



MIDDLE EAST UPDATES

FRAGOMEN

FRAGOMEN MONTHLY MENA NEWSLETTER: INSIGHTS ON IMMIGRATION, CORPORATE, AND SOCIAL SECURITY SERVICES IN THE MENA REGION

United Arab Emirates

10 October 2024 - Golden Visa Forthcoming for Outstanding Individuals in Private Education Institutions in Dubai

Effective October 15, 2024, outstanding individuals who have demonstrated exceptional performance and made significant contributions to Dubai's private education sector will be eligible for a Dubai Golden Visa. This applies to heads of academic departments, full-time faculty members, senior administrators at universities, as well as principals, teachers and managers of schools and nurseries. In addition, close family members of Golden Visa holders are eligible to apply for a Golden Visa (with the same duration as that of the principal visa holder's residency period).

Private educational institutions can submit nominations to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). If the KHDA approves the nomination, the applicant can then initiate the visa process with relevant Dubai immigration authorities. The annual nomination period will run from mid-October to mid-December.

18 October 2024 - Launch of a New National Economic Registry Platform

The UAE Ministry of Economy has introduced a new national economic [registry](#) platform called 'Growth', a unified database of enterprise and business licenses across the seven emirates. This innovative platform aims to streamline procedures and requirements for establishing businesses and conducting economic activities. The platform offers access to data on over 2,000 economic activities, allowing investors and entrepreneurs to inquire about business licenses and investment opportunities. The platform will be continually updated with commercial license data and is positioned to support sustainable growth in strategic sectors. There are plans to expand the platform by linking it with 100 federal and local entities, increasing the number of services offered to 500 over the next two years.

29 October 2024 – New Regulations for Blue Residency Visa for Environmental Leaders and Innovators

The United Arab Emirates has announced the eligibility requirements for its Blue Residency Visa, including provisions for visa holders to sponsor family members and domestic workers. This visa type – which will grant visa holders a right to reside in the country for up to 10 years (renewable) – is not yet in effect, and authorities are yet to clarify when the permit type will be available.

The Blue Residency Visa is likely to increase the attraction and long-term retention of talented individuals in the environmental, climate change, sustainability or renewable energy sectors.

01 November 2024 - Amnesty Program Extended for Foreign Nationals in Irregular Status

The Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Ports Security has extended the UAE visa amnesty program for two months, now set to conclude on December 31, 2024.

06 November 2024 - Economic Substance Reporting No Longer Required

Companies no longer need to provide Economic Substance Reports for financial years from 2023 onwards. However, they must still file such reports for any financial years from 2019 to 2022, if they have not already done so.

QATAR

30 October 2024 – New Qatarization Fines and Details Announced

Effective March 1, 2025, Qatar will introduce a new comprehensive Qatarization law. The new legislation will introduce new non-monetary and monetary sanctions for non-compliance with Qatarization in the private sector, with fines ranging from QAR 10,000 to QAR 100,000 (increasing for repeated violations). Additionally, the law will establish a mechanism for classifying which companies are subject to Qatarization, and mandatory policies for hiring and training Qatari nationals. Qatari authorities are expected to announce further regulatory guidelines soon. This policy development follows a general trend of more comprehensive and strict labor nationalization throughout the Middle East (including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). It is expected to drive increased compliance with Qatarization regulations, ensuring that businesses prioritize hiring and development of Qatari nationals.

SAUDI ARABIA

08 October 2024 – Temporary Suspension of Consulate Services in Beirut

Effective immediately, the Saudi Consulate in Beirut has temporarily suspended operations. As part of this, the consulate has temporarily ceased processing visa

applications, and has redirected processing of degree attestations to Saudi consular offices in Jordan.

16 October 2024 – Foreign Worker Wage Insurance Protection Program Launched

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has introduced a program called the Expatriate Worker Wage Insurance Scheme, which aims to protect foreign workers in the private sector from salary defaults by their employers. Under the program, if an employer fails to pay 80% or more of their workers' wages for six months, the insurance will cover up to six months of unpaid wages and provide a travel ticket for those wishing to return to their country of origin. The maximum compensation per worker is SAR 17,500. This is part of the government's efforts to protect worker rights, as part of the Saudi Vision 2030 initiative.

24 October 2024 – Substantial Processing Delays and New Requirements at Saudi Consular Posts in Egypt

Recent staffing changes and new processes at various Saudi consular posts in Egypt have led to significantly longer visa processing times, with approvals now taking 10-20 calendar days – up from the previous five to seven calendar days. The new procedural changes, which have been implemented without notice, include stricter review of documentation; new limits on how many submissions a third-party representative can submit; and more frequent rejection or return of applications without clear reasons. Applicants and employers should anticipate significant delays in Saudi visa processing in Egypt. To minimize the risk of rejections or additional delays, applicants should carefully review their applications and supporting documents before submission.

04 November 2024 - Amendments to Temporary Work and Seasonal Visa Regulations Forthcoming

Starting early 2025, holders of the Temporary Work Visa will be subject to a shorter duration of stay of 90 days (down from the current 180-day duration). As is currently the case, such visa holders will still be able to apply for a further 90-day extension. Additionally, Temporary Work Visa for Umrah and Hajj Services holders will be allowed to enter and stay only within specific dates throughout the pilgrimage season, which are determined by the Islamic calendar (currently, the maximum allowable duration of stay is set at four months during the pilgrimage season). Eligibility for this visa category will be limited to nationals of specific countries to ensure geographic diversity. In addition, the amended regulations provide for close coordination between the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and other government agencies, setting specific timeframes for issuing approvals and recommendations by the authorities involved in the visa process. Finally, violators of immigration rules will face stricter penalties for infringements, starting at SAR 5,000 for minor violations and increasing to SAR 50,000 (whereas currently, the maximum fines are set at SAR 15,000).

IRAQ

04 November 2024 - New Social Security Contribution Obligations

Employers are now required to make social security contributions for foreign workers covered by their home country's social security system. Previously, employers were exempt from making social security contributions for such employees – provided they could demonstrate proof of the employee's home country social security arrangements to the authorities. The contributions are 3% of monthly salaries (including any allowances) for non-oil and gas sector employees; and 7% of monthly salaries (including any allowances) for oil and gas sector employees. Following this reform, many employers of foreign nationals will need to account for increased social security contribution obligations.

ABOUT FRAGOMEN

Fragomen is a leading firm dedicated to immigration services worldwide. The firm has nearly 5,500 professionals and staff in 62 offices located in the Americas, Asia Pacific and EMEA. Overall, Fragomen offers support in more than 170 countries.

We are structured to support all aspects of global immigration, including strategic planning, efficiency, quality management, compliance, government relations, reporting, and case management and processing. These capabilities allow us to represent a broad range of companies, organizations and individuals, working in partnership with clients to facilitate the transfer of employees worldwide.

Our Middle East and North Africa (MENA) practice also provides corporate services, including social security assistance, end-to-end corporate setup, corporate secretarial services, corporate amendments, restructuring activities and more. Our corporate services and immigration professionals have extensive experience working with multinational businesses, conglomerates, local employers, start-ups and individual investors. We have a deep understanding of the MENA region and maintain strong professional relationships with relevant authorities.

To learn more about how we can assist you, please visit our website at www.fragomen.com or contact us at middleeast@fragomen.com.