

Corporate Immigration 2017: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Overview

1. In broad terms what is your government's policy towards business immigration?

Historically, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has struggled with high levels of unemployment among its citizens (specifically in the private sector) and an over-reliance on foreign talent to drive its industrial and commercial exploits. In order to redress the balance, the KSA has, in past years, made conscious and systematic efforts to improve the representation of Saudi nationals in the private (and government) sectors. A key initiative (which has been fine-tuned and honed over the years) was the implementation of formal localisation ('Saudisation') policies that aim to prescribe minimum thresholds that entities were to adhere to. The country's localisation policy, which has now become a hallmark of most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) corporate immigration policies, is aimed at ensuring that the KSA's skilled workforce (primarily those from a younger demographic) are better represented in the private sector. The country's

Saudisation policies went on to form the backbone of the Nitaqat guide to corporate governance, which prescribes specific tiers that entities – depending on their commercial activities and size – must adhere to. The KSA government is also working on moving towards more robust electronic platforms for immigration and labour applications. Most work authorisation and business visitor applications can now be submitted (and monitored) electronically and the government is introducing measures to improve data-sharing (between the various ministries involved) and improving transparency in the process. This was inaugurated specifically to tackle the high rate of youth unemployment in Saudi Arabia as well as the low levels of Saudi participation in the skilled workforce of the private sector.

The Nitaqat framework as it stands today was formally introduced in 2011. Under Nitaqat, a private company is required to meet specific Saudisation thresholds, which are calculated based on the sponsoring entity's size and the industry sector under which it is registered. Companies under Nitaqat are colour-coded according to their levels of Saudisation, with the highest rating being platinum and the lowest and non-compliant ratings being red and yellow. Platinum-rated companies are afforded many immigration-related privileges such as expedited processing of immigration requests and preferential treatment of quota allocations. Lower-rated companies (yellow and red) are effectively penalised as they are restricted from hiring foreign national employees and are thus compelled to improve their rating before they can benefit

from such advantages. Low-rated companies are also unable to prevent existing foreign national employees from transferring to other, higher-rated employers. In addition, the government has launched initiatives to ensure that companies do not simply work towards having a higher Nitaqat grade, but rather make honest and calculated efforts to ensure that they implement sustainable recruitment policies that are in line with the programme's underlying objective. Policies such as the calculation of Nitaqat percentages through a system of 'rolling averages', as opposed to simple aggregates, serve to ensure that companies are unable to change their Nitaqat grade on an as-needed basis, but are rather required to make conscious and deliberate formal Saudisation policies. In essence, the Nitaqat framework aims to provide incentives for companies that strive towards improving the representation of Saudi nationals in the private sector and not necessarily those that aim to improve just their Saudisation rating in order to bypass the system. Generally speaking, sectors with a high demand for unskilled workers (eg, construction and farming) have lower Saudisation quotas to maintain than sectors employing a more skilled workforce such as banking and telecommunications. The minimum Saudisation requirements for the former are around 5 to 10 per cent for small entities, but as high as 50 per cent for the latter.

Another ongoing Saudisation initiative is the reservation of certain designations for Saudi nationals alone (ie, restricting foreign nationals from obtaining

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specific job titles). Such roles typically include human resources positions, clerical positions, and some higher managerial roles. The list of restricted job titles is routinely amended and additional positions typically added.

The KSA government is strict in ensuring that foreign nationals comply with immigration and labour policies, namely articles 33, 38 and 39 of the Saudi Labour Law. Article 33 permits foreign nationals to work only once they procure the appropriate work authorisation, ie, work permit and iqama (residence permit). Article 38 pertains to employment only under the terms of the work permit (ie, working in a role or position that is in line with the job title mentioned on the work permit and iqama). Article 39 states that employees are only authorised to work for, and at the premises of, the sponsoring entity. The Saudi authorities, cognisant of the fact that a large majority of foreign entities and foreign nationals were non-compliant and falling foul of the new labour laws, introduced an amnesty in 2013 on all illegal workers and companies employing illegal workers and implored them to come forward and correct their immigration status without any penalties or repercussions. Such was the interest in the amnesty and the subsequent strain on the immigration authorities that the planned three month amnesty had to be increased to nine months. It is estimated that approximately 4 million foreign workers took advantage of this scheme to either regularise their immigration status or to leave Saudi Arabia without penalty. Following on from the amnesty

the authorities have been aggressively pursuing companies that continue to employ illegal staff. The penalties for contravention of this are austere and many jail sentences have been issued to those found guilty.

