
The “New Normal” Part 2: A Preliminary Producer’s Guide to Restarting Film and TV Production Internationally

Preventing and containing the COVID-19 virus continues to be one of the most significant issues affecting the entertainment and media industry today. Producers of film and television content are grappling with unprecedented domestic, state, and local safety measures and devising production plans comprised of industry-wide accepted protocols in an effort to restart productions domestically. Our previous white paper, [“The “New Normal”: A Preliminary Producer’s Guide to Restarting Film and TV Production in the US”](#) discusses in great detail the health and safety protocols producers of film and television content should consider when restarting a film or television production domestically.

Producers of international film and television content are also tasked with navigating these issues and are considering similar health and safety protocols.

This second installment addresses these safety measures, as well as additional logistical hurdles that producers should consider when devising production plans for international film and television productions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Safety Protocols

Film and television producers of content shot in whole or in part in the United States have agreed on the basic safety protocols required to prevent and contain the COVID-19 virus on sets. These safety protocols include: regular COVID-19 testing for all cast and crew, daily temperature screenings, symptom monitoring on and off sets, wearing masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE), using designated handwashing stations, social distancing and participating in health and safety trainings. An in-depth discussion of these and other safety measures can be found in our previous white paper and the [Proposed Health and Safety Guidelines for Motion Picture, Television and Streaming Productions During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) published on June 1, 2020, by the Alliance of Motion Picture and TV Producers Industry-Wide-Labor-Management Safety Committee Task Force.

Generally speaking, countries outside of the United States are instituting similar extensive and complex sets of safety protocols. Recently, the European Producers Club (EPC), one of Europe’s most prestigious industry associations representing 130 independent producers from 28 European countries and Canada, set forth eight recommendations to protect casts and crews from COVID-19 on sets: (1) social distancing; (2) self-assessment by cast and crew for COVID-19 symptoms; (3) temperature testing, including at every set entry point; (4) increased sanitation and disinfecting practices; (5) use of masks and other PPE; (6) safety training; (7) a designated COVID-19 health and safety specialist; and (8) antibody testing.

Similarly, in other countries, industry bodies are issuing their own rules and guidelines. For example, the Commercial Producers Association of South Africa has come out with non-negotiable rules that must be followed if production is to restart. These regulations include: (1) working from home when possible; (2) screening on-set employees and freelancers for COVID-19 symptoms; (3) implementing social distancing; (4) PPE; (5) hand sanitizing and/or handwashing stations; (6) people over 60 will be required to work from home; (7) meals will be individually packaged rather than in buffet form; (8) on-set make-up and hair will be reserved for the featured actors only; and (9) remote video viewing will be encouraged at a video village set up off-set, if possible.

Producers of film and television productions shooting internationally, whether partially or exclusively, must be aware of the up-to-date locally applicable safety measures such as these and should address them in written production plans.

Travel Restrictions and Considerations

The economic and social impact of COVID-19 has not been uniform internationally, leading some countries to institute strict travel restrictions to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19. Some countries have routinely imposed travel bans, while others have limited the number of entrants or

enforced quarantines upon arrival. When considering whether or not a particular country is a viable location to commence or restart a film or television production, it will be necessary for producers to stay abreast of each country's separate travel restrictions.

For example, France imposed a travel restriction limiting the entry of non-European Union nationals into France until June 15, 2020, at the earliest. Consequently, producers planning to restart or commence a film or television production in France will need to take this travel restriction into account in their production plans and to consider potential solutions such as hiring European Union citizens, where possible, or delaying principal photography until the travel restriction is lifted.

Additionally, some countries require travelers from other countries or states to self-quarantine upon arrival. For example, in Iceland, all travelers were forced to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival to Iceland, a restriction that was lifted on June 15, 2020. Now, Iceland requires every traveler to take a COVID-19 test upon arrival and can mandate that the traveler self-isolate if he/she tests positive for the virus.

Individual countries and, in some cases, regions within countries, continue to maintain separate travel restrictions and will likely continue to do so throughout the pandemic. As a result, it will be necessary for producers to keep up to date on a continuous basis regarding the restrictions applicable to the locations where productions are planned and remember that pandemic "hot spots" are moving targets. Producers may need to quickly alter production plans, monitor local outbreaks and trends, and keep cast and crew informed, as appropriate. Producers should consider advising cast and crew traveling internationally that (1) circumstances are subject to change in any particular international location, (2) travel restrictions may be imposed during travel or production, and (3) that enforced quarantine may be possible.

