



EU Visa Policy: Commission puts forward proposals to make it stronger, more efficient and more secure

Brussels, 14 March 2018

The Commission is today proposing to reform the EU's common visa policy to adapt the rules to evolving security concerns, challenges linked to migration and new opportunities offered by technological developments.

The proposed changes to the Visa Code will make it easier for legitimate travellers to obtain a visa to come to Europe, facilitating tourism, trade and business, whilst strengthening security and mitigating irregular migration risks.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *"Every year, millions of travellers visit the EU and boost our travel and tourism industry. With the reforms we propose today it will become easier and faster for legitimate travellers to obtain a visa while security standards will be enhanced to better detect and stop those who are not. The new rules will also make sure our common visa policy can help improve our cooperation with non-EU countries when it comes to the return of irregular migrants."*

The tourism and travel industry plays a key role in the European economy, representing around 10% of the EU's GDP. Whilst EU Member States are among the world's leading tourist destinations, lengthy and cumbersome procedures can deter tourists from travelling to Europe, redirecting investment and spending to other countries and affecting the EU's economy negatively. At the same time, the benefits of visa travel need to be balanced alongside improved migration, security and border management to adequately respond to present and future security and migration challenges.

Today's amendments to the Visa Code are the first step of the reform of the common EU visa policy – a proposal to update the Visa Information System (VIS) will follow in spring this year.

Simpler, faster and more secure procedures

The updates proposed today aim at modernising and streamlining the common EU visa rules, facilitating the process for issuing visas both for legitimate travellers and Member States, while strengthening the security standards of the visa procedure.

- **Faster and more flexible procedures:** The decision making time for visa applications will be reduced from 15 to 10 days. It will be possible for travellers to submit their applications up to 6 months in advance of their planned trip, instead of the current 3 months, and to fill in and sign their applications electronically.
- **Multiple entry visas with longer validity:** Harmonised rules will apply to multiple entry visas to better prevent "visa shopping" and to reduce costs and save time for Member States and frequent travellers. Such multiple entry visas will be issued to trusted regular travellers with a positive visa history for a gradually increasing period from 1 up to 5 years. Travellers' fulfilment of entry conditions will be thoroughly and repeatedly verified.
- **Short-term visas at external borders:** To facilitate short-term tourism, Member States will be allowed to issue single-entry visas directly at external land and sea borders under temporary, seasonal schemes subject to strict conditions. Such visas will be valid for a stay of a maximum of 7 days in the issuing Member State only.
- **Additional resources to reinforce security:** In view of significantly increased processing costs over the past years, a moderate increase of the visa fee (from €60 to €80) – which has not increased since 2006 – will be introduced. This moderate increase is meant to allow Member States to maintain adequate levels of consular staff worldwide to ensure stronger security screenings, as well as the upgrading of IT equipment and software, without representing an obstacle for the visa applicants.

Visa policy as a tool to improve cooperation on return and readmission

As called for by EU leaders in June 2017, the Commission is today also stepping up the joint EU efforts on return and readmission by making better use of the leverage of the EU's common visa policy. The

Commission is proposing to introduce a **new mechanism to trigger stricter conditions for processing visas** when a partner country does not cooperate sufficiently on the readmission of irregular migrants, including travellers who entered regularly by obtaining a visa which they overstayed. The new rules will provide for a regular assessment by the Commission of non-EU countries' cooperation on return. If needed, the Commission, together with Member States, can decide on a more restrictive implementation of certain provisions of the Visa Code, including the maximum processing time of applications, the length of validity of visas issued, the cost of visa fees and the exemption of such fees for certain travellers such as diplomats.

Enhancing security checks

In spring this year the Commission will come forward with a proposal to **revise the Visa Information System (VIS)** – the database where applications and the biographical data of applicants are registered. The reform aims at making swift and effective background checks on visa applicants easier for visa officers and border guards. It will also close yet another information gap at the EU level by enabling national authorities to access and exchange information related to long-stay visas and residence documents for border management and security purposes.

Core provisions will include **mandatory checks** of visa applications against relevant security and migration databases and measures to ensure **full interoperability** of the VIS with EU-wide databases such as the newly established Entry-Exit System (EES) as well as the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), through a Single Search Portal.

Reflections on digital visas

Before the end of 2018, the Commission will launch a feasibility study and initiate a discussion with the European Parliament and Member States on how the visa application process can be fully digitalised.

Background

The common EU visa policy facilitates travel to the EU for tourism and business purposes, contributing to the EU's economy and growth, people to people contacts and cultural exchanges. In 2016 alone, almost 14 million Schengen visas were issued for short stay visits (see the [latest statistics](#) on Schengen visas).

Currently, there are 105 non-EU countries and entities that require a visa to travel to Schengen area (the full list is available [here](#)). Generally, a short-stay visa issued by one of the Schengen States entitles its holder to travel throughout the 26 Schengen States for up to 90 days in any 180-day period.

Since the entry into force of the Visa Code in 2010, the environment in which visa policy operates has drastically changed. Over the last years, the EU has been faced with new migration and security challenges. In September 2017, the Commission announced it would come forward with ideas on how to modernise the EU's common visa policy. The Commission confirmed it would propose a revision of the Visa Code in its Work Programme for 2018 and in parallel withdraw its pending proposal on the same matter.

At the same time, the EU is upgrading its information systems for border management in order to close information gaps and enhance internal security. The future revision of the VIS – together with the recent adoption of the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information Authorisation System (ETIAS) – will be yet another building block towards making the EU's information systems interoperable.

For More Information

[Q&A: Adapting the common EU visa policy to new challenges](#)

FACTSHEET: [A stronger, more efficient and secure EU visa policy](#)

[Communication: Adapting the common visa policy to new challenges](#)

[Proposal: Regulation amending the Visa Code](#)

- [Annexes to the proposal for a regulation](#)
- [Commission Staff Working Document: Impact Assessment](#)
- [Commission Staff Working Document: Executive Summary of the Impact Assessment](#)

IP/18/1745

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