The overall immigration and work authorisation process in the KSA is time-consuming and involves both in-country and out-of-country components. Depending on the nationality of the applicant, the proposed job title and the consular post of filing, it is not uncommon for the process to take several months to complete. However, that said, the government's move towards implementing a more robust online application system with shared databases has significantly streamlined a process that was, historically, completely manual. Despite the introduction of online immigration portals, companies operating in the region are still advised to plan business immigration needs in advance, maintain contingency plans, and seek counsel from their immigration advisers.

Short-term transfers

2. In what circumstances is a visa necessary for short-term travellers? How are short-term visas obtained?

All short-term visitors (except for holders of GCC passports) must obtain a visit visa prior to arrival in Saudi Arabia, as there is no visa-on-arrival or tourist visa category. Generally speaking, short-term visas are issued for particular purposes: visits in relation to attending business meetings, seminars, exhibitions, conferences or even short-term work assignments. From a business immigration perspective, there are two types of short-term visitor

visas for Saudi Arabia: commercial visit visas (CVV) and work visit visas (WVV).

Commercial visit visa (CVV)

A CVV is generally issued to individuals intending to enter Saudi Arabia for business-type activities. Though the Saudi authorities do not maintain an exhaustive list of permissible activities that may be conducted on a CVV, practically speaking such activities tend to include:

- attending face-to-face meetings;
- giving presentations;
- receiving classroom-based training;
- conducting research; and
- negotiating contracts, etc.

Holders of CVVs are strictly prohibited from engaging in any hands-on activities that may be construed as work. CVVs are generally granted to managerial or professional job title holders who have a less technical role within the company.

Work visit visa (WVV)

A WVV is issued to individuals who need to enter Saudi Arabia to engage in work activities in relation to short-term contractual obligations or projects. A WVV does not, from a strict immigration compliance perspective, grant the holder long-term work authorisation (which would require the procurement of a valid work permit and iqama), but rather allows limited hands-on work without the establishment of a formal employment arrangement with the local entity or the establishment of local payroll. WVVs are usually granted to technical staff, ie,

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engineers and technicians rather than management, as the intention is that they would be performing the technical activities such as installations, repairing and maintenance, trouble-shooting equipment, etc.

Both the WVV and CVV involve an in-country and consular component. The in-country process involves the procurement of a formal letter of invitation (LOI) sponsored by the Saudi host entity. The LOI would specify engagement-specific details as well as the applicant's employment and biographical details. Once the LOI is procured, the applicant must apply for the physical visa at the relevant Saudi consular post abroad. The document requirements (and subsequent processing times) for procuring CVVs and WVVs vary from consular post to consular post, though in most instances the sending entity or employer of the applicant may be required to furnish a formal support letter requesting the consular post to issue the visa.

3. What are the main restrictions on a business visitor?

As of now, CVVs may be issued for up to 180 days, while WVVs are generally issued for up to 90 days. Both single- and multiple-entry options exist, although multiple-entry visas generally only permit in-country stays of 30 days per visit. The type of visa that is issued (including the specified duration of stay) is often contingent on the nationality of the applicant and the consular post of filing. American nationals are eligible to obtain WVVs and CVVs that

are valid for up to five years with in-country stays of up to 180 days (if multiple entry is specified). It is extremely important that applicants adhere to the duration of stay specified on the visa. Failure to do so can result in the imposition of penalties and bans on re-entry. As stated above, a CVV holder is not permitted to do hands-on work or revenue-generating work. A visitor of this type can only attend meetings, presentations and training sessions. Failure to do so can result in the imposition of financial penalties and bans on re-entry.

A business visitor must always be situated at the Saudi sponsor's premises or somewhere he or she is contractually permitted to be. If the visitor is required to be at a client site then he or she must wear a visitor badge at all times.

Female applicants go through a slightly different visa process and must obtain a pre-approval for entry prior to applying at the consulate. Women under the age of 35, or those holding certain South Asian, Middle Eastern, or eastern European nationalities may experience increased scrutiny and difficulty in obtaining a visa.

