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MEMO

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New EU visa rules – Questions and Answers

New EU rules on short-stay visas will apply worldwide from 2 February 2020. They make it easier for legitimate travellers to apply for a visa to come to Europe, facilitating tourism, trade and business, while providing more resources for countering irregular migration risks and threats to internal security.

Which non-EU countries do the new rules apply to?

The changes apply to travellers from all countries which need visas to travel to the EU. Currently, citizens from 105 non-EU countries or entities are required to have a visa (full list available [online](#)). Nothing changes for countries benefitting from visa-free travel to the EU because the new rules do not apply to their citizens.

Which destination countries are covered by the update?

The rules cover short-stay visas for the 22 EU countries that are part of the Schengen area (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden), as well as for four associated countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. A uniform short-stay visa issued by one of these countries covers travel throughout the 26 Schengen countries for up to 90 days in any 180-day period.

Why change the EU visa rules now?

The European Parliament and the Council agreed the changes in June 2019.

The tourism and travel industry plays a key role in the European economy. EU Member States are among the world's leading tourist destinations – the number of visa applications processed has increased considerably over the last 9 years and continues to expand. Since 2009, the number of applications for EU visas has risen by 57% – from 10.2 million to over 16 million in 2018. At the same time, **visa application procedures have not changed since 2010** and there was a need to make them less cumbersome, while maintaining the same level of security and control.

Visa **fees have not been adapted since 2006** and a €60 fee no longer covers the costs of processing applications, in particular due to inflation.

Finally, by creating a link between visa procedures and cooperation on readmission, the revision gives the EU new tools for a dialogue with partner countries about migration. This possibility is part of the EU's **ongoing efforts in favour of a comprehensive and effective migration policy**.

What are the main benefits for travellers?

With the new rules, travellers now benefit from a simpler and more user-friendly visa application procedure:

- Visa applications can be submitted **up to 6 months** before the intended travel (9 months for seafarers), instead of 3 months previously, allowing travellers to better plan their trips;
- **Multiple entry visas** with long validity (from 1 to 5 years) are now easier to obtain, saving frequent travellers time and money, as they will have to apply for a new visa less often;
- In most cases, an application can be submitted directly in the traveller's **country of residence**, and where possible **filled in and signed electronically** (only hard copies were accepted until now), which will also save travellers time, money and hassle.

What are the new rules for issuing multiple-entry visas?

Frequent travellers with a positive visa history are to be granted multiple-entry visa with a gradually increasing validity period from 1 year to a maximum of 5 years.

Travellers' fulfilment of entry conditions will be thoroughly and repeatedly verified in all cases, and only persons with a positive visa track record will be issued multiple-entry visas with a long validity.

Multiple-entry visas allow the holder to travel repeatedly to the EU during the period of validity of the visa.

How long will it take for the visa application to be processed?

The maximum time for visa applications to be processed remains unchanged at 15 days. The processing time may be longer only in individual cases, for instance where further scrutiny of the application is needed, and take up to maximum 45 days.

With which consulate should applicants lodge their visa application?

The rules remain the same. Applicants must lodge their application at the consulate of the country they intend to visit. Applicants planning to visit several Schengen states must apply at the consulate of the country where they will spend the longest period. Applicants planning on visiting several Schengen states for equal lengths of stay must apply at the consulate of the country whose external borders they will cross first when entering the Schengen area. In case the Schengen state of destination has no consulate in the country where the applicant resides, the applicant should check whether it is represented by another consulate.

Do visa applicants have to submit their application in person at a consulate?

In most cases, visa applications can be submitted in the applicant's country of residence (either at a consulate or at the premises of an external service provider) and, where possible, the application form can be filled in and signed electronically. Under the new rules, applicants have to appear in person only when fingerprints are to be collected (i.e. every 59 months).

Can the application be submitted via an external service provider?

Most Member States use external service providers to collect visa applications and supporting documents. The large network of “visa application centres” means that applicants do not usually have to travel too far to lodge their application. Member States remain fully responsible for processing and deciding on visa applications.

What are the requirements for applying for a short stay visa?

The rules have not changed. In order to apply for a short stay visa to the EU, applicants must present:

- A filled in and signed visa application form;
- A passport issued in the last 10 years and valid for at least 3 months after the end of the stay;
- An identity photograph;
- Proof of possession of adequate and valid travel medical insurance;
- Supporting documents relating to the purpose of the stay, evidence of means of support during the stay and accommodation.

