

Global Immigration alert

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South Africa

South Africa publishes official immigration processing times for the 2026 to 2027 period

Executive summary

The South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has recently published its service turnaround times for visa, permit and related immigration applications for the 2026 to 2027 period. The published processing times apply to applications submitted within South Africa and are effective from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027. The circular supersedes all previously published turnaround times.

The publication provides greater transparency regarding expected processing periods and establishes the service delivery benchmarks against which the DHA will measure immigration processing performance for the 2026 to 2027 period.

Key developments

The DHA has confirmed that all turnaround times are calculated in working days only. Weekends and South African public holidays are excluded, and the South African calendar will be used exclusively to determine processing periods.

Key visa processing times include:

- Critical Skills Visas (including Trusted Employer Scheme applications): Four weeks
- General Work Visas (including Trusted Employer Scheme applications): Four weeks
- Business Visas: Eight weeks
- Port of Entry Visas (TTOS): Five days
- Port of Entry e-Visas: 10 days

Additional temporary residence visa categories include:

- Visitor's Visas (Sections 11(1) and 11(2)): 60 days
- Exchange Visas: 60 days
- Study Visas: 60 days
- Medical Treatment Visas: 60 days
- Crew Visas: 60 days
- Relative's Visas: 120 days
- Retired Person Visas: 120 days
- Treaty Visas: 120 days

The DHA has also published processing times for permanent residence permits and related services, including:

- Permanent residence permits under Sections 26(a), 27(b) and 27(c): Eight months
- Permanent residence applications for spouses, dependents, quota workers, refugees, retirees and financially independent persons: 240 days
- Appeals under Sections 8(4) and 8(6): 180 and 240 days respectively
- Visa waiver applications: 120 days
- Permit waiver applications: 240 days

Service standards for business-related immigration services include:

- Visa transfers: 30 days
- Rectifications of visas and permits: 30 days
- Visa verifications: 40 days
- Permit verifications: 90 days
- Proof of permit requests: 90 days
- Permit withdrawals: 90 days
- Visa cancellations: 90 days

Impact on employers

The publication of official processing times provides employers and foreign nationals with greater certainty when planning assignments, hiring and employee relocations to South Africa. While the four-week processing target for Critical Skills and General Work Visa applications supports workforce planning, employers should continue to apply early, as document preparation, legalization and appointment scheduling remain outside the published timelines.

Overall, the publication of processing standards is a positive step toward greater transparency and predictability in South Africa's immigration system. However, employers should continue to plan proactively to ensure compliance, accommodate unexpected delays and minimize potential business disruption.

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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