Certain nationalities are restricted from obtaining business visitor visas but the list of restricted nationals is not fixed and changes often. It is always advisable to contact the Saudi embassy in the country of filing for an up-to-date list of the countries currently being denied entry. Countries experiencing restrictions on entry at the time of writing include Iraq, Iran, Syria and Yemen. Israeli

nationals will not be granted visitor visas for Saudi Arabia and also individuals with Israeli stamps in their passport are discouraged from travelling to Saudi Arabia for fear of rejection at airport immigration. The list of nationalities restricted from entering Saudi Arabia depends on prevailing diplomatic relationships and is subject to change without prior notice.

Consular posts exercise significant discretion in issuing CVVs and WVVs. The list of document requirements varies from consular post to consular post. In addition, certain consular posts may refuse to issue WVVs to individuals who do not hold technical job titles. In such instances, the consular post may issue CVVs instead or request that a new LOI (requesting for a CVV rather than a WVV) be provided. The reverse may also be true for individuals holding technical job titles, but applying for CVVs.

4. Is work authorisation or immigration permission needed to give or receive short-term training?

From a strict immigration compliance perspective, work authorisation is required in order to deliver training. Generally speaking, such engagements will require the procurement of a valid WVV. However, practically speaking, and depending on the specifics of the engagement (duration of stay, length or type of training, venue of training, etc) holders of a CVV would be able to receive classroom-based training, though delivering training would add an element of risk as this might be misconstrued as profit-generating, work activity.

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5. Are transit visas required to travel through your country? How are these obtained? Are they only required for certain nationals?

All visitors regardless of nationality (except for GCC nationals) are required to obtain a transit visa if an 18- to 72-hour stay in Saudi Arabia is planned. This must be obtained in advance (an application must be filed with the Saudi Embassy in the applicant's country of residence or home country) and is subject to the following limitations:

- applications should have a confirmed onward booking to a subsequent destination detailed and these must correspond to the dates in question;
- women travelling alone will not get transit visas; and
- the visa can only be used for single entry into Saudi Arabia.

Obtaining transit visas is subject to the discretion of the Saudi authorities, who may require the presentation of additional supporting documentation justifying the need for a transit visa.

Long-term transfers

6. What are the main work and business permit categories used by companies to transfer skilled staff?

The only long-term category is the work permit and iqama option. For those based outside of Saudi Arabia, this can be obtained by first securing a work (entry) visa from the country of

filing and then entering Saudi Arabia to complete certain in-country formalities until a final work permit and iqama are issued. For foreign nationals already situated in Saudi Arabia, they can only transfer to a new sponsor via a sponsorship transfer.

7. What are the procedures for obtaining these permissions? At what stage can work begin?

Like most GCC countries, Saudi immigration is predicated on a quota system. Any new positions must first be justified to the Ministry of Labour. A local Saudi contract to support the need to hire is required and the value of the contract should be commensurate with the number of people requested. This contract will form the basis of what is called a block visa application. This is a discretionary application and the authorities rarely grant foreign companies what they have requested. Therefore, the strategic positioning of a block visa is vital (ie, request enough positions based on the business's requirements, ensure that the applicants are identified in advance to ensure that there is no mismatch between job title and academic qualifications, but being mindful that potentially not all of the positions will be granted).

A supporting contract cannot be used more than once (although multiple contracts can be used), therefore it is imperative for a company to get its foreign hiring projections correct at the earliest juncture. Generally speaking, block visas have a validity period of two years and once a company applies for a block visa it cannot apply for another one within two months of the date of issuance (tantamount to a cooling-off period) or until the block visas

have been depleted, whichever occurs first.

In addition to the contract, the company applying for the block visa must have all relevant corporate documentation in place and must be fully licensed to operate within Saudi Arabia. Owing to the increased interlinking of ministry databases, if any one licence is not valid the entire block visa application stands at risk. This can sometimes lead to a delay of several months, therefore it is imperative to review all the appropriate licences well in advance of any block visa application.

The block visa application does not request who the individuals applying for authorisation are, but instead demands the general profile of the individuals. Mandatory criteria required include: proposed job title, gender and religion.

There are different types of block visa applications available, each designed to cater to different business needs (ie, those for companies with private contracts, those with government contracts, and even those looking to replace foreign nationals that have recently exited the country). Historically, most block visa applications incurred processing times of two to three months; however, owing to the establishment of online portals, processing times have been significantly reduced and most applications are now adjudicated in two to six weeks. Once block visa positions are approved, they must be allocated to specific nationalities and consular posts of filing. Currently, only consular posts situated in the applicant's home

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country can be selected.

