



IMMIGRATION DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MENA REGION

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United Arab Emirates

05 October 2022 – Employment Residence Permit Validity Reduced to Two Years for Applicants in Free Zones

Effective immediately, applicants in free zones are no longer eligible for a UAE employment residence permit with a three-year validity; instead, the maximum validity they now can opt for is two years. Similarly, dependent family members of foreign nationals employed by companies in free zones are now issued a residence permit with a maximum validity of two years. Upon completing the UAE immigration process, foreign nationals will be issued an Emirates Identity Card with the validity corresponding to the validity of their residence permit.

This stems from the recent [amendment of immigration regulations](#) which provide that the UAE residence permit can be issued with a validity of one, or two years, unless the applicant is eligible for a Green Visa or a Golden Visa in which case the permit may be obtained for up to five, or 10 years, respectively.

The employment residence permit allows for long-term work authorization in the United Arab Emirates, and its validity depends on the following factors:

- if sponsored by an employer, the location of the sponsoring entity (i.e.: free zone vs mainland); and
- if self-sponsored, the category of the visa the individual applies for (e.g.: a Green Visa, or a Golden Visa).

Individual circumstances, such as the applicant's age, may impact the maximum validity of the permit that will be granted. The validity of a resident permit issued for a dependent family member typically match the validity of the principal visa.

Historically, most free zones in the United Arab Emirates issued employment residence permits with a three-year validity, compared to two years in the mainland.

05 September 2022 - Visa-Free Entry in Effect for Nationals of Georgia

Effective immediately, nationals of Georgia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are eligible for a visa-free entry into each other's country for stays of up to 90 days for tourism. This stems from a bilateral agreement signed by the governments of both countries earlier this year.

Nationals of Georgia must have a passport valid for a minimum six months from an intended date of entry into the UAE, valid health insurance and a return or onward ticket. Those travelling for other purposes, including study or work, must obtain a relevant visa in advance.

07 September 2022 -An Advanced Visa System Program Announced

The Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Port Security (FAICCPs) announced the launch of an Advanced Visa System program to support practical implementation of the new UAE immigration regulations.

According to the announcement, the Advanced Visa System consolidates an electronic platform for visa applications with [recently amended immigration regulations](#) that have introduced new visa categories and brought other changes to the UAE immigration landscape. The Advanced Visa System is currently in its trial phase which is expected to end on October 3, 2022.

It is anticipated that applicants seeking to obtain visas from the [newly introduced visa schemes](#), including the Green Visa, will not be able to apply until October 3, 2022. However, it is not clear if the FAICCPs will introduce a completely new visa platform or if the portal that is currently in use will be upgraded.

The new UAE immigration regulations were published on July 15, 2022 and have come into force on September 5, 2022. Since then, no decision amending the effective date of the regulations has been published.

14 September 2022 - Relaxed Conditions of Medical Fitness for Residency Purposes

The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates has relaxed certain conditions related to medical fitness requirements for residency purposes, including residency for work. According to the new rules, foreign nationals testing positive for HIV may now be eligible for residency in the UAE.

The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has amended certain conditions of medical fitness requirements for residency purposes, including residency for work.

According to the new rules, foreign nationals testing positive for HIV may now be eligible for residency in the UAE, subject to an approval by the Minister of Health and Prevention or another relevant authority in the country. Previously, such individuals would automatically be denied residency.

Additionally, those testing positive for Hepatitis B or C (the test is mandatory for applicants in specific professions) may still qualify for a residence permit if they change the purpose of their residency to a category that does not require testing for Hepatitis.

Previously, they had 14 days to update residency category whereas now they have up to 30 days.

All other provisions related to medical fitness for residency purposes remain unchanged, including the possibility of obtaining a one-year conditional residency for individuals testing positive for Pulmonary Tuberculosis.

Foreign nationals seeking residency, including residency for work in the UAE, are subject to medical fitness and other tests when applying for a new residence permit, and upon renewing their existing permits. The following table indicates the scope of the testing:

Test	Categories of Applicants	Application Type
HIV	All applicants	New residence permit and renewal of residence permit
Hepatitis B	Babysitters, housemaids, kindergarten and nursery employees	
Hepatitis C	Workers at barber shops, beauty salons and health clubs, workers at health facilities	
Pulmonary Tuberculosis	All applicants	
Leprosy	All applicants	
Syphilis	Babysitters, housemaids, kindergarten and nursery employees, workers at barber shops, beauty salons and health clubs, workers at health facilities	
Pregnancy	Domestic workers, including babysitters and female drivers	

Saudi Arabia

06 September 2022 – More Categories of Foreign Nationals Now Eligible for an E-Visa for Tourism

Effective immediately, foreign nationals are eligible to apply for an electronic visa (e-visa) for tourism in Saudi Arabia based on their residency status in one of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states. Additionally, those with a valid residence, tourist or business visa issued by a Schengen Member State, the United Kingdom, or the United States can obtain their e-visa for tourism upon arrival in Saudi Arabia.

