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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Local Schengen cooperation between Member States' consulates
(Article 48(5), first paragraph, of the Visa Code)
- Compilation of annual reports covering the period 2018-2019

Delegations will find attached the annual reports drawn up in the local Schengen cooperation, as transmitted by the services of the Commission.

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION
ANNUAL REPORTS - 2018-2019**

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*= third state whose nationals are subject to the visa requirement.



EUROPEAN UNION - BASHKIMI EVROPIAN

DELEGATION TO ALBANIA
DELEGACIONI NE SHQIPERI

European Integration, Political, Press and Information Section

26 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Albania 2018-2019 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

17 Member States have diplomatic representations in Albania. Denmark closed down its embassy in 2018.

Six Member States - Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Slovakia – are represented by other Member States for Schengen visas. Austria represents Malta, France represents Luxembourg and Portugal, Hungary represents Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia.

Among non-EU Schengen countries, only Switzerland has a diplomatic representation in Tirana but does not issue visas here. Austria represents Switzerland and Liechtenstein for Schengen visas.

Outside Tirana, Greece has two General Consulates, in Gjirokastra and Korca. Italy has one General Consulate in Vlora.

Several EU Member States represented in Tirana also have Honorary Consuls outside The capital: Austria (Shkodra, Vlora), Bulgaria (Vlora), France (Korca), Hungary (Shkodra), Italy (Gjirokastra, Shkodra) and Romania (Korca). Italy has one Consular Correspondent in Berat.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period (April 2018 - March 2019), one LSC meeting was held on 21 March 2019 which was very well attended by Member States with 15 out of the 17 represented Member States in Albania attending the meeting. The meeting was organised back-to-back with a Consular Protection and was chaired by the EU Delegation in Albania.

Many Member States welcomed the opportunity to have such meeting and all sides agreed to convey LSC meetings on a more regular basis.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Information System (VIS) for Schengen short-stay visa became operational in 2014 in all Schengen States' Consulates present in the Western Balkans.

¹ April 2018 – March 2019

EU Member States present in Albania did not report any particular problems related to the application of VIS in particular or the Visa Code in general.

3.2 Exchange of information

The exchange of information among Schengen countries participating in the LSC meeting was very dynamic and allowed to compare experiences and practices to the benefit of all.

On Schengen visas it was agreed to share information about the three most represented citizens among applicants. The first (partial) data collected after the meeting show that for most EU+ countries, Kosovars, Turks and Chinese are the most represented among applicants for Schengen visas.

In-depth exchanges took place on the documents required by Member States' authorities to issue national visas, either for students or working visas/permits. Some detailed discussions took place on the issue of tracking the financial resources of applicants and what documents are requested in the various Schengen countries.

Further experiences were also shared on the use of the Schengen Information System to detect travel bans and enforce them. The issue of visa requests for family reunifications purposes from Albanian citizens with criminal records in Member States was also discussed.

Finally, the LSC meeting provided a platform to compare trends, figures and analysis on the abuse of visa free regime by Albanian citizens who apply for asylum in Schengen countries. Even if the trend has decreased by 13% in 2018 compared to 2017 (from 25 528 to 22 195 Albanian applicants) they remain over-represented among asylum applicants in Schengen countries compared to other countries of safe origin. Most Schengen countries praised their cooperation with the Albanian authorities and the measures enforced by them to tackle this phenomenon.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

It was agreed at the LSC meeting to exchange statistics on visas both Schengen and national visas issued by Schengen countries represented in Tirana.

A table was drafted and circulated by the EUD and allowed to collect and share statistics with all represented countries.

4. Challenges

The challenge of abuse of visa free regime by asylum applications remains very relevant even if progress has been made and the trend is decreasing.

The issue of overstays by Albanian citizens in Schengen countries was also raised by several Schengen countries present at the LSC meeting.

Both phenomena could be looked into at a next meeting of the LSC.



COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN ALGERIE RAPPORT² 2018-2019

1. Introduction

Dix-huit Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique en Algérie, à savoir: AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE. En dehors de la capitale, FR et ES disposent des consulats à Oran, et FR et IT à Annaba. Pour les questions de visa AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, HU et PL représentent respectivement SI, LU, SK, LT, EE, LV et SE. NO représente DK et IS. En cas d'urgence et sur la base d'une demande expresse BE peut également délivrer des visas pour NL.

En ce qui concerne la réception des demandes de visa AT, EL, FI, HR, HU, NO, NL et MT travaillent avec 'VFS Global' en tant que prestataire de service extérieur, tandis que BE et IT utilisent les services de 'TLS Contact' et ES celles de 'BLS International'. Alors que leur coopération avec 'TLS Contact' a continué à Oran et Annaba, FR a changé de prestataire à Alger, devenu depuis le mois avril 2018 'VFS Global'.

En 2018, 710.644 demandes de visas uniformes ont été traités par les missions des Etats membres en Algérie (5ième demandeur au niveau mondial), qui en ont délivrés 382.360 aux résidents d'Algérie dont presque 30% à entrées multiples. Par rapport à 2017, les taux des demandes traités et de visas délivrés ont diminué de 9 % et 24 % respectivement. Ces évolutions s'expliquent en grande partie par les évolutions au sein de service consulaire de FR. Pour des raisons historiques et sociales (un nombre élevé de ressortissants algériens vivent ou ont des liens avec FR), la plupart des demandes de visa concerne FR, à savoir 76 % en 2018. Une suspension temporaire du traitement des dossiers par FR en raison de difficultés liées au changement de prestataire de service extérieur à Alger a eu un impact important sur le nombre de demandes traitées (une diminution de presque 10 %) et donc également sur le nombre de visas délivrés.

Les chiffres ci-dessus impliquent une augmentation du taux de refus de visa. En effet, en 2018, le taux de refus de visa était à 46 %, confirmant une tendance haussière au cours des dernières années (36% en 2017 et 28% en 2016). Le taux de refus élevé est dû, d'une part, principalement à l'insuffisance des moyens de subsistance présentés par les demandeurs, et à la persistance de faux documents et de phénomène du *visa shopping*. D'autre part, les Etats membres traitent les demandes de visa de manière strictement conforme au Code des Visas. Ceci est en raison des expériences négatives, notamment sur les dettes hospitalières, le phénomène important du *visa overstay*, les demandes d'asile largement injustifiées (10.040 demandes en 2018 dont 94% pas reconnus) et les difficultés persistantes en matière de retour et de la réadmission (seulement 22% des 23.570 ordres de quitter le territoire UE réalisé en 2017). Ensuite l'augmentation par rapport au taux de refus de 2017 en particulier, est liée à l'application du contrôle accru depuis 2018 par FR.

² Avril 2018 – Mars 2019

Comme il ressort de ce qui précède, le domaine des visas est étroitement lié au contexte plus large de la migration en Algérie. Par exemple, dans le débat public, la question des *harragas* (les ressortissants algériens qui tentent d'atteindre l'Europe de manière irrégulière) est souvent liée aux conditions imposées aux visas Schengen. La politique des visas Schengen est un sujet très discuté dans les médias locaux. Bien qu'il n'y ait pas de Partenariat de Mobilité, la mobilité est une partie signifiante des dialogues bilatéraux et une de Priorités de Partenariat UE-Algérie. Ce caractère politique et médiatique de la question des visas entraîne une pression supplémentaire sur la mise en œuvre du Code des Visas en Algérie.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2018-2019

Durant la période de référence, huit réunions ont été organisées, dont l'une a porté sur la coopération en matière de retour et de la réadmission et deux autres sur la modification de la liste harmonisée des documents justificatifs.

La coordination des réunions LSC est assurée par la Délégation de l'UE en Algérie. Le taux de participation des Etats membres aux réunions a été généralement bon. BG, HR, RO et UK sont invités systématiquement en tant qu'observateurs pour échanger des informations sur des questions relatives aux visas. Dans le cadre de certaines réunions thématiques, CA et US sont également invités.

Les rapports des réunions LSC sont établis par la Délégation de l'UE et partagés avec les Etats membres à Alger. Les Etats membres ont communiqué les rapports à leurs consulats à Oran et Annaba, et à leurs capitales.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les États membres et la Délégation de l'UE se sont engagés à accomplir les tâches imposées par le Code des Visas. Il y eu une bonne coopération et des échanges utiles dans le cadre des réunions organisées par la Délégation de l'UE et souvent aussi par le biais de contacts bilatéraux. Les nouveaux développements et les points d'attention d'actualité y sont discutés, tels que les nouvelles tendances relatives aux faux documents. Dans le contexte d'application du Code des Visas, les États membres ont souligné l'importance de disposer d'assez de personnel, ce qui est parfois sous pression en Algérie.

La plupart des États membres sont obligés de s'écarter de la période conseillée pour le délai d'attente jusqu'au rendez-vous afin de déposer une demande (en règle générale dans un délai de deux semaines selon l'article 9.2 du Code des Visas). La forte pression migratoire en provenance de l'Algérie se traduit par une pression particulièrement forte sur l'agenda des rendez-vous pour le dépôt du dossier. L'estimation est que l'intérêt est jusqu'à dix fois supérieur à ce que les États membres peuvent gérer. La conséquence est que les calendriers de certains États membres sont à chaque fois entièrement remplis jusqu'à deux voir plusieurs mois à l'avance. Ce contexte est associé et est davantage compliqué par le phénomène du *visa shopping* et la multiplication des intermédiaires qui souvent abusent de la procédure.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

Une discussion est en cours sur l'adaptation de la Décision d'exécution C(2016)5927 de 23 septembre 2016 modifiant la liste des justificatifs devant être présentés par les demandeurs de visa en Algérie. Outre certaines propositions de fond et de rédaction de moindre importance, les États membres recherchent principalement un compromis permettant de classer la réservation d'hôtel en tant que justificatif d'objet du voyage touristique ou en tant que justificatif d'hébergement. Le premier cas est conforme à la liste harmonisée actuelle mais selon FR il encouragerait la fraude et les pertes financières des hôtels (souvent la réservation d'hôtel est annulée à la dernière minute tandis que le demandeur reste chez la famille ou les amis). D'autres États membres, cependant, soutiennent que la réservation d'hôtel est importante pour vérifier de façon concrète l'intention du demandeur avant d'examiner le reste du dossier et, surtout, d'éviter le détournement de l'objet du visa dans la catégorie tourisme. De ce fait, il ne suffit pas de le considérer comme justificatif d'hébergement.

Les discussions se poursuivent actuellement notamment par le biais de contacts bilatéraux et informels, afin de trouver une nouvelle proposition. Celle-ci pourra ensuite être discutée lors d'une prochaine réunion de tous les États membres dédiée à la discussion sur la liste harmonisée.

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

Les États membres ont échangé régulièrement des informations et des expériences spécifiques servant à harmoniser les procédures. Cela concerne, entre autres, la mise en place d'un calendrier de rendez-vous en ligne et le prépaiement de charges de services, la coopération avec les prestataires de service extérieurs et les échanges avec certaines institutions algériennes sur la vérification des documents justificatifs.

Les procédures en matière de visas à entrées multiples (MEV) varient légèrement parmi les États membres. La plupart des MEV délivrés en Algérie ont une durée de 1 an, principalement pour permettre des voyages d'affaires et des visites familiales régulières. En considération des demandes présentées, tout en tenant compte aussi de la condition socio-économique des demandeurs, des États membres délivrent d'une façon progressive des MEV de 2 ou 3 ans, et moins souvent de 4 ou 5 ans, conformément à ce qui est prévu par le Code Visas. A cet égard, un certain nombre des États membres attribuent toujours un visa à entrée unique (SEV) initialement, et seulement après une utilisation appropriée de ce dernier, un MEV. Dans le même sens, certains États membres appliquent dans le cas d'une utilisation incorrecte d'un MEV une rétrogradation ou même un refus pour une demande de suivi.

3.4 Echange d'informations

Les échanges d'information entre les membres LSC se sont déroulés à l'occasion des réunions de coordination et via e-mail, de façon régulière ou ad-hoc en fonction des besoins. Grâce aux efforts de FR pour la centralisation et la présentation des statistiques, les États membres ont examiné et discuté chaque trimestre l'évolution des taux de demandes de visa traitées, de visas délivrés et de refus. Lors de réunions qui ont eu lieu presque mensuellement, on a parlé régulièrement des tendances actuelles en matière de faux documents. Bien qu'en dehors de la période de référence, il convient de mentionner qu'une réunion thématique sur la lutte contre la fraude a été organisée par FR le 9 avril 2019.

Lors du période de référence, il n'y a eu que peu de discussions au cours des réunions sur l'assurance voyage médical et les problèmes associés. L'utilisation de VISMail et du système d'information sur les visas n'a été discutée qu'en référence à d'autres sujets.

Parmi les sujets à l'ordre du jour autres que ceux déjà mentionnés dans ce rapport figurent:

- le retour et la réadmission des ressortissants algériens en situation irrégulière (au cours d'une session thématique du 4 juin 2018 préparée par la Délégation de l'UE et le DG HOME);
- le problème du *visa overstay*, et le rendez-vous de retour ou le justificatif du retour;
- l'analyse des risques en matière d'immigration et de sécurité dans le contexte plus large de la situation migratoire en Algérie;
- la politique des autorités algériennes en matière de migration et de mobilité, et la coopération dans ce domaine y compris le 'UE – Algérie Dialogue Informel sur la Migration et la Mobilité';
- les implications de la modernisation de la politique UE en matière des visas.

3.5 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Les Etats membres et la Délégation de l'UE ont discuté de possibilité de la coopération avec les autorités algériennes pour contrer les crimes de fraude commises par des intermédiaires nombreux, prêts à établir des dossiers de la demande de visa avec le support de faux documents. La Délégation réfléchira sur les formats appropriés pour sensibiliser les autorités algériennes à ce problème.

4. Défis

Comme prévu par le rapport précédent, au cours de la période de référence les États membres et la Délégation de l'UE ont renforcé les échanges sur la base des informations statistiques sur l'octroi et le refus de visas, et sur l'analyse de risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité.

Les points à traiter lors du prochain période (2019-2020) seront les suivants:

- s'accorder sur la modification de la liste des justificatifs devant être présentés par les demandeurs de visa en Algérie, et la mettre en œuvre;
- renforcer encore la coopération dans le domaine de la lutte contre la fraude, notamment sur la base des engagements ou proposition issus de la réunion thématique susmentionnée;
- formuler des messages communs sur la procédure de demande de visa, notamment afin de lutter contre les intermédiaires frauduleux.

Le rapport a été approuvé par tous les Etats membres présents en Algérie.



DELEGACIÓN DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA EN LA REPÚBLICA ARGENTINA

24 May 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

2018-2019 REPORT³

1. Introduction

Presence: 22 EU Member States (PT, ES, FR, IT, EL, BG, RO, HR, SI, SK, AT, DE, DK, NL, BE, SE, FI, PL, CZ, HU, UK, EI) are present in Argentina – 20 of them are bound by the Schengen acquis; plus Norway and Switzerland.

Representation agreements to issue visas: Norway represents Sweden, Denmark and Iceland to issue visas. Germany represents Latvia, Austria represents Malta, Spain represents Estonia and Belgium represents Luxembourg. In all cases, the issuing of visas for represented MS is very low or non-existent. Argentinian nationals do not need a visa to travel to the Schengen area for short stays.

Given the large amount of EU citizens living in Argentina, there are numerous consulates outside Buenos Aires, in particular in the cities of Córdoba, Rosario and Sante Fe. Some of them can issue Schengen visas, but most of such visas are issued in Buenos Aires.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

On 14 March 2019, representatives of the European Union Member States and Schengen associated countries met in the premises of the EU Delegation in Argentina for their annual Local Schengen Cooperation meeting, chaired by the EU Delegation. All of the 20 EU MS bound by the Schengen acquis except one participated in the meeting, as well as the two non-EU Schengen associated countries present locally. The meeting was therefore well attended. The previous such meeting was held a year earlier, in March 2018. The LSC does not consider it necessary to organise more than one meeting per year in Buenos Aires given the small amount of Schengen visas issued in Argentina and the lack of significant problems.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS present locally do not experience particular issues in the implementation of the Visa Code. Low number of applications/visas issued (around 1 000 annually). The Schengen visa applications in Argentina concern mostly nationals from Bolivia, Ecuador, Russia and China.

