



# GLOBAL IMMIGRATION UPDATE - AUGUST 2024

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## Feature Article

### GOVERNMENT IMMIGRATION FEES: AN OVERVIEW

*This article provides an overview of government immigration fees in several countries.*

#### Belgium

Strictly speaking, there is no filing fee for work authorization for third-country employees. Third-country individuals who want to be active in Belgium as self-employed must apply for a professional card. The filing fee is €140, or, if filed abroad, the equivalent in local currency of €140 (at present \$153 USD). There is

no "premium processing" fee.

However, there is a "contribution fee" to be paid when filing a first work authorization or professional card application. This fee covers the administrative costs for processing an application for Belgian long-term residence. If a "long stay" D visa application must be filed, the contribution fee comes on top of the visa application fee (see below). The contribution fee for first applications for employees is €144. The contribution fee for those who are self-employed with a professional card is €229. Family members who are 18 years or older, applying for a D visa under family reunification, must also pay a contribution fee of €206.

Work authorization is issued without cost. Administrative fees for a professional card amount to €90 per year of validity.

Upon approval of the work authorization or the professional card, a D visa for Belgium is required. In principle, a D visa application fee (equivalent in local currency to €180; i.e., at present \$196 USD) will have to be paid by the D visa applicant to the Belgian embassy/consulate general in the home country. The exact amount can be checked on the website of the Belgian embassy/consulate general in the home country.

Upon arrival in Belgium, a Belgian residence permit must be applied for. The administrative fees for residence permits in Belgium range between 50€ and 250€. The fees depend on the municipality of residence and on the process for the physical issuing of the Belgian residence permit (standard or urgent processing).

## Italy

Below is an overview of the most common immigration-related government fees:

- **Work permit** application: 2 government stamps of €16: total **€32**
- **Family clearance** application: 2 government stamps of €16: total **€32**
- **D type visa application: €116,00**, to be paid at the consulate in local currency
- **Residence permit:** 1 government stamp €16; + RP filing fee (from €40 to €100) + RP card printing fee €30.46 + 2; + post office managing fee €30. Total **from €118.46 to €178.46**
- **Identity Card application:** €22 (approx.)

## Türkiye

Türkiye's immigration government fees have not increased in the past several years in terms of euros/USD. This is the case even though inflation has been quite high, so fees from a Turkish lira perspective have risen. For example:

- A one-year work permit government fee is a bit over €200, and about €400 for a two-year work permit.
- Residence permit fees are approximately €100 for one year, and approximately €150 for two years (with a complicated matrix to calculate government fees that depends on nationality and validity length).

For residence permit applications, the government fee may pale in comparison to the cost for the notarization, translation, and legalization of several biographical documents. Given the high amount of government staff time needed to adjudicate a residence permit application and the high rate of denial of short term residence permits (not the case for dependent residence permits), it is surprising that the filing fees have not increased more from a euro/USD perspective.

## United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's (UK) immigration fees have risen significantly over the past 20 years and are now some of the highest in the world. Immigration fees generated revenue of more than £2.1 billion in 2022-23. The UK Home Office generates a profit on the fees it charges and uses this to subsidise UK border security and enforcement operations. The latest rise in October 2023 increased application fees by a further 15 to 20 percent on average, and the Immigration Health Surcharge increased in February 2024 by 66 percent to £1035 payable for each year of a person's visa.

Total fees payable to the UK government for a five-year visa for a Skilled Worker working for a large employer plus a family of three dependents are now more than £29,000. Combined with the major increases in the general minimum annual salary threshold for Skilled Workers (from £26,200 to £38,700) and to the "going rates" for specific occupations that must be paid to Skilled Workers in April 2024, these costs are acting as a major disincentive to recruit overseas workers, particularly in sectors that pay lower wages, in the regions outside London and the South East of England, where wages are typically lower

and for businesses that hire graduates and younger workers at early stages in their careers.

The fee and minimum salary increases are a direct attempt by the UK to dampen demand for overseas workers in the face of the UK's highest ever recorded net migration figures in 2022 (745,000) and high figures in 2023 (683,000), and in the run-up to the 2024 UK General Election, where migration was seen as a key policy issue.

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## Country Updates

### COLOMBIA

*This article discusses visa options for retirees and "digital nomads" in Colombia.*

#### **Colombia: An Emerging Haven for Foreign Retirees**

In recent years, [Colombia](#) has emerged as an attractive destination for foreign retirees, consistently ranking high in various international listings. The country's appeal lies in its diverse climate, rich biodiversity, affordable cost of living, excellent culinary offerings, and vibrant cultural scene. Foreign retirees often highlight the warm and welcoming attitude of Colombians, which greatly facilitates their integration into local communities. Cities like Medellín, Cartagena, Santa Marta, and those in the coffee-growing region are particularly popular among this demographic.

