be classified as a digital nomad.⁵ The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) offers a more specific definition, describing digital nomads as individuals who reside in a country different from that of their employer – often a third country distinct from their nationality.

³ See n 1 above.

⁴ M Hynes and B O'Mahony, *Defining digital nomadism: a systematic review* (2023).

⁵ '6 Challenges of the Digital Nomad Lifestyle and How to Overcome Them' (MBO Partners, 9 September 2025), see www.mbopartners.com/blog/how-manage-small-business/6-challenges-of-the-digital-nomad-lifestyle-and-how-to-overcome-them.

For the purpose of the Report, we will look only at digital nomads who reside in and work from a jurisdiction other than where the company they work for is located. They engage in work purely through telework for a limited period; typically, they do not enter the local labour market of their host country.⁶ Academic discourse emphasises that self-identification as a digital nomad and the integral use of digital technologies are essential defining characteristics, rather than mere variables.⁷ This distinction is important, as it helps differentiate digital nomads from other categories of remote workers or expatriates, a differentiation that carries significant legal and policy implications.

These and other aspects will be examined in the *Digital Nomad Report*. As a glimpse into the wide scope of the digital nomad phenomenon, this paper approaches the digital nomad from an immigration law perspective.

Digital nomad visa schemes compared

The occasion is a survey undertaken by IBA on digital nomad visa schemes. In a high-level survey conducted in 2024 (available [here](#)), 34 respondents shared details of remote work and digital nomad schemes in their country. Estonia, acknowledged as the very first country to introduce a digital nomad visa scheme, only did so as recently as 2020. Since then, dozens of countries have followed: currently there are more than 60 digital nomad visa schemes available.⁸ What do these visa schemes have in common, and how do they differ? What signifies a ‘digital nomad visa’?

The survey

The respondents were presented the following questions:

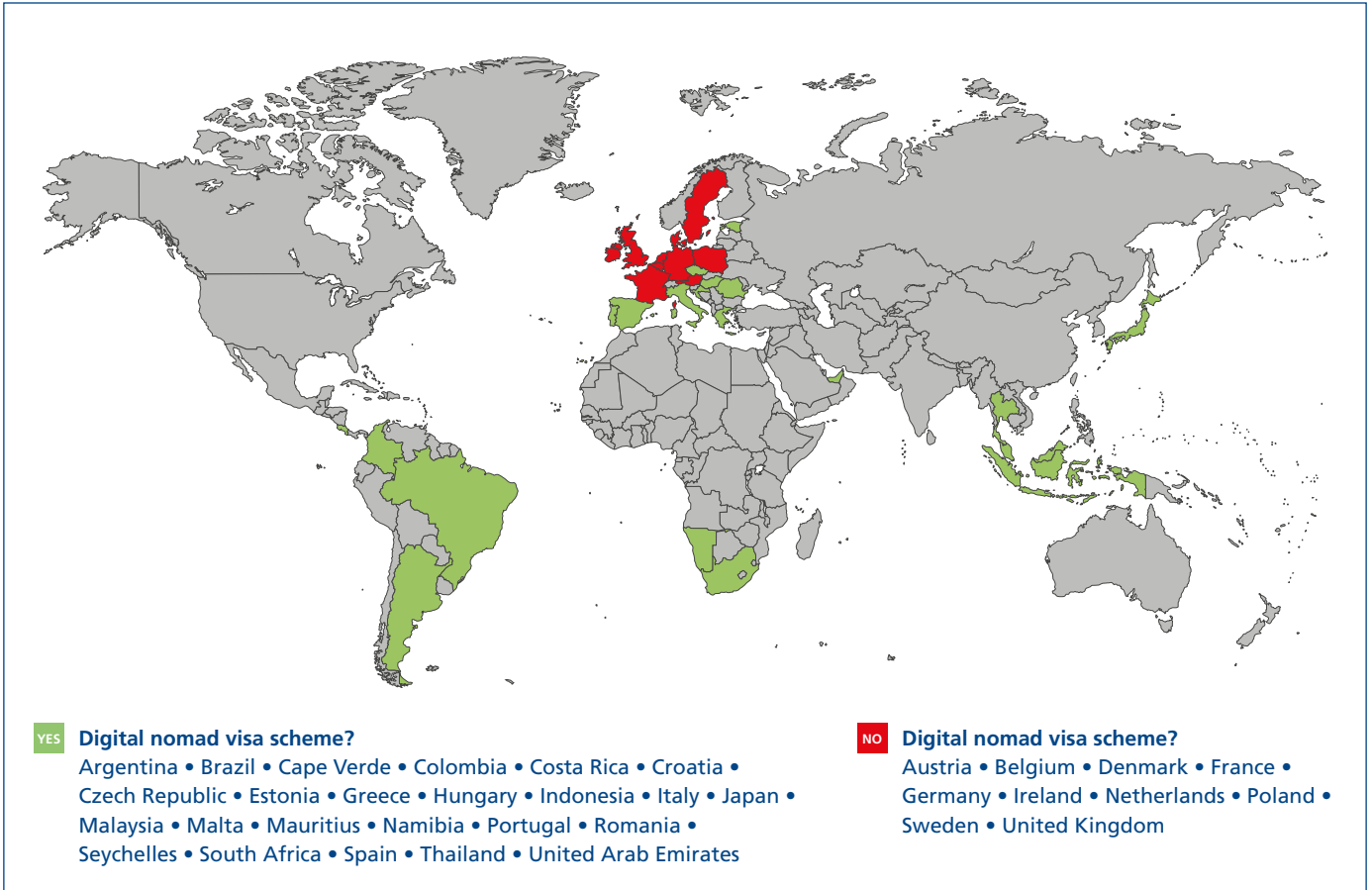
1. Availability of a specific digital nomad (DN) visa category (Yes or No)
2. Difficulty to obtain the DN visa (Easy – Medium – Hard)
3. Possibility of an in-country DN visa application (Yes or No)
4. Validity of the DN visa (Duration)
5. Renewability of the DN visa (Yes or No)
6. Further remarks

