



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

### **United Arab Emirates**

Effective 13 September 2017, visa applicants for mainland China are required to submit their documents at the dedicated Chinese Visa Application Service Centre in Dubai, which is now responsible for processing applications on behalf of the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Dubai. The new CVASC is run by the VFS Global and is dedicated to UAE citizens and residents in the Emirates of Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al-Khaimah and Fujairah.

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The UAE Cabinet has approved a law, extending the visa-on-arrival program to Indian passports holders with a valid residency visa issued by the United Kingdom or a European Union member country. Currently, citizens of India can benefit from [a 14-day single-entry visa-on-arrival, if they have a United States' visa or Green Card](#) with a minimum validity of six month from the day on intended entry to the UAE. The effective day of the new law is yet to be confirmed.

### **Qatar**

Qatari Authorities have launched new Electronic Travel Authorisation System, allowing foreign nationals who are not eligible for [a visa-on-arrival](#) as per their passport, but who hold a valid visa from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, a Gulf Cooperation Council member country or a Schengen Member State to obtain a 30-day single-entry visa online. The ETA costs USD 14 and a one-time extension is permissible. Work or business activities are not permissible under this travel authorisation.

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Effective immediately, Pakistani passport holders are now eligible for a 30-day visitor visa-on-arrival for tourism, as long as they have a confirmed return ticket and a financial guarantee amounting to QAR 5,000 in cash (or equivalent in another currency) or a valid credit card. The visa is free of charge. Pakistani nationals' passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of entry to Qatar and a certificate of vaccination against polio is mandatory for individuals travelling directly from Pakistan. The visa is extendable for an additional 30 days, subject to providing a confirmed return ticket.

## **Saudi Arabia**

The Ministry of Labour and Social Development has issued new legislation on the employment of domestic workers and has introduced minimum financial security requirements for sponsors. Foreign residents, including males and married females, can sponsor up to two work visas for domestic workers if the duration of the employment contract with the domestic worker is 18 months or more. Unmarried foreign resident males can recruit only one domestic worker. To be eligible, the foreign resident must earn a minimum salary of SAR 10,000 per month and pay a security deposit of SAR 5,000 for each application.

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A Memorandum of Cooperation between the governments of Saudi Arabia and Japan has been approved and, effective immediately, Japanese passport holders travelling to Saudi Arabia are eligible for multiple-entry visit visas valid for up to three years with a maximum duration of stay not exceeding 90 days. A government fee for the visa has been set at SAR 190. Visitors to Saudi Arabia typically apply for a commercial or work visit visas which are issued for a single-entry or multiple-entry for six, 12 and 24 months. For citizens of the countries which have existing bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia, the visit visas are normally issued with a longer validity.

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Companies in Saudi Arabia not meeting their Saudization targets may now subscribe for the Parallel Saudization Program, which allows the company to pay a monthly fee instead of hiring more Saudi employees. Under the arrangement, companies can pay a monthly fee based on a [specific formula](#) (this website is only accessible in Saudi Arabia); for instance, if a company employs 10 Saudi citizens and it requires an additional three local employees to meet its Saudization target, it may instead choose to pay a monthly fee of SAR 12,600. Although this may work as a temporary solution for certain businesses, companies are advised to meet Saudization levels in the long-term instead of continuously utilizing this system.

## **ABOUT FRAGOMEN**

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