Work (entry) visas are generally issued for a period of 90 days and allow the holder to enter Saudi Arabia to engage in certain in-country formalities (including a medical examination) until a final work permit and iqama are issued. Individuals cannot exit Saudi Arabia until the entire work authorization process is complete and an exit and re-entry permit has been obtained. In addition, from a strict immigration compliance perspective, foreign national employees entering on a work (entry) visa may not commence work until a formal work permit has been procured.

8. What are the general maximum (and minimum) periods of stay granted under the main categories for company transfers?

The Saudi work visa is valid for 90 days from date of issue and grants the holder a total period of 90 days to finalise all the requirements for obtaining an employment residence permit. This is a single-entry visa, meaning that having entered Saudi Arabia the holder cannot exit until the iqama formalities are completed. Once granted, the iqama must be renewed annually.

9. How long does it typically take to process the main categories?

A block visa application can take between two to six weeks to process, depending on the type of visa, the size of the request, the Saudisation rating of the company, etc. Once the underlying block visa is

procured, a work (entry) visa application can take one to two weeks to be processed, depending on the country the application is made in and assuming that all the document legalization has been complete. Document legalisation (including the legalisation of the applicant's degree by the Saudi cultural attaché's office and the Saudi embassy in the country of issuance) can significantly add to the total lead times.

Once the applicant enters Saudi Arabia on the basis of the work (entry) visa, obtaining a work permit and iqama generally takes one to two weeks (assuming all the corporate documentation is valid and up to date and all government portals are functional). If the applicant requires additional validation from a professional body (ie, engineers and accountants) the total processing time may increase by two to three weeks.

10. Is it necessary to obtain any benefits or facilities for staff to secure a work permit?

Before a work permit can be granted, the sponsoring entity in Saudi Arabia must have registered the individual on to a local health insurance scheme. The scheme must be approved by the Council of Cooperative Health Insurance.

11. Do the immigration authorities follow objective criteria, or do they exercise discretion according to subjective criteria?

The immigration authorities follow objective criteria, but all determinations are made on a case-by-case basis. Rejected applications are generally not accompanied by any explanation for the rejection. Saudi Arabia does not have express immigration

rules in the same way as other jurisdictions. This arrangement lends itself to subjective interpretations of the rules that do exist. It is not uncommon for two applications with nearly identical facts to be decided in two separate ways. In addition, consular posts abroad tend to exercise significant discretion in the issuance of work and visit visas. Document requirements vary from consular post to consular post (even those within the same country).

12. Is there a special route for high net worth individuals or investors?

There is currently no special route for high net worth individuals. However, those wishing to set up their own business in Saudi Arabia might be able to source a resident's permit through their own entity, although this process tends to be both complicated and time-consuming.

13. Is there a special route for highly skilled individuals?

There is no such special route for highly skilled individuals. However, if the applicant holds a unique skill or is a leader in his or her respective field then a certain dispensation may be granted if the applicant does not fulfil the immigration criteria. A good example is where the applicant is over 60 years of age and, therefore, ordinarily would not get work authorization for Saudi Arabia. However, if it can be proven the applicant has a unique skill that is not found in Saudi Arabia then he or she could be granted a special exemption.

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14. Is there a special route (including fast track) for high net worth individuals for a residence permission route into your jurisdiction?

There is no such special route for high net worth individuals. See question 12.

15. Is there a minimum salary requirement for the main categories for company transfers?

There is no direct minimum salary placed on foreign national employees. However, only certain categories of employee can sponsor dependants. Generally, unskilled workers cannot sponsor family members. Employees without university qualifications may also face issues sponsoring family members.

16. Is there a quota system or resident labour market test?

In Saudi Arabia each industry sector has its own thresholds of Saudisation that must be maintained and any entity registered under this sector must abide by the minimum levels that have been set by the Nitaqat programme introduced in 2011 (see question 1). The thresholds set vary greatly depending on the industry sector the entity is registered under.

Nitaqat means 'zones' in Arabic and the programme classifies Saudi registered entities into six categories: platinum, high green, medium green, low green, yellow and red. Platinum, high green and medium green are compliant categories

denoting the companies with high Saudisation rates, while yellow and red are non-compliant categories that must be corrected. Low green, while compliant, is considered a transitionary zone and is a warning to the entity to improve its rating.

