



## **Immigration developments in the MENA Region**

### **Middle East and North Africa Region**

Foreign nationals and their employers may have experienced processing delays over the past few weeks due to the observance of Eid-al-Adha in addition to the continuing disruption and delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (please visit our dedicated microsite <https://www.fragomen.com/about/news/immigration-update-coronavirus> for more details and for additional insights on this fluid situation).

### **United Arab Emirates**

Special regulations for citizens and foreign residents of the United Arab Emirates were issued by immigration authorities to regulate travel across the country. Travelers will have to follow additional rules when travelling abroad and/or returning to the UAE. All travelers must verify the requirements applicable to them before traveling. Individuals above 70 and those who suffer from chronic diseases are still not allowed to travel outside the UAE regardless of the destination.

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The Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship announced the extension of a grace period to regularize the immigration status for holders of UAE visit visas that expired on or after March 1, 2020. According to the announcement, affected foreign nationals must either change their immigration status or exit the UAE within 30 days from August 11, 2020, otherwise they will be subject to overstay fines.

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The Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship (FAIC) announced the elimination of the return permit requirement for UAE residence permit holders seeking to return to the United Arab Emirates. Instead, these foreign nationals should register their personal details through the FAIC's [electronic portal](#) in order to facilitate their entry. Previously, UAE residents with a visa for Dubai returning to the UAE had to obtain an approval from the General Directorate of Residence and Foreigners Affairs in Dubai (GDRFA), while those with a visa from other emirates had to obtain approval from the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship in order to return.

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The Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship announced the extension of a grace period to regularize the immigration status for holders of a UAE residence permit that expired before March 1, 2020. According to the announcement, affected foreign nationals must exit the UAE by November 17, 2020, otherwise they will be subject to overstay fines. Those departing from Dubai must visit the airport immigration office 48 hours before their flight, while those leaving from other emirates must do it six hours before their flight.

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After briefly withdrawing the return permit requirement for residents of Dubai looking to exit and re-enter the country, the Supreme Committee of Crisis and Disaster Management have clarified that Dubai residents would still be required to obtain a return permit for re-entry. Last week, the federal authorities eliminated the return permit requirement for foreign nationals holding a residence permit for other emirates as reported in the attached Fragomen Middle East Immigration News Flash 130/2020. Affected Dubai residents intending to travel should apply for a return permit through the [electronic portal](#) of the General Directorate of Residence and Foreigners Affairs in Dubai.

### **Saudi Arabia**

The Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development (MHRSD) announced the implementation of a new rule for the Saudization of the engineering sector, effective from the beginning of 2021. The new regulation mandates the employment of Saudi nationals in 117 professions within the engineering sector in order to achieve a total Saudization ratio of 20% by the first quarter of 2021. Foreign nationals will not be allowed to work in any of these professions.

### **Bahrain**

The Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) announced resumption of new work permit application process for foreign nationals outside Bahrain, effective August 9, 2020. The process was suspended in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the announcement, the employers are now required to advertise vacancies in the local newspaper for two weeks in order to test the local market for available talent. Further details of this process are expected to be announced by the LMRA shortly.

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The Labour Market Regulatory Authority announced additional details to a labour market testing process that employers in Bahrain must now conduct before they obtain approval for a new out-of-country work permit application. The immigration process for out-country applicants resumed on August 9, 2020, after being suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

## **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.*

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