³ April 2018 – March 2019

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

List of supporting documents: Several MS have pointed out that the **credit card requirement** is complicated for some people to comply with.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No information available on the length of MEVs issued.

3.4 Exchange of information

- MS agreed that the travel medical insurance and the use of the Visa Information System were not a problem in Argentina.
- MS informed that they did not use external service providers for the processing of visa applications (the low number of applications would not justify it).
- Cases of fraud: One MS reported 25 cases of misuse of visas they had granted to Turkish nationals in the last 2 months. The people concerned left the transit area in a MS airport where they have arrived from Buenos Aires *en route* to Istanbul. The way they manage to get out of the transit area is currently unknown. As a precaution, no more visas are currently granted by that MS consulate to Turks in Argentina.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

Given the low numbers of visas applied for and issued in Argentina (1 114/1 002 respectively according to the DG HOME 2018 Visa statistics) and the very limited number of problematic cases, there is no appetite among the MS present locally (some of which have to deal with a significant workload of consular cases due to the size of their own communities in the country) to engage in LSC related activities.

5. Other issues

EU Delegation used the annual LSC meeting in March 2019 to inform MS consulates on the new rules involved by the reform of the EU Visa Code - they will likely come into effect towards the end of 2019. Written information about the main changes in the revised Visa Code had been sent to consuls ahead of the meeting.

As Argentina is a visa-free country and many Argentines travel frequently to Europe, there is a certain level of disquiet about the future implementation of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), aimed at registering the people who do not need any visa to travel to Europe. A common effort will be needed beforehand in order to inform Argentines of the new requirements, and it will be necessary to explain that this is not a visa obligation, just an obligation to register as traveller.

This report was consulted with and validated by MS embassies present locally in Buenos Aires in May 2019



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO ARMENIA
Political, Press and Information Section

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ARMENIA 2018-2019 REPORT⁴

1. Introduction

11 MS have resident embassies in Armenia; 7- France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Czech Republic and Poland- issue Schengen visas. All visa-issuing consular sections are located in the capital, Yerevan.

For visa purposes, apart from their own countries, France represents Portugal, Norway, Iceland; Germany represents Belgium, The Netherlands⁵, Luxemburg, Sweden and Austria; Italy represents Finland and Malta; Lithuania represents Spain⁶, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia, Estonia. Poland represents Slovenia, Slovakia, and Switzerland. Czech Republic issues Schengen visa for the Czech Republic only. The embassies of Lithuania, Greece and Italy co-operate with external service providers: VFS Global (LT, GR) and TLS Contact (IT).

In the reporting period, Schengen meetings were coordinated by the EU Delegation. Switzerland too expressed desire to take part in the LSC meetings.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Two LSC meetings took place in the reporting period. The implementation of the Visa Facilitation Agreement and technical issues related thereto were the main agenda points of the meetings, which were well-attended by the Schengen consuls, and Romania and Bulgaria as observers. The EU Delegation chaired the meetings. The LSC meetings served as a good platform for the consuls to have brainstorming on the topical issues related to their daily activities.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States are well prepared to carry out the tasks under the Visa Code.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The list of visa supporting documents was drawn up in 2014; therefore the consuls were invited to discuss the necessity of its revision. The MS, however, did not show explicit need for the revision.

⁴ April 2018 – March 2019

⁵ As of July 2019, applicants will have to apply to an ESP for a visa to Netherlands

⁶ Visa applicants wishing to travel to Spain will have the option to apply via an ESP

The Czech MFA introduced ATV in international transit areas of the airports located on the territory of the Czech Republic, for nationals of Armenia as of March 11, 2019. There has been a sharp and substantial increase in the amount of asylum seekers of Armenian nationality in the transit area of Prague Airport, traveling via Prague from non-Schengen area countries to other non-Schengen area countries. As reported earlier, the Czech Embassy also requires that the Armenian applicants fully pay for the accommodation.

Member States discussed and agreed not to waive flight reservation requirement since it serves as a reference for actual travel dates not always clearly mentioned in the application form.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Member States discussed and decided to apply, if possible, a uniform approach regarding acknowledgement of the Armenian passport validity. Whereas most MS consider the actual validity of the passport, some take into account the date of the police stamp, which make an Armenian passport valid in foreign countries, and without which Armenians cannot travel outside Armenia (not applicable in case of biometric passports).

Switzerland pointed to a lack of uniform approach also vis-à-vis legal proof of residence in Armenia by foreign citizens. Russian passport holders residing in Armenia can have a stamp in their passport proving their legal residence in the country. However, Poland, which issues visas in representation of Switzerland, does not consider it as sufficient proof and refuses to accept applications.

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information between Member States is overall good. Resident consuls regularly sent visa statistics and information on returned asylum seekers via email. VIS and VIS Mail are successfully used.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

The main challenges remain fake and forged documents and provision of false information by applicants, increased number of applications, which are difficult to handle in some consulates due to limited staff.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO AUSTRALIA

17 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) AUSTRALIA 2018-19 REPORT⁷

1. Introduction

There are 21 Schengen countries represented in Australia (AT, BE, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SK, SI, ES, SE and CH) who regularly participate in the meetings of the LSC Group which are usually held in Canberra (except once a semester in Sydney). Observer countries represented in Australia attend on a semi-regular basis (BG, HR, CY and RO). LSC group meetings are run back-to-back with the Consular Group, a formula which has been working well since its inception in 2013 (since 2014 non EU-Schengen Members can also attend the Consular Group meeting as observers, following local agreement in this sense).

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

The LSC Group met twice within the last six months of 2018⁸. The Group plans to have two meetings in the first semester of 2019. The attendance for the LSC meetings for the period under consideration was very high. The meetings were chaired by the EUDEL Head of the Political, Press and Information Section; draft minutes were prepared by EUDEL, shared for approval with the Group under silent procedure and then submitted to HQ. We can confirm that the Schengen countries normally share these minutes with their HQ.

3. State-of-play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

As reported in previous years, the application of the Visa Code does not seem to pose any major problems in Australia. The item is included as standard on all LSC Group meeting agendas. Among specific issues that attracted a certain amount of discussion in 2018 was (i) the use of off-shore insurance companies by visa applicants and (ii) differing practices by Schengen countries re. the recognition of the Australian Document of Identity. EUDEL is considering highlighting the latter issue by adding specific information to the FAQ document that is available on its website.

3.2 Assessment of the list of supporting documents

After intense lobbying and monitoring by EUDEL, by March 2019 all Schengen countries represented in Australia have included on their websites the correct information re. The list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants of short stay visas in Australia (as per Commission Decision C (2017) 5853).

⁷ April 2018-March 2019.

⁸ 23 July & 10 December 2018

To date, there has been no suggestion that said list should be amended. During the December 2018 meeting of the LSC Group the need for visa applicants to present confirmed flight reservations was discussed, and while acknowledging the limits of that specific requirement, most Schengen countries agreed it should be retained as being useful for the overall assessment of the visa application.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The issuing of MEVs was not discussed in any detail during LSC Group meetings (in any case only some countries issue MEVs with a validity of 1 to 2 years). There is a de facto agreement in place among Schengen countries to share information if they feel a candidate may be "shopping" around, but no suggestion to harmonise visa-issuing practices: at this stage this is not considered necessary (small number of visa applications for most Schengen countries, low security risk).

3.4 Exchange of information

Following the LSC Group meeting in July, AT as Presidency of the Council of the EU offered to collect visa statistics for the remainder of 2018. Unfortunately, only a very small number of Schengen countries contributed to this exercise. The issue will have to be raised and solved in one of the next meetings, with a view to a positive outcome for 2019.

EUDEL with the assistance of the LSC group has drawn up a list of insurance companies who offer adequate TMI and shared it with the group (including both onshore and offshore companies). We were informed that a company formerly on the list had an issue with their registration. We were asked to remove them from the "list", which we did. In addition, some Schengen countries noted they prefer not to use / accept off-shore insurance companies.

EUDEL shares information with Schengen countries on a regular basis with most information being uploaded onto the password protected AGORA local Intranet. Schengen countries that are not part of the EU have access to the specific Schengen agora sub group.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EUDEL and the LSC Group have created a document titled "Where to apply for a Schengen Visa in Australia" which is kept up to date and is available on the EUDEL's website, together with the FAQ. We have encouraged all Schengen countries to include both these documents on their websites to accompany the "Established list of common documents for Australia".

4. Challenges

EUDEL addressed the ongoing issue of visa applications in FIJI and PNG, due to the lack of EU missions that can issue Schengen Visas and the subsequent need for applicants to travel to other countries to lodge their visa application. EUDEL advised the group that HQ suggested these possible solutions:

- Schengen countries could conclude agreements with an external service provider (possibly VFS Global which is already active in the region) to collect visa applications and biometric identifiers and transfer them to the closest consulate for processing and decision/issuing of visa. The likely insufficiency of the current service fee for ESP (max 30 EUR) to cover costs and courier fees emerged as a evident obstacle to this solution. Questions were also raised re. call for tenders that would have to be launched to select the operators to provide this service and how this could apply for all Schengen countries.
- A system of consular officers who would travel regularly (e.g. every 2-3 months) to Fiji and/or PNG to collect visa applications and biometric identifiers with a mobile biometric kit. Questions were raised as regards (i) the need for agreements on representation that would authorise one consular officer of country X to collect Schengen visa applications for country Y; (ii) even if the prior issue were solved a number of practical problems would remain, including; where to receive the applications, data transmission compatibility between the visa systems of different countries, visa fee harmonisation, different policies re. Currency acceptance, passport processing and transport, publicity re. visit of consular officer to the country.

5. Other issues

No other issues at present

This report has been approved by all Member States



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO BANGLADESH

Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC)

25 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BANGLADESH 2018-2019 REPORT⁹

1. Introduction

Nine Member States are present and 19 are represented in Dhaka:

Schengen Member State	Also represents	Represented by
Denmark	Norway	
France	Austria, Czech Republic, Portugal	
Germany	Estonia, Hungary	
Italy	Greece, Malta, Slovakia	
Netherlands		Sweden
Norway		Denmark
Spain	Spain	
Sweden	Belgium, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, Iceland	
Switzerland	Liechtenstein	

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

EU Delegation, Head of Administration, chairs the LSC meetings. Meetings are scheduled on a bi-monthly basis, with exception of the summer vacations when many Members are absent and it is difficult to fix a date with a sufficient number of Members present and available in Dhaka. Ad hoc meetings can be called by any Member State if an urgent need arises.

Meetings are generally well attended. Occasionally a Member State may be absent due to heavy workload or staffing constraints or other obligations.

Regular meetings took place according to the following calendar: 2018: 14 May, 3rd September, 3rd December; 2019: 11 February, 18 March

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No comments

⁹ April 2018 – March 2019

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The harmonized list for visa applications for Bangladesh was adopted on 30 August 2017. Implementation by MS in Bangladesh was agreed to start on 14 September 2017.

All MS updated their information and websites accordingly. None of the MS has raised any difficulty with the implementation. None of the MS sees any need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

MS spent time in the LSC meeting in October to exchange views on their respective experience with the implementation of the Harmonized list. No issues were reported.

During the previous reporting period, in line with the Visa Code article 16 (7), MS attempted harmonizing the visa fee. Unfortunately, it had to be concluded that the different systems do not allow for full implementation of article 16(7). Some MS however adjusted the fees to reduce some of the gaps, differences observed. The same topic was brought up again in the current reporting period. The same conclusion was reached.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States exchange the following information:

- Statistics of applications received, visa issued and refusal rate, (on a monthly basis by email),
- Cases of fraud or practical cases or difficulties encountered, (during the LSC meeting).

MS rarely use VISMail. Some MS are not fully aware of the VIS system.

The first EURLO, (European Return Liaison Officer), funded by the EU and hosted by NL, arrived in Dhaka early 2017 and left end of 2018. His successor arrived in January 2019.

The EURLO is an integral part of the LSC Bangladesh and as such invited to all LSC meetings.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

During the current reporting period, MS have agreed to analyse in more depth the list of medical travel insurance companies. This exercise will continue in the next reporting period.

4. Challenges

The previous report mentioned "LSC Bangladesh agreed to review the list of travel medical insurance companies, (Visa Code art. 10.3.g and art. 15): only a few companies appear to be regularly used by applicants; some applicants also subscribe policies with international insurance companies outside of Bangladesh."

LSC Bangladesh has started to address this matter and will continue to follow up on this in the next reporting period.

Enhance cooperation among partners to avoid visa shopping.

This annual report was drafted by the LSC Chair and commented by LSC MS. The final version has been approved by all MS LSC Bangladesh.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BELARUS

April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BELARUS 2018-2019 REPORT¹⁰

1. Introduction

14 EU Member States are present Belarus: Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovak Republic and Sweden. Ten Schengen Member States (MS) issue visas (Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovak Republic). Bulgaria and Romania are also issue visas.

Latvia has a consulate in Viciebsk, Lithuania has consulates in Hrodna and Brest. Ten MS operate visa application centres (Denmark, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Estonia, Slovak Republic).

Representation arrangements:

Estonia represents Finland and Sweden; France represents Iceland and Norway; Germany represents Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia; Hungary represents Switzerland and Liechtenstein; Italy represents Malta; Latvia represents Spain, as well as - in Viciebsk consular district – Austria, Estonia, France, Netherlands, Slovenia, Lithuania, Spain, Poland and Lithuania; Lithuania represents Greece only for official delegations and diplomatic passports, as well as Latvia, Portugal and Czech Republic in Hrodna (for Hrodna and Brest regions); Slovakia represents Portugal.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period there were three LSC meetings (11 June 2018, 18 October 2018 and 28 February 2019).

The meetings are generally well attended with attendance continuously on the rise – 10-14 MS attended the meetings in the reporting period. Bulgaria and Romania are invited to the LSC meetings and sometimes join.

As previously, EU Delegation (EUDEL) is organising and chairing LSC meetings in its premises. EUDEL draws up the meetings' reports and disseminates the draft among LSC members for comments before their final adoption. Some MS send these reports to their capitals; others draw their own reports. EUDEL asks MS for input to the meetings' agenda.

MS Consulates General outside Minsk are informed about the LSC meetings and related issues via e-mail (they receive meetings' agenda, reports, questions, etc.).

¹⁰ April 2018 – March 2019

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is applicable since May 2010 and is being implemented in a well-coordinated manner.

The issue of revocation and annulment of visas was discussed extensively during the reporting period. At the operational level, MS agreed on the local practice with regard to notifications sent to the issuing country in case of revocation/annulment of a visa issued by other MS. As a follow-up to this exercise, the LSC undertook the task of mapping local practices in this field. The findings revealed a relatively high number of revocations and annulments. The reasons behind are different: on one side, it proves that the applicants use skilfully all flexibilities and exemptions of the system and that they should be informed better on the possibilities to travel with their valid MEV visas in Schengen zone. On the other side, it also raises the issue of varying intensity of border controls, which should be discussed further between different agencies of MS.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Commission Decision establishing the List of supporting documents for Belarus was adopted on 29 April 2014 and since then legally binding for all the MS. The EU Delegation monitors the implementation of the List by the MS and the provision of unified information to the applicants.

MS agreed that there will be a need to update the existing list in the second half of the year, taking also into account the upcoming changes in the EU visa legislation and eventual conclusion of the talks on the EU-Belarus visa facilitation agreement.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

In the reporting period, MS continued to apply harmonised practices (under the flexibilities offered by the Visa Code) as follows:

Art. 16-5 b) - All MS waive the visa fee for holders of diplomatic and service passports.

Art. 16-5 c) - All MS agreed to waive the visa fee for participants aged 25 or less in seminars, conferences, sports, cultural or educational events, organized by non-profit organizations.

Art. 16-6 cultural events – MS waive the visa fee.

All MS waive the visa fee for applicants whose travel to Schengen has a connection to programmes of developing civil society in Belarus.

All MS waive the visa fee in the interest of foreign or development policy.

Harmonisation could not be reached in the following fields:

Art. 16-6 sports events – due to differences in a definition of what constitutes a sport event (e.g. sport as a hobby?).

