



GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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Belgium – COVID-19: Some Easing of Travel Restrictions Coming

Belgium is slowly returning to a “new normal” business situation as the data show that the coronavirus threat is subsiding. As from 15 June 2020, Belgian citizens are allowed to travel **for non-essential reasons** in Belgium and in the European Union (EU). In parallel, the European Commission is setting out a framework to allow travelers back into the Schengen area.

This GMS *Flash Alert* highlights the different layers of travel bans and aims to provide an update on different guidelines for persons wanting to travel in, into, and out of Belgium.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The various COVID-19 containment measures have had a profound impact on both professional and the personal travel. Companies worldwide had to cancel or postpone business trips and assignments. Companies can now slowly start to resume their international travel plans and prepare for upcoming business travel and assignments.

Easing of Restrictions in Belgium

On 3 June 2020, the Belgian National Security Council approved the transition to the third phase of the gradual phase-out plan, **starting on 8 June**.¹ With this new phase, **everything is allowed except for activities that are explicitly prohibited**. This is a radical change from the list of approved activities which previously applied. The instructions have been set out in two different levels of rules.

Individual Behavior

The Belgian National Security Council has published a set of cumulative golden rules:

- Hygiene measures remain essential;
- Activities should preferably happen outdoors;
- Additional safeguards should be implemented for high-risk groups;
- The extended “personal bubble” can contain up to 10 different people every week;
- With the exception of the members of the extended “personal bubble,” the safe distance rules remain in place – if a safe distance cannot be guaranteed, a mask should be worn;
- Group meetings are limited to a maximum of 10 people (indoors and outdoors).

Regulatory Framework

- All organised activities can resume unless otherwise specified;
- The protocols for each (sub)sector will be evaluated by 1 July;
- Working from home continues to be recommended where possible.

Within Belgium, it is possible to travel for trips lasting one or more days **since 8 June**.

Travel Restrictions

Belgian Borders

As from 15 June 2020, Belgium will reopen its borders for travel to and from countries from the EU, U.K., Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland, and Norway, irrespective of the reason of travel.

Travellers should also check up-front if the country of destination has also reopened its borders for travelers coming from Belgium.

The European Commission recommends the member states lift the internal borders by 15 June 2020. Ultimately the different member state governments will have to decide whether they implement the recommendation of the European Commission or not.

Outside the EU/Schengen Area, Visa Services

On 16 March 2020, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the introduction of travel restrictions for non-essential travels for 30 days into the EU/Schengen Area. The proposed restrictions were approved by the EU member states and have since formally been extended until 15 June 2020.

The European Commission now recommends the partial and gradual lifting of the travel restriction to the European Union after 30 June 2020.² (For prior coverage, see GMS [Flash Alert 2020-278](#), 12 June 2020.) The European Commission is aiming to ensure the uniform application across the EU of these new flexible and dynamic restrictions. To that goal, the Commission has published a set of objective criteria that need to be met by the third countries before the travel restrictions can be lifted.³

The lifting of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU, should be based on the following guiding principles:

- Non-discrimination: residence (and not nationality) as the deciding factor;
- Flexibility: if necessary it will always be possible to reintroduce the travel restrictions for a specific country;
- Common and coordinated approach;
- Objective, clear, transparent, and reliable criteria.

The European Commission recommends synchronising the resumption of countries' visa operations with the lifting of travel restrictions.⁴ The Commission also stresses that health checks should not be required at the time of application for a visa, if health checks are required these should take place shortly before the time of travel and these should apply to all travellers from a given location irrespective of their nationality or visa status.

The countries that are already meeting the objective criteria of the European Commission are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The Commission recommends lifting the travel restrictions for those countries on as of 1 July 2020.

As Belgium is part of the Schengen area, its external borders have also been closed to all non-European nationals, with some exceptions:

- Third-country nationals with a valid Belgian residence permit (e-ID card);
- Third-country nationals with a valid Belgian visa type D for long-term residence issued before the lockdown;
- Third-country nationals working in a vital sector who have an essential reason to travel to Belgium (e.g., medical personnel).

The Commission recommends enlarging the categories of permitted travellers to include international students and **highly-qualified third-country workers if their employment is necessary from an economic perspective.**

KPMG NOTE

Ultimately, the Belgian authorities will decide whether they implement the suggested approach of the EU Commission.

FOOTNOTES:

1 For more information, see: <https://crisiscentrum.be/nl/news> . (Note that this is a 3rd party (non-governmental, non-KPMG) website. Providing this link does not represent an endorsement of this website by KPMG.)

2 See Press release of the European Commission of 11 June 2020:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1035 .

3 Checklist to be used for the possible lifting of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/annex-communication-assessment-temporary-restriction-non-essential-travel_en.pdf .

4 Guidance for a phased and coordinated resumption of visa operations:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/guidance-phased-coordinated-resumption-visa-operations_en.pdf .

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Contact us

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

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