

**22 January 2024**

**HON. ERNESTO V. PEREZ**

Director General  
Anti-Red Tape Authority

**Dear Secretary Perez:**

On behalf of the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP), we are writing to reiterate our position on the visa application process for foreign nationals. Our letter dated 16 August 2023 (Annex) was forwarded to your office via electronic mail following the first clarificatory meeting conducted by the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) in July of the same year. To ensure that ARTA continues to have access to our comprehensive insights and recommendations, we are resending our position paper and comments on visa application processes and a simpler list of travel requirements.

The ECCP and its Tourism Committee are deeply committed to making the Philippines a more competitive destination for local and foreign investments. Given the increased travel demand of tourists in the wake of fully reopened borders, we emphasise the urgency of simplifying travel regulations. The Committee underlines that considerably shorter visa application processes and a simpler list of travel requirements will enhance the country's position as a preferred tourist and investment destination.

In line with the government's efforts to reduce red tape, we specifically recommend streamlining non-pandemic-related documents, as well as addressing concerns related to the tedious process expatriates face in coordinating with various government agencies during the visa application and processing stages.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we appreciate the ARTA's continued dedication to fostering collaboration among stakeholders. For inquiries and further coordination, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Chin Nethercott at [advocacy@eccp.com](mailto:advocacy@eccp.com) or via mobile at +63917-871-9778 (SMS/Viber).

Regards,



**GWEN DELA CRUZ**  
ECCP Tourism Committee Chairperson  
Seda Ayala Center Cebu General Manager



**ATTY. GENELYN MANGUILIMOTAN**  
ECCP Tourism Committee Co-Chairperson  
Parklane Hotels and Resorts COO

**16 August 2023**

**HON. ERNESTO V. PEREZ**

Director General

Anti-Red Tape Authority

**Subject: ECCP POSITION AND COMMENTS ON THE VISA APPLICATION PROCESS  
FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS**

**Dear Secretary Perez:**

For over four decades, the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP) has committed to pursuing advocacies in making the Philippines a more competitive destination for local and foreign investments. Together with its sector committees, including the Tourism Committee, the ECCP has endeavoured to make its members' viewpoints heard on economic and business issues, legislative measures, and administrative regulations.

Recognising that competition for tourists has become more fierce ever since the borders have completely reopened, the Chamber's Tourism Committee underlines the need to streamline travel regulations and requirements to facilitate the ease of travel to the Philippines. In accordance with the government's push to reduce red tape and expedite business and nonbusiness-related transactions in government, considerably shorter visa application processes and a simpler list of travel requirements will help the country compete as a favoured tourist and investment destination. Likewise, non-pandemic-related documents other than the minimum requirements for travellers to enter the country should be streamlined. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Documentary proof of relationship to the principal Philippine national for arriving Former Filipinos and foreigners (spouse and/or children of a Filipino or a former Filipino national travelling with them) with Balikbayan privilege eligible to enter PH without a visa under Republic Act No. 9174;
- Sworn statement for overstaying/updating Visa Extension Lane of stay for non-visa required tourists admitted initially for thirty (30) days and is requesting for an initial extension; and
- Other applicable visa requirements and immigration entry and departure formalities

In regards to the travel requirements of expatriates, concerns have been raised to the Chamber concerning the tedious process of coordinating with various government agencies that create bottlenecks in visa application and processing. Failure to address the concerns of expatriates seeking entry into the country may hamper the promotion of the Philippines as a top tourism and investment destination. Please refer to the table below for our comments and inputs based on the expertise and insights of the ECCP members.

<b>Feedback/Comments/Challenges</b>
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On the overall timeline of visa application processing

- The timeline for application processing indicated in the Bureau of Immigration (BI) Citizen's Charter is not followed. For example, as per the Citizen's Charter, the processing of visa downgrading is 6 days, but based on the experience of a lot of travellers, the actual processing time is 15 to 30 days.
- The actual number of days to complete the whole visa process is way far longer than what is advertised on the BI website. Suffice it to say that there are a lot of delays in the BI especially when it comes to the approval of the 9G working visa and the release of their agenda. There is really a need to improve on their processes as this does not only cost stakeholders time and resources, it also delays the travel plans of in-patriates as they need to wait for their visa prior to going out of the Philippines whether for business or personal trips.
  - **Recommendation:** The government should observe the processing time indicated in the BI Citizen's Charter.

Individuals holding Chinese and Indian passports require pre-arranged visas. It takes time to get it from the respective Philippine embassies/consulate.

- Generally, entering the Philippines using 9A Tourist Visa for certain nationals such as those from the United States and Europe is relatively easier.
- Visa requirements on the websites of the Philippine government agencies and embassies/consulates are not updated and complete. This causes back-and-forth transactions in the embassies and consular offices.
- The Philippine Government requires several duplicated documents from the company sponsor in the Philippines, which are unnecessary such as the invitation letters when you have company registration papers and signed application forms.
- There is also a challenge in the turnaround time to secure the visa.

