

KPMG

GMS Flash Alert

Immigration

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United Arab Emirates – Temporary Suspension of New Freelance Visas

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced a temporary suspension on the issuance of new freelance visas, effective 5 July. This measure impacts independent professionals and digital nomads – particularly from Europe, Asia, and North America – who intended to relocate to the UAE under this visa category.

The UAE's freelance visa programme has been a cornerstone of its strategy to attract global talent, support flexible work models, and diversify its economy.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The sudden suspension of new freelance visa issuance disrupts mobility plans for digital nomads, consultants, and independent professionals seeking entry into the United Arab Emirates.

For employers, this may limit access to agile freelance talent for short-term projects. For freelancers, it could delay relocation plans and may require pivoting to alternative visa pathways.

While existing freelance visa holders are not affected, the pause appears to reflect a shift in the UAE's immigration strategy to review, align, and potentially redesign the freelance visa scheme in line with evolving labour market needs and regulatory goals.

More Details

The UAE freelance visa – a popular option under the self-employment or virtual working programme – allowed remote professionals and entrepreneurs to legally reside and work in the UAE without traditional employment sponsorship. The visa has contributed significantly to the UAE's position as a global hub for digital nomads and freelance professionals.

The Freelance Visa programme is legally supported through a network of cabinet resolutions, ministerial decisions, and free zone regulations. Key instruments include Cabinet Resolution No. 65 of 2022, which defines self-employment residence categories; Ministerial Decision No. 46 of 2022, which outlines Green Visa eligibility including freelancers; and Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021, which provides a framework for

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flexible labour relations. Freelance work is further authorised through MOHRE's self-employment permits for mainland operations and individual circulars from free zones like DDA, RAKEZ, and twofour54, which issue freelance permits under their respective guidelines.[1]

According to official sources, immigration authorities are currently reviewing the framework to enhance regulatory safeguards, align with labour market dynamics, and streamline operational criteria.[2]

Authorities have confirmed that all existing freelance visas remain valid and will continue under current terms until expiry or renewal and no new freelance visa applications will be processed until further notice. Revised procedures and eligibility criteria are expected to be announced in the coming months.

KPMG INSIGHTS

Considerations for Freelancers:

Freelancers who wish to re-locate to UAE may consider:

- exploring alternative visa categories, such as Remote Work Visa, Investor Visa, or Employment-based options, where applicable;
- deferring their relocation timeline until new guidelines are issued;
- monitoring official announcements closely to understand the new eligibility framework once published.

Considerations for Employers:

Employers may wish to consider the importance of:

- reassessing talent deployment plans involving freelance workers entering the United Arab Emirates;
- exploring alternative visa options for contractors or independent professionals;
- engaging qualified immigration advisers to assess short- and long-term impacts on workforce planning.

KPMG in the Lower Gulf will monitor developments and endeavour to keep readers of *GMS Flash Alert* informed as developments occur.

The suspension of the issuance of new freelance visas will likely cause disruption for individuals planning to come to work in the UAE under this visa route and to organisations employing freelancers in the United Arab Emirates. Parties with related questions or compliance concerns, and those wishing to explore other options that may be available to them, are encouraged to reach out to the Immigration Authorities, a qualified immigration adviser, or a member of the KPMG Immigration team in the Lower Gulf (see the Contacts section).

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FOOTNOTES:

1 According to Cabinet Resolution No. 65 of 2022 (in English): https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1601/download , and Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 (in English): https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1541/download .

2 According to a recent *Dubai Times* article on the UAE freelance visa suspension, "UAE Places New Freelance Visas on Temporary Hold" in *Dubai Times* at: https://dubaitimes.com/zpmver-uae-places-new-freelance-visas-on-temporary-hold . *Please note that by clicking on this link, you are leaving the KPMG website for an external site that KPMG is not affiliated with nor does KPMG endorse its content. The use of the external site and its content may be subject to the terms of use and/or privacy policies of its owner or operator.*

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