



GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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United Kingdom – COVID-19: Visa Application Centre Closures, Visa ‘Overstayers’ Get Extension

The U.K. government, in its continued response to the COVID-19 crisis, announced on 27 March 2020, the temporary closures of all U.K. visa application centres in the U.K.¹ and around the world.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The closure of the majority of visa application centres outside of the U.K. affects both businesses and individual applicants in a number of ways. Some of the immediate impacts are:

- The start dates for individuals who are intending to come to the U.K. to work are most likely to be delayed;
- International assignments for those applying under the Tier 2 (Intra Company Transfer) category are likely to be delayed or cancelled;
- Visa applications that are currently being processed will be delayed or halted – arrangements will need to be made for the return of passports and original documents submitted.

The closure of all visa application centres in the U.K. will have an impact on:

- Individuals who have submitted extension or immigration change/switch applications online via the U.K. government portal and have booked an appointment via Sopra Steria²;
- Individuals who have submitted extension or immigration change/switch applications online and have not yet booked an appointment via Sopra Steria;
- Individuals who are yet to submit their applications online via the U.K. government portal.

U.K. Visa Application Centre Closures – Regions Affected

Application Service Centres in the U.K.

All U.K. Visa and Citizenship Application Centres (UKVCAS), Post Office enrolment services, and Service and Support Centres (SSCs) are currently temporarily closed. Booked appointments will be automatically rescheduled six weeks after the original booked slot. New appointments cannot be booked.³

Visa Application Centres around the World

The U.K. began closing its overseas visa application centres in a phased approach. On 27 March 2020, the following regions stopped accepting U.K. visa applications:

VFS Global: Americas, Middle East (majority), Asia Pacific Japan (APJ);⁴

TLSContakt: Europe, Africa (majority).⁵

For individuals who have already submitted their applications, staff at the respective visa application centres will make contact to offer options for retrieving original documents.

KPMG NOTE

The closures of U.K. visa application centres worldwide will likely hinder the mobility of the migrant workforce for businesses in the United Kingdom. Businesses and individuals should be prepared to exercise patience and flexibility in work start dates and/or seek alternative work arrangements. Even where U.K. visa application centres remain open, application centre staffing levels and travel restrictions will hinder visa processing and logistical planning. Another point to consider is travel restrictions and entry bans.

Priority/Super Priority Services

In addition to the closure of visa application centres, all priority and super priority services have been suspended and applications can only be submitted online via the standard submission route.

Visa Overstays and Home Office Policy

The Home Office has recognised that these are unprecedented times and has therefore provided a blanket extension to foreign nationals with visas whose visas have or are due to expire between 24 January 2020 and 31 May 2020.⁶ This blanket extension is automatic but subject to the visa national being unable to leave the U.K. due to travel restrictions or being in self-isolation related to COVID-19. Individuals who find themselves in this situation will not be considered as 'overstayers' during this period and this will not negatively impact their immigration status or future immigration applications. If individuals are intending to apply to extend their stay in the U.K. before 31 May 2020, they should continue to do so.

KPMG NOTE

Due to COVID-19, the Home Office has issued and implemented temporary immigration measures to help migrants and businesses navigate through this crisis. The full scale of the impact of these measures is yet to be seen, however we expect to see worldwide pauses and delays to all U.K. visa application processing.

The COVID-19 crisis has occurred at a time when the Home Office is preparing for a new immigration system, due to be implemented on 1 January 2021 as the U.K. formally ends its Brexit transition period. We have recently issued a GMS *Flash Alert* on the government's latest update in relation to this system (for prior coverage, see GMS [Flash Alert 2020-170](#), 14 April 2020).

FOOTNOTES:

1 See: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents?utm_source=6a15dfc9-bf89-4e02-b70e-74b7e0dbb6ed&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate .

2 Sopra Steria is the third-party provider chosen by the U.K. government, through which individual visa applicants can book appointments at a U.K. Visa and Citizenship Application Centre or Service and Support Centre.

3 See: <https://www.ukvcas.co.uk/flash-message-detail?flashmessageId=950> .

4 See: <https://www.vfsglobal.com/en/individuals/covid-19-customer-advisories.html> .

5 See: <https://uk.tlscontact.com/> .

6 For guidance from the U.K. government on visa customers and applicants in the U.K., visa customers outside of the U.K. and British nationals overseas who need to apply for a passport and individuals with visas about to expire, see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents> .

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Contact us

For additional information or assistance, please contact your local GMS or People Services professional* or one of the following professionals with the KPMG International member firm in the United Kingdom.

The KPMG Legal Services – Immigration Team has a wealth of experience in transactional, advisory, and compliance assurance services. We will be able to advise your business in relation to practical considerations in light of the above changes, as well as what this means for your long-term recruitment and compliance strategies.



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The information contained in this newsletter was submitted by the KPMG International member firm in the United Kingdom.

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