

EU Visa Policy: Commission welcomes agreement to strengthen EU visa rules

Today Member States endorsed the agreement reached by the European Parliament and the Council on the Commission's [proposal](#) to modernise the EU's common visa policy, adapting the rules to evolving security concerns, challenges linked to migration and new opportunities offered by technological developments. The agreed changes will make it easier for legitimate travellers to obtain a visa to come to Europe, facilitating tourism, trade and business, whilst strengthening security and reducing irregular migration risks.

Welcoming the endorsement, Commissioner for Home Affairs, Migration and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"I welcome the agreement on this important file. The new visa rules will facilitate travel for the millions of legitimate travellers who visit the EU every year to the benefit of our travel and tourism industry. At the same time, they will also improve and strengthen our security standards to detect those who pose a threat or have no right to enter the EU. The new rules will also enable us to use the leverage of our visa policy in cooperation with non-EU countries when it comes to the return and readmission of irregular migrants."*

The new rules include in particular:

- **More flexible procedures:** Travellers will be able to submit their applications up to 6 months in advance of their planned trip (9 months for seafarers), instead of the current 3 months, and in most cases, directly from their country of residence. Where available, they may also fill in and sign their applications electronically. Minors between 6 and 18 years old may be exempted from the visa fee.
- **Multiple entry visas with longer validity:** Thanks to the introduction of common mandatory rules, frequent travellers with a positive visa history can receive a multiple-entry visa with a gradually increasing validity period from 1 year to a maximum of 5 years, saving time and costs for applicants and Member States. Travellers' fulfilment of entry conditions will be thoroughly and repeatedly verified in all cases.
- **Additional resources for strengthening security:** In view of significantly increased processing costs over the past years, a moderate increase of the visa fee (from €60 to €80) will be introduced. This modest increase will 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.
- **Improving cooperation on readmission:** The conditions for processing visa applications can be adapted depending on whether a third country cooperates satisfactorily on the return and readmission of irregular migrants, including as regards the maximum processing time of applications, the length of validity of visas issued, the level of the visa fee and the exemption of such fees for certain travellers.

Next steps

The European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on the Commission's proposal to modernise the EU visa policy on 29 January. Today the agreement was confirmed by Member States and will now have to be endorsed also by the European Parliament. The European Parliament and the Council will then have to formally adopt the Regulation. The adopted text will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union and the new rules will apply 6 months later.

In parallel, negotiations are ongoing on the Commission's [proposal](#) to upgrade the [Visa Information System](#) (the database containing information on persons applying for Schengen visas). This upgrade is also part of the reform of the common EU visa policy and aims to better secure the EU's external borders.

Background

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 with measures to adequately respond to present and future security and migration challenges.

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 2017 alone, over 14 million Schengen visas were issued for short stay visits (see the [latest statistics](#) on Schengen visas).

The current visa rules are set in the Visa Code and date back to 2010. Since then, the environment in which visa policy operates has drastically changed. Over the last years, the EU has been faced with increased security concerns and challenges linked to migration, while new opportunities deriving from technological developments call for an update of the visa policy to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This is why in [March 2018](#) the Commission proposed to modernise the EU's common visa policy and revise the Visa Code.

There are currently 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.

For More Information

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