



# Immigration Regulatory Updates

## **DIGITALIZATION OF VISA APPLICATIONS IN NIGERIA**

Effective March 1, 2025, visa applications in Nigeria will transition to an online-only system, as announced by the Minister of Interior, Dr. Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, during an X Spaces session on January 20, 2025. The initiative introduces a centralized visa approval center, a significant step towards combating corruption, enhancing national security, and streamlining visa processes.

Additionally, the Minister disclosed plans for a National Data Center at the Bola Ahmed Tinubu Technology Innovation Complex (BATTIC), located at the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) headquarters in Sauka, Abuja. This facility will harmonize national data and safeguard its integrity. In the past, Nigeria's immigration data was stored on private systems managed by contractors, a practice that violated the Data Protection Act. The new center assures greater data security and integrity, signaling the government's commitment to modernization and security.

This bold move reflects the Federal Government's dedication to leveraging technology for progress and national security.

## **KENYA EASES TRAVEL REQUIREMENTS FOR AFRICAN VISITORS**

On January 21, 2025, the Kenyan Cabinet announced that the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) requirement will be dropped for visitors from all African countries, except Somalia and Libya, due to security concerns. This change enables citizens of nearly all African nations to visit Kenya without prior travel authorization.

The ETA, launched in January 2024, replaced the Kenya eVisa system, serving as a pre-authorization platform for travelers. While it enhanced identification of visitors, it negatively impacted Kenya's standing in the 2024 Africa Visa Openness Index, where the country dropped to 46th place out of 54 nations.



Under the new policy:

Citizens of most African nations can stay in Kenya ETA-free for up to two months.

Members of the East African Community (EAC), including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, can stay for up to six months in alignment with bloc policies.

This move aligns Kenya with other African nations like Ghana and Rwanda that have adopted visa-free travel policies for African passport holders. It's also a key step toward boosting tourism and the economy while promoting African unity, a priority of the African Union (AU).

So, if you're an African passport holder and Kenya is on your travel list, now's the perfect time to plan your visit.

### **ECOWAS WITHDRAWAL OF BURKINA FASO, MALI, AND NIGER**

By a press statement released on January 29, 2025, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) announced the immediate withdrawal of Burkina Faso, the Republic of Mali, and the Republic of Niger from the regional bloc. It is widely speculated that this decision was influenced by ECOWAS' demands for a return to democratic rule, which these three military-led governments resisted.

Despite the withdrawal, ECOWAS has chosen to keep its doors open, ensuring minimal disruption to citizens and businesses. Relevant authorities within and outside ECOWAS Member States have been advised to:

- a.** Recognize national passports and identity cards bearing the ECOWAS logo, held by citizens of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, until further notice.
- b.** Continue to treat goods and services from these three countries in accordance with the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and investment policy.
- c.** Allow citizens of these nations to continue enjoying visa-free movement, residence, and establishment rights under existing ECOWAS protocols until further notice.
- d.** Provide full support and cooperation to ECOWAS officials from these three countries as they carry out their assignments for the regional community.

These measures will remain in place until the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government determines the future approach for engagement with Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The ECOWAS Commission has initiated discussions with these countries to ensure a smooth transition and prevent unnecessary disruptions to people's daily lives and businesses.

Should you require further assistance or clarification on the above, please feel free to contact [pamilerin.akabunwa@famsvillelaw.com](mailto:pamilerin.akabunwa@famsvillelaw.com) or [uzochukwu.kpaduwa@famsvillelaw.com](mailto:uzochukwu.kpaduwa@famsvillelaw.com)

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