

Mobility: Immigration alert

December 2022



United Arab Emirates

Electronic Residency Visas replace physical stamping of passports

Executive summary

Effective 12 December 2022, the UAE authorities began issuing electronic Residency Visas to individuals who apply to obtain or renew their work or residence authorization, in lieu of stickers stamped on their passports. UAE residents must now present only their (physical) Emirates ID cards when entering or departing from the UAE and are no longer required to present their Residency Visas.

Background

In general, non-UAE nationals who seek to work and reside lawfully in the UAE were previously required to file applications both for Residency Visas (which, if granted, authorized them to work and reside in the UAE) and Emirates ID cards (which served as their proof of identity). In April 2022, the UAE Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Ports Security (ICP) [announced plans](#) to stop stamping Residency Visas in residents' passports, and enable qualifying individuals to submit a single application and receive their Residency Visas electronically. The change was originally implemented as a pilot program in two free zones (i.e., Dubai International Financial Centre and Jebel Ali Free Zone Authority). Separately, the UAE authorities also recently began issuing new Emirates ID cards, which include all details previously contained in the physical Residency Visas (e.g., employer's name and profession).

Key developments

Effective 12 December 2022, the pilot program was extended to all other free zones and mainland areas in the UAE. Individuals who seek to apply for work or residence authorization are no

longer required to submit their passports to the UAE authorities during the application process. Instead, successful applicants can now download their Residency Visas electronically via the [UAEICP](#) mobile app once their applications are approved. In general, Emirates ID cards are mailed to successful applicants one week after their Residency Visas are issued online.

Individuals whose Residency Visas were physically endorsed in their passports prior to 12 December 2022 may continue to use these endorsements along with their ID cards for international travel. Those who received Residency Visas electronically on or after 12 December 2022 may present their Emirates ID cards for international travel, and as proof of work and residence authorization in the UAE.

Impact on employers

The issuance of electronic Residency Visas is expected to streamline the work and residence authorization application process. Individuals will no longer be required to submit their passports to the UAE immigration authorities as part of their applications. However, during the transition period (over the next few months), foreign nationals who are in the process of obtaining UAE residency documents and are not eligible for UAE visas on arrival (based on their nationality) may encounter challenges when traveling internationally prior to receiving their physical Emirates ID, as the authorities in many countries require individuals to show proof of residency in their destination country prior to travel. Impacted individuals may consult their airlines in advance to preempt complications.

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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