

Visa application delays as new system gets running

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South Africa's immigration system sees a complete overhaul on the horizon starting with long term visa applications for foreign nationals wishing to stay for over three months in South Africa.



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On 8 June 2022, the Minister of Home Affairs announced a complete overhaul of South Africa's immigration system. The first area of change is long term visa applications by foreign nationals wishing to stay for over three months in South Africa. However, these changes have already caused a backlog in processing visa applications.

Visa submissions by this group previously went through Visa and Permit Facilitation Centres (VFS Centres) or through South African Missions. Then, one of the two centres would process applications and send the outcomes directly to the foreign national.

Centralised system

Going forward, these visa applications will be processed through a centralised adjudication system to achieve consistency and uniformity in the visa adjudication process. In essence, a foreign national will still apply through the VFS Centre or South African Mission, but these two institutions will scan and email the application to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) office, headquartered in Pretoria. The DHA's adjudicating team will receive the application and verify the documents. A recommendation will then be drawn up, and the application, along with the recommendation will be sent by the DHA to the Director for quality assurance. The director must confirm that compliance has been met, they make a further recommendation as to whether to approve or reject the application. The chief director or the director general receives the recommendation and makes the final decision to approve or reject the application.

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After this decision is made, the application is sent back to the adjudicating team to capture the decision and upload what is known as the manual route cover, which includes the decision, onto the system. The outcome is thereafter printed and routed back to the director general to sign off. The final document is captured on the movement control system (MCS) which is the system that facilitates the entry and exit into a country by a foreign national. It is a digital system that records entries and exits and is also used to view a person's complete travel history, records, and corresponding documents. The outcome is finally dispatched to the original High Commission or VFS Centre.

Processing time

The DHA cannot confirm how long processing times will take in the new system, however, given challenges such as staff shortages and rotational work arrangements, frequent system failures, communication issues, and existing backlogs, an initial delay in processing times may result from the change. On 27 June 2022, the DHA introduced temporary measures to address the impact that the increased backlog in processing visa applications has on foreign nationals. The measures provide a blanket temporary extension of foreign nationals' current visa status until 30 September 2022 for those awaiting visa application outcomes. Foreign nationals who wish to abandon the process and leave the country instead may also do so until 30 September 2022.



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Following the Minister's announcement on 8 June 2022 in respect of the immigration system, it is likely that further official changes will be revealed in the coming weeks.

Our Employment team are advising businesses on the impact of the changes to the immigration system on foreign employees as organisations respond to, manage, and pre-empt legal risk that may arise as a result.

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