Art. 16-5 a), waving a visa fee for children – not possible to harmonise due to the practice of one MS

The number of MEV issued by MS has been stabilised and is now slightly lower than the number of single entry visas. The most common validity of MEV issued is 1-2 years. The number of MEV with 4-5 years validity is very small (around 1% of MEV issued).

MS are generally willing to issue multiple entry visas with longer validity for family members, visiting Belarusian citizens residing in a Schengen MS, students and businessmen. Some MS limit the validity of the visa to the length of the residence permit of an inviting person.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC and EUDEL regularly shared respective information in accordance with art 48.3 of the Visa Code.

Until the end of 2018 the statistics were compiled by volunteering MS, which resulted sometimes in disruption of information flows. To make the process more streamlined, it was decided to return to the previous practice and to provide the statistics to EUDEL on a monthly basis, which will be then compiled into semi-annual overviews.

The regular exchange of information within the LSC also covered implementation of the Visa Information System, use of VIS Mail, cases of fraud, travel medical insurance, but also bad practices such as "visa shopping", false proof of employment, ticket bookings, reservations for accommodation etc.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

MS support each-other by offering services of their experts (in-house or visiting) in documents security, migration risks, border controls etc.

MS were updated on the second phase of the EU funded mobility project MOST in order to ensure necessary consular support for participants travelling to the EU countries.

EUDEL draw attention of MS to the specifics of the issuing of visas and residence permits to participants in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes coming from third countries and asked to support these participants in their temporary mobility.

EU Delegation kept Member States informed about the progress in EU internal negotiations and adoption of the Visa Code recast, negotiations with Belarus of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements, the Mobility Partnership and projects resulting from cooperation in these fields.

4. Challenges

Should the Visa Facilitation Agreement be signed in the next reporting period, the LSC will be required to adjust the current list of supporting documents and possibly review the harmonisation of practices accordingly. However, there is no clarity at the moment regarding the possible timeline to conclude the negotiations of the EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement, so the revised Visa Code may become applicable before any eventual liberalisation takes place. In any case, the changes introduced by the revised Visa Code will have an impact on the activities of the Member States' visa sections/departments, and this should be also discussed within the LSC.

The report was approved by the Member States on 9 April 2019.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN (LSC) A COTONOU (BENIN) - RAPPORT¹¹ 2018-2019

1. Introduction

Depuis le 1er juin 2015, seulement deux Etats Schengen ont des représentations diplomatiques habilitées à délivrer des visas à Cotonou: l'Allemagne et la France.

La France couvre les demandes de visas pour la Belgique, la République Tchèque, l'Estonie, la Grèce, l'Espagne, l'Italie, la Lituanie, la Hongrie, Malte, l'Autriche, le Portugal et la Suisse.

Même si depuis le 1^{er} février, le Bureau diplomatique de la Belgique est devenu une Ambassade, l'Ambassade de France reste en charge des visas Schengen, et le Consulat de Belgique à Abuja des visas de longue durée.

Après des expériences concluantes dans d'autres pays, la France a décidé de procéder à l'externalisation de la collecte des dossiers de demandes de visas au Bénin (ce système sera d'application à partir de fin mai 2019).

Depuis début 2014, l'Ambassade des Pays-Bas ne délivre plus de visas localement. Les demandes sont réceptionnées localement puis traitées par le Bureau régional des Pays-Bas au Ghana. Ce Bureau traite aussi les demandes de visas pour le Luxembourg et la Finlande.

Depuis le 24 avril 2019, les demandes sont traitées par un service central au sein du Ministère des affaires étrangères à La Haye

Concernant le nombre de demandes traitées par les EM: la France traite un peu plus de 13.000 demandes par an (légère hausse par rapport à 2017), l'Allemagne environ 1000 demandes par an (légère baisse par rapport à 2017), et les Pays-Bas environ un peu plus de 300 (légère baisse par rapport à 2017). Le taux de refus pour la France s'est élevé à 13,29 % en 2018 (taux stable entre 2017 et 2018, en augmentation depuis fin 2018 pour atteindre 18% pour le 1^{er} trimestre 2019, pour un taux de refus de 26,8% pour l'Allemagne (en hausse par rapport au taux de 21,9% en 2017) et 29,75% de refus pour les Pays-Bas (légère hausse par rapport à 2017).

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2018-2019

Depuis janvier 2013, la Délégation de l'UE assure la Présidence et le Secrétariat du groupe LSC au Bénin qui se réunit en moyenne trois fois par an.

Pendant la période de mars 2018 à mars 2018, nous avons tenu 3 réunions Schengen (21/03/2018, 28/06/2018, 26/09/2018), avec une participation des Etats Schengen présents au Bénin (y compris la Suisse).

¹¹ Mars 2018- Mars 2019

Les rapports de réunions sont validés par les EM. Chaque EM rapporte directement à son siège.

La coordination LSC n'est pas assurée en dehors de Cotonou, car pour le moment, cela n'est pas nécessaire compte tenu des réalités du pays.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1. Application du Code des Visas

Les EM présents au Bénin appliquent le Code des Visas en accord avec les instructions reçues par leurs autorités respectives. Les 2 EM délivrant des visas au cours de la période couverte par ce rapport utilisent le système VIS sans grandes difficultés à signaler.

Comme les années précédentes, la difficulté majeure à laquelle ont fait face les consulats portaient sur les cas de **fraude documentaire** (relevés bancaires falsifiés, fausses déclarations d'importation, faux contrats de travail, faux diplômes, fausses lettres d'invitation...) pour l'obtention de visas, ainsi que de fraude à la transcription d'actes de naissance. Les Etats membres ont souligné la sophistication croissante des fraudes. Ils ont aussi fait état de l'excellente collaboration avec la police républicaine, qui a démontré son efficacité par le démantèlement de plusieurs filières et de nombreuses interpellations et arrestations (une cinquantaine d'interpellations en 2018 comme en 2017).

Dans le milieu étudiant, ces interpellations et arrestations ont eu un effet dissuasif, le nombre de faux documents produits pour l'obtention de visas d'étudiants a fortement baissé par rapport à l'année précédente.

Par contre, il y a relativement peu d'interceptions à l'aéroport de passagers à destination de l'espace Schengen pour production de faux documents (e.g. visas, passeports).

Comme les années précédentes, la Suisse a fait l'objet d'un « phishing » relatif aux bourses d'études: de fausses informations circulent sur l'existence de fausses bourses. La coopération avec la police a également bien fonctionné pour la recherche des coupables. Un mail automatique est diffusé sur le mail général officiel de la Coopération suisse/Agence consulaire suisse pour attirer l'attention du public sur cette question.

Certains Etats membres ont aussi constaté des **problèmes à l'entrée de l'espace Schengen** (voyageurs béninois avec un visa délivré par un EM mais considérés inadmissibles sur l'espace Schengen et donc refoulés à l'aéroport, et nombreux demandeurs d'asile béninois en possession d'un visa octroyé au Bénin par un EM). Concernant les demandeurs d'asile, il s'agit surtout de commerçants et de marins. Les EM ont dès lors adopté une politique d'octroi de visas plus stricte pour des personnes qui se font engager sur des bateaux pour exercer des métiers de commis, cuisiniers...

3.2. Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs

Le travail d'harmonisation de la liste de documents justificatifs est terminé et appliquée par les 2 EM. Les différents EM publient les documents sur leurs sites web.

La France applique depuis novembre 2017 un nouveau système informatique relatif aux demandes de visas. Pour le Bénin, qui fait partie d'une première vague de 6 pays pilotes, les demandeurs de visas devront rentrer sur le site "Logiciel France visas" qui leur donnera les informations utiles sur le type de visa dont ils ont besoin, et les documents nécessaires à fournir pour son obtention. Dans une seconde phase (prévue dans un à deux ans), les demandes de visas devront se faire électroniquement, avec l'envoi de documents scannés, et le visa sera aussi fourni électroniquement. Ce logiciel sera commun à tous les consulats, toutes les Ambassades, et le Ministère de l'intérieur français. Pour 2019, à compter de l'externalisation, les formulaires de demandes de visa devront être remplis en ligne.

3.3. Harmonisation des procédures

Les Etats membres ont procédé à une harmonisation de fait de la délivrance des visas de longue durée à entrées multiples: lors de la première demande, le visa est délivré pour une durée équivalente à la demande, si le demandeur fait plusieurs demandes par an un visa d'un an lui sera délivré, et par la suite il pourra bénéficier d'un visa de plusieurs années.

3.4. Echange d'informations

Les statistiques sont partagées dans chaque réunion avec une compilation annuelle, si bien que la circulation des informations entre les représentants des EM est régulière.

Pour améliorer l'efficacité de l'échange des statistiques relatives aux demandes de visas entre les membres du Groupe, le Groupe a adopté en 2018 une pratique suivant laquelle l'Allemagne, la France et les Pays-Bas remplissent avant la prochaine réunion un tableau statistique reprenant les données relatives aux demandes de visas qu'ils auront traitées, sur base d'un modèle fourni par la DUE. Ces données sont ensuite compilées par la DUE et distribuées lors de la réunion suivante.

Les réunions LSC servent aussi de cadre d'échanges d'informations, de pratiques communes et de discussions pour vérification et/ou consultation sur des dossiers frauduleux. Lors de ces échanges sur des cas de fraudes documentaires, le policier français en mission à l'aéroport de Cotonou assiste généralement aux réunions et informe les EM sur les éventuelles difficultés constatées.

La coordination téléphonique et/ou par mail entre les EM est active au Bénin dans le traitement de certains dossiers.

3.5. D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

N/A

4. Défis

Les défis suivant sont identifiés:

- Il convient de poursuivre la veille et la vigilance relative aux cas de fraude documentaire (surtout pour l'obtention de visas d'étudiants).
- Il convient de poursuivre une politique stricte d'octroi de visas aux personnes dont les profils professionnels ont été identifiés comme susceptibles de poser des problèmes à l'entrée de l'espace Schengen

L'ensemble des Etats membres ont approuvé le présent rapport



UNIÓN EUROPEA

DELEGACIÓN EN BOLIVIA

18 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Bolivia 2018-2019 REPORT¹²

1. Introduction

Six Member States (MS) and associated states are present, i.e. France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Spain and Switzerland. Switzerland does not issue visas, France in specific cases (in the framework of privileged bilateral relations in the cultural, political, financial and business domains) and Sweden via its Embassy in Colombia.

20 MS are represented, i.e.

- Estonia (via Germany),
- Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia (via Italy),
- Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland (via Sweden),
- Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, The Netherlands, The Czech Republic and Switzerland (via Spain).

The General Consulate of Spain located in Santa Cruz is the only LSC consular section situated outside the Capital city of La Paz.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period, four regular LSC meetings were held which were well attended. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (EUDEL), which also drew up the meeting reports. One ad hoc meeting was held on 24 April 2018 to finalise the LSC Report 2017-2018. Coordination with the General Consulate of Spain in Santa Cruz was ensured via the Spanish Embassy in La Paz.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and EUDEL are well prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out in the LSC under the Visa Code. In La Paz, regular LSC meetings have been established since 2013.

Statistics shared locally in 2018-2019 continue to indicate some differences among MS on refusal rates, varying between 1,1 % and 35,9 % with an average refusal rate of 23,6 %.

Despite the differences in refusal rates, there is no concern by LSC members about "visa shopping", since there is a good cooperation between MS in signalling the few attempts of visa shopping in cases of visa refusal.

¹² April 2018 – March 2019

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The list of supporting documents was adopted on 24 October 2018. MS during the LSC meeting on 8 November 2018 informed the EUDEL that the list had been applied for their visa application procedures. A need to amend the list was not identified.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

There were no other initiatives aiming at harmonizing visa-issuing practices.

As a matter of routine, MS issue multiple entry visas (MEVs) only for the period of the travel. In exceptional cases of applicants proving the need or justifying the intention to travel frequently and/or regularly (e.g. due to his/her occupational or family status), one MS issued MEVs with a duration of 1 year (6,76 % of visas issued) and of 2 years (2,16 % of visas issued). 3,4 % of visas issued by another MS were MEVs with a duration of 1,2,3,4 or 5 years.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings provided the opportunity to exchange information on a number of topics relevant for the issuing of Schengen visas, such as statistics, travel medical insurances, fraud attempts.

MS use and are satisfied with the VIS.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/a

4. Challenges

The list of supporting documents, described in the previous two reports as a challenge, was adopted on 24 October 2018.

The trend of increasing sophistication of visa-fraud attempts, identified in the previous report, has been further discussed during the LSC meetings and beyond in order to intensify the exchange information and best practices between MS. As a result, one MS established stricter procedures to detect falsified documents.

With the falsification of financial documents remaining one of the main challenges, it will be crucial for the next reporting period (2019-2020) to improve controls as well as cooperation with financial institutes, such as banks.

5. Other issues

N/A

The report has been approved by LSC members present in La Paz.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND SADC

27 May 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Botswana 2018-2019 REPORT¹³

1. Introduction

Germany, France and the UK have embassies in Gaborone, Botswana. Only visas for the Schengen countries represented by Germany in Botswana (Germany, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Luxemburg, Malta, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland) can be obtained in Gaborone. Applications for most other Schengen countries are in Johannesburg/Pretoria, but a few can be much farther (e.g. Namibia for Spain, Zambia for Italy, Egypt for Slovenia). There are ongoing negotiations between Botswana and several Schengen countries for visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports.

There are little to no problems with visa applications of Botswana citizens. Other than an occasional student visa, most applications are short-term visas.

Since Gaborone is the seat of the SADC Secretariat, we regularly face difficulties with visa applications of SADC Secretariat personnel traveling on (last-minute) mission to European countries without local Schengen representation.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

No formal LSC meetings were held in Botswana in the time period, and make little sense with only one embassy issuing Schengen visas. Informal meetings take place regularly, and there is good email contact. A planned meeting in Pretoria to include non-resident MS could not take place due to scheduling difficulties.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

n/a

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Only one MS issuing visas, thus harmonisation achieved in practice.

¹³ April 2018 – March 2019

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Only one MS issuing visas, thus harmonisation achieved in practice.

3.4 Exchange of information

German embassy regularly shares statistics of visas issued per Schengen country with the EU Delegation. Some non-residents also share their visa statistics.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

Several members of the COAFR working group had asked the EU Delegation and MS to look into solutions for issuing visas for applicants travelling to Schengen countries not represented in Botswana. Discussions are ongoing.

5. Other issues

The option of having a once-yearly LSC meeting outside of country in Johannesburg/Pretoria has been very fruitful and should be continued. It could unfortunately not take place during this reporting period.

Botswana is a vast country the size of France. Thus visa applications from rural areas presents a significant challenge, especially if travel abroad, e.g. to Pretoria/Johannesburg is required. This has created a significant amount of frustration.

This report has been approved by all Schengen Member States resident in Botswana.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO BRAZIL

Brasilia 8 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) Brasilia/BRAZIL 2018-2019 REPORT (April 2018 – March 2019)

1. Introduction

The Delegation of the European Union to Brazil chairs the EU Schengen group meetings. The following Schengen MS Embassies (or Schengen associated MS) are present in Brasilia:

1. **Austria** (also issuing Schengen visas on behalf of Malta and Latvia)
 2. **Belgium** (also representing Luxemburg in consular issues; Schengen issues are dealt with only by the General Consulate of BE in Sao Paulo)
 3. **Bulgaria** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
 4. **Cyprus** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
 5. **Croatia** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
 6. **Czech Republic**
 7. **Denmark** (all visas for Denmark are issued by Norway)
 8. 9. **Finland** (short-stay visas for Finland are issued by Norway in Brasilia and by The Netherlands in São Paulo)
 10. **France**
 11. **Germany** (due to limitations of the consular department at the Embassy in Brasilia, all visa issues are dealt with by the General Consulates of DE in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Porto Alegre and Recife).
 12. **Greece**
 13. **Hungary** (only issues long-stay visas)
 14. **Italy**
 14. **Luxembourg** (Schengen visas issued by General Consulate of BE in São Paulo)
 15. **Netherlands** (issues Schengen visas for Finland at Consulate General in São Paulo)
 16. **Poland** (holds Schengen representation for Latvia at the Consulate General in Curitiba)
 17. **Portugal** (also issuing Schengen visas on behalf of Slovenia)
 18. **Romania** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
 19. **Slovakia**
 20. **Slovenia** (Schengen visas for Slovenia are issued by Portugal)
 21. **Spain** (issuing Schengen visas for Estonia in Sao Paulo)
 22. **Sweden** (short-stay visas for Sweden are issued by Norway)
 - + 23. **Norway** (also representing Sweden and Finland for short-stay visas and Denmark for all the visa-related issues)
 - + 24. **Switzerland** (also issues Schengen visas for Hungary in Swiss Consulate in São Paulo)
25. One Member State present only outside the capital: **Lithuania**

The General Consulate of Lithuania in Sao Paulo constitutes a very special case as this Member State does not have an Embassy in the capital Brasilia.

