



# GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

2020-416 | September 30, 2020



## Belgium - COVID-19: Update on Travel Restrictions and Public Health Protection Measures

The Belgian authorities announced on 23 September 2020, the start of a new phase in their response to the COVID-19 public-health crisis, shifting to a longer-term approach to health-risk management and a greater accountability of Belgian citizens.<sup>1</sup> Belgium is also moving away from the 'hard' travel ban to regions within the EU+ region that are designated as 'red zones' by the Foreign Office, bringing its travel restrictions more in line with the rest of the EU+ region. Also, third countries are no longer automatically considered red zones.<sup>2</sup>

As communicated in our GMS [Flash Alert 2020-318](#), on 17 July 2020, Belgium decided not to open its border for non-essential travel by travellers from the safe country list issued by the European Commission. Instead the list of essential reasons for travel has been further clarified and consular activities abroad were gradually resumed to facilitate visa applications for travellers with an essential function or need to travel to Belgium. The authorities have now also implemented a process for third-country nationals wishing to travel to Belgium for less than 90 days and who could previously benefit from the visa waiver.<sup>3</sup>

This GMS *Flash Alert* aims to provide an overview of the new measures taken by the Belgian authorities and to clarify who can travel to Belgium and under which conditions.

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### WHY THIS MATTERS

Belgium is easing its response to the health crisis. Reducing the obligation to self-quarantine both in time and in scope. Even though non-essential travel remains largely forbidden for travellers from outside the EU+ region, Belgium is opening up for professional travel under strict conditions.

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.

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Companies can now slowly start to resume their international travel plans and prepare for upcoming business travel and assignments to/from Belgium.

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## Launch of 'Risk Management Strategy'

As communicated in our GMS [Flash Alert 2020-281a](#) (16 June 2020), on 3 June 2020, the Belgian National Security Council approved the transition to the third phase of the gradual phase-out plan. With this new phase, **everything is allowed except for activities that are explicitly prohibited**. This was a radical change from the list of approved activities. The Belgian National Security Council announced on 23 September 2020, the start of a yet new phase, towards a longer-term approach and calling for greater accountability of Belgian citizens.

As from 1 October 2020, the following rules (non-exhaustive list) will come into force:<sup>4</sup>

- If social distance can be maintained, people are now allowed to have contact with as many people as they want (but not more than 10 individuals at the same time and place).
- Close contact should be limited to 5 different persons (outside their household) per month. 'Close contact' is defined as every contact with someone that lasts more than 15 minutes, is within a distance/space of 1.5 metres, and occurs without a mask.
- Masks should still be worn when a safe distance cannot be guaranteed, but will no longer be mandatory in outdoor areas unless otherwise determined by the local authorities.
- Working from home is still highly recommended.
- Self-quarantine rules are eased. As from 1 October, asymptomatic persons should self-isolate for seven days as from the last day of close contact with a COVID-19-infected person. A PCR test should be done on the fifth day after the last day of close contact. If negative, the quarantine stops after the seventh day.

A mobile app will be launched on 30 September 2020 to facilitate contact tracing.

## Who Can Travel to Belgium from outside the EU+?

Belgium has still **not** re-opened its borders for non-essential travel of travellers from countries on the list of safe countries of the European Commission.<sup>5</sup> This will remain the case until further notice. However, visa activities in Belgian Embassies and Consulates abroad are gradually resuming so as to facilitate visa applications and the list of essential reasons of travel has been further clarified.<sup>6</sup>

### Who Can Travel to Belgium from a Third Country?

- 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 of visa), regardless of whether they are returning home are allowed to travel to Belgium.
- The following categories of travellers can travel to Belgium from a third country:
  - Health-care professionals, health researchers, and elderly-care professionals;
  - frontier workers;

- seasonal workers in agriculture;
- transport personnel engaged in haulage of goods and other transport staff, to the extent necessary;
- diplomats, staff of international organisations, military personnel, and humanitarian aid workers in the exercise of their functions;
- passengers in transit;
- passengers travelling for imperative family reasons (further clarified as family reunion procedures, non-cohabiting long-term partners, co-parents, funerals or marriages for first- or second-degree family members);
- Sea-farers;
- persons in need of international protection or for other humanitarian reasons;
- third-country nationals travelling for the purpose of study;
- highly-qualified third-country workers if their employment is necessary from an economic perspective, if the work cannot be postponed or performed abroad and if they obtained a Single Permit;
- **New:** third-country workers who are authorised by the competent region to work as an employee in Belgium (i.e., obtained a work permit or are meeting the exemptions);
- **New:** third-country workers who are authorised by the competent region to work as self-employed persons in Belgium (i.e., obtained a professional card or are meeting the exemptions).

## When Is a Visa Required?

Travellers with an essential function or need to travel to Belgium for more than 90 days should always first obtain a valid D visa.