Generally speaking, international production plans should, if possible, minimize travel between countries, particularly back-and-forth travel. Identify local medical personnel in advance to assist with the care of cast and crew who may exhibit COVID-19 symptoms during an international production and monitor each country's public health guidance as it typically will be subject to change. Last, whenever possible, those traveling for productions should not bring family members or other non-essential personnel, and air travel should be booked only on airlines whose policies comply with the Federal Aviation Administration's regulations concerning COVID-19. United States-based air carriers and non-United States-based air carriers operating within the United States follow those regulations. The recommendations are available [here](#).

Location Shoots

As production restarts internationally, producers should consider each country's restrictions regarding locations for principal photography.

For example, Sweden allows shooting freedoms as long as protocol, guidelines, and regulations are followed, while Denmark allows shooting in public places on a case by case basis only. Other countries, including Italy, strongly encourage filming on sound stages since indoor spaces are easier to sanitize and secure safely. In contrast, production did not stop for *Children of the Corn*, which was filmed outside in a cornfield in Australia, precisely because the remote location allowed the cast to self-isolate during production.

Rebates and Incentives

While financial rebates and tax incentives are traditionally key factors considered by producers when selecting where to shoot film and television content internationally, they are especially important now. Given the increased expense of implementing the above-described health and safety protocols, the inability in many cases to procure adequate insurance to cover the cost of a possible future production shutdown caused by an outbreak of COVID-19 and the possibility of more extended principal photography periods with diminished crew and cast.

Various countries have introduced rescue measures in response, which may be helpful for producers of international film and television productions to consider. For example, Brazil and Spain (both hard hit by the pandemic) increased their rebate incentives in a bid to expand production within their borders. Spain raised the spending cap from €3 million to €10 million, increased the tax rebate for the first million Euros from 25% to 30% and from 20% to 25% for the remainder of the available rebate. Brazil will introduce its first-ever cash rebates for productions. Brazil's tax rebates will be set around 20-30% of local expenditure as long as the expenditure is at least \$500,000.

In response to COVID-19's impact on the television and film industry, additional rescue measures in Central and Eastern Europe were implemented. In Germany, the federal and state film funding agencies put together a €15 million rescue package to support production approved for funding before mid-March 2020, which were slated to commence principal photography by the end of June 2020. This package waived the reimbursement of funds already disbursed in the filming process and provided special aid for additional costs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Hungary introduced temporary tax exemptions for employers in the film industry, exempting them from social contribution taxes and vocational training contributions.

Insurance

Our previous white paper discussed potential hurdles for producers related to obtaining insurance for United States film and television productions. With respect to international film and television productions, at present, producers will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain COVID-19 related insurance coverage.

As mentioned in our previous white paper, there is a bill pending in the United States House of Representatives to create an additional fund to provide government backing for COVID-19 related insurance coverage. Many countries, including France, the UK, and Canada, are considering similar government measures to fill the gap left by insurance coverage exclusions of pandemic-related losses. In Canada, the Canadian Media Producers Association recently developed a proposal whereby producers would pay a premium to access COVID-19 coverage that would ultimately be supported by a \$100 million backstop by the government. The UK is developing a very similar insurance policy whereby the government would create a fund that could be relied upon in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak during production.

The following chart is a summary of countries that have either restarted or intend to restart production in the near future. The chart also contains entry restrictions and examples of productions currently filming in the countries noted. As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, each country's restrictions and safety protocols are subject to change. Thus, it is important for producers to confirm the rules below when considering whether or not to film in a particular international location, particularly if such consideration is made after the publication of this article.

Country	Entry Restrictions	Open for Filming?
Australia	Entrants must have a visa. If entering the country as a non-citizen, quarantine is mandatory for 14 days. Note, the Australian government is not issuing visas except under "compelling" circumstances.	Yes. Currently filming are the television show, <i>Neighbors</i> , and the film, <i>Children of the Corn</i> .
Austria	Entry is restricted to residents of the EU or Schengen area, with the caveat that residents of the UK, Portugal, and Sweden must either present a negative COVID-19 test or self-	Yes.

