

Mobility: Immigration alert

September 2022



South Africa

Resumption of visa application processing at South African missions and extension for ZEP holders

Executive summary

Effective 1 September 2022, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) Head Office is no longer processing Long-Term Temporary Residence Visa applications filed at South African Missions, and the Missions have resumed processing these applications. In addition, the DHA has extended the deadline for Zimbabwe Exemption Permit (ZEP) holders to change to another immigration status until 30 June 2023.

Temporary Residence Visas

In February 2022, the DHA implemented a new policy whereby all Long-Term Visa applications (except Study Visa applications) filed at South African missions were to be directed to the DHA Head Office in Pretoria for adjudication, instead of being processed at the missions. The DHA recently reported an increase in the backlog at its Head Office, leading to significant delays in the processing of visa applications. In many cases, applicants were unable to track the status of their applications once they were sent to the DHA Head Office for processing. Applications filed prior to 1 September 2022 are still being processed by the DHA.

Zimbabwe Exemption Permits (ZEPs)

The DHA introduced the ZEP in 2017 for eligible Zimbabwean nationals who were living in South Africa at the time on a Zimbabwean Dispensation Permit. ZEPs, which were initially valid until 31 December 2021, enable their holders to work, study and conduct business in the country. However, ZEP holders are not eligible to apply for permanent residence.

In December 2021, the DHA discontinued the ZEP and granted existing ZEP holders 12 months to transition to an alternative

South African immigration category. Despite the initial extension to 31 December 2022, the DHA reported receiving few applications from ZEP holders to change their immigration status in South Africa. The DHA has now extended the deadline to 30 June 2023 and announced that it will not grant any further extensions.

Impact on employers

The change in the process for adjudication of Temporary Residence Visas is expected to reduce the overall processing time for these visas and empower employers to deploy foreign workers to South Africa more quickly. Further, employers that hire ZEP holders now have over nine months to assist their impacted employees with converting to another immigration status and minimize the potential for work disruptions stemming from ZEP holders losing their immigration status in South Africa.

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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