Due to the continental size of Brazil and the very limited resources of EU DEL, it is impossible to coordinate Local Schengen Coordination in all the cities where MSs have their consular representations (Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Recife, Curitiba, Salvador, Belem, Fortaleza and Belo Horizonte). However, since 2018 EU DEL has organized LSC meeting in Rio de Janeiro (1) and São Paulo (2). It is in the process of launching the Recife chapter in 2019, and consolidating the practice outside the capital of LSC meetings.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

From April 2018 to March 2019 seven LSC meetings were held in the capital Brasilia in the following dates: April 2018, May 2018, June 2018, September 2018, October 2018, November 2018, and March 2019. This is an increase from last report.

In addition, there were two meetings in São Paulo (October 2018 and February 2019).

The LSC group always meets at the EU Delegation in Brasilia and normally is well-attended by MS (around 75%). When meetings are held outside Brasilia attendance is almost complete (90%). The number of meetings has been increasing since 2015, with discussions on counterfeit documents and visa shopping as well as regular information on the Visa Committee and the upcoming revision of the Visa Code. As a result, MS are more engaged with follow-up discussions online. LSC meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation. Minutes are drafted by EU Delegation and shared for comments with MS. Any further follow up is dealt with by the chair. MSs draft their own reports to their capitals. EU Delegation reports are then sent to the Visa Committee.

Ad-hoc meetings are organized in São Paulo by member states. EU Delegation tries to attend when possible since they concentrate the majority of the visa-related issues. As of 2018, member states are also organizing ad-hoc meetings in Rio de Janeiro, and soon will be organizing meetings in Recife. EU Delegation is encouraging other consulates to also organize meetings on visa-related issues.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Due to the EU-Brazil Schengen visa waiver agreement, Schengen visa-related problems do not constitute a major issue in the local consular work. VIS was fully implemented in Brazil. The requirement for collecting biometric details means that in some cases, visa applicants need to travel further to ensure this requirement.

MSs apply different exchange rates and also update them with different regularity, mostly according to instructions from their capitals, which makes it impossible to have one uniform visa fee in the local currency. However, the differences in fees are not significant and they do not lead to visa shopping.

The issue of treatment of EU nationals entering Brazil is regularly the object of criticisms towards BR authorities. Specific cases of questionable refusals upon arrival in Brazil and a lack of familiarity with diplomatic, service passports and the EU laissez-passer were raised. Often these would occur due to a clear lack of training of immigration officers, however in general it can be stated that BR authorities comply with the VWA.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Work was finalized and the harmonisation exercise concluded during this period. MS are currently monitoring the harmonisation of practices. So far there is no need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

So far no harmonisation of practices has taken place. About a third of all visas issued are multiple entry visas (MEVs). Most of the visas issued takes place in São Paulo (80% of total in the country) with Rio de Janeiro coming second, followed by Brasilia.

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC group is working very well. EU DEL regularly updates Member States on Schengen *aquis* and all legal developments in this area taking place in Brussels. There have been several special sessions on the novelties and changes foreseen at the next overhaul of the Visa Code. The EU DEL has been responsible for compiling local statistics for the worldwide statistics exercise, which has been successfully finalized. EU DEL is also responsible for distributing data bases of EU MS consular offices in Brazil, as well as any other relevant Schengen information.

Almost all the MSs maintain regular working contacts between themselves (partly thanks to their close cooperation in consular issues). The EU DEL is included in the exchange of consular information between the MS, both in Schengen and in consular issues. Statistics are exchanged on an ad hoc basis.

The flow of information between MS Embassies and Consulates located outside Brasilia is not always ideal. The EU Delegation, upon request, shares information with the consular offices outside the capital.

Tentative of possible visa shopping and cases of fraud documents are also shared between all MS and EU Delegation. Some MS have observed that changes in the modus operandi from various visa sections are quickly noticed by local community and spread around. This information turns out to be relevant for third national in Brazil, in their attempts to use visa shopping or some causes of fake documents, especially financial statements.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges in 2018-2019

EU Delegation and the MS consular officers have been receiving numerous questions from Brazilian nationals about a possibility to remain as a tourist within different Schengen States for more than 90 days (which is not possible under the EU-Brazil Schengen visa waiver agreement). In Brazil, in principle, the period of stay of EU citizens cannot be extended either (number of EU citizens of various nationalities were denied extension beyond 90 days and the Foreign Ministry Immigration Division argued reciprocity with the Schengen Area). Before the new migration law was adopted, there were cases of EU citizens, who had the initial 90-day period renewed by the Brazilian Police for another 90 days (which seems to indicate a case by case approach); however this is not possible nowadays. EU nationals who want to extend their stay would have to pay a penalty of 100R\$/day to a maximum of 2.000 R\$.

It has also been a challenge to launch and better coordinate LSC in locations outside Brasilia. So far São Paulo has the leading experience but there is great progress in Rio de Janeiro. In addition, other locations will require close monitoring with local rotating chairs. There are a large number of MS with consular offices outside the capital and some of them – Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo-, with larger numbers in terms of visas and Schengen-related issues, than in Brasilia.

5. Other issues

The Schengen group in Brasilia is composed of 24 Members and it is a very heterogeneous group in terms of acquaintance with Schengen *acquis*. Since the visa waiver programme is working fine and no major problems arise, MS tend to focus more on consular protection.

This report has been prepared by the EU Delegation in Brazil. Members of the EU Schengen group have been invited to comment on the draft and their suggestions were included in the document.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF CABO VERDE

Praia, 20 March 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Cabo Verde 2018-2019 REPORT¹⁴

1. Introduction

Cabo Verde is a lower middle income country with well-functioning democratic institutions and overall good governance. Cabo Verde has agreed a Mobility Partnership with the EU. A Visa Facilitation Agreement and a Readmission Agreement entered into force on 1 December 2014.

There are four resident Member State Embassies in Cabo Verde: Spain, France, Luxembourg and Portugal. Many more MS have ambassadors in Dakar and Lisbon accredited to Cabo Verde. Portugal runs the Common Visa Centre (CCV) in Praia, which by now receives Schengen visa requests for a total of 19 Schengen countries. Among the four MS mentioned, Spain does not participate in the CCV and has its own consulate in Praia. Spain also offers the possibility to present applications in Sal and Mindelo through its vice honorary consulates (if no biometrics are needed), which send them on to Praia for processing. The CCV has a similar offer. There is excellent cooperation between Portugal (CCV) and Spain in cases where further information on refusals/applicants is needed as well as any other question of common interest.

Cabo Verde being an archipelago with nine inhabited islands approx. 500km off the coast of West Africa, it is challenging for inhabitants of the other islands to request visas in Praia, but also for all citizens as regards visits to countries not covered by the CCV, and for longer-term national visas. As regards Schengen visas, the CCV therefore also offers its services on the islands of Sal and São Vicente on a regular basis.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period, three regular LSC meetings were held. They were chaired by EU DEL and always attended by all four resident MS. EU DEL drafted the meeting reports, which were then circulated to Member States for comments, before being sent to DG HOME and EEAS.

Portugal shares the meeting reports with Lisbon. Spain either shares the common report or does specific ones if it is considered that there is a relevant issue to underline or stress to Madrid.

As all four MS Embassies are in the capital city of Praia, coordination outside the capital is not necessary.

¹⁴ April 2018 – March 2019

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Apart from those mentioned in this report, no other specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code were discussed in the LSC meetings.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

A harmonised list of supporting documents is in place. In the context of the Third Joint Committee of the EU-Cabo Verde Visa Facilitation Agreement on 27 November 2017, DG HOME recalled the need to provide full information about the list of harmonised documents on respective websites.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Given the fact that the Common Visa Centre receives and processes requests for Schengen visas for a total of 19 countries, there is a large degree of harmonisation of practices in place.

Different practices in the treatment of visa requests related to binational marriages have been discussed, but no attempt at harmonisation has been undertaken so far.

The issue of the length of validity of multiple entry visas (MEVs) visas have been discussed regularly. According to a rough estimate (there are no precise statistics available), nearly half of all Schengen visas issued by the CCV are MEVs. These are granted in accordance with the rules as and when requested by the applicant, and pose no particular problems.

A specific issue in Cabo Verde is the fact that national passports have a maximum validity of five years. It is therefore practically not possible to issue 5-year MEV, and 4-year MEVs are very rare.

3.4 Exchange of information

During all LSC meetings, a regular exchange of information takes place. This typically includes:

- visa statistics;
- cases of fraud, in particular false documents and “*marriages blancs*” and an exchange of best practices how to discover and minimize such fraud;
- overall trends in visa applications, seasonal variations;
- public debates, information campaigns on visa issues.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC meetings have in the past also been used to prepare the meetings of the Joint Committees of the EU-Cabo Verde Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements, but no such meeting took place within the reporting period.

4. Challenges

As mentioned above, Cabo Verde being an archipelago with nine inhabited islands, it is very challenging for inhabitants of the other islands and even from rural areas on the main island of Santiago to request visas. Therefore, the CCV and Spain also offer their services on the two important islands of Sal and São Vicente (city of Mindelo) on a regular basis.

In the context of the conclusion of the EU-CV Visa Facilitation Agreement, false expectations were raised in the domestic political arena, which in turn led to a certain degree of frustration among the population, which in many cases seems to have assumed everyone would now be able to obtain a visa. This issue has been addressed by a reinforced effort at public information by the CCV, which is considered to have had a positive effect.

Overall, the visa issue is one of the very few “irritants” which have the capacity to somewhat tarnish the otherwise excellent relations between Cabo Verde and the EU, as well as bilaterally between Cabo Verde and Member States. The rules of the Visa Code are applied correctly, but many Cabo Verdean applicants feel treated unfairly when their application is refused.

This report has been tacitly approved by all Member States resident in Cabo Verde.

EU DELEGATION TO CAMBODIA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN CAMBODIA 2018-2019 REPORT¹⁵

1. Introduction

There are currently two Member States present in Cambodia (France and Germany) that issue Schengen short stay visas. FR represents: Belgium, Spain, Greece, Slovenia, Malta, Latvia, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Czech Republic and Iceland. DE represents: Austria, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. For other EU countries, Schengen visas are issued either in Bangkok or Hanoi (normally very few applications). Switzerland has a consular agency in Cambodia. Norway is not directly represented in Cambodia and covers the country from Bangkok.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

With regard to consular and Schengen cooperation in Cambodia, two regular meetings are held per year (one per semester). LSC issues are normally discussed back to back to the more general consular cooperation issues. Ad hoc meetings can be organised at request of EU MS.

In 2018, the two local coordination meetings took place, in June and December. During the meeting in June, 12 Member States attended, while during the meeting in December 9 Member States attended. The meeting reports were drawn up by the EUDEL and circulated among MS for their further comments and suggestions. An ad hoc meeting was organized in November on the impact of the new EU regulation regarding data protection. During the meeting, Member States shared their practices regarding the application of data protection regulation to the issuing of visas.

LSC in Cambodia is primarily based on cooperation between FR and DE. The two missions have close connections and work together through regular formal and informal meetings every semester. DE has visited FR visa service following an invitation to do so from FR.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Given the limited number of Member States involved in the processing of visa application in Cambodia, the harmonised application of the Visa Code is considerably easier than in some other countries.

The Visa Code is strictly applied (plus for FR specific instructions regarding the issuing of multiple entry visas to bona fide applicants). As regards FR, a web platform for applying for visas to France is operational in Cambodia. DE opened a visa application centre (VAC) in Phnom Penh on 1 March 2019. The VAC is instructed to make sure that applications are accepted only for countries which are represented by DE. So far, only a few applicants tried to hand in applications for countries which are handled by FR.

¹⁵ April 2018 – March 2019

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The list of supporting documents has been harmonized. FR and DE ask for the same supporting documents. No issues have been faced in this regard.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

As regards harmonisation of visa-issuing practices, there are different approaches on long validity MEVs, and also on short validity visas. The basic visa issued by FR is a one entry for 30 day. DE issues visa based on a case by case approach.

As regards the length of validity of multiple entry visas (MEVs) issued, around 25 % of visas issued by FR are for 1 to 5 year MEVs. FR issues 1 to 5 year MEVs to all bona fide applicants, and to all Cambodians who already have received 3 or more Schengen visas and who used them according to the legislation. After a 1 year MEV, FR issue a 2 year MEV, and then maximum duration. In total, 1133 long validity MEVs have been delivered by FR in 2018 : 767 one-year MEVs, 248 two-year MEVs, 71 three-year MEVs, 15 four-year MEVs and 15 five-year MEVs.

DE issued about 4.4 % of visas with between 1 – 5 years validity. This has to do with the fact that DE dealt with only 3600 visa applications in 2018. This will change in 2019 due to the new VAC.

3.4 Exchange of information

During the LSC meetings, the topics discussed were related to the number of visa applications and visa issuance, the externalisation of the administrative handling of visa applications, the increase of visa 'shopping', the possibility to offer a visa waiver for Cambodian diplomatic passports, and the exchange of practices regarding data protection.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

The main challenge for FR is how to cope with the increasing demand. The demand for visas in Cambodia has increased from around 6000 units in 2016 to 7200 in 2017 and 8200 for 2018 (+13%). DE expects a considerable increase in the volume of applications in 2019 because of the outsourcing. This will require more staff in order to remain within a processing time of 2 working days within the Embassy.

FR is considering outsourcing visa services in 2020 or 2021, as part of a regional outsourcing of FR visa services in South East Asia. Externalisation of DE visa services is already effective (see above on VAC).

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN OTTAWA, CANADA

2018-2019 REPORT

1. Introduction

26 EU Member States, together with Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, are represented in Ottawa. Luxembourg and Malta do not have embassies in Ottawa. Luxembourg is represented by Belgium. No such arrangement exists for Malta, which has a General Consul in Toronto. Most Member States also have an established network of Consulates across the country, issuing Schengen visas. Member States also have ad hoc cooperation agreements allowing one Member State to issue visas on behalf of another.

Local Schengen Coordination Meetings are held in the Delegation's premises once per quarter, back-to-back with the Consular cooperation meetings.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Local Schengen Coordination Meetings were held in Ottawa on 5 July, 11 October 2018, and on 7 February and 25 April 2019.

LSC Meetings are generally well attended with the majority of represented Member States present on a regular basis. The Luxembourg Honorary Consul participates in the meetings at the request of the Embassy of Luxembourg in Washington, which is accredited to Canada. Malta is not represented in Ottawa and does not have a representative at the meetings.

The meetings are chaired by the Head of the Political Section of the EU Delegation to Canada. The notice of meetings, the draft Agenda, as well as draft and final minutes are circulated via AGORA to the LSC coordination group, thus encouraging meeting participants to regularly use this Member States' secure information tool.

There are regular contacts with the respective Chair of the Consular group (MS Presidency), to ensure coordination and logistical support.

In accordance with a well-established practice, outside parties are invited to give presentations to Consular and Schengen groups on topics of interest. These presentations are agreed between the EU Delegation as Chair of the LSC Group and the Chair of the Consular Group, and take place between the respective meetings, thus allowing participants of either group to attend.

During the reporting period, the following guests were invited:

- October 2018 - Mr Jean-Pierre Taschereau, Senior Advisor, Emergency Management at the Canadian Red Cross on "The Canadian Red Cross and Emergency Management in Canada.