The first five questions allow for a quick comparison. Under Question 6 (Further Remarks), respondents provided more detailed information about the DN visa schemes. This information is less easy to chart and is discussed later in this report.

6 *Digital Nomads and Hybrid Work* (International Organisation of Employers, 2024). www.ioe-emp.org/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=159891&token=319e52a2beee5e0e3616a5919f2d1c418db11f0b.

7 See n 4 above.

8 ‘The Best Digital Nomad Visa to Get in 2025’ (Nomad Capitalist, 2 June 2025), see <https://nomadcapitalist.com/global-citizen/digital-nomad-visa-to-get/>.



Availability of a DN visa scheme (Question 1)

A majority of 24 out of 34 respondents said that their country has a specific DN visa scheme (see map). Respondents cover all regions except North America and Australia/New Zealand, and the DN visa countries are spread over all regions.

Difficulty of obtaining the DN visa (Question 2)

Low difficulty: 10
 Medium difficulty: 12
 High difficulty: 2
 (Total: 24)

With 22 out of 24 rated either low or medium, DN visas seem to be relatively easy to obtain.

Possibility of in-country application (Question 3)

Application can be lodged in-country: 7
 Application only at a consulate abroad: 17
 (Total: 24)

Without a comparison with other visa categories, it is hard to draw clean conclusions. In general, however, it seems that DN visa applicants are not treated substantially differently to other visa applicants.

Duration and renewability (Questions 4 and 5)

The DN visa's initial period of validity differs. It sometimes is a maximum – eg, for the duration of the foreign work contract, if it is shorter. The following varieties occur:

DN visa initially granted for (a maximum of):

90 days:	1
6 months:	6
12 months:	14
1 or 2 years:	1 (Portugal*)
1 or 3 years:	1 (Spain*)
5 years:	1
(Total:	24)

* Spain and Portugal have two modalities: an initial visa (for one year) or a residence permit (for two years and three years, respectively).

In 17 out of 24 countries the initial duration is 12 months or more. In other words, 12 months is the dominant validity period.

Regarding renewability, only two respondents answered that the DN visa is not renewable. Renewal is mostly for the same duration as the initial visa or longer. Specific conditions apply only in a few cases, such as proof that the applicant does not have a tax debt in the home country (Romania) or that the applicant must spend at least 50 per cent of their time in the country (Argentina).

