



GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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Belgium – COVID-19: Further Lifting of Travel Restrictions

The European Union (EU) is gradually lifting the travel restrictions at its external borders. As explained in our [GMS *Flash Alert* 2020-278](#) (12 June 2020), the European Commission has put forward an approach for a gradual and coordinated phasing out of the travel restrictions, based on a set of common principles and criteria for identifying those third countries with which it is possible to lift the travel restrictions on non-essential travel into the “EU+ area.”

As communicated in our [GMS *Flash Alert* 2020-318](#), Belgium decided not to open its borders for non-essential travel by travellers from the “safe country” list of the European Commission until further notice, but agreed to gradually resume visa operations and activities in Belgian Embassies and Consulates abroad to facilitate the visa applications for 10 categories of travellers with an essential function or need.

On 20 August 2020, the Belgian government decided to further lift the travel restriction for individuals in possession of an approval for a Single Permit (annex 46) as a highly-skilled worker (B34).

This *GMS Flash Alert* aims to provide an update of the restrictions that are still in place for third-country citizens wishing to travel to Belgium and of the new exemptions in respect of the travel restrictions.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Belgium agreed on 17 March 2020, to follow the recommendation of the European Commission to close its external borders for non-essential travel for (initially) 30 days (see our [GMS *Flash Alert* 2020-084](#), and our [GMS *Flash Alert* 2020-096](#) in this respect). Belgium has since extended the travel ban multiple times with the last extension expiring on 31 August 2020 (diverging from the recommendation of the European Commission to open the border for non-essential travel for countries that are considered safe, see our [GMS *Flash Alert* 2020-318](#)). Although Belgium resumed its consular activities in July 2020, only certain types of visa are issued.

The various COVID-19 containment measures have had a profound impact on both professional and personal travel. Companies worldwide have 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 – however, in Belgium, such plans may still need to be put “on hold” as the travel restrictions have only partially been lifted.

Travelling to Belgium after 20 August 2020

Belgium has not re-opened its borders for non-essential travel by travellers from countries on the European Commission’s list of safe countries. This will remain the case until further notice. However, visa activities in Belgian Embassies and Consulates abroad are gradually starting up again so as to facilitate visa applications for 10 categories of travellers with an essential function or need.¹

Who Is Allowed to Travel to Belgium from a Third Country since 20 August 2020?

- EU citizens and citizens of Schengen associated states and third-country nationals legally residing in the European Union, as well as their family members (if they hold a valid Belgian residence permit or visa), regardless whether or not they are returning home, are allowed to travel to Belgium.
- The following 10 categories of travellers can request a visa C or D to travel to Belgium²:
 - o Health-care professionals, health researchers, and elderly-care professionals;
 - o frontier workers;
 - o seasonal workers in agriculture;
 - o transport personnel engaged in haulage of goods and other transport staff, to the extent necessary;
 - o diplomats, staff of international organisations, military personnel, and humanitarian aid workers in the exercise of their functions;
 - o passengers in transit;
 - o passengers travelling for imperative family reasons;
 - o persons in need of international protection or for other humanitarian reasons;
 - o Third-country nationals travelling for the purpose of study;
 - o **New**: highly-qualified third-country individuals **if they obtained any type of Single Permit, including the B34 Single Permit.**

Obtaining Necessary Visas and Processing of Applications

Travellers with an essential function or need to travel to Belgium must obtain a visa even if they would fall under the Schengen visa waiver under “normal, non COVID-19” circumstances.

In addition, the Belgian consular authorities accept visa applications for the purpose of family reunification and visas may be issued in the event of a positive decision for certain categories of family reunification (including family members of highly-qualified third-country workers).

Outsourcing partners for visa applications (VFS Global or TLS Contact), have received the necessary instructions from Belgium’s consular authorities in order to gradually resume the delivery of visa services again.

Consular services will first issue visas for previously-lodged applications and visas will be issued in order of applications filed, i.e., first in, first served.

Companies and travellers should be aware that certain consular services are faced with a backlog in their visa issuance process, resulting in delays of several weeks to obtain an appointment to lodge their visa application.

KPMG NOTE

Public Health Passenger Locator Form

Every passenger on a flight to Belgium from an extra-Schengen country is required to complete the “[Public Health Passenger Locator Form](#)” prior to boarding. The form must be handed over to the designated authorities on arrival in Belgium.³

The form will enable public health offices to locate passengers who may have been exposed to the coronavirus.

Obligation to Self-Quarantine

Similar to our communication in our GMS [Flash Alert 2020-318](#), every passenger travelling from an extra-Schengen country or from a red zone (as published on the website of the Federal Public of Foreign Affairs) within the Schengen+ area is required to self-quarantine for 14 days when travelling to Belgium and is required to submit to a PCR test.⁴

FOOTNOTES:

1 Belgian Immigration Office “Visa: geleidelijke hervatting van de activiteit” at: <https://dofi.ibz.be/sites/dvzoe/NL/Gidsvandeprocedures/Pages/Visa-Covid-19.aspx> .

2 Belgian Immigration Office “Travel to Belgium” at: <https://dofi.ibz.be/sites/dvzoe/EN/Pages/Travel-to-Belgium.aspx> .

3 Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs “You are returning from...” at: <https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en> .

4 Belgian Federal Public Service “Current Measures” at: <https://www.info-coronavirus.be/en/fag/> .

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

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