For the 9G Working Visa

- The turnaround time to release work permits from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and visas from the BI is two (2) months at the minimum.
- Exit clearance fees have to be paid every time a working foreigner has to leave the Philippines.
- A private individual who is employed by a local employer cannot transact directly with the BI. It has to pass through accredited immigration facilitators/agents.
- There is a need for a sponsor company to post a hefty amount of bond to the BI when the company processes the papers of the traveller and other requirements.
- In the event that the sponsor company posts a bond to process their own expats' visas, the time to process the visas takes longer than that of the accredited immigration facilitators.
- Conversion from Section 9(g)/9(d) to a Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) or any Section 13 series visa is not allowed without downgrading to Section 9(a).
  - **Recommendation:** Allow direct conversion from one visa to another without reverting to a 9(a) visa, to save time on the process without hampering the work of foreign nationals.

- On the Job Ad Publication requirement of DOLE, as a rule, the allowed number of days to file for the Alien Employment Permit is within 45 days from the job ad publication. However, there was an instance where an AEP was rejected even if filed within the 45-day window, on DOLE's claim that it is 'nearing' the 45-day period. Because of this, additional costs, paperwork, and delay were incurred in the whole 9G visa process for a particular employee.

On the Alien Certificate of Registration Identity Card (ACR I-Card) and Emigration Clearance Certificate (ECC)

- The ACR I-Card has to be renewed annually. This should not be the case; the length of the ACR I-Card validity should be the same as the visa.
- ACR I-Cards are required to be cancelled before an Emigration Clearance Certificate (ECC) application can be filed.
  - **Recommendation:** Simultaneous filing of ACR I-card cancellation and ECC application should be allowed. This will significantly reduce processing time.
- The implementation/stamping of approved visas and ECC issuance takes 5 working days at BI main office.
  - **Recommendation:** Effective issuance is needed to reduce the processing time to 1-2 working days only.
- Visa downgrading applications filed at subport/satellite offices are forwarded to BI main office for Commissioner's approval, thus the transmittal takes up a lot of time. Likewise, ACR I-card cancellation is only done at the BI main office.
  - **Recommendation:** Entire downgrading process from filing, approval, implementation, ACR I-card cancellation, and ECC issuance should be allowed to be done entirely at the satellite offices.
- For incorrect details reflected in the ACR I-card, the Petitioner is required to submit a letter request for the correction, even if the error was made on the part of BI (the applicant provided correct details but BI made a mistake in encoding the details).
  - **Recommendation:** The BI should reprint the ACR I-card with the correct details as per the application forms submitted. Executing a letter request should no longer be required.
- Submission of the Petitioner's corporate documents for every filing of work permit/visa applications
  - **Recommendation:** Collate the corporate documents in an online portal where the Petitioner can submit current and updated corporate documents for compliance whereas the BI can also trigger the portal if a new/updated corporate document is required. This is to lessen the required documents of the applicant without having to submit a new set of corporate documents per application and mitigate the documents to be reviewed by the BI officers. Not reprinting the same corporate documents will also reduce paper consumption.
- Online submission of Alien Employment Permit (AEP) applications is not

available for other DOLE regional offices.

- **Recommendation:** Regional offices must integrate the filing system into online submission same as the DOLE National Capital Region (NCR).

On requirements:

- The Order of Approval for signature that is returned to lawyers for correction takes at least two (2) weeks before they are returned to the office which returned them.
  - **Recommendation:** Expedite the return of the corrected Order of Approval to avoid further delay.
- Applications are outright dismissed/denied for non-compliance/incomplete documents without informing liaison officers or without issuing an Order to Comply first.
  - **Recommendation:** Inform liaison officers if there is a need to comply with the submission of additional documents. This is to avoid filing a Motion for Reconsideration (MR) that causes a delay in the approval of the application.
- Apostille of documents such as birth and marriage certificates is required for accompanying dependent/s, resulting in further delay in the visa issuance.
  - **Recommendation:** Presentation of the original copy for comparison purposes should be sufficient.
- Evaluating officers are requesting additional documents out of the norm, which are not included in the general checklists and eventually will delay the application.
  - **Recommendation:** Officers should conceptualise focusing on the list of requirements indicated in the checklist and/or at least elaborate with a clear description per additional documentary requirements.


Downgrading of a valid Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) Visa is required every time a change in job title occurs (due to promotion or rebranding of positions, thus employment will still continue).

- **Recommendation:** Remove the downgrading requirement for change in position titles. Submission of a notification letter and a copy of new Alien Employment Permit (AEP) cards must be sufficient. If the downgrading requirement for a change of job title cannot be forgone, at least remove the Order to Leave (OTL) requirement in such a case. A change in job title is a common occurrence especially since companies offer promotions and new opportunities to their employees. The Downgrading and OTL in this case disrupt the employment and create a gap in their tenure.

The ECCP looks forward to ARTA's assistance on the abovementioned matters in an effort to further improve government services and eliminate barriers to domestic and international tourism. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate

to contact Ms. Chin Nethercott at [advocacy@eccp.com](mailto:advocacy@eccp.com) or via mobile at +63917-871-9778 (SMS/Viber).

Sincerely,



**GWEN DELA CRUZ**  
ECCP Tourism Committee Chairperson  
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