Canada – Measures Announced to Improve Client Experience, Modernize Immigration System

In the past week, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has announced key measures to leverage technology with the goal of modernizing the Canadian immigration system and improving client experiences.[1] These include expanding the digital application portal to increase the number of permanent residence applications in 2022, introducing a new Permanent Residence Application Tracker, and leveraging an advanced data analytics system to assist with sorting and processing Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) applications submitted outside of Canada.

WHY THIS MATTERS

In the wake of COVID-19, applications have been subject to extensive processing times and delays due to the significant shortage of staff and backlog of cases that IRCC is facing. Foreign nationals applying for work permits or those who wish to unite with their family members in Canada could be experiencing frustration due to the extensive delays in the processing of their applications.

To address these challenges, IRCC is committing to finding new ways to improve client service and processes to help individuals and families obtain predictable and timely information related to their applications. The new measures are part of IRCC's plans to develop and deliver an enterprise-wide digital platform that will gradually replace IRCC's legacy Global Case Management System to improve application processing and support for applicants.

Canada's Commitments to Modernizing the Current Immigration System for Permanent Residence Applicants

On January 31, 2022, Sean Fraser, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced measures to improve client experience and modernize the Canadian immigration system to address the challenges applicants are currently facing, particularly those who have applied for permanent residence.[2]

IRCC made over half a million decisions on permanent residence applications in 2021. IRCC expects to increase processing capacity because of these measures and plans to make 147,000 permanent residence final decisions in the first quarter of 2022.[3]

To further support permanent residence applications, IRCC will expand the digital application portal to increase the number of applications in 2022.[4]

KPMG NOTE

The transition to an online application process aims to reduce COVID-19-related delays associated with processing paper applications and clients are expected to receive immediate confirmation that their application was successfully submitted.

New Permanent Residence Application Tracker

IRCC will also introduce a new Permanent Residence ("PR") Application Tracker in February 2022 for spouses and their dependents to access their application information and status online.[5] IRCC has also developed a portal to allow permanent residence applicants in Canada to finalize their process and receive their PR cards without the need for any in-person interaction.

For citizenship applications, IRCC has introduced online testing, developed an online application tracker, and launched virtual citizenship ceremonies. The government aims to continue expanding the use of their technology-based solutions to assist individuals obtain their Canadian citizenship.[6]

Leveraging Advanced Data Analytics to Process Visa Applications

On January 24, 2022, IRCC announced that it will leverage an advanced data analytics system to assist with sorting and processing Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) applications submitted outside of Canada.[7]

The new data analytics system will accelerate IRCC's case load by identifying routine applications for streamlined processing, such as those from clients who have been previously approved to visit Canada in the past 10 years. The system will also sort and triage non-routine applications for officers based on their complexity. While the advanced data analytics system can classify routine applications and assess eligibility, the technology will never actually refuse or recommend refusing applications. An officer will be the final decision-maker on an applicant's admissibility to Canada and only an IRCC officer can refuse or overturn an application.

KPMG NOTE

Overall, the new system is expected to help improve client service by helping IRCC manage the increasing volume of visitor visa applications.

IRCC has been using advanced data analytics since 2018 to sort and process over 1 million TRV applications from countries with a high-volume of applications.[8] Since then, advanced data analytics has shown to assess routine files 87 percent faster than manual assessments. By scaling-up the use of this technology and reducing the clerical and repetitive work, IRCC expects to have some applicants receive decisions more quickly. Reviewing officers will also have greater capacity to focus their attention on assessing and making final decisions.

IRCC has noted that it is working to ensure that the new technology aligns with relevant privacy requirements so that risk is mitigated, and measures are in place to facilitate an extensive review process for discriminatory and privacy concerns.

Canada and the United States Introduce Entry/Exit Program

IRCC also announced that it will enhance its use of the Entry/Exit Program, which is a joint initiative between Canada and the United States. IRCC's goal is to obtain accurate and objective entry and exit information from the Canada Border Services Agency.[9] Specifically, IRCC will be able to leverage the CBSA's Entry/Exit System via the Global Case Management System (GCMS) to:

- verify residency requirements in support of applications for grants of citizenship (CIT) or permanent resident cards;

- verify if a temporary residence applicant may have previously over-stayed their allowable period of admission in Canada;

- assist in an investigation of an individual's entitlement to a Canadian travel document;

- verify that sponsors are residing in Canada;

- verify the residency of spouses and partners under the spouse or common-law partner in Canada class;

- verify whether or not a refugee claimant entered Canada using their travel documents; and

- support investigations of possible fraud in relation to immigration, citizenship, and passport/travel document programs.

Information will be available to IRCC for both land and air entries and exits. When performing an Entry/Exit query through GCMS, IRCC will receive results automatically within 30 seconds to 2 minutes.

KPMG Note

Key Considerations for Employers and Travellers

- Permanent residence applicants can expect to receive more predictable and timely updates regarding their applications.

- Individuals who have applied for visitor visas or have family members awaiting a decision on a visitor visa application can expect to receive faster processing.

- Entry and exit tracking will provide IRCC with new tools to help ensure compliance with various immigration categories, with a focus on spousal sponsorships and foreign nationals who have previously over-stayed. Employers need to be diligent as IRCC's new tools will provide greater transparency into compliance.

Individuals who have questions or concerns about the new technological measures are encouraged to contact their qualified immigration counsel or a member of the team at KPMG Law LLP (see Contact Us section below) for further guidance.

FOOTNOTES:

1 See IRCC news release (January 31, 2022) (with links to related documents), "Modernizing Canada's immigration system to support economic recovery and improve client experience."

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 See IRCC notice (January 24, 2022) "Advanced data analytics to help IRCC officers sort and process temporary resident visa applications."

8 Ibid.

9 See the IRCC webpage for the Entry/Exit Program - Canada.ca .

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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 Canada:

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