- February 2019 – Ms Melina White, Manager of the CBSA National Document Centre and Mr. Nick Titcombe, Document Specialist and Team lead at the CBSA National Document Centre on counterfeit documents.
- April 2019 - Mr. Andre Baril, Senior Director, Refugee Affairs, Ms. Leah Winsor, Assistant Director, Asylum Policy, Ms. Valerie Bisson, Assistant Director of Bilateral and Regional International Engagement and Ms. Sonal Patach, Senior Policy Analyst, at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Consular offices implement the Visa Code in accordance with instructions from capitals and Regulation 810/2009.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

During the previous reporting period, a Draft List of Harmonised documents had been submitted to Brussels. After comments from the Visa Committee, the draft was re-assessed and re-submitted just at the end of the previous reporting period (5 April 2018). Over the course of the current reporting period, the LSC group further amended the draft following DG HOME and Visa Committee's recommendations.

The final draft, together with clarifications requested by the Visa Committee, was submitted to DG HOME on 29 November 2018, and approved by the Visa Committee on 22 January 2019. At the time of this report, the Commission Implementing Decision on the Harmonised List was expected to be adopted shortly after the reporting period. The LSC group was informed that the list is mandatory and must be advertised on the Embassies website once the Decision is approved.

3.3 Exchange of information

The LSC group agreed in 2014 to implement the exchange of statistical information on a quarterly basis, and an ad-hoc mechanism has been put in place and used during the reporting period. Since Canadian citizens (with valid Canadian passports) travel visa-free to the EU (for tourism, up to 90 days), the local provision of statistics is of limited practical use. Member States see little value in discussing these statistics, given the low risk situation of the host country.

No issues have emerged during the reporting period regarding possible cases of fraud or travel medical insurance.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None to be reported.

4. Challenges

4.1 Recognition of Canadian "blue" travel document (1951 Convention)

In February 2019, the LSC group initiated a discussion on the acceptance by Member States of the Canadian "blue" travel document for refugees (1951 Convention), with or without a visa. The discussion highlighted different policies among Member States, which has resulted at times in travellers being turned away when entering the Schengen area: when travelling towards a Member State not requiring the visa, but entering Schengen area transiting via a Member State requiring such visa. The discussion also raised the issue of potential "entry shopping", since some Member States reported cases of "blanket requests for information" on rules pertaining to the Blue Document.

The LSC group agreed to raise the issue with DG HOME for possible discussion in the Visa Committee. Following indications from DG HOME, the LSC group will continue discussions on the issue.

5. Other issues

None to be reported.

This report has been approved by Member States participation at the Local Schengen Cooperation meetings in Ottawa.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BEIJING, CHINA 2018-2019 REPORT¹⁶

1. Introduction

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) has a strong presence in China with representation of Schengen States encompassing a total of 68 consulates. All 28 EU Member States and 25 Schengen States are represented in Beijing. 20 Schengen States have consulates in Shanghai, 11 have consulates in Guangzhou, and several also have consulates in Chengdu (5), Wuhan (2), Shenyang (3) and Chongqing (2). The Schengen states continued the opening of Visa Application Centres (VACs) in cities without consular presence. In April 2019, there were over 330 VACs in China.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

The LSC continued to convene approximately once a month. LSC meetings are generally very well-attended. Non-EU Schengen States: Switzerland, Iceland and Norway are regularly present, so are EU non-Schengen states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Romania, and Ireland.

The calendar of LSC meetings is established at the beginning of each Presidency. The LSC is chaired by the EU delegation, which is also in charge of setting up the agenda and drawing up reports.

The LSC in Beijing remained in regular contact with other constituencies. The EU delegation was invited to the LSC Guangzhou in September 2018; the LSC Beijing hosted the Austrian Presidency from Shanghai in October 2018 and the EUDEL took part in an informal meeting with consuls in Shanghai in November 2018. Representatives from Guangzhou and Chengdu participated in the Anti-Visa Fraud workshop in May 2018.

The LSC convened extraordinarily DG HOME attending the 2nd round of bilateral EU-China talks on a visa facilitation agreement (VFA) in September 2018, to discuss the main expectation of both sides in terms of outcome, notably issuance of multiple entry visas, supporting documents, visa fees and service fees, treatment of service and public passport holders, as well as processing times.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In 2018, the LSC noted that strong growth in demand for Schengen visa continued in China, with 2.8 million applications (18% of global total) representing an increase of 11.3% on 2017. 2.7 million visas were issued (19% of global total), including 0.92 million MEV (11% of global total).

MEV made 34% of all visas issued in China (against 58% globally). However, disproportion in issuing MEV was huge: from 2.1% to 100%. The LSC reflected about the reasons for such a considerable gap in the issuance of MEV in China and worldwide, with a big number of first-time travellers, but also a too restrictive an approach in issuance suggested as a possible explanation.

¹⁶ April 2018 – March 2019

Refusal rate was 3.7%. Again the rate spanned a wide range from 0.5% to 23.3%. The generally lower refusal rates in Shanghai were explained by a specific profile of business travellers.

Concerning the revised Visa Code, the LSC noted that no precise date could be given yet on the start of application of the new rules. The revised text would enter into force 20 days after the publication in the Official Journal and become applicable 6 months after that date. The LSC reflected about the link between the provisions of the new Visa Code and the ongoing VFA negotiations with China, and noted that as long as the VFA is not in place the Visa Code will be applied accordingly.

Generally, the LSC would benefit from a better exchange of information with other constituencies, especially regarding any possible decisions taken in the provinces, of which the LSC Beijing may not be adequately informed. This would allow for a more coherent application of rules in China and should be done through the member states.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

While the LSC acknowledges the need to revise down the harmonised list of supporting documents, no specific proposal has been made since 2015. Moreover, the issue is expected to be addressed during the negotiations on an EU-China agreement on visa facilitation.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

In February 2019, the LSC held an exercise based on a questionnaire with 20 dummy visa applications, with the aim to assess visa issuance practices among the Member States and allow for an analysis of any differences in decisions based on the Visa Code. The exercise confirmed a level of convergence by many MS, but also highlighted a degree of decisions on both ends of the spectrum (e.g. refusal vs. MEV) and considerable differences in the potential/willingness to issue long-validity MEV. MS showed various degrees of interest in the exercise, with some questioning the general scope of the questionnaire and lack of relevant information considered important in the application process. The LSC noted limited potential of the exercise for stronger harmonisation of visa issuance procedures, at least in the current context. The LSC will return to the question once the revised Visa Code has been enforced by the end of 2019.

In reply to a consultation by the Visa Committee in 5 September 2018, concerning the relevance of requiring visa applicants to present "(confirmed) flight reservation" when applying for a visa, majority of the LSC supported the need for flight reservations, as it can serve as indication of the real intention (country of main destination) of applicants. The LSC would prefer to reduce the harmonized list in all categories at once rather than case-by-case; however this would be done in the visa facilitation agreement.

3.4 Exchange of information

Visa statistics: Submission of visa statistics continues to remain an issue also over this reporting period. While certain Member States provide regular monthly updates, others lag behind. As a result, the ability of the EU delegation to make detailed analyses did not improve over 2018/2019. However, the LSC held regular exchanges of views on visa trends.

Service fees (application of pre-payment): Concerning a pre-payment of the service fee when requesting an appointment to prevent that intermediaries sell appointments and prevent "no shows", the LSC discussed MS' information as to whether they allow External Service Providers to collect pre-payment and whether this was subject to approval at central or local level. The LSC noted that no Member State allows pre-payments.

ADS: The LSC reported no major problems with the implementation of the ADS scheme, which continues to be an important vehicle for facilitating travel by Chinese citizens. For a number of Schengen States the scheme accounts from 50% to 75% of visa applications. The LSC revisited its discussion of April 2016 on return controls. The LSC confirmed that return controls are without exception made at the consulates (and not VACs), with most Member States opting for passport and boarding passes control, as well as guarantee letters by travel agencies and receipts from airports. A few MS inquired whether it would be possible to make passport checks at the VACs and whether this would be in line with the Visa Code. While according to Article 47(1)(d) Visa Code, the Member States had to inform applicants about accredited commercial intermediaries (=Chinese travel agencies), so that applicants can check which travel agencies were reliable and which ones might be fraudulent, the LSC pointed to lower probability of Chinese travellers checking up EU embassies websites instead of Chinese sources (CNTA).

Use of new technologies: The LSC discussed the experiences with a pilot project on visa applications with travel service Fliggy/Alibaba (other travel agencies – e.g. CTRIP, also offer similar schemes). As a first step, applicants access visa platform on Fliggy website, fill in the forms, scan documents and send them to consulates. As a second step, applicants are invited to the consulates, where examination of original documents takes place. All the documents from the harmonised list are required. However, applicants can choose between providing bank statements or Alibaba's Sesame Credit Score (Ant Financial, a branch of Alibaba, is considered as a banking institution) if over 750 points. The scheme only allows applications for tourism visas (with exception of children under the age of 8). The LSC noted low number of applications treated under the scheme.

Golden visa: Given the considerable interest in the Chinese context, the LSC noted a recent Commission report on investor citizenship and residence schemes operated by a number of Member States. The report maps the existing practices and identifies certain risks such schemes imply for the EU, in particular, as regards security, money laundering, tax evasion and corruption.

Fingerprinting: The LSC noted gradual introduction of fingerprinting at Chinese external borders (airports) in a follow up to initial measures taken back in 2017. Diplomats are exempted from the procedure, as well as a limited number of other categories of travellers.

Contacts with Chinese authorities: Following the outcome of last round of VFA negotiations on 12 September 2018, the LSC invited MFA to present information regarding the technical specifications and eligibility criteria of the Chinese official passports. The official passports are divided into two categories: service passport (covered by the talks on VFA) and public affairs passport (no mandate) and are valid for up to five years, with MFA being the competent authority for the issuance. According to MFA, in 2017, the number of service passports issued was about 50,000, and the number of public affairs passports issued was about 300,000. 139 countries have granted visa-free access to service passports, including 10 EU MS, and 56 countries have granted visa-free access to public affairs passports. The LSC noted divergence between the numbers offered by MFA in November 2018 and those indicated in April 2019: 230 thousand service passports and 1.2 million PUPs.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Combatting illegal migration: Beyond a series of related activities under the Migration and Mobility Support Project (MMSP) financed by the Partnership Instrument and implemented by the IOM, the LSC prepared its participation in a visa anti-fraud workshop on May 22-23, 2018 offered by DG HOME in cooperation with trainers from Swedish and Austrian police, Immigration Liaison Officers from China and FRONTEX, and designed for the use of MS Consular Officers responsible for processing visas in targeted, high visa volume and fraud risk locations. Given big demand from Consulates General outside Beijing, they were registered on a first come first serve basis. The need to organise similar activity in the provinces was noted.

4. Challenges

1. *The response to challenges, listed in the 2017-2018 report*

The challenges identified in the last reporting period remain to large extent valid: i) slow progress of the Migration and Mobility Dialogue, including the ongoing negotiations on VFA and CIMA, ii) lack of clarity on the possibility to open VACs in further location in China, to release pressure on consulates, iii) possibility to use VACs to handle visa applications from public affairs passport holders, v) increasing number of fake accompanying documents submitted with visa applications, vi) possible visa shopping, mostly through varying times of handling visa applications.

PUPs: The LSC took steps concerning the treatment of public affairs passports. In line with current Chinese requirement, visa applications by Chinese holders of passports for public affairs are lodged at the EU and Schengen states' consulates. The number of such visa applications is constantly growing and reached approximately one hundred thousand in 2018 (over 18% year-on-year). As discussed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the LSC on 28 November 2018, this practice proves increasingly burdensome and inefficient for the consulates and applicants. Member States have continuously received requests from Chinese applicants to allow them to lodge visa application at external service providers, to ensure speedier and more convenient process. In April 2019, the EUDEL on behalf of the LSC invited the National Immigration Administration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to grant the external service providers authorization to accept visa applications by Chinese holders of Passports for Public Affairs at VACs.

Visa fraud: Following the anti-visa fraud training in Beijing in April 2018, the EUDEL has been working with FRONTEX and DG HOME to support the EU visa section staff deployed in 3rd countries by offering a false documents related training. Based on the FRONTEX risk analyses report on number of visa applications and the number of issued visa in 2017, a dedicated workshop will be held in Shanghai in November 2019. Similar trainings could be organised under the new edition of the Migration and Mobility Support Project, once the contracting procedure finalised. Previously the project delivered trainings on document verification techniques, specifically on detection techniques of fake, or fraudulent, Chinese bank statements, hukou, certificates of employment, licenses, and university diplomas etc., used in visa application procedures.

2. *Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2019-2020)*

Migration and Mobility Dialogue (MMD): The LSC cooperated against the context of the parallel negotiations on an EU-China VFA and on an agreement on combatting illegal migration, opened on 4 May 2017. At the EU-China summit on 9 April 2019, in the joint statement, EU and China committed to actively engage in the EU-China Mobility and Migration Dialogue and to swiftly conclude the parallel negotiations on the agreements on visa facilitation and on cooperation in combating illegal migration. In the meantime, the LSC noted continued slow progress of the parallel negotiations, the main outstanding issues being: i) visa waiver for service passport holders (and as of recently, a visa waiver for holders of public affairs passports), ii) issuance of long-validity MEV on first application, and iii) simplification of supporting documents. Any progress on EU request for the extension of VACs would clearly be conditional on progress in VFA/CIMA talks.

5. **Other issues**

Migration and Mobility Support Project: The LSC received regular updates on the activities under the Migration and Mobility Support Project, financed by the Partnership Instrument, as well as invitations to activities under the Work Programme. With the MMSP concluded at the end of 2018, contractual work is underway for the new edition of MMSP II.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DU CONGO

Le Chef de la Section Politique

Objet : Coopération locale au titre de Schengen entre les consulats et les États-membres (LSC) au Congo-Brazzaville - Rapport¹⁷ 2018-2019

1. Introduction

Quatre Etats membres ont des chefs de mission résidents à Brazzaville : Allemagne, France, Italie et Belgique. L'Allemagne et la Belgique (qui vient de rouvrir et est représentée par un chargé d'affaires) ne délivrent pas de visas Schengen.

Trois entités délivrent les visas Schengen en République du Congo: la section consulaire de l'ambassade d'Italie à Brazzaville, la section consulaire de l'ambassade de France à Brazzaville, le consulat général de France à Pointe Noire,

La Suisse est le seul Etat membre de l'espace Schengen basé à Kinshasa à délivrer des visas Schengen aux ressortissants du Congo-Brazzaville.

La France délivre des visas en représentation de l'Allemagne, l'Autriche, la Belgique, l'Espagne, la Grèce, la Lituanie, le Luxembourg, Malte, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal, la République tchèque et l'Islande.

L'Italie délivre des visas en représentation de la Suède, la Slovaquie et la Slovénie.

Etats Schengen ni présents ni représentés: Danemark, Estonie, Finlande, Hongrie, Lettonie, Liechtenstein, Norvège et Pologne.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2017-2018

Le rythme est en principe annuel avec la participation de tous les EM et de la Suisse. Deux EM échangent régulièrement des informations sur des cas rencontrés. La présidence et le secrétariat sont assurés par la DUE.

S'ajoute à cela la coordination avec les consulats présents à Kinshasa (en étroite collaboration avec la DUE en RDC) sur certaines questions de protection consulaire mais qui abordent quelquefois des questions de visas.

Tous les consulats étant localisés à Brazzaville ou Kinshasa, il n'y a pas lieu de prévoir de coordination en dehors de ces villes.

¹⁷ Avril 2018 – Mars 2019

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les deux EM qui délivrent des visas Schengen aux ressortissants du Congo-Brazzaville sur le territoire du Congo-Brazzaville et la Suisse ont une bonne connaissance de leurs obligations en matière de coopération au titre du Code. Ils échangent leurs informations de manière fluide.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

Les EM présents à Brazzaville considèrent que l'harmonisation des pratiques est déjà réalisée.

La liste des documents justificatifs a été discutée à plusieurs reprises sur la base notamment des recommandations du Comité Visa. Cependant subsistent les différences sur 1) l'opportunité de demander la preuve du versement à 100% du devis médical; et 2) la durée de validité du titre de séjour des requérants non congolais qui varie de 3 mois à un an.

