



Global Immigration alert

August 2024

Panama

Changes to the SEM Visa application process

Executive summary

Panama's General Directorate of Multinational Company Headquarters recently implemented changes to the "Sedes de Empresas Multinacionales" (SEM) Visa application process for applicants and their dependents.

Background

[SEM Visas](#) are available to foreign nationals who work for multinational companies located in Panama that have a valid Multinational Company License, as well as their dependents. These visas allow holders to work and reside in Panama for an initial period of up to five years and can be renewed indefinitely for up to five years each time. Holders may also apply for permanent residence after the expiry of their initial SEM Visa.

Key developments

The following changes were introduced effective 24 July 2024:

- ▶ Foreign nationals (and their dependents) who seek to apply for SEM Visas can no longer file their applications outside Panama and must be in Panama to begin the application process, in line with the general process that was in place before the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, Panama had temporarily suspended this requirement and allowed individuals to file SEM Visa applications from outside Panama. This relaxation has now been removed.
- ▶ Individuals who are nationals of [restricted countries](#) and seek to apply for SEM Visas must submit their applications directly to the Secretariat of Multinational Company Headquarters, without applying for prior review and entry authorization from the Security Council.

Impact on employers

The suspension of the requirement to obtain prior authorization from the Security Council is expected to shorten the time required for eligible individuals to obtain entry authorization. Employers may inform impacted employees of the requirement to file SEM Visa applications within Panama and update their internal policies to minimize business disruptions.

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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