As mentioned previously, compliant entities are rewarded with quicker visa-processing times, access to more immigration services and facilities, and the right to transfer employees from lower-ranked entities without objection. Yellow and red entities cannot hire any foreign staff while in this category and they cannot stop their existing staff from transferring away, without exception.

Companies with fewer than 10 employees are exempt from Nitaqat so long as they employ at least one Saudi citizen (usually the company's government relations officer). This exception typically benefits newly setup Saudi entities that would be otherwise deterred from investing in Saudi Arabia. However, as soon as the 10th employee is hired the entity will be subject to the usual Nitaqat thresholds applicable to that industry sector.

In addition, "Taqat" is the Saudi government's latest initiative to improve the representation of Saudi nationals in the private sector. The "Taqat" framework requires companies looking to obtain work authorisation for foreign nationals to conduct a resident labour market test by advertising positions to Saudi nationals locally before they can apply for a foreign national's visa.

Job vacancies should be posted for 14 days before companies may proceed to apply for a block visa.

During this period Saudi nationals will be given the opportunity to apply for the role.

17. Are there any other main eligibility requirements to qualify for work permission in your jurisdiction?

Yes, the Ministry of Labour has prescribed a minimum level of qualification for certain designations, which is usually a bachelor's qualification. However, for jobs that are specific then the qualification held must be equally specific, for example, a chemical engineer must hold a chemical engineering degree and not a generic qualification. More recently, this clause is especially important for foreign nationals entering Saudi Arabia on engineering job titles. As part of the in-country process of obtaining a work permit and iqama, engineers must be registered with the Saudi Council of Engineers (SCE). The SCE now requires applicants to provide relevant engineering credentials, prior experience in the field and even clear aptitude tests prior to the SCE issuing its approval.

18. What is the process for third-party contractors to obtain work permission?

Companies with the appropriate licence may offer manpower services to foreign companies. Under this arrangement, the manpower company sponsors the employee and then subcontracts the employee to the end client. This arrangement is typical where a foreign company does not have its own entity in Saudi Arabia but has contractual needs that must be fulfilled. The main drawback to this arrangement is that the manpower company effectively becomes the employer of the

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employee and the original employer loses control over that employee while they remain subcontracted out. This is especially problematic in the event of a labour dispute, where any secondment agreements may not be accepted as valid immigration documents per se.

19. Is an equivalency assessment or recognition of skills and qualifications required to obtain immigration permission?

Attested copies of educational certificates are required in order to obtain an employment residence permit for the employee's profession. For example, an engineer would need to have an engineering degree from a recognized institution (see question 17).

Extensions and variations

20. Can a short-term visa be converted in-country into longer term authorisations? If so, what is the process?

No. If long-term authorisation is needed then the short-term visa must be cancelled first. Any application for long-term work permission must be completed from the employee's country of citizenship. As the long-term Saudi process can be quite lengthy, many employees will enter Saudi Arabia on short-term authorisation while the preparatory work for their long-term move is being completed (ie, document legalisation, block visa procurement, etc). This scenario is commonplace where the demands of a client or project are immediate but the immigration clearance for Saudi Arabia is still some time away owing to a block visa application

or lengthy document procurement times.

21. Can long-term immigration permission be extended?

When an individual has obtained an employment residence permit, he or she can continue to live and work in Saudi Arabia as long as his or her residence permit is valid and renewed at the stipulated time. Currently, the residence permit must be renewed every year.

22. What are the rules on and implications of exit and re-entry for work permits?

Employees can exit and re-enter the country as long as their employment residence permit remains valid and they hold a valid exit and re-entry (ERE) permit. Usually residents will secure a multiple-entry ERE and these are valid for six months at a time. If an ERE is allowed to expire while the holder is outside Saudi Arabia then the holder could be refused re-entry into the country. To this end it is vital that the ERE expiry date is carefully tracked and renewed in a timely fashion.

23. How can immigrants qualify for permanent residency or citizenship?

Immigrants cannot qualify for permanent residency or citizenship.

24. Must immigration permission be cancelled at the end of employment in your jurisdiction?

Yes, the employment residence permit must be formally cancelled at the end of the employment and

the employee's ERE cancelled. In its place the employee is issued with a final exit permit that enables him or her to leave the country. If the employee leaves the organisation to join a new company he or she will be required to undergo a sponsorship transfer application, which does not formally cancel the iqama.

25. Are there any specific restrictions on a holder of employment permission? Work permits in Saudi Arabia are not region-specific but they are employer specific.