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

p.m

3.4 Echange d'informations

Les trois pays ont fourni leurs statistiques à la délégation pour 2017. On relève une augmentation dans les trois cas, aussi liée à la fermeture de la maison Schengen à Kinshasa. Les Congolais ayant quelquefois les deux nationalités.

Les taux de refus restent importants (aux alentours de 30%) en particulier pour CH et IT en raison principalement de détournement de procédure, la destination principale du séjour étant en réalité la France.

Les EM ont souhaité que l'expérience passée de convier le spécialiste français des fraudes documentaires soit répétée afin d'actualiser leurs connaissances. Ce spécialiste détaché au service des frontières congolais a marqué son accord pour participer à la prochaine réunion de coordination locale Schengen.

4. Défis

La prochaine réunion de la coordination locale devra à nouveau se pencher sur l'harmonisation des conditions d'octroi des visas.

5. Divers

Les pays membres ont partagé sur l'attitude à adopter face à des cas de rétention de passeport de ressortissants européens par les autorités motivées par des conflits relevant du droit des entreprises.

Les faibles ressources disponibles au sein des EM et de la DUE en 2018 comme les années précédentes ont été largement sollicitées par la plate-forme consulaire de Kinshasa, une concertation avec les missions diplomatiques européennes et des like minded en RDC (et la DUE à Kinshasa) autour des plans de contingence et d'évacuation des citoyens européens (et autres) vers Brazzaville en cas d'insécurité persistante à Kinshasa.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DÉLÉGATION EN RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) – REPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

RAPPORT 2018-2019 (AVRIL 2018 – MARS 2019)

1. Introduction

Onze¹⁸ états membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique en République Démocratique du Congo. Pour les questions de visas court séjour, BE représente dix-sept ambassades et/ou consulats¹⁹ en matière de visas court séjour, à travers le Centre Européen des Visas (C.E.V, précédemment la Maison Schengen) à Kinshasa. Le Consulat général de Belgique à Lubumbashi représente dix-sept Etats Schengen également en matière de visa.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2018-2019

La période considérée par ce rapport a été marquée par la fermeture de la Maison Schengen et du Consulat Général de Belgique à Lubumbashi. Suite à la décision des autorités congolaises, la Maison Schengen Kinshasa (MSK), ainsi que le Consulat Général de Lubumbashi ont été inopérants entre le 1 février 2018 et le 22 février 2019. Cette décision, motivée par des raisons politiques, a été prise pendant une période de tensions entre la communauté internationale et les autorités congolaise.

Malgré cette fermeture, des réunions mensuelles, et parfois bimensuelles, de coordination Schengen étaient organisées. Les réunions LSC ont été suivies et ont bénéficié de la participation régulière de la plupart des Etats Schengen. La Délégation de l'Union Européenne a présidé les réunions de coordination Schengen pendant la période concernée jusqu'à fin janvier 2019 quand les états Schengen présents ont décidé sur une présidence tournante dans un rythme bimensuel.

Etant donné la nature politique de la fermeture de la MSK, la situation était également un point permanent sur l'agenda des réunions Chefs de mission européenne.

¹⁸ BE, DE, CH, GR, ES, FR, IT, NL, NO, PT, SE.

¹⁹ AT, BE, DE, ET, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LV, LU, NO, NL, PT, SL, CZ, SE, SI, SK.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Pendant la période concernée, les Etats membres et la Délégation de l'UE ont continué leur coopération en conformité avec les dispositions du Code des Visas. A cause de la fermeture de la MSK, BE n'était pas en mesure de pouvoir délivrer des visas Schengen. Les autres Etats représentés par la Maison Schengen ont observé une stricte solidarité avec BE et n'ont pas repris la délivrance de visas à leur compte. Ainsi, un nombre très limité de visas Schengen ont été délivrés aux citoyens congolais ou des personnes résidentes en RDC pendant la période de fermeture, et quasi uniquement par les Etats non représentés par la MSK ou dans quelques cas d'exceptions (voir 3.3).

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs

Les états membres qui sont représentés par la BE assurent une harmonisation des documents justificatifs. Cette harmonisation doit être poursuivie avec les autres Etats de l'espace Schengen non représentés. Cela est un point qui sera abordé pendant les réunions LSC du 2019.

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

Pendant la période où le MSK a été fermée, les états membres ont fait montre de solidarité avec le MSK et la BE. Par conséquent, tous les états membres ont mis en œuvre une approche commune. Les ambassades des états autres membres Schengen présents à Kinshasa ne délivraient que des VTL²⁰ pour des raisons humanitaires, cas médicaux urgents, bourses délivrées par le pays, intérêt national ou des visas dans le cadre des obligations en tant que pays hôte d'organisations internationales.

Les états membres non représentés par BE ont vu une augmentation considérable du nombre de demandes de visa Schengen, mais n'ont délivré que des visas pour les cas où la destination du voyage était leur pays respectifs.

3.4 Échange d'informations

L'échange d'informations entre les membres LSC se déroule de façon régulière ou ad-hoc en fonction des besoins, et à l'occasion des réunions de coordination Schengen. L'échange d'informations était notamment sur:

- Documents justificatifs demandés;
- Consultation préalable;
- Couverture d'assurance;

3.5 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

A la réouverture de la MSK, désormais Centre Européen des visas, les Etats partis ont décidé de mettre en place un comité de pilotage du centre, à présidence tournante.

Le rapport a été approuvé par tous les Etats membres présents en RDC.

²⁰ Dans le respect de l'article 25 du Code des visas.



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION
IN ECUADOR

Quito, 25 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Ecuador 2018-2019 REPORT²¹

1. Introduction

Six Schengen States have diplomatic or consular representation (France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Switzerland) and 13 are represented in Ecuador by one of the countries mentioned above (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia). There are Spanish General Consulates in Quito and Guayaquil. The Spanish General Consulate in Quito receives visa applications for Spain, the Netherlands, Finland and Lithuania from residents in its consular area only, and represents Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and the Czech Republic for residents throughout Ecuador. The Spanish General Consulate in Guayaquil receives visa applications for Spain, the Netherlands, Finland and Lithuania, from residents in its consular area only.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Between April 2018 and March 2019, three LSC meetings were held in Quito (08/06/2018, 10/10/2018, 29/01/2019). The meetings were attended by the Embassies/Consulates present in Ecuador (except the Spanish General Consulate in Guayaquil) and by representatives of the EU Delegation. The EU Delegation organised and chaired these meetings and drafted the reports.

3. Current situation

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The exchanges of information and the coordination between the Consuls on matters relating to the Visa Code and its application are satisfactory. The Member States present highlighted the following:

- The need to submit flight reservations. The Member States pointed out that applicants do not need to have bought a flight ticket, but that a personal reservation or travel plan is required, obtained either through a travel agency or from the internet. They believe that a reservation makes it easier to check the consistency of dates, the reasons for travel and the main country of destination to avoid ‘visa shopping’.

²¹ April 2018 - March 2019.

- Prepayment of service fee to request an appointment. The Member States stated that there are no prepayment requirements of any kind. Some Member States outsource the management of the visa application system through an agency that receives the applications and documents and forwards them to the Consulates and, where appropriate, returns the documents to the applicants. Paying for a courier for the return of passports is entirely optional for applicants.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the list of supporting documents

Work to harmonise the list of requirements began in 2015 based on an EU Delegation proposal with comments by the Member States. The proposed harmonised list was submitted to the Council in March 2017. The comments made by the Visa Committee in October 2017 and February 2018 were accepted by the Member States' Consuls in March 2018. The Commission Implementing Decision of 24 October 2018 establishing the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants for short-stay visas in Bolivia, Ecuador, Pakistan and South Korea was adopted. The Member States have confirmed that the decision is being applied properly. The existing list has been updated recently and there seems to be no need to amend it in the short term.

3.3 Harmonising practices

Schengen visas valid for more than six months are granted in duly justified cases. Some consulates grant such visas to a particular entrepreneur or tourist profile or to the spouses of European citizens. Others grant them on the basis of compliance with rules on the use of previous visas, gradually granting longer-term visas. Most Member States grant visas for one to two years, some also for three years. Visas for four and five years are rarely granted; some States issue them only for spouses of EU citizens. Some States do not grant multiple visas to minors.

3.4 Exchange of information

At LSC meetings the Member States have exchanged information on the practices of certain travel agencies that fairly regularly produce false documents (tours, travel tickets, bank certificates, etc.), clearly with the knowledge of the applicants concerned. The Member States agreed to share information whenever they identify agencies that commit this type of fraud.

3.5 Other initiatives taken in the LSC

Not applicable

4. Challenges

The subject of visa waivers for Ecuadorian citizens continues to be a high priority for Ecuador in its relations with the EU; it has been discussed in all high-level and political dialogue exchanges with the EU, and also with the Member States.

In April 2019 Ecuador launched the contracting process for the issuing of biometric passports, with a view to meeting one of the technical requirements for visa-free travel. The first biometric passports are expected to be issued at the end of October 2019.

All the Embassies/Consulates involved in Local Schengen Cooperation have approved this Report.



EUROPEAN UNION
Delegation to Ethiopia

26 / 04 / 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ETHIOPIA 2018-2019 REPORT²²

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is a regional hub in Africa with Ethiopian Airlines having connections to numerous African countries and with direct flights to Europe. The massive expansion of the Addis Ababa airport is further increasing the number of transit passengers travelling to Europe. The EU embassies in Ethiopia have to deal with a large number of family reunification and visa requests from citizens from neighbouring countries, including Eritrea, South Sudan and Somalia. Since April 2018, Ethiopia is in political transition with many political and economic reforms. However, there are also rising ethnic conflicts and internal displacement that may increase irregular migration out of Ethiopia. There are increasingly organised networks organising fraudulent visas, and some local staff in embassies has been involved. Since November 2017, a prior consultation procedure is in place for Ethiopia. The adoption of the Harmonised List for Supporting Documents in August 2017 was an important milestone in LSC cooperation in Ethiopia. Dialogue and technical cooperation with Ethiopian administration, including the immigration services, remains very challenging. Ethiopia suffers from poor internet connections, and there are some cultural and language barriers that affect visa cooperation.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-19

21 EU Member States, as well Norway and Switzerland, are present in Ethiopia. The EU Delegation is chairing the regular LSC meetings on average every six weeks. The LSC meetings are very well attended by the interested embassies and there are lively exchanges of information and experiences. There were no ad hoc meetings with third parties. The European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) attended the LSC meetings regularly and provided updates on the wider migration cooperation. In October 2018, Germany hosted a special practical workshop on Schengen visa cases that was also attended by the EU Delegation.

²² April 2018 – March 2019

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The EU embassies continued to apply the Visa Code despite many challenges. The use of prior consultation procedure since November 2017 has complicated the visa process slightly, but fortunately it has not led to any significant additional delay in processing times.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Harmonised List for Supporting Documents for Ethiopia was adopted in August 2017. The LSC meetings regularly share experiences on the implementation of the Harmonised List and the prior consultation procedure.

3.3 Exchange of information

The EU embassies regularly share information about the statistics and the main challenges faced by the visa sections during the LSC meetings. In addition, there are also regular exchanges about the VIS implementation and other matters of common interest via email and other means of communication. There is also an active Fraud Working Group that brings together also non-Schengen countries. Joint trainings have been organised by various partners in Ethiopia and regionally.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In 2017, some interested LSC members organised joint familiarisation visits to the Nordic VFS outsourcing centre, as well as to the German and Belgian embassy visa sections. Some concerned LSC members also had a dialogue with the African Union protocol department to address the frequent visa problems with their official travel to Europe.

4. Challenges

The main difficulties to apply the Visa Code in Ethiopia continue to be the following:

- 1) limited staff in visa sections, in particular experts and qualified local staff;
- 2) complicated cases and incomplete applications submitted by Ethiopians, which requires important time investment at the visa office;
- 3) frequent lack of correct understanding of some questions in the visa forms;
- 4) risk of document fraud, “visa shopping” and attempts of irregular migration including by people with adequate financial resources;
- 5) numerous overstaying and asylum cases;
- 6) difficulty of finding reliable translators and interpreters in the context of a multi-ethnic country;
- 7) lack of effective cooperation with Ethiopian authorities, including frequent turnover of Ethiopian administration staff and non-uniform application of Ethiopian rules; and
- 8) political pressure of high officials to obtain visas without following the due procedure. The LSC members continue to address these challenges and to share best practices during the LSC meetings.

5. Other issues

In general, it would be useful to consider simplification of the visa forms to reduce the cases of misunderstood questions and incomplete files that undermine efficient handling of dossiers.



16/04 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Hong Kong and Macao 2018-2019 REPORT²³

1. Introduction

16 Member States are present in Hong Kong and one MS is represented in Macao.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

In 2018-2019 (up to March 2019) LSC held 5 meetings. The meetings were well attended. The meetings are chaired by Head of Political, Press and Information section of the EUO. Reports are drawn by EUO. MS share the common report with their capitals. Hong Kong and Macao being very small there is no need for coordination with the LSC in locations outside capitals.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All MS and EUO are fully prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code.

No specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code were signalled in the LSC meetings.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

MS started implementing common list on 30 September 2016. No problems have been signalled since then and there is no need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No attempts have been made to harmonise visa-issuing practices, such as the issuing of long-validity MEV. Roughly half of MS issue MEV for 2-5 years, others 1-3 years. A couple of MS issue MEVs only for 1 year with one MS stating that even this is done only exceptionally. All MS check travel history and do not issue MEV for first time entry applicants (one MS said that it might issue MEV to a first time applicant if the applicant has received visa in the past, for example, USA, Canada or Australia)

²³ April 2018 – March 2019

3.4 Exchange of information

During the reporting period the LSC has exchanged information on cases of fraud, cooperation with local authorities and companies (banks), cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises); it assessed the use of VISMail and the Visa Information System. LSC also discussed other issues such as celebration of civil unions or visas for domestic helpers.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LCC

At the request of MS, in the fall of 2018 the EUO office has sent two notes verbales to the MFA asking for written clarification regarding arrangements for consular access and assistance in West Kowloon Station Mainland Port Area which has fallen into almost exclusive jurisdiction of Mainland China (although physically on Hong Kong's territory). A reply from the MFA was sent to MS embassies in Beijing at the end of 2019 and a more detailed explanation was sent on 3 April to MS consulates general in Hong Kong and to the EU Office.

Also at the request of MS, the EUO sent a note verbale to Hong Kong's protocol asking for clarifications regarding the notification procedure of death and arrest of EU citizens. A reply was duly received but MS deemed that further clarifications were necessary.

4. Challenges

No challenges were identified in the previous reporting period of 2017-2018. In 2019-2020 it will be necessary to monitor the new consular access arrangements for the West Kowloon Station Mainland Port Area to ensure that a good consular assistance can be provided to all EU citizens.

HKSAR is considering legislative amendments to its extradition legislation which, if adopted, will allow extradition of the EU citizens, both resident and passing through Hong Kong, to mainland China. This might have consular consequences that will need the attention of LCC.

5. Other issues

On 24 January 2019 HKSAR protocol informed EUO and MS consulates general of the revised facilitation arrangement of issuing entry visas to partners of members of the consular posts. Permission to remain in the HKSAR on the time limitation co-terminus with the tenure of consular agent will be granted to partners in same-sex civil partnership, same-sex civil union, same-sex marriage, opposite sex civil partnership or opposite-sex civil union, including those holding ordinary passports.

An informal arrangement granting visas for same sex spouses was already in place for a couple of years, but now this is formalised and is extended to other forms of partnerships, including for non-married same sex partners, which are legally and officially recognized by the local authorities of the place of celebration.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO INDIA

26 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN INDIA 2018-2019 REPORT²⁴

1. Introduction

Schengen visas in India are directly processed by the consulates of 24 Schengen Member States (SMSs) present in the territory. The remaining two SMSs have represented arrangements (IS is present in India but is represented by DK for Schengen visas; LI is represented by CH for visas). The four prospective SMSs (BG, CY, HR, RO) are also present and issue visas in India. All the SMSs have a consular section in New Delhi. In addition, a number of SMSs also process visa applications in the following locations: Mumbai (BE, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, PL), Kolkata (DE, FR, IT), Bangalore (DE, FR), Chennai (DE), Pondicherry (FR) and Goa (PT).

