

# Immigration Law

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### SOUTH AFRICA

New digital visas to be launched in South Africa in the entertainment and events sectors



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## New digital visas to be launched in South Africa in the entertainment and events sectors

Earlier this year, the Minister of Home Affairs (Minister) announced the implementation of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA), a comprehensive digital visa system to modernise South Africa's immigration framework. The ETA aims, amongst other things, to digitalise the entire visa application process, combat the corruption often associated with the paper-based immigration system, and enhance efficiency. All of this is to be welcomed and praised as a step in the right direction.

The ETA is intended to go live at the end of September 2025 in relation to tourist visas, first focusing on travellers arriving by air at OR Tambo International Airport and Cape Town International Airport, with plans to expand to additional visa categories and ports of entry.

To support the pending rollout of the ETA, and speaking during the budget vote debate in early July 2025, the Minister announced that the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) would launch the following two new digital visa initiatives:

- The Screen Talent and Global Entertainment Scheme (STAGES)
- The Meetings, Events and Exhibitions Tourism Scheme (MEETS)

STAGES is tailored specifically for the film and television industry and is aimed at simplifying visa access for film production companies. According to the Minister, an outdated and paper-based immigration system currently hinders this industry. STAGES will allow production companies to apply for visas using a digital online portal, receiving visa outcomes within hours. This will negate the need to submit visa applications in-person at a mission abroad.

The implementation of STAGES will also mitigate against, amongst other things, lost film production opportunities in South Africa due to visa delays. Just recently, South Africa lost a production from a major streaming platform due to visa delays, costing the country approximately R400 million in lost revenue.

MEETS, on the other hand, is tailored for the music, events, entertainment, theatre and sports sectors.

The implementation of MEETS is aimed at combatting an outdated immigration system that has frustrated international event organisers. Through MEETS, visa applications for international attendees at conferences, sporting events and exhibitions will be processed online with faster turnaround times. The Minister has suggested that MEETS will support sports events like the SA20 cricket tournament and the World Rugby Sevens, allowing athletes to travel to South Africa without delays.



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What is clear from recent developments is that the DHA is taking proactive steps to simplify and enhance the visa application process, address South Africa's archaic immigration system and increase South Africa's appeal as a leading filming location and destination for film, tourism, sports, culture and events. This will, in turn, increase economic growth and job creation within these sectors.

While no concrete details have been provided in relation to these initiatives, they are certainly extremely positive and will do away with the administrative challenges foreigners (including artists, film crews and athletes) often face when attempting to enter South Africa. Although these are positive developments, there is still uncertainty in relation to how STAGES and MEETS will apply practically and whether new visa categories will be implemented under these initiatives.

We will be monitoring the release of the necessary regulations by the DHA.

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