	quarantine for 14 days upon entry.	
Belgium	Entry is restricted to citizens from EU countries, Schengen Area and the UK.	Yes.
Bulgaria	Entry into the country is prohibited through at least June 30. As of June 18, permanent residents of the EU countries, Schengen Area and the UK are permitted entry. There is a mandatory quarantine for 14 days upon entry.	
Canada	Foreign nationals from the United States will only be allowed into the country for “non-discretionary travel.” Foreign nationals from other countries will not be allowed into the country, except under certain exemptions.	Productions will likely resume (including the CW’s <i>Riverdale</i> and <i>The Good Doctor</i>) after July 1, 2020.
China	Foreign nationals are not allowed entry into China.	Yes, since April 9, 2020, but filming is limited to commercials.
Czech Republic	Until May 15, 2020, it is recommended (although not completely prohibited) that non-European citizens remain out of the country. A quarantine or certificate of health is required in some cases based on the risk level of the country the traveler arrived from.	Yes.
Denmark	Denmark’s borders are closed to most foreign nationals, though travelers arriving from Germany, Iceland, and Norway are now permitted as of June 15.	Yes.
France	Travel from the EU and Schengen countries, excluding Spain, is permitted. The travel from the UK and other foreign countries is still prohibited.	Yes. Unscripted shows are in production. Netflix, Amazon, and a few French productions are planning to restart production of scripted shows, including <i>Voltaire</i> , <i>Mixte</i> and <i>Arsene Lupin</i> .
Germany	As of June 15, 2020, borders are again open for all residents of the European Union, Schengen countries and associated countries Norway, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Iceland and the UK, with the exception of Spain’s residents, whose travel remains restricted to Germany until June 21, 2020.	Yes.

	<p>Other foreign nationals are only allowed entry for urgent reasons (film production work is not sufficient).</p> <p>Mandatory 14-day quarantine applies to incoming passengers from risk countries as defined and regularly updated by the Robert-Koch-Institute (RKI).</p>	
Hong Kong	Foreign nationals will not be allowed entry until September 18, 2020. Hong Kong residents and non-Hong Kong residents coming from mainland China, Macau, or Taiwan are required to quarantine for 14 days after arrival.	The government has said productions may commence in early June, but it appears that filming has remained stalled. The feature film <i>Blossoms</i> plans to restart production in July.
Iceland	While all entrants were required to have a 14-day quarantine, that restriction was lifted on June 15. Entrants are now required to take a COVID-19 test upon arrival. If the entrant tests positive, a mandatory 14 day quarantine will be required.	Yes. Filming is allowed. The Netflix show, <i>Katla</i> , is currently in production.
Italy	Travelers from certain European countries (those in the European Union, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, UK, Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City) can enter into Italy without mandatory quarantine upon arrival. Travelers from other countries must show, upon arrival, proof of the particular need to be in Italy and must self-isolate for 14 days under the supervision of local health authorities.	Yes, in the Lazio Region only.
Malaysia	All foreign nationals are restricted from entering the country, with limited emergency exceptions, until at least August 31, 2020.	Yes.
Netherlands	Until July 1, 2020, only nationals of the European Union, Schengen, and the United Kingdom are allowed entry into the country with certain specific exceptions for diplomats.	Yes.
New Zealand	The border is closed to foreign nationals.	Yes. <i>Avatar</i> and <i>Poppy</i> have commenced production.
Norway	The border is closed to all foreign nationals, except that on	Yes.

	June 15, 2020, Norway and Denmark opened their countries to each other.	
South Africa	Entry is restricted. All airports are closed to commercial flights.	Yes. Local filming has restarted, but there is no international filming until the tourism sector reopens.
South Korea	Mandatory 14 day quarantine for all incoming passengers. Travelers coming from certain regions in China are not allowed to enter.	Yes, including Netflix productions <i>Love Alarm</i> and <i>Move to Heaven</i> .
Spain	Entry is restricted to citizens/legal residents of the European Union or Schengen countries.	Yes.
Sweden	Entry is restricted to citizens of the European Economic Area and Switzerland until June 30, 2020.	Yes.
Switzerland	Entry is free for Schengen countries, and possibly for nationals of the United Kingdom and Ireland as of June 15, 2020. Entry restrictions continue for all others.	Yes
United Kingdom	Entry is permitted. However, it is important to note that if a visa is required in order to work, most visa centers outside the UK remain closed making it extremely difficult, if not impossible for visas to be obtained. In certain circumstances, non-visa nationals (including US nationals) may be able to enter as visitors or under the Tier 5 creative category (requires company sponsorship but no visa application for stays of less than 3 months). Mandatory 14-day self-isolation upon entry is required.	Yes, including <i>Jurassic World: Dominion</i> , which will resume filming on July 6.

Each country’s film and safety protocols are changing weekly—if not daily—as the industry navigates the changes brought on by the COVID-19 crisis. Below are a few links that will be helpful in staying up to date on filming and travel restrictions internationally.

Travel:
<https://reopen.europa.eu/en>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

Filming:
<https://afci.org/global-production-alert/>