Conclusions from Questions 1–5

A majority of the surveyed countries have a specific DN visa scheme (24 out of 34). Most of these DN schemes are easy (10 out of 24) or medium-easy (12 out of 24) to navigate. However, in only seven out of 24 countries can the DN visa be applied for from within the country of destination. In the other 17, the applicant must apply at a consulate abroad.

In terms of duration, an initial visa for at least one year is the dominant variety (17 out of 24 countries). In 22 out of 24 countries the DN visa is renewable, mostly without specific conditions. In the context of the Schengen area, this means that the DN status is a *residence status* as opposed to a short stay status (which, in the Schengen area, is limited to 90 days). The DN visa status would therefore lead to a build-up of rights towards eventual permanent stay.

In other jurisdictions (eg, Canada, the United States), other distinctions may be more relevant (eg, immigrant status vs non-immigrant status) but in any case DN visas seem to cater for more than just incidental stints and grant the digital nomad a perspective on a more structural setup. Whether the DN visa can eventually lead to permanent stay was not addressed in the survey, and will be interesting for further research.

Further Remarks (Question 6)

In the Further Remarks column, respondents shared certain specifics of the DN visa schemes from which we will try to deduce some general trends.

Highlights

We use Spain as an example. The Spanish DN visa scheme, introduced in 2022, is relatively straightforward (the respondent regarded it as ‘medium’ difficulty). Drawing from the survey and from internet sources, we will briefly touch upon the characteristics of the DN visa in Spain. What conditions are applicable and what is allowed with a DN visa? We’ll also make a quick comparison with the other responses.

The Spanish DN visa bears the name *visado de residencia por teletrabajo en el extranjero* (‘residence visa for the purpose of remote work abroad’). Indeed a condition is that **the source of the work** must be abroad, not in the host country. In countries with DN visa schemes we see few exceptions to this condition although, as it happens, Spain is one of them: allowing self-employed DNs to do work for local companies for up to 20 per cent of the total amount of their professional activity. Another country that, according to the respondent, allows local work is Malaysia.

The Spanish DN visa is available to both **employees and contractors/freelancers**. Most countries admit only employees to the DN visa scheme. Next to Spain, only Colombia, Malaysia, Malta and Mauritius allow freelancers. The work must be substantiated by a work contract (employees), or assignment or letter of intent (contractors). Just a few respondents mention the requirement of a written contract but we assume that this requirement widely applies across the board.

In Spain, the applicant should be using **exclusively computer telematics and telecommunication media and systems**. This reflects several other countries’ requirements.

Applicants for a Spanish DN visa must certify a prior **work history** of at least three months for a foreign-based company. If the applicant is an employee they must prove:

1. the length of the contract;
2. the explicit **consent to work remotely in Spain**; and
3. the salary.

If the applicant is self-employed they must prove:

1. the length of the contract; and
2. the terms and conditions to work remotely in Spain.

Work history is found to be a condition in many countries. Explicit consent is not mentioned by other respondents, albeit that in application forms a statement from the employer may need to include such consent.

Like most DN visa schemes, Spain applies a **minimum income condition**. This is set at 200 per cent of the monthly national minimum wage (some US\$2,415 per month). In Brazil the minimum monthly income is US\$1,500 or an available bank balance of US\$18,000 from non-Brazilian sources. In Malaysia, the threshold is US\$24,000 per year for tech talent, and US\$60,000 per year for other



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professional fields; in Indonesia the threshold is US\$60,000, and in Costa Rica it is US\$36,000 per year. In Thailand, master's degree holders must earn US\$40,000 per year, whereas non-degree holders must earn double this amount: US\$80,000 per year.

In terms of qualifications, in Spain the DN must have an undergraduate or postgraduate degree from a university, college or business school of prestige, or have at least three years of work experience in their current field of activity. None of the other respondents mentioned higher education as a requirement; only Italy requires evidence of professional experience.

Comments on the Further Remarks question

In summary, income requirements and a sufficient amount of projected work are important factors that are mentioned by most respondents. With minor exceptions, the work source must not be in the host country. The income thresholds are substantial in some cases but not to the extent that they should be prohibitive. Some countries allow independent work but most are limited to salaried employment with foreign-based companies.

