

Global Immigration alert

October 2024



South Africa

South Africa announces five-year plan to digitize immigration services

Executive summary

On 30 September 2024, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) announced a five-year plan to further digitize its immigration processes to enhance services and strengthen security.

Key developments

DHA Minister Dr Leon Scheiber announced that the goal of the "Home Affairs @ Home" project is to make the DHA a "digital first" department by 2029 and ensure that "no one has to visit a Home Affairs office in-person again to access routine services." The Minister announced the following changes:

- ▶ **New Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) system:** South Africa will launch a new ETA system for foreign nationals, who will no longer be required to obtain paper-based visas. To obtain an ETA, individuals will first need to register themselves on a secure online platform and submit their biometrics to the DHA. ETA applications will be processed automatically and instantly, and manual reviews will be conducted only in cases of irregularities. Applicants will be issued a unique digital code, which they will need to present, along with their biometrics, upon arrival in South Africa for verification. Those who seek to extend their stay or change their status will be able to apply through the same platform, and these applications will also be adjudicated instantly. The ETA will initially apply to short-term visitors, with plans to eventually extend it to long-term visa holders.
- ▶ **Enhanced application process:** Individuals will be able to apply for various documents (e.g., passports, birth and marriage certificates) via a new secure online platform,

which will utilize their biometric information to verify their identity. Applications submitted via this platform will be processed automatically, and manual reviews will be conducted only in cases of irregularities. The DHA will mail the final documents to applicants' homes, regardless of whether they are in South Africa or abroad. Digital versions of these documents will also be available on the online platform and authorized mobile apps.

- ▶ **Security:** The DHA will strengthen the security of its processes and platforms using an automated risk engine (a software tool to assess and mitigate risk). The risk engine will utilize individuals' biometric information, national and global databases, and travel authorization information from South Africa's Border Management Authority to identify fraud in various situations (e.g., use of fraudulent documents, or of the same documents in multiple applications). The risk engine will cross-check whether visa applicants are included in national or international criminal databases before issuing a decision. The engine will also facilitate swift verification of the status of foreign nationals in South Africa and notify immigration officials in real time if a visitor has not exited the country before the expiry of their authorization.

Impact on employers

This scheme is expected to benefit employers by streamlining the travel and immigration processes for foreign employees.

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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