

Mobility: Immigration alert

March 2023



South Africa

Changes expected to address visa application backlogs and processing times

Executive summary

On 14 March 2023, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) presented an update to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs regarding the current backlogs in visa application processing and issuance. They also announced upcoming changes to the South African immigration framework and regulations to address the backlogs.

Background

The DHA attributed the backlog in visa processing, which dates as far back as 2016, to several factors, including a shortage of adequately trained resources, an exercise by the DHA to curb corruption, a complex visa application process which involves five stages of review, and travel restrictions imposed following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of 14 March 2023, 49,529 permanent residence permit applications were pending adjudication, of which 40,365 were backlog cases. Further, 75,814 temporary residence visa applications were pending adjudication as of that date, of which 55,173 were filed more than eight weeks prior.

Key developments

To address the backlogs, the DHA announced that the following changes are expected in the near future:

- ▶ A restructuring of the visa application adjudication system to simplify and shorten the process.
- ▶ An expansion of the E-Visa regime to individuals who apply to obtain long-term work visas (e.g., Critical Skills Visas and General Work Visas) and Long-term Business Visas.

Currently, the E-Visa system is only available only for short-term visitor visas, such as tourist visas.

- ▶ The deployment of at least 18 additional DHA officials to adjudicate visa applications from within South Africa by the end of March 2023 and at least 61 DHA officials to South African embassies and consulates abroad by the end of June 2023 to assist with application processing. These 61 officials are undergoing training and will support with clearing the backlog from within South Africa from March until June.

Impact on employers

The backlog is expected to take 15 months or more to be cleared. In the long term, the changes announced by the DHA can benefit employers by streamlining the immigration process for their employees and reducing backlogs and processing times.

Key steps

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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