

Global Immigration alert

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South Africa

South Africa launches phase two of the Trusted Employer Scheme

Executive summary

As part of its efforts to attract skilled talent and streamline immigration processes, South Africa has launched phase two of the Trusted Employer Scheme (TES). On 20 July 2026, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) opened expressions of interest for admission to the scheme, inviting qualifying employers to apply.

Key developments

Phase two broadens the scheme's scope to include infrastructure projects, companies operating or establishing regional or global headquarters in South Africa, and qualifying financial sector entities under the Synthetic Financial Centre (SFC) pathway.

Expressions of interest are open from 20 July 2026 to 4 September 2026. Application outcomes are expected to be issued within 30 working days after the closing date. Qualifying employers may benefit from priority visa processing and reduced documentary requirements. Applicants must apply under a single pathway and achieve a minimum score of 80 points.

The three application pathways are:

- *South Africa-based operations:* Points are awarded for investment, employment, economic sector participation and skills development.
- *Regional or global head offices:* Points are awarded for local presence, financial contribution, employment and economic sector participation.
- *Synthetic Financial Centres:* Points are awarded for the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) exchange control authorization or approval in principle, recognized regulatory standing, SFC market infrastructure commitment, SFC VFO certification and a skills transfer commitment.

The scheme is intended to support South Africa's ability to attract skilled talent and manage immigration by facilitating visa applications for senior executives, technical personnel, corporate employees and investors. It is not intended to support the employment of unskilled or low-wage workers.

The DHA has also positioned phase two as part of its broader digital transformation agenda, with a dedicated online application process that is expected to be integrated into the Electronic Travel Authorisation platform.

Impact on employers

TES phase two offers qualifying employers a streamlined route to secure priority visa processing with reduced documentary requirements, provided they meet the scheme's eligibility criteria, including a minimum score of 80 points. Employers should evaluate the most suitable pathway and prepare supporting evidence relating to investment, local employment, tax contributions, sector classification and skills development. For multinational companies with significant operations or investments in South Africa, the scheme may facilitate the deployment of key foreign talent. Employers considering participation in TES phase two should:

- Assess eligibility and identify the most appropriate TES pathway.
- Compile supporting documentation aligned to the selected scorecard.
- Submit an expression of interest through the DHA TES portal by 4 September 2026.
- Prepare for the interdepartmental review process and, if approved, the conclusion of a memorandum of agreement with the DHA.

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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