Applicants must also pay the visa fee and, where applicable, have their fingerprints collected.

Do visa applicants need a travel medical insurance when travelling to the EU?

Yes, visa applicants must present a valid travel medical insurance when applying for a visa, as it was already the case under the previous rules.

What is the amount of the visa fee? What will the increased visa fee be used for?

The visa fee increases from €60 to €80. This increase is the first one since 2006 and it brings the fee in line with the level where it would be today if it had been aligned to the general EU-wide inflation rate since 2006.

The €60 fee no longer adequately covered the administrative costs (such as staffing, premises and equipment) for offering adequate service to the constantly growing numbers of applications. The increase in the visa fee will ensure there are sufficient financial resources to maintain a wide consular coverage worldwide and reinforce consular staff, speed up the application process and provide better quality service for travellers, upgrade IT equipment and software, and improve the capacity to detect potential security and irregular migration risks.

Importantly, for regular travellers, the fee increase will be partly offset by the new rules on long-validity visas: these travellers may actually save money under the new provisions, since they have to apply for visas less often.

Will the visa fee also increase for countries benefiting from lower fees under Visa Facilitation Agreements?

No. The increase of the general visa fee has no impact on the lower visa fee (€35) set in the Visa Facilitation Agreements concluded between the EU and a number of third countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia.

How does the revised visa fee compare to the fees charged by other countries?

By international standards, the €80 visa fee remains low. As a comparison, applying for a tourist visa to the United States costs €143 and €126 for China. Travellers to Australia have to pay €90 for their visa, while those going to New Zealand will be charged €146. A visa to Canada costs €68, to India €95, and to the UK €112 (January 2020).

Are there any visa fee waivers and reductions?

Yes, the visa fee is still waived for children below 6 years old, as was already the case under the previous rules. The visa fee for minors between the age of 6 and 12 years remains half of the general fee, and thus increases by €5 (to €40). In addition, it is now possible for Member States to waive the visa fee for minors between the age of 6 and 18 years.

How will the cooperation on readmission be linked to EU visa policy?

Over the past years, the EU has been stepping up activities to support Member States in returning people who have no right to stay in Europe. Even though readmission of own nationals is an obligation under international law, Member States have experienced difficulties in returning irregular migrants.

The revised visa rules introduce a new mechanism linking visa policy and cooperation on readmission. This will bring an important element into the EU's discussions with partner countries.

Under the new rules, the Commission will conduct a regular assessment of how non-EU countries cooperate on readmission, taking into account indicators such as:

- The number of return decisions issued to citizens of a given non-EU country;
- The number of actual returns as a percentage of the number of return decisions issued;
- The number of readmission requests accepted by the non-EU country as a percentage of the number of requests submitted to it; and
- The level of practical cooperation in the different stages of the return procedure, including as regards the assistance provided in the identification of persons irregularly staying in the EU and the timely issuance of travel documents.

Member States which encounter substantial and persistent readmission problems with a given non-EU country may also notify the Commission of such a situation. In such cases, the Commission must assess the notification within one month.

On this basis, the Commission, together with Member States, can establish a more restrictive and temporary implementation of certain provisions of the Visa Code for the processing of visa applications from nationals of the country in question, such as the processing time, the length of validity of visas, the level of the visa fee and the fee waivers.

If a third country cooperates sufficiently on readmission, and taking account of the Union's overall relations with the third country concerned, the Commission may also propose a more generous implementation of certain provisions of the Visa Code (lower visa fee, quicker processing times and multiple-entry visas with longer validity to be agreed upon by Member States in the Council).

Can nationals of non-EU countries which do not cooperate on readmission still apply for and obtain a visa to travel to the EU?

More restrictive implementation of certain procedural rules and the general rules on the issuing of multiple-entry visas will not call into question applicants' basic right to submit an application for a visa or to be granted a visa.

When the Commission, together with the Member States, decides that the mechanism should be triggered, the restrictive implementation of certain rules will be adapted to the particular situation in each non EU-country. This could have an impact on the processing time, the length of validity of the visa to be issued, the level of the visa fee to be charged and the fee waivers.

Will the new rules affect the UK after it leaves the EU?

No. In 2019, the Visa Regulation was amended to grant UK nationals visa-free travel to the EU after the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. This means that UK nationals will remain visa-free when travelling to the EU for short stays, so the revised visa rules will not apply to them.

For more information

[Regulation \(EU\) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Regulation \(EC\) No 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas \(Visa Code\)](#)