Government enacts major legislative amendment to the Foreign Nationals Act to tighten protection

The Parliament of Iceland adopted on 16 February 2026 amendments to the Foreign Nationals Act which entered into force on 6 March 2026, introducing several significant changes to immigration and protection rules.

One of the main changes is the abolition of the 18-month rule, which previously allowed applicants for international protection to receive a residence permit if their case was not decided within 18 months (16 months for children). As a result, residence permits granted under this rule can no longer be renewed. People who held such permits may now apply for a residence permit based on special ties without paying a fee. However, they must meet certain conditions, including being financially self-sufficient and having no involvement in criminal proceedings or imprisonment.

The amendments also allow authorities to revoke international protection if a person commits a serious criminal offence. In such cases, residence and work permits will automatically become invalid.

A new 'tolerated stay' permit has been introduced for individuals who cannot be removed from the country due to safety concerns. This temporary permit may come with restrictions and does not provide a pathway to permanent residence.

Source(s)

- Directorate of Immigration | Útlendingastofnun (20 March, 2026), Breytingar á lögum um útlendinga taka gildi [Amendments to the Foreign Nationals Act Take Effect], https://island.is/en/o/directorate-of-immigration/news/amendments-to-the-foreign-nationals-act-take-effect

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