The e-visa costs SAR 300 and it is for a single- or multiple-entry. It is valid for 90 days or one year, allowing a maximum duration of stay of 30 days or 90 days respectively. It is not clear if visa extensions are permissible.

The applicant must have a residence visa issued by a GCC country (i.e.: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, or the United Arab Emirates) valid for at least three months from the date of e-visa application and must be from one of the approved professional occupations listed on the [electronic platform](#) for visa application; this condition is to mitigate the use of this visa for other purposes.

Those applying for the e-visa upon arrival in Saudi Arabia based on a residence, business, or tourist visa issued by a Schengen Member State country, the United Kingdom, or the United States must have entered the visa-issuing country at least once prior to travelling to Saudi Arabia.

In any case, the applicant must have a valid health insurance for Saudi Arabia.

Since 2019, nationals of 49 countries can apply for an e-visa for tourism [electronically](#) or upon arrival through an e-visa kiosk at select airports. They are issued a one-year visa for multiple entries and with a maximum allowable duration of stay of 90 days in Saudi Arabia.

Individuals who are not eligible for the electronic visa must apply in person at a Saudi consular post abroad.

Qatar

22 September 2022 - Restrictions on Entry During 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar Announced

The Ministry of Interior of Qatar announced the suspension of entry to Qatar for all visitors not attending the FIFA World Cup tournament, from November 1, 2022, until December 23, 2022. To attend the tournament, individuals must obtain a 'Hayya Card'.

The suspension of entry applies to individuals entering by land, air and marine borders; however, it does not apply to the following categories of individuals:

- Nationals of Qatar
- Nationals of GCC countries holding a Qatari Identity Card
- Foreign residents holding a Qatari Identity Card
- Holders of personal recruitment visas
- Holders of a work entry permit

Additionally, entry will be permitted in emergency situations, subject to the approval of the relevant government authorities.

It is expected that the restriction will be lifted on December 23, 2022.

All FIFA World Cup attendees must obtain a Hayya Card, which substitutes for an entry visa to Qatar and allows foreign nationals to remain in the country until January 23, 2023. Currently, only those who have purchased a match ticket are eligible to apply for the Hayya Card. To apply for the card, [please click here](#).

Bahrain

05 September 2022 – New Visa for Training Purposes Announced

The Nationality, Passports and Residence Affairs Authority announced the introduction of a multiple-entry electronic visa (e-visa) for training purposes which allows a trainer or a trainee to stay in Bahrain for up to six months.

The visa costs BHD 60 and is extendable for additional six months. Applicants can apply [online](#) by providing a letter from a host entity in the private or government sector outlining the purpose and scope of the training, in addition to other details. Further details about the visa are expected to be available in the coming weeks.

Oman

28 September 2022 – Digitalization of Residence Permit Sticker

The Royal Oman Police has discontinued the use of the residence permit sticker endorsed in passports, which foreign nationals receive as proof of residence status in Oman. Instead, foreign nationals will receive a digital copy of their residence permit and a Residence Identity Card which will serve as proof of their residency.

With immediate effect, foreign nationals applying for a residence permit in Oman will no longer be issued a printed residence permit sticker endorsed in their passport. Instead, foreign nationals will receive a digital copy of their residence permit and a Residence Identity Card which will serve as proof of their residency. The aim of this change is to facilitate the digital transformation and reduce administrative procedures.

Kuwait

02 September 2022 - Temporary Suspension of Family Residence Visas

Following the temporary suspension of family visit and tourist visas, Kuwait's Ministry of Interior has also suspended the issuance of family residence visas until further notice.

As a part of the restructuring efforts of Kuwait's regulatory framework, the Ministry of Interior has temporarily suspended the issuance of family residence visas until further notice, alongside [family visit visas and tourist visas](#). Eligible foreign nationals may enter Kuwait on an [e-visa or visa-on-arrival](#) or a valid residence permit. No further details have been announced regarding when the suspensions will be lifted.