If an employee wishes to work for a different employer within Saudi Arabia then a transfer of sponsorship must be completed. However, from time to time an employee may need to visit a client site: this is permissible but if the employee is placed there for a longer period of time then justification will be needed, namely, a contract should exist between the applicant's iqama sponsor and the client whose site the applicant is placed at. Evidence may be needed if an immigration inspector is not satisfied with the reasons given by the applicant (if he or she is questioned as to why they are working at a site that is not the same as their sponsor's address).

Dependants

26. Who qualifies as a dependant?

The following are considered as dependants:

- spouse; and
- children (male or female minors, female adults unless married, and males up to 18 years old or older if in full-time education).

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Once the main applicant has obtained a residence permit he or she must then apply for the family's visa. If the main applicant has elderly or infirm parents then a case can be presented to the authorities to permit their sponsorship. However, if granted this will be an exception and the onus is on the main applicant to prove his or her parents need care (eg, a widowed mother, or medical records suggesting the need for constant care).

Please note that Saudi Arabia does not recognise the following as dependants:

- civil partners;
- siblings;
- unmarried partners;
- same-sex partners;
- cohabitees; and
- children of unmarried parents.

27. Are dependants automatically allowed to work or attend school?

A spouse in Saudi Arabia under her husband's sponsorship can only work in the health or education sector. In this instance she would remain under her husband's sponsorship but would be granted a work permit. Children holding formal residency (ie, not visitors) can be enrolled into a local school. Male children who are old enough to work (and not in fulltime education) must transfer to a local employer's sponsorship. Female children who are old enough to work (and not in full-time education or married) will stay under their father's sponsorship and can only transfer out into a limited number of occupations (ie, health and education).

28. What social benefits are dependants entitled to?

There are no social benefits provided to non-Saudi nationals or their dependants.

Other matters

29. Are prior criminal convictions a barrier to obtaining immigration permission?

A police clearance certificate from the applicant's home country is required from most (but not all) jurisdictions. If clearance is not received then the immigration permission will not be granted. Consular posts hold discretion in ascertaining whether a police clearance certificate citing any prior convictions would permit the issuance of a work (entry) visa.

30. What are the penalties for companies and individuals for non-compliance with immigration law? How are these applied in practice?

Non-compliance with immigration law can result in companies being fined and their immigration files being blocked or being forcibly closed down. Individuals can also be fined, imprisoned or have their permits cancelled and can be deported. Furthermore, a lifetime ban can be applied to the violating individual depending on the breach. In some instances, managers and directors of the sponsoring entity may be publicly reported, be imprisoned and subsequently deported.

31. Are there any minimum language requirements for migrants?

No such requirements currently exist.

32. Is medical screening required to obtain immigration permission?

Medical screening is required to obtain a residence permit and a dependant residence permit. For visit visas, formal medical screening is not currently required. Nevertheless, additional tests may be prescribed, depending on which country a foreign worker is coming from. There are certain exceptions made for pregnant women and children. This may, however, change from time to time and so it is recommended that all visitors check this before their departure. All visitors to (and residence permit holders of) Saudi Arabia are screened (eye scan) at the immigration counter before entering the country and their biometric information is recorded for future reference.

33. Is there a specific procedure for employees on secondment to a client site in your jurisdiction?

The concept of secondment in Saudi Arabia does not really exist from an immigration perspective. If an employee is to work for a client and be remunerated by that client then a transfer of sponsorship must be undertaken, although this would make the client the employer of the secondee, which is not the intention of a secondment.

However, relatively recently, Saudi Arabia has launched a mechanism permitting employees to be seconded to a third party in relation to an underlying contract or

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agreement. In such instances, the employee would retain his or her sponsorship with the existing employer and obtain an authorisation to work for, and at the premises of, the third party. This facility is granted through the Absher e-service department in the Ministry of Labour.

Update and trends

It is widely anticipated that the thresholds for minimum Saudisation in the skilled worker sector will increase again in the future. As stated above there is a strong drive to employ local Saudis in skilled occupations and this trend looks set to continue for some time.

Additionally, the number of 'Saudised' positions looks set to increase over the next few years. It should be noted that Saudi Arabian immigration is in the middle of a transition. The largely antiquated manual immigration procedures are being replaced by online ones. Although many systems have now been upgraded, we anticipate that this trend will continue over the next few years.



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