Conclusions on the DN visa schemes survey and further research

The IBA survey definitely gives us some useful insights; however, since respondents were not asked to go into much detail the results remain somewhat surface level. For example, the level of difficulty of the DN visa scheme was only measured by a somewhat rough scale (low, medium and high) and without objective criteria.

As far as the further remarks are concerned, the comments seem somewhat coincidental. We would suspect, for example, that either higher education or proven professional experience would be required in more than just one or two countries. Furthermore, procedural aspects (processing time,

required paperwork) and costs involved should be expected to play a bigger role than the survey results suggest. Last but not least, most of the responses do not address the rights associated with the DN visa, like family reunification rights and the outlook on a stronger status or citizenship.

A more detailed survey addressing such aspects explicitly would lead to more concrete and useful findings. In summary, this could lead to the following overview of relevant parameters (without pretence of completeness).

Relevant aspects of DN visa schemes

1. Source of work:

- a) Only abroad or local work allowed?
- b) If also local, limitations?

2. Contractual nature:

- a) Salaried employment?
- b) Self-employed/independent work?
- c) Both employed and self-employed?

3. Limitation to working purely on remote working devices and telematics?

4. Sponsor:

- a) Sponsor required – yes/no?
- b) If so, a sponsor in the home or in the host country?
- c) Prior work history with sponsor?

5. Income:

- a) Earnings in the past? And amounts required.
- b) Projected earnings/forecast? And amounts required.
- c) Capital / bank balance required? And amounts required.

6. Qualifications:

- a) Higher education required?
- b) Work experience required?
- c) Language requirements?

7. Costs:

- a) Government fees – main applicant and/or family members?
- b) Procurement of documents and legalisations?

8. *Procedural aspects:*

- a) Waiting times, maximum number of applications?
- b) Processing times?
- c) Online or in-person process?
- d) Documents and certificates required?

9. *General limitations:*

- a) Nationals from certain countries excluded or treated more favourably?
- b) Quota?

10. *General visa requirements:*

- a) Health insurance.
- b) Adequate accommodation.
- c) Clean criminal record.

11. *Rights:*

- a) Family reunification?
- b) Building up of rights towards:
 - i. Permanent residence?
 - ii. Citizenship?
 - iii. Access to local labour market?
- c) Tax exemptions for DN visa holders?

12. *Outlook on permanent stay or naturalisation?*

Conclusion and comments

The information received from 24 countries operating DN visa schemes reveals a small number of clear, common features: a work source abroad, salaried employment, and a title of long stay as opposed to short stay. However, even this short survey reveals that the modalities of and requirements for a digital nomad visa differ considerably. A more detailed and focused survey would be required to understand how DN visa schemes operate in practice and how they can be compared effectively. The parameters for such a survey are suggested in the ‘Relevant aspects of DN visa schemes’ section.

In addition, it would be useful to have statistics, including application numbers, approval rates, countries of origin. From a policy perspective, it would also be interesting to know the government motives behind the introduction of DN visa schemes, information on enforcement and on alternative immigration avenues for digital nomads.

Last but not least, how do employers view the DN visa; as a reliable and easy-to-navigate HR instrument, or rather as a perilous remedy to accommodate unavoidable HR challenges like pressing employees' demands or acute skills shortages?

In the *Digital Nomad Report*, the IBA GEI aims to address all the relevant issues and provide useful information in order to enable multinational employers to navigate the DN phenomenon in a beneficial and sustainable manner.

Annex 1: Countries with digital nomad visa schemes

Country list	Digital nomad visa scheme?	
Argentina	Yes	
Austria		No
Belgium		No
Brazil	Yes	
Cape Verde	Yes	
Colombia	Yes	
Costa Rica	Yes	
Croatia	Yes	
Czech Republic	Yes	
Denmark		No
Estonia	Yes	
France		No
Germany		No
Greece	Yes	
Hungary	Yes	
Indonesia	Yes	
Ireland		No
Italy	Yes	
Japan	Yes	
Malaysia	Yes	
Malta	Yes	
Mauritius	Yes	
Namibia	Yes	
Netherlands		No
Poland		No
Portugal	Yes	
Romania	Yes	
Seychelles	Yes	
South Africa	Yes	
Spain	Yes	
Sweden		No
Thailand	Yes	
United Arab Emirates	Yes	
United Kingdom		No



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