#### ***Visa Options for Retirees***

Colombia offers a specific migrant visa category for retirees, outlined in its current immigration regulations. This visa is available to foreigners with a steady monthly income from a pension granted by a government or private pension fund. The visa is valid for up to three years, can be renewed indefinitely, and allows multiple entries into the country. Retirees who have held this visa continuously for at least five years are eligible to apply for a permanent resident permit.

#### ***Requirements for the Retiree Visa***

To obtain the retiree visa, applicants must provide:

1. **Pension Certification:** Proof of a monthly pension payment of at least

\$1,000 USD.

2. **Police Clearance:** A document confirming the applicant has no criminal record duly apostilled and sworn (translated).
3. **Medical Certificate:** This document can be issued from a doctor abroad and must come apostilled and sworn (translated if needed) or issued in Colombia.
4. **International Medical Insurance:** Confirmation of coverage within the national territory against all risks in case of accident, illness, maternity, disability, hospitalization, death, or repatriation, for the duration of stay in Colombia.

Colombia's unique blend of natural beauty, cultural richness, and welcoming atmosphere makes it an ideal retirement destination for some retirees. The retiree visa facilitates a smooth transition for foreigners looking to make Colombia their new home, offering benefits such as long-term stay options and the potential for permanent residence.

### **Digital Nomads in Colombia**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued Resolution 5477 on July 22, 2022, which established new provisions on types of visas, application processes, and issuance, among others. One of the main changes to the Colombian immigration regime introduced by Resolution 5477 is the inclusion of the Visitor Visa for Digital Nomads. Since October 21, 2022, the date on which the new immigration regime entered into force, foreigners, whether independently or labor-related, who wish to enter to provide remote work or teleworking services from Colombia through digital media and internet exclusively for foreign companies, or to start a digital content or information technology venture of interest to the country, may request and obtain a Visitor Visa for Digital Nomads at a Colombian consulate abroad or directly at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Among other requirements, the applicant must demonstrate through bank statements a minimum income equivalent to minimum monthly wages (approximately \$1,220 USD) during the last three months, and health insurance with coverage in Colombia against all risks in case of accident, illness, maternity, disability, hospitalization, death, or repatriation, for the planned duration of stay in Colombia.

This multiple-entry visa is valid for up to two years. The authorized period of

stay is the same time for which it is granted. It allows beneficiary visas for the spouse, permanent partner, and children of the holder. The holder of this visa may not work or carry out any paid activity with a natural or legal person in Colombia. According to Resolution 5477, this visa is apparently only applicable to those foreigners who are exempt from short-stay visas to enter Colombia, such as those listed in Resolution 5488 of 2022.

Similarly, nationals of countries that do not require a short-stay visa may enter without a visa and remain in Colombia with an entry and stay permit granted by Migración Colombia. With this permit, Digital Nomads can stay in the territory for up to 90 days (continuous or discontinuous), extendable for another 90 days as long as the activities they carry out do not generate payments from Colombian companies. Despite the above, it is not certain whether this type of activity can be carried out with a tourist permit (PT), integration and development permit (PID), or permit for other activities (POA), since those currently do not specifically allow this type of activity. Thus, authorization by the competent authorities must be obtained before carrying out digital nomad activities with the aforementioned permits. Possibly a new permit will be created that explicitly authorizes the execution of this type of activity.

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## EUROPEAN UNION

*The Council of the European Union has extended temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees until March 2026.*

In a press release on June 25, 2024, the Council of the European Union announced its decision to extend until March 4, 2026, temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees fleeing from Russia's war with Ukraine.

The temporary protection mechanism was initially triggered on March 4, 2022. The latest extension does not change the categories of persons covered by temporary protection.

This move by the Council aims to provide continued support and stability for Ukrainians who have sought refuge in Europe amid the ongoing conflict in their home country.

For further information, see

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/25/ukrainia-n-refugees-council-extends-temporary-protection-until-march-2026/>

## ITALY

*Italy has amended its immigration law to provide quota-free entry for foreign workers. Also, under new EU Blue Card implementing guidelines, Italy has expanded acceptable documentation of validation of university diplomas.*

### **Quota-Free Entry for Workers**

A recent amendment to the Italian Immigration Law (*Testo Unico dell'Immigrazione*), introduced in 2023, represents a significant innovation for the entry of foreign workers through a non-quota entry route.