With SK starting in 2018, all but two of the 24 present SMSs outsource non-judgemental tasks to an external service provider (ESP): LT and PL. All the SMSs but ES use the same ESP, which runs 16 visa application centres (VACs): 14 MS are represented in 12 or more of these VACs; visas for ES can be applied for in 10 VACs of the ESP. CY and HR also use the service of an ESP.

Many consular sections in India have also jurisdiction to process Schengen visa applications from neighbouring countries (Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh).

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Eight regular LSC meetings have been held since May 2018, gathering SMSs and prospective SMSs. On average, 18 States were present at each meeting, and only one prospective SMS was never represented during the year. The meetings are chaired by the EUD. Minutes were taken by the Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer (RSCO) until September 2018, then these were drafted by EUD.

In addition to representatives from visa sections, airports or immigration liaison officers (ILOs) of the Schengen MS attend also the meetings (DE has 3 ILOs in Delhi, one in Mumbai and one in Chennai; CH, AT and NO have one immigration liaison officer in Delhi; FI and NL have an ILO located abroad (Helsinki and Bangkok respectively), who also covering India). Until December 2018, an EU return liaison officer from EE was posted in India, and attended the meetings.

Minutes and related information are stored in the AGORA secured platform. All officers of SMSs and prospective SMSs have access to the platform, including those in other location in India.

24 April 2018 – March 2019

In addition to the regular LSC meetings in Delhi, Local Migration Group meetings are organised on a more ad-hoc basis. EU non-SMSs are also invited, and these meetings are organised back-to-back with a LSC meeting. They are chaired by the EUD and are dedicated to the cooperation on migration and mobility.

A LSC meeting was organised in Mumbai in March 2019, gathering all 7 consular sections processing Schengen visas from this place (25% of visas issued in India).

EUD organised also a series of 5 training sessions for local staff and visa officers of the EU and Schengen MS in March 2019. Training was given by the local ILOs and around 120 people were trained on verification of documents (passports, visas and stamps, accompanying documents).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Visa Code is fully implemented in Schengen States' visa operations in India with all SMSs prepared to carry out all the necessary tasks. The majority of SMSs continue to consider further harmonisation of practices and approaches locally. In addition to the tools available and updated for fiscal registers, travel medical insurance, the participation of ILOs to the LSC meetings, and the series of training they delivered contribute to the exchange of information.

Some aspects of local Schengen Cooperation remain non-implementable: the translation of application forms into Hindi and other official languages (high number of such languages, and widespread use of English); the harmonisation of visa fee in local currency (issue involving in many cases central administration of Member States).

Agreeing on common criteria for visa fee exemptions related to certain categories of applicants remained an open issue.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The list of supporting documents was harmonised in 2015 (C(2015)6490). During the exchanges at the LSC meetings, it became clear that there is a need to review and amend the list, either because it did not cater for some specific cases (e.g. MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibition) group tourists from a same enterprise), or because some MS do not consider some points relevant any longer.

The process of revision of the harmonised list has been initiated in February 2019, with the objective to complete it before the end of 2019.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The annual statistics suggest a significant variation in terms of practices. The average refusal rate is of 9%, but varies according the countries: 5 countries present a refusal rate of 23% or higher, while 5 countries have a refusal rate of 5% or lower. Part of this variation may be explained by the fact that the statistics do not only refer to a same population (some SMSs have jurisdiction for processing visas from national of neighbouring countries, which do present a much higher rate of rejection), but this would not explain the totality of the wide variation observed. More targeted/detailed statistics would be necessary (separate data for Indian nationals).

The share of multiple-entry visas (MEVs) according to countries also presents wide variations across SMSs. The average of MEVs over the total number of visas for India is of 77%, with two SMS issuing 100% of MEVs, and one SMS issuing 2% of MEVs. The two biggest “visa issuing” MS in India have obviously a different approach, as one issues between 80 and 100% of MEVs in its 5 visa sections, whereas the other issues between 8% and 16% of MEVs. No attempt has been made lately to harmonise these practices (or even to identify if they stem from national instructions or local implementation practices).

3.4 Exchange of information

Exchange of information is being performed during LSC meetings, but also through AGORA. Exchange of statistics between SMSs has been reduced to once every quarter, and efforts are being made to harmonise the format that would allow automatic compilation and easy synthesis in order to ease the discussion. As explained in point 3.3., the heterogeneity of origin of applicants would hamper meaningful analysis if it is not addressed.

The support of the ILOs is universally praised by the SMSs, as they provide a service at the airport of their place of (permanent or temporary) location, guidance and expertise to all SMSs, and also share intelligence and information on cases of fraud trends observed. The service they provide is invaluable for all SMSs, and the system would probably benefit from an increase and further deployment of ILOs to other major international airports of India

ILOs have also the opportunity to report the result of their discussions at experience e-sharing DIALOG or Risk Assessment and Anti-Fraud Team (RAAFT) meetings organised in India with officers of like-minded countries (US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK). Discussions include information on frauds, patterns and prevention approaches.

While the Visa Information System provides an adequate resource to the SMSs, the use of *VISMail* seems to be sub-optimal for some SMSs as it is not routinely used by many. This has been discussed during LSC meetings, and will be subject to further investigations. The entry into force of the General Data Protection Regulation also raised the issue of finding the correct channels for sharing information of experience of fraudulent attempts and alerts.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Throughout the reporting period, driven by the pressing concerns and eagerness to improve functioning of visa processes, the LSC in India continued to cover issues that go beyond what is strictly foreseen in the Visa Code. Most of these initiatives were developed through the dedicated Sub-groups and were a continuation of efforts started in previous years.

AGORA platform

The AGORA platform is useful for easy sharing and exchange of information, and is routinely used by all MS.

Training of local staff on documents checks - March 2019 (see point 3.3)

Coordination for ESP monitoring

A common checklist template for ESP monitoring has been developed by the LSC group it is available on AGORA, where MS can also file the result of their actual inspections. A planner table has also been developed for all MS to report their planned or performed inspections of VACs, to facilitate the organisation of joint inspections, and plan inspections based on a risk-assessment.

However, the Nordic countries have also developed at central level a different common check-list, which includes aspects that go beyond the Schengen requirements.

Visa officers exchange day:

The LSC meeting of March 2019 took the form of a “visa officers exchange day.” This event, hosted by one SMS, gathers more participants than a normal LSC meetings. The participants are split into small groups of 5 to 7 officers, and are invited to visit a couple of consular sections of SMSs (5 additional SMSs opened their doors for the exercise). This allows constructive discussion on practical arrangements and organisation of visa sections, and sharing of good practices. The experience is then shared in a plenary session.

4. Challenges

- *Challenges listed in the 2017-2018 report*

- People smuggling and false, counterfeit or forged travel documents: the challenge remains constant. While sharing of information happens through the meetings, guidance on how to share and store personal data related to smuggling or forged documents while respecting GDPR would be needed. A harmonised deterrent response for presentation of counterfeit or forged documents would also help curbing such occurrences.

- Resources of visa sections: with an increase of 17% of the number of visas applications in 2018 compared to the previous year, and the trend remaining the same for 2019, SMSs are introducing strategic changes in their organisation (delegation of decision to regional or central offices, digitalisation, ...)

- EU-India cooperation on consular and visa issues: the EU-India Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM) has been stalled for the last year, and has not produced any effect impact on visas or cooperation on irregular migration.

- *Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2019-2020)*

- Harmonisation of practices: in the year to come we will investigate the possibility to collect and analyse data and practices in a way allowing meaningful comparison and discussion on possible harmonisation of practices (approach to MEVs, use of VISMAIL, visa fees exemption, assessment of visa requests for MICE, ESP monitoring).

- Update of documents : list of supporting documents, common information sheet will be updated, to take into account occurring changes.

- EU-India cooperation on consular and visa issues: the high level dialogue on migration and mobility can give an impetus for better cooperation on visa and consular issues.



Jakarta, 26 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA April 2018-March 2019 REPORT

1. Introduction

In Jakarta, Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings are held back to back with the EU Consular Cooperation meetings. The participants in LSC are thus Schengen MS Embassies (including Switzerland and Norway), with the participation open to the 5 non-Schengen EUMS Embassies participating in the Consular meetings, which allows to compare notes on visa issues and to address also the visa and immigration policies of the host country (Indonesia)²⁵.

Several Consulates issue Schengen visas on behalf of other Schengen States under bilateral arrangements, including Austria for Malta and Slovenia, Denmark for Iceland, Finland for Estonia, Germany for Latvia, Hungary for Lithuania, and the Netherlands for Belgium and Luxemburg. A growing number of Schengen Consulates use external service providers for collecting applications, whilst 5 Member States have not outsourced this service. NL moved the visa processing to its new regional hub in Kuala Lumpur in 2016, itself due to repatriate processing in Den Haag in 2020.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

There were **5 well attended LSC meetings held during the reporting period** and chaired by the EU Delegation, back to back with the Consular meeting chaired by in 2018 by BG in the 1st semester and AT in the second semester. The Secretariat is ensured by the Delegation, with reports sent to local participants who share them with their capitals, and to EU Headquarters (Commission and EEAS). Consular/Schengen meeting reports are also shared with member States through the HQ Consular-on-line platform (COoL). There is no coordination in the country outside Jakarta, with only one Member State having the capacity to issue Schengen visas outside the capital (Bali) whilst some member States collect applications in Bali and/or Surabaya for processing in Jakarta.

²⁵ There are 21 EU Member States Embassies in Jakarta, all regularly attending the EU Consular/LSC meetings. Those include all EU and Schengen Member States except Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta and Slovenia.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Schengen Member States and the EU Delegation worked well together on fulfilling the visa code requirements. Besides LSC meetings, Schengen Consuls used the local Consular/Schengen mail and WA groups to exchange in real time information, questions, answers and experiences on Schengen related issues.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The **Local Schengen Coordination agreed on 24/04/2019 changes to the harmonised list** set in the Commission Decision of April 2011, following comments received in January 2019 from the EU Visa Committee on the previous submission, and is transmitting the proposal to the European Commission (DG Home). The changes proposed are limited, whilst restructuring and making the exhaustive list of documents more precise for each type of travel purpose.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The coordination established in 2016 on **travel insurances requirements has continued**, whereby the EU Delegation receives the requests of insurance companies, checks the compliance with the Visa Code requirements and update through written procedure with the MS the list of insurance companies made available for information to visa applicants in the Schengen Consulates. The list has been checked again in January 2019 through contacts with all concerned companies, and streamlined/updated following that check.

The group shared experience on the issuance of **multiple entry visas (MEVs)**, with no change noticed compared to the practice discussed in 2018. Some Schengen Member States issue MEVs for standards short term visas as a matter of routine whilst other restrict MEVs to longer validity visas of 1-year or more. Cases of abuse of short term MEVs were reported allowing the holder to avoid applying for a visa to travel to in non-Schengen countries (e.g. Western Balkans) that accept visa free entrance if the person has first entered Schengen countries with a short stay visa. For long validity MEVs of 1-year or more, several MS reserved that possibility to applicants with a positive Schengen visa history, whilst others were more open to issue 1-year or more MEVs to first applicants provided that strong business and/or family links with the concerned country were demonstrated. In all cases, the duration of the MEVs depended on these demonstrated links and on the validity period of the passport.

Most member States issue 1-year MEVs for **seafarers**. Member States not issuing MEVs but single entry visas declared themselves interested to follow that practice. In one case, the issuing of visas on arrival was going to be moved to visa issuing in Jakarta.

3.4 Exchange of information

Good cooperation was ensured on the monthly transmission of **visa statistics** by MS and compilation by the EU Delegation, for discussion in LSC meetings. Full 2018 statistics showed **continuing trend in the increase of Schengen visas issued** (214.197 Schengen visa issued, a 7% increase compared to 2017). The Group noted that this increase was noticeably inferior to previous years, and discussed possible causes such as the depreciation of the Rupiah during part of 2018 as well as the development of cheaper markets for Indonesian tourists, such as Turkey. **The proportion of refused visa applications remained low (1,68%), though in progression** (1,30% in 2017). Consuls attributed this increase mainly to mistakes if not attempt of visa shopping in the choice of MS consulates where to submit the application. The Group noted discrepancies between the visa statistics data published by DG Home and the data collected locally through the LSC.

There is no local coordination on the regular adjustment of exchange rates for the visa fee as most MS have limited capacity to do such local coordination/adaptation. The EU Delegation circulates the regular adjustments done by the German Consulate based on BCE exchange rates for possible voluntary alignment. The currently uncoordinated adjustments did not result in major discrepancies as to the visa fees applied in Indonesian Rupiah. **Advice from HQ would be welcomed on this point.**

The **VISMail** continues to be **used only marginally** between a few Schengen Consulates, and is not perceived locally as being user-friendly enough to be developed as a regular communication tool between local partners; embedding an e-mail notification in the VISMail to warn recipients of the receipt of a message would help increasing the use of the system.

4. Challenges

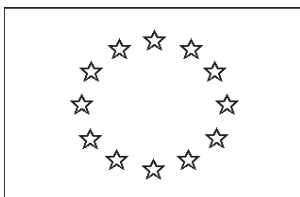
As mentioned in previous years' reports, there is limited staff capacity in the EU Delegation to carry out LSC effectively (one EEAS Official in charge as part of many other duties). Increased communication from/with HQ (DG Home), close local cooperation with the Schengen Consuls as well as some training received in a MS Consulate have mitigated this challenge. **Headquarters could consider periodically holding LSC training for EU Officials in Delegations** back to back with the regular EEAS Consular Protection trainings.

5. Other issues

Exchange of information was also managed on **bilateral agreements on visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports**, which Indonesia is actively seeking with third countries and has already concluded with a majority of EU Member States (18 bilateral agreements concluded; 7 under negotiation or project). In several cases, the implementation of bilateral agreements was on hold pending the inclusion of biometrical data in Indonesian Diplomatic Passports and the refusal of Indonesia to differentiate between diplomatic and service passports, the latter category being granted generously.

More generally, the Indonesian authorities continue to press for their nationals to be granted **visa-free access to the Schengen area**, in reciprocity to the 30-day visa-free access granted to all EU MS citizens, and all together citizens of 169 countries, mainly for touristic purpose.

This report was approved by Member States at the Local Schengen Coordination meeting held in the EU Delegation in Jakarta on 24 April 2019.



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation to the State of Israel

29/04/2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) TEL AVIV 2018-2019 REPORT²⁶

1. Introduction

LSC Tel Aviv covers the area of the State of Israel. Visas are issued by Member States (MS) in the Consular Sections of their embassies in Tel Aviv. IS and LU have no representation of their own in this jurisdiction. ISL is thus represented by DK and LU is represented by BE. Some MSs also cover the area of the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip from the Consular Sections of their embassies in Tel Aviv (FI, CZ, PL, SK, EE, LV and LT). Israeli citizens, holders of ordinary passports, are not required to be in possession of a visa when entering the Schengen area for less than 90 days. LSC Tel Aviv therefore essentially covers the cases of non-Israeli citizens who are residents in Israel.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

The LSC meetings are held in the office of the EU Delegation in Tel Aviv. Three well-attended LSC meetings were held in the reporting period (on April 24, 2018; October 4, 2018 and on December 6, 2018). The meetings were chaired by the EUD.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

As a follow-up to previous meetings on interpretation of the Visa Code Article 15(5) requirements for assessing the adequacy of travel medical insurance representatives of local Israeli insurance companies were invited. The issue of exemption from visa fees and medical insurance for diplomats was raised in relevance to Article 15 paragraph 7 of the Visa Code which specifies that holders of diplomatic passports shall be exempt from the requirement to hold travel medical insurance. If diplomats are posted in Israel, the majority of MSs do not ask for TMI if the purpose of travel of the diplomats is work related. If holders of diplomatic passports travel for tourism and especially if they are spouses of diplomats, also holding diplomatic passports, then yes they ask for TMI.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

MS's agreed on Harmonised List of Supporting Documents and on comments presented by the Visa Committee. LSC is waiting for the implementation act to be adopted by the Visa Committee.

