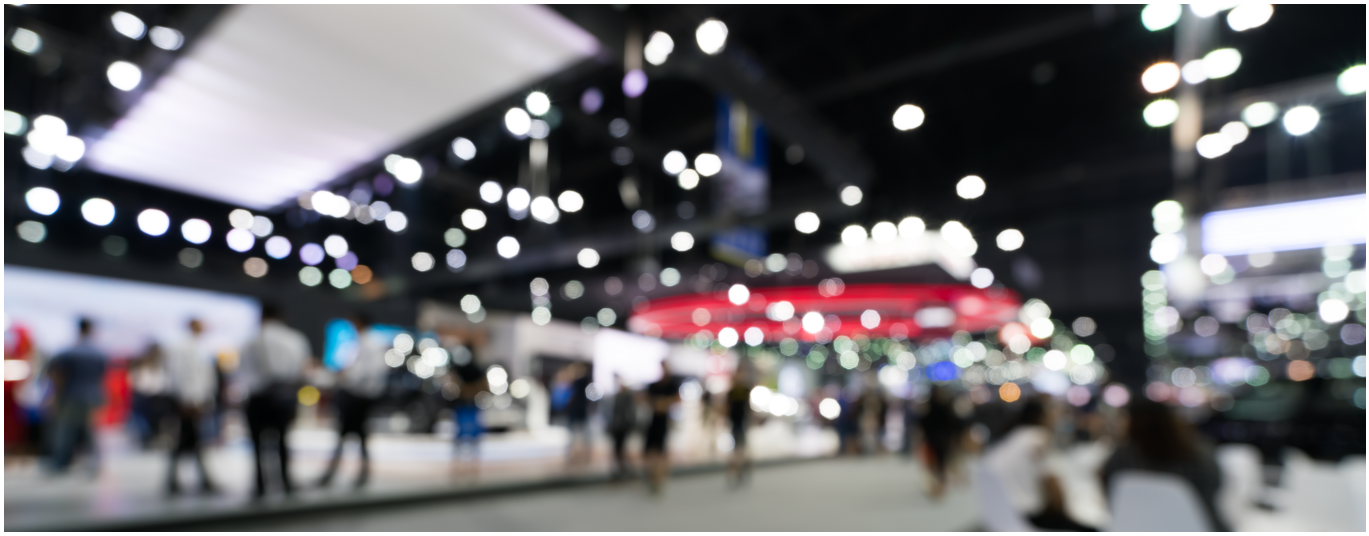
Expo 2020: An Employment Overview

Gordon Barr - Partner - Employment and Incentives
g.barr@tamimi.com - Dubai International Financial Centre



With Expo 2020 fast approaching, it is important that participating countries and corporates understand the key employment and immigration considerations.

This is particularly so given the emphasis by the Expo 2020 leadership on worker welfare including Health and Safety. Indeed, on 19 April 2018, Dubai Municipality and the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization held an Expo driven Health, Safety, Quality, and Environment (HSQE) leadership event to ensure that all stakeholders including contractors, sub-contractors, project managers, regulators, and partners were cognisant of their obligations.

Some of these key employment considerations are addressed below:

What employment framework is in place?

Broadly speaking for the purposes of Expo 2020, employees will fall into three main categories: Expo 2020 staff, employees working on the ongoing construction phase and participating countries and companies.

The venue for Expo 2020 is Dubai South (formerly Dubai World Central), a 140 km2 area in Jebel Ali near to the new Al Maktoum International airport. In addition to the prevailing UAE Federal employment and immigration laws, the Dubai South Free Zone Regulations outline the applicable employment/immigration regulations that apply to entities licensed within the Dubai South.

For the purposes of Expo, although Dubai South Free Zone Authority shall have a licensing function, a specially formed Expo LLC shall project manage matters. Expo LLC is preparing the structure to regularise the influx of manpower that will be required prior, during and after Expo in order that it can act as a one-stop shop for such matters.

Expo LLC (via each participating country's assigned Country Manager) will assess the submitted country plans and thereafter will determine a visa quota for each participating country. A similar process will apply for participating companies.

It will only be possible to obtain visas for employees once the participating country/company is appropriately licensed. As noted, ultimately the license is issued by Dubai South but all participant interface will be with Expo LLC.

What immigration and employment restrictions should be borne in mind?

Upon completion of the licensing formalities (see above), it will be possible to obtain visas for a period of up to 18 months prior to the commencement of Expo with the latest date of expiry being 6 months after the event finishes. Accordingly, the longest period that a visa may be issued for Expo purposes is 30 months (18 months prior to the event, 6-month duration of Expo and 6 months' post Expo). We anticipate that a streamlined process will be put in place to secure visas and Dubai South ID cards are processed promptly.

If a participating country or company requires an individual(s) to access the Expo site prior to the completion of the licensing formalities, it must apply to Expo LLC for approval. An example would be a visiting engineer attending the site to carry out a pavilion feasibility study. For such approval to be granted it will be necessary to set out information such as the reason(s) for and duration of the visit. Expo LLC will thereafter assess such an application before approving or declining access.

The license granted to a participating country shall cease 6 months after Expo. If there is a desire to retain a presence in the UAE post Expo, including the presence of personnel in the UAE, separate corporate structuring advice will require to be sought.

At present, we do not expect the introduction of additional employment legislation in respect of Expo albeit additional guidelines may be issued to supplant the existing suite of policy guidance.

What arrangements are in place for interns and volunteers?

In respect of interns for the event, they are often based in the UAE with a valid residency visa (eg. via a spouse or family member). In such a cases, the steps involved are limited including the provision of a no objection certificate from the legal sponsor and the requirement to obtain a Dubai South ID card.

Past Expo experience demonstrates that volunteers are a major cornerstone of a successful event. The relevant labour laws in the UAE do not specifically provide for volunteering. Despite that, the UAE government has introduced certain volunteering initiatives earlier this year with the aim of increasing

volunteer participation. The government has identified 14 specific areas in which volunteering may take place. We expect that this will adequately cater for the requirements of Expo.

Volunteers must register on a designated volunteer platform online. Express provision has been made for Expo 2020 Dubai volunteers being added to the volunteer platform whereby volunteer opportunities are posted and applicants can apply online to participate.

We will continue to monitor Expo worker welfare developments with interest and will issue a further article in the likely event that further updates materialise in the coming months.

Al Tamimi & Company's Employment team regularly advises on regional employment matters and provides key support to our Expo 2020 practice group. For further information, please contact expo2020@tamimi.com.