The new provisions allow foreign workers who have completed professional and civic-linguistic training programs approved by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies to enter Italy and be employed at any time of the year without being subject to the limitations of entry quotas set by the flow decrees (*decreti flussi*).

To benefit from this opportunity, workers must have completed training programs in Professional Training (to acquire the technical skills needed to perform specific job roles required by Italian companies) and Civic-Linguistic Training (Italian language learning and civic training to facilitate the worker's integration into Italian society).

The procedure for bringing in and employing foreign-trained workers includes:

- **Identification of Programs:** Companies must identify and collaborate with approved training programs.
- **Entry Application:** Employers can submit an application for the entry of the foreign-trained worker at any time during the year.
- **Evaluation and Authorization:** Competent authorities will evaluate the application and, if approved, authorize the worker's entry into Italy.

This new provision offers several advantages to Italian companies:

- **Flexibility:** Companies can quickly respond to labor needs without waiting for annual flow decrees.
- **Competitiveness:** The new provision allows faster access to qualified workers and thus helps companies maintain and increase their market

competitiveness.

- Targeted Training: Workers who complete approved training programs are already prepared for the specific needs of Italian companies.

Only programs officially recognized by the Ministry qualify workers for the "quota-free" entry. For more details, see the list of approved programs and countries involved in the project [here](#).

### **EU Blue Card in Italy: Validation of a University Diploma**

According to the new European Union (EU) Blue Card implementing guidelines, Italian authorities are now accepting the [CIMEA](#) (Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence) [Statements of Comparability and Verification](#) as an alternative to the Declaration of Value (*Dichiarazione di valore*) diploma validation.

The primary goal of CIMEA is to enhance academic mobility in all its forms. CIMEA aims to facilitate understanding of the Italian education system and foreign education and training systems, while promoting the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention on qualifications recognition. The [website](#), available in English, provides useful information on the application process. By paying a reasonable fee, it is possible to have the statement issued in 60 days. To apply for CIMEA's services, you will be asked to upload scanned copies of your documents (e.g., diplomas, transcripts) to the dedicated [platform](#). The website guides the user through the submission process, provides a list of documents required for each country (and indicates if translation is required), and generally helps in navigating the overall process with clear guidelines.

Applicants should be aware, however, that local offices are implementing the new guidelines slowly and that the EU Blue card online application form has not yet been updated by the government. Before going for the CIMEA validation, it is advisable to ask the relevant immigration office whether they accept it in place of the *Dichiarazione di valore* at this stage.

## **UNITED KINGDOM**

*There have been developments related to right-to-work checks and the transition to eVisas.*

### **Right-to-Work Checks on BRPs Short-Dated to 31 December 2024**

There is an ongoing Home Office transition to eVisas, which means that people



with a physical immigration document such as a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) must apply for an eVisa before the end of 2024. Anyone with a BRP having an expiration date of 31 December 2024 whose UK visa is valid beyond that date will need to apply. BRP holders will need to register for a UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) account. The eVisa is the online record of the immigration status contained in the UKVI account.

In relation to right-to-work checks on employees with a BRP short-dated to 31 December 2024, the new guidance confirms the following:

- **Online check.** Where an employer has carried out an online right-to-work check on a BRP, they will have seen the expiration date of the visa itself, rather than the short-dated 31 December 2024 BRP expiration date. In this situation, no immediate action is required. The usual repeat check can be made before the visa expires.
- **Manual original document check.** Before April 6, 2022, employers could carry out a manual right-to-work check on an original BRP. Where the employer has carried out such a check and recorded 31 December 2024 as the right-to-work expiration date, the guidance says that a "follow-up check"—an [online right-to-work check](#)—will be required before the end of the year.

### **Repeat Right-to-Work Checks Not Required on Employees With Pre-Settled Status**

A [2023 High Court judgment](#) covered issues relating to EU citizens who have applied for the EU Settlement Scheme for pre-settled status (when they have not yet lived in the UK for five years) or settled status (when they have been living in the UK for five years). The judgment established that, in accordance with the Withdrawal Agreement when the UK left the EU, pre-settled status holders do not lose their right to residency if they fail to make a settled status application before the expiration of their pre-settled status.

As a result of the judgment, the Home Office guidance on right-to-work checks was finally updated as follows:

- *No right-to-work expiration date for holders of pre-settled status.* Employees with pre-settled status are no longer considered to have an expiration date for their right to work.
- *No repeat right-to-work checks.* Employers do not need to carry out a

repeat right-to-work check on employees with pre-settled status. This puts them in the same position as employees with settled status and means employers only need to check the employee's right to work once—before the employment starts.

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