Travellers who benefit from the Schengen visa waiver and who have an essential function or need to travel to Belgium for less than 90 days are not required to obtain a valid C visa but should always first obtain an 'essential travel certificate'. This certificate is issued by the competent Belgian consular authority in the country of residence of the traveller after verifying the nature of the travel.

Travellers who do not benefit from the Schengen visa waiver and who have an essential function or need to travel to Belgium for less than 90 days should always first obtain a C visa. If the visa has been issued before 18 March 2020, an 'essential travel certificate' should be obtained too.

An essential travel certificate is not required if it is clear from the travel documents that the travel is essential (example: plane ticket for transit passengers, diplomatic passport for diplomats, etc.).

## Belgian 'Traffic Light' System – Some Changes

The Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs has categorised countries (and sometimes regions within countries) in green, orange, and red zones. **New:** Some third countries are now considered green or orange zones. For persons travelling or returning to Belgium after a stay abroad of at least 48 hours, the following rules must be followed<sup>7, 8</sup>:

- All persons travelling/returning to Belgium after a stay abroad of at least 48 hours must complete the [Public Health Passenger Locator Form](#) before travelling to Belgium. Upon arrival, travellers returning from red zones

are required to self-quarantine from the first day of their return and will need to be tested on the fifth day (as from 1 October 2020).

- Travelling/returning from a green zone: no mandatory testing or quarantine;
- Travelling/returning from an orange zone: no mandatory nor encouraged testing or quarantine;
- Travelling/returning from a red zone until 30 September 2020: mandatory testing and quarantine of 14 days;
- Travelling/returning from a red zone after 1 October 2020, 2 options:
  - Quarantine as from the first day of return and testing on the fifth day – if negative, the quarantine stops after the seventh day;
  - The possibility to be exempted from quarantine and testing by completing an evaluation form is something currently being developed by the Belgian authorities. Persons who returned from a red zone but who did not come into close contact with someone while abroad could be exempted from the obligation. Also in this context, **'close contact' is defined as every contact with someone that lasts more than 15 minutes, is within a distance/space of 1.5 metres, and occurs without a mask.**

As from 25 September 2020, travelling into red zones is no longer prohibited for non-essential travel – but it is highly discouraged.

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## KPMG NOTE

Third countries are no longer automatically considered red zones by the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs. Starting on 25 September, travellers from Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Rwanda, Thailand, Uruguay, and South Korea no longer need to self-quarantine and undergo a test upon arrival in Belgium.<sup>9</sup>

This update is only applicable for travellers with an essential reason to travel to Belgium. The travel ban for non-essential travel for third country nationals remains in force.

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## FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Press release of the Belgian Crisis Centre of 23 September 2020 (in Dutch) at: <https://crisiscentrum.be/nl/news/crisisbeheer/lancering-van-de-strategie-voor-risicobeheer-responsabilisering> .
- 2 Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs “You are returning from...” at: <https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en> .
- 3 Belgian Immigration Office “Reizen naar België” (in Dutch) at: <https://dofi.ibz.be/sites/dvzoe/NL/Gidsvandeprocedures/Pages/Reizen%20naar%20België.aspx>.
- 4 Press release of the Belgian Crisis Centre of 23 September 2020 (in Dutch) at: <https://crisiscentrum.be/nl/news/crisisbeheer/lancering-van-de-strategie-voor-risicobeheer-responsabilisering> .

## FOOTNOTES continued:

- 5 Belgian Immigration Office “Reizen naar België” (in Dutch) at:  
<https://dofi.ibz.be/sites/dvzoe/NL/Gidsvandeprocedures/Pages/Reizen%20naar%20België.aspx>.
- 6 See the following issues of our GMS *Flash Alert*: [2020-066](#) (17 March 2020), [2020-096](#) (23 March 2020), [2020-281a](#) (16 June 2020), [2020-318](#) (17 July 2020), and [2020-374](#) (28 August 2020).
- 7 Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs “You are returning from...” at: <https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en> .
- 8 Press release of the Belgian Crisis Centre of 23 September 2020 (in Dutch) at:  
<https://crisiscentrum.be/nl/news/crisisbeheer/lancering-van-de-strategie-voor-risicobeheer-responsabilisering> .
- 9 Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs “You are returning from...” at: <https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en> .

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### **Keeping Connected Globally Virtual Meeting Series: Interesting Information, Insightful Statistics, and Past Webinars**

As businesses react to the challenges faced today, build resilience, identify opportunities for recovery, and adapt to a new reality, KPMG International hosted weekly webcasts from 24 March to 16 June to help tax, legal, and mobility leaders around the world successfully navigate the business impacts arising from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Over the course of 13 weeks, 10,000+ business leaders joined these webcasts and provided their valuable feedback through polling questions, post-session surveys, and Q&A sessions. [This webpage](#) offers you highlights of the series.

## 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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