Iraq

26 September 2022- Delays Expected in the Processing of Immigration Applications for Companies in Oil and Gas Sector

Employers in the oil and gas sector should expect delays in immigration application processing, following the Federal Supreme Court's ruling to invalidate the Iraq Cabinet's decision that established the Iraq National Oil Company.

The Federal Supreme Court has issued a ruling invalidating the Iraq Cabinet's decision that established the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) on the basis that the decision was unconstitutional. As a result, the INOC, which was established two years ago, will no longer be permitted to operate. The INOC was part of the Ministry of Oil and played an important role in the immigration process as a liaison between oil and gas companies and the Ministry of Interior for issuance of visa invitation letters and other approvals.

It is expected that the Ministry of Oil will establish new mechanisms for private sector companies and government agencies responsible for visa approval to liaise with each other now that the INOC will no longer be operating. This is likely to take a significant amount of time, and, combined with the current political unrest in Iraq, may negatively affect immigration processes for companies in the oil and gas sector by lengthening processing times for related visas and creating uncertainty around how the new processes will operate. Additionally, companies with oil and gas contracts approved by INOC may be required to redraft their contracts to meet new criteria and resubmit them to a new body within the Ministry of Oil.

Middle East

05 September 2022- Special Visa Programs Announced for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Attendees to Facilitate Regional Travel

Governments of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia announced special visa programs for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 attendees holding a Hayya Card. Under these programs, attendees will be eligible for a multiple-entry visa to visit United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia.

Governments of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia announced special visa programs for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 attendees holding a Hayya Card. The World Cup tournament will be hosted in Qatar from November 20 to December 18, 2022. Under these programs, attendees will be eligible for a multiple-entry visa to visit United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia without the condition of first having to enter Qatar. Foreign nationals seeking to apply for this visa under each program must first obtain a [Hayya Card](#), which can be applied for once World Cup tickets are purchased. More details on each visa program are below:

	United Arab Emirates	Saudi Arabia
Number of Entries	Multiple	Multiple
Maximum Duration of Stay	90 days	60 days
Possibility of Extension	Yes	Yes
Main Eligibility Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 ticket • Hayya Card • Health insurance for the visiting country 	
Application Process	Online	Online (details TBC)
Visa Fee	AED 100	TBC

Foreign nationals can apply for the visa for the United Arab Emirates starting November 1, 2022. It is not clear when the application process in Saudi Arabia will commence;

however, individuals who have obtained the visa will be allowed to enter Saudi Arabia 10 days before the tournament starts.

26 September 2022- Additional Special Visa Programs Announced to Facilitate Regional Travel for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar

The governments of Oman and Jordan announced special visa programs for individuals holding Hayya Cards who are attending the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Under these programs, attendees will be eligible for a multiple-entry visa to visit Oman and Jordan

The governments of Oman and Jordan announced special visa programs for individuals attending the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, which lasts from November 20 to December 18, 2022. The programs are similar to those introduced [by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia](#).

Under these programs, attendees who have obtained a [Hayya Card](#), after they have purchased World Cup tickets will be eligible for a multiple-entry visa to visit Oman or Jordan without having to first enter Qatar. Individuals must ensure that they have health insurance valid in the country they are visiting. Further, under Oman's program, individuals will be able to stay in the country for up to 60 days and the visa will be issued at no charge; related information has not yet been released for Jordan's program. It is not yet clear when the new visa programs for either country will open for applications.

ABOUT FRAGOMEN

Fragomen is the world's leading single-focus provider of immigration services and support. Our firm is comprised of law practices and immigration consultancies that work together to support our clients across all regions globally. At Fragomen, we leverage our collective immigration experience to offer clients targeted and trusted solutions that help them achieve their local, regional and worldwide business goals.

Fragomen's team of dedicated immigration professionals has extensive experience in working with multinational businesses, local employers, start-ups and individual investors. We have a deep understanding of the region and maintain strong professional relationships with immigration authorities. Our MENA immigration team is supported on a global basis by over 3,800 immigration professionals in more than 50 offices worldwide. Together, we provide comprehensive immigration support in over 170 countries.

All we do is immigration, a sole focus that makes a considerable difference. Unlike many other providers, all of our thinking, passion and resources are dedicated to improving the immigration experiences of our clients and their employees. We have the track record, region specific experience and know-how to provide you with a streamlined and compliant immigration solution.

Visit our website www.fragomen.com or contact us at dubaiinfo@fragomen.com to learn more about our company and services.