



# GMS Flash Alert



## Immigration Edition

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# Belgium - COVID-19 Travel Restrictions and Immigration Process Changes

Below we highlight the current situation in Belgium regarding the government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including Belgian social distancing measures, advisories and restrictions on traveling to Belgium and abroad, and updated immigration procedures for third country nationals.<sup>1</sup>

## WHY THIS MATTERS

The COVID-19 outbreak affects business, employees and their families and their travel. Global mobility managers should take into account the current situation in Belgium and plan accordingly.

## Social Distancing Measures

As of 12 March 2020, the Belgian National Security Council has communicated additional social distancing measures, including:

- The strong encouragement of home-work.
- The suspension of lessons in primary and secondary schools and of all recreational activities.
- The closing of bars and restaurants.
- The closing of shops (except shops selling food and pharmacies) during the weekend.

Many businesses, including KPMG, and governmental organisations have requested their workforce to work from home.

Public transport will, in principle, run normally but the government requests limiting travel to essential trips. Trains will run less frequently.

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## Restrictions When Traveling or Returning to Belgium

There are currently no measures taken on a governmental level for people traveling into Belgium from other countries. Individuals returning from regions with known novel coronavirus outbreaks are not currently obliged by the Belgian government to self-isolate unless they fall ill within 14 days.

Many businesses in Belgium however are enforcing self-quarantine for their staff (and visitors).

On 16 March 2020, European Council President von der Leyen announced the introduction of travel restrictions for non-essential travels for 30 days (and possibly longer).<sup>2</sup> The proposed restrictions that have been submitted to the national leaders of the EU member states aim to coordinate and enforce the measures taken by the individual member states.

Exceptions will be made for EU nationals, long-term residents, family members, essential staff (e.g., nurses, doctors, etc.), people transporting goods, and border control staff. Green or fast lanes will be put in place giving priority to essential transport to keep the mobility sector going and ensure economic continuity.

## Restrictions When Traveling Abroad

As countries around the world are taking action to contain the coronavirus and end the pandemic, many have put in place mandatory quarantine measures or have closed their borders. As a result normal border crossing can no longer be guaranteed. Many airlines are also drastically reducing the number of flights they offer.

Out of concern for Belgian citizens who could get caught in a foreign country because of those measures, the Belgian Foreign Affairs Office advises against any travel abroad.

People who are already abroad and want to return to Belgium are advised to contact their travel agency, tour operator or airline company. In case of emergency, a call centre has been opened to facilitate assistance to Belgians facing difficulties abroad.

## Impact on Immigration Processes for Third Country Nationals

In principle, the Brussels and Walloon regions require applications for single permits and work permits B to be filed in hard copy only, including some original documents such as medical certificates and certificates of good conduct.

As civil servants of these regions are also working from home and to mitigate impact on the processes timeline, on 16 March, Brussels and Walloon authorities have confirmed in writing that they will accept applications introduced by e-mail. (This was already possible for the Flemish region.) Applicants will need to keep the original documents available should authorities request them at a later stage.

In addition, some local town halls have decided to cancel and reschedule all appointments for now. Temporary documents to cover the stay in Belgium will be issued digitally were possible.

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### KPMG NOTE

We anticipate delays on all levels of the Belgian decision-making process: the Belgian Embassies/Consulate General, the Belgian federal authorities, as well as in the Walloon, Flemish and Brussels regions and the local town halls.

The start date for assignments to Belgium for individuals requiring a visa, work permit B or single permit prior to coming to Belgium might therefore need to be postponed.

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## FOOTNOTES:

1. Official dedicated website of the Belgian authorities (in English): <https://www.info-coronavirus.be/en/>.
2. Press release of President von der Leyen: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_20\\_477](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_477).

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## Contact us

For additional information or assistance, please contact your local GMS or People Services professional\* or the following professional with the KPMG International member firm in Belgium:



### Nele Godefroid

Tel. + 32 2708 3846

[ngodefroid@kpmg.com](mailto:ngodefroid@kpmg.com)

*\* Please note that KPMG LLP (U.S.) does not provide any immigration services. However, KPMG Law LLP in Canada can assist clients with U.S. immigration matters.*

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

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