²⁶ April 2018 – March 2019

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Harmonization of visa fees for minors aged 6 to 12 years, as per Article 16 (5) and Article 48 of the Visa Code was discussed. MSs decided to harmonize the exemptions from Article 16 and do not charge fees from holders of diplomatic passports applying for visas, minors aged 6 to 12 years will be charged equivalent of 35 euros.

3.4 Exchange of information

Good meeting with representatives of Israeli insurance companies was held. It was decided that LSC will prepare a list of information which is crucial to be listed on the TMI (for example, geographical scope of the insurance). MSs exchanged views on TMIs issued by Israeli companies.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

MSs examined the table of recognition of travel documents issued by IL. MSs who submitted notifications regarding the Travel document issued by Israel to the Visa Committee were asked locally for clarification. MSs asked for simplification and merging of some of notifications: C2, C4 and C9.

4. Challenges

Issue of recognition of TMIs issued by local Israeli insurance companies was solved. All MSs in Tel Aviv recognize TMIs issued by local Israeli companies for the purpose of visa applications.

5. Other issues

No other issues are reported from LSC Tel Aviv.

The report has been approved by all MSs present in Tel Aviv.



EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION IN JORDAN

Amman, 24 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in JORDAN

2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT²⁷

1. Introduction

Fourteen Schengen Member States have consulates in Amman and issue visas (AT, BE, CZ, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, NL, NO, PL, ES, SE, CH). Several countries (EE, DK, FI, IS, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, PT, SI, SK) are represented by another Schengen country: AT represents SI and SK; BE represents LU; CH represents LI; DE represents LT and LV, ES represents PT; IT represents MT; NL represents EE; NO represents DK, FI and IS. The countries that are represented in Amman have their nearest consulates in Cairo (MT, LV, LT, PT, SI), Ankara (EE, FI), Beirut (SK, DK) and London (IS).

As a consequence of the Syrian crisis and the withdrawal of many diplomatic missions from Damascus, many Schengen countries' embassies in Amman are competent for receiving applications from Syrian nationals. Some countries have no restrictions as to where Syrians should apply (FR), whereas others have authorised Beirut and Amman to receive the applications (PL, NL, AT, IT, CH, BE, HU, CZ, GR), with the majority being processed in Beirut. DE receives visa applications from Syrians in Ankara, Beirut and Amman. ES only handles applications in Amman from Syrians who reside in Jordan; all Syrian citizens can apply at the ES embassy in Beirut. FR issues „asylum visa” only to Iraqis and Syrians residing in Jordan.

Several MS are not represented in Iraq or not processing visa applications at their Embassy there; in some cases they process visa applications of Iraqi nationals at their embassies in Amman.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Four LSC meetings were held in the reporting period (in May, September and December 2018 and February 2019). The meetings were well attended with regular participation by most of the MS which have embassies in Amman. Throughout the reporting period, EUDEL chaired the LSC meetings in EUDEL premises and drew up summary reports. The reports are shared with MS, some of which also share the reports with capitals. MS and RSCO²⁸ submitted inputs for the agenda. Visa requirements, the harmonised list of supporting documents and visa trends have been recurrent items on the LSC agenda.

²⁷ April 2018 – March 2019

²⁸ Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer, project funded by the Internal Security Fund of the EU. Accredited for Jordan and Lebanon from October 2018. Main project goals are to support MS and EUDEL on LSC matters, e.g. as stipulated in article 48 Visa Code.

In 2018 and in 2019 extended anti-fraud meetings were organised by the EMLO (European Migration liaison Officer), and hosted by one MS, on a quarterly basis.²⁹ Furthermore, he organised a regional conference on irregular migration in March 2019.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

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- The MS are well equipped to apply the Visa Code and share information on various visa matters. MS exchange information on a regular bases and when needed, for example on refusals. MS reported visa shopping due to differences in capacity and waiting time for appointments. MS furthermore discussed how to verify family ties and the relationships between spouses.
-

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Commission Implementing Decision on the list of supporting documents entered into force on 26 March 2013 and is applicable to all Schengen MS. MS, EMLO and RSCO took initiative to update and amend the list of supporting documents. The first update was discussed at the LSC meeting in February. The input given by MS has resulted in an updated version which will be further discussed during the LSC meeting in May 2019. When approved by MS it will be submitted to the Visa Committee for formal adoption.

3.3 Exchange of information

MS continued to routinely exchange information on visa statistics, fraud cases and experiences regarding the documentation requirements for visa applications.

This year was the first time that all MS exchanged information on statistics. In February 2019, it was agreed that visa statistics should be collected and discussed on a quarterly basis.

Compared to the previous year, the number of visa applications decreased by 7% in 2018. SE (-41%)³⁰, AT (-34%) and CH (-29%) saw the highest decreases, while HU (+19%), and BE (+13%) reported the highest increase in the number of applications.

Across all MS, the average refusal rate was 16% (similar to 2017). SE and BE have the highest refusal rate at 32%, followed by NL (24%) while the lowest rates are reported by FR, DE (10%) and HU and NO (11%). The main reasons for refusal are lack of proper supporting documents and doubts regarding the purpose of the stay. Visa issued to Iraqi nationals represented up to 25% of all visas issued by AT and 21% for BE, in contrast with 2% of total visas approved by HU and IT. Syrian nationals represented 12% of all visas issued by BE and 10 % for DE, whereas they constituted less than 1% for ES, GR and HU.

- *Cases of fraud:* information on fraud cases are shared ad hoc and during extended anti-fraud meetings between MS. Some MS use a warning list to exchange information on travel agencies and translation companies that are involved in suspicious practices and fake documentations.

²⁹ Participants also included likeminded countries such as UK, US, Canada, Japan and Pacific Alliance countries.

³⁰ SE stopped issuing visa for Lebanon from May 2018.

- *About travel medical insurance (TMI)*: the EUDEL highlighted that MS are solely responsible for verifying whether the insurances presented by applicants are adequate under the terms of Visa Code. However, consulates can provide a "useful" list of insurance companies to applicants.
- *about cooperation with local authorities and companies*: MS detected a significant number of fraudulent bank statements. As a result major local banks were invited to the anti-fraud meeting in April 2019.
- *about use of the Visa Information System*: MS operate with VIS systems based on national requirements, biometric features from EU-VIS are actively used to identify a visa applicant and to share information amongst MS of applicants who have been previously refused Schengen visa.
- *about use of VISMail*: some MS use VISMail but others do not yet. Some MS face issues while sharing information via VISMail.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

As part of the RSCO project, MS participated in a questionnaire on LSC. Major topics MS suggested to work on (in collaboration with the EUDEL and RSCO) are the harmonisation, cooperation and sharing of information within the framework of Article 48 Visa Code. Therefore, initiatives were taken to update the harmonised list of supporting documents, to discuss statistics quarterly and to further enhance the exchange of information. As a result of MS input, the RSCO was able to draft quarterly overviews on visa trends, statistics and modi operandi of fraud cases. Another initiative could also be to discuss differences in issuing of long-validity multiple entry visa (MEVs). The 2017 MEV visa statistics show significant differences between MS in Jordan. When the 2018 statistics are published, differences might be discussed during an LSC meeting

4. Challenges

MS continue to face challenges in terms of applicants' compliance with deadlines for lodging visa applications as well as providing the required documentation.

MS face as well long waiting lists for appointments, even if some of them have introduced a phone number which require manpower. During Ramadan, one can observe an increase of applications.

Several Schengen MS expressed concerns on the continuous suspicious practices of many travel agencies or translator companies.

5. Other issues

No further issues to report.

This report has been approved by the Local Schengen Cooperation group.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

25 April 2019, Nur-Sultan

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KAZAKHSTAN 2018-2019 REPORT³¹

1. Introduction

Croatia opened its embassy in Kazakhstan at the end of 2018, so as of today the following Member States and associated states are present with full-fledged embassies in Kazakhstan's capitol Nur-Sultan (former Astana): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, (and United Kingdom).

France closed its Consulate General in Almaty in early 2019, so the following Member States have consulates general in Almaty: Germany, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period a total of four Local Schengen Cooperation meetings were held in Astana: namely on 19 April, 19 July, 11 October 2018 and on 26 February 2019. The meetings were well attended, at least 11 Member States were present. Only 3 Member States never attended, but all of these absences are understandable, as these countries have very small embassies (just an Ambassador) and they do not have consular departments or they are not Schengen Member-States. Ad hoc meetings were not organised but non-Schengen Member States and Switzerland³² were invited and present at all the four meetings. Certain meetings were attended by colleagues from the French, the German and the Hungarian consulates in Almaty. Coordination in location outside the capital was also ensured through the embassies. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation and the reports were also drawn up and circulated locally by EUDEL.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Operational issues in relation to the application of the common visa policy is regularly discussed and somewhat facilitated by the fact that Austria represents 6 other MS in Nur-Sultan and Hungary and Lithuania represents respectively 9 and 3 other MS in Almaty for the purpose of examining visa applications and issuing visas, including the collection of visa applications and biometric identifiers. Visa shopping therefore is not a significant issue. Visa statistics are sent monthly to EUDEL, who aggregates the data and shares it with MS.

³¹ April 2018 – March 2019

³² Apart from Switzerland no other associated country is represented in Kazakhstan

During the LSC meetings Member States identified Article 24 of the Visa Code as unclear legal basis, as it leaves room for diverging interpretation with regard to the conditions for issuing long-validity MEV, the personal scope and the precise length of validity.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices largely has been already acquired, co-operation with commercial intermediaries is regularly discussed.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Though the practices are formally not harmonised most of the MS have a similar practice of gradual approach. During the LSC meeting it was identified that one MS does not take into account the "period of grace".

An overwhelming majority of the multiple entry visas (MEVs) issued for KZ citizens has validity of one-year.

3.4 Exchange of information

An exchange of information on the below topics took place during the LSC:

- statistics: visa statistics are sent monthly to EUDEL, who aggregates the data and shares it with MS.
- cases of fraud;
- travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI);
- any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules;
- cooperation with local authorities and companies (banks, employers, transport companies)
- cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises);
- other issues

4. Challenges

Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2019-2020):

- Further harmonisation
- Implementation and proper interpretation of the new Visa Code
- High level of the new visa fees negatively affecting potential young travellers
- Less room for individual interpretation



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN UNION OFFICE IN KOSOVO
EUROPEAN UNION SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

12 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KOSOVO

2018-2019 REPORT³³

1. Introduction

Kosovo hosts Diplomatic Missions of 18 EU Member States. Short stay visas are issued by: Italy (representing Estonia), Hungary, Slovakia, Greece, Germany, Finland and Slovenia (issues short stay visas for Latvia). Switzerland represents Austria, Belgium, France, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Norway represents Denmark, Iceland and Lithuania. Sweden and the Czech Republic process Kosovo's visa applications in Skopje (North Macedonia). Poland process Kosovo's visa applications Skopje and Tirana and Portugal in Sofia.

In the reporting period, there was a rise in the number of short stay visa applications. This trend is expected to continue as long as there is no progress on visa liberalization. Maintaining the visa requirement is an important challenge to EU Member States and associated states. It leads to long waiting lists and waiting periods. Instances of visa shopping and falsification of supporting documents are also reported. Many consulates experience daily overload, some report missed appointments. An increasing number of Schengen States have started to use external service providers (VFS Global and TLS Contact) and applications are collected through visa centers in Pristina.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

From April 2018 to March 2019, the European Union Office in Kosovo convened four LSC meetings, on 13 June, 11 October and 13 December 2018 and 25 March 2019. The meetings were organised by the LSC policy officer and chaired by the Head of Political, Economic and European Integration Section. The attendance and exchange of information in the LSC meetings have been consistently good and have further improved during the reporting period. Given Kosovo's small size, it is sufficient to coordinate LSC in meetings in Pristina, where all the Embassies are located.

³³April 2018 – March 2019

3. State of play

a. Application of the Visa Code

Most Schengen participants experienced a rise in visa applications and there are in general long waiting periods. The average waiting period is around 2-4 months. It might currently take an applicant around 4 months to obtain Schengen visa at some Embassies, whereas the Visa Code stipulates that one cannot apply for visa 3-months prior to a trip. The Visa Code rules continue to be breached in Kosovo due to the high number of visa requests. Distortions of the existing Visa Code provisions have been also reported with regard to the admissibility of visa requests (art.19) and the validity of the visas issued (art. 24 par. 2, 3).

Some Schengen states started to use external service providers (VFS Global or TLS contact-Visa Centre) to meet the Visa Code deadlines and speed up the process. This however brought an increase of the visa cost through a service fee. Overall, the number of visa applications have almost tripled and refusal rate increased. The main challenge as reported by the Embassies using outsourcing is the increase in visa shopping. Due to the long waiting periods, some people turn to the Visa Centre even though their main destination might be different from the one the Visa Centres serve. This in turn has an impact on the rising refusal rate. The refusal rate was reported for most cases between 20-30% and is also linked to not harmonized list of appointments and other differentiated practices among Schengen participants linked to visa issuance (visa fee, visa duration, etc.). For example, most Kosovars are interested in multiple-entry Schengen visas, some Embassies quoting the abuse of the previous visas or first time visas only issue single or double entry visas, sometimes based on instructions of their Capital.

Member States and Schengen participants also reported a relatively high abuse of Schengen visas. Due to attempts to find quicker way to get an appointment and due to lack of awareness on the competent Consulate to apply to, most people try to find the easiest and fastest way to get the Schengen visa.

There are also challenges with abuses of the visa appointment booking systems, reportedly by travel agencies, who then sell the places to the applicants.

Several Member States raised the problem of frequent use of fake supporting documents for the visa application such as bank statements, TATIM and Trusti documents or fake transaction for the visa fee.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The harmonisation of the list of supporting documents has been completed in Kosovo in 2012. The EU once again shared the harmonised list based on request of some Member States and from the discussion and responses in the four LSC meetings; the harmonised list of documents is being used, and sometimes other documents might be requested. There was no request made to amend the existing list during the reporting period.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

In the absence of a Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA) between Kosovo and the EU, the EU Member States continue to apply different visa application fees. Some EU Member States charge the €35 visa fee for Kosovo passport holders based on the EU-Serbia VFA or on a political decision taken by their capitals, while most apply the €60 visa fee. Current practice of differentiated visa fees, even as regards children is one of the factors that contribute to visa shopping. Account should also be taken of the fact that apart from Kosovo nationals, some Serbs in Kosovo still hold Koordinaciona Uprava passports. Practices of visa fees vary also in such cases.

During the reporting period some participants have expressed the intention to revise and the visa fee but the issue is politically sensitive in the current context. Any decision on revising the visa fee should be taken at central level as recently suggested by the LSC.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States continued to submit visa statistics. While not all of them have been doing it regularly, overall the practice of sharing monthly visa statistics has improved since last year. The EU Office reminded the EU Member States/Schengen participants issuing visas on behalf of some Member States to send monthly statistics at the beginning of every month to a dedicated functional mailbox. The EU Office consolidates and disseminates these statistics on a quarterly basis. There is certainly scope to improve the information exchange in this regard both on the timely reception and the dissemination part.

The EU Office functional mailbox and the common mailing list have proved useful tools for Member States as regards the exchange of statistics but also as a tool to share information of common interest. This has included for instance reports on cases of fraud or forged documents, issues related to external service providers, the use of VISMail, Visa Information System and the secure destruction of old visa applications.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

On the request of Ministry of European Integration, in October 2018 the LSC meeting hosted two Ministry of European Integration representatives to discuss the challenge of relatively high refusal rate in Kosovo.

4. Challenges

By far the main challenges are the high number of visa applications and the continued absence of visa liberalisation resulting in long waiting times, which is a breach to the Visa Code (see above). Following the adoption of the revised Visa Code in 2019, any solution to the aforementioned challenges/problems must take into account the political and other specificities and ramifications on the ground, especially the political considerations in Kosovo on its current visa regime.

In July 2018, the European Commission confirmed that Kosovo has fulfilled all the 95 visa liberalisation roadmap benchmarks and recommended to the EP and the EU Member States to grant Kosovo visa liberalisation. However, the decision of EU Member States on the matter is not expected before the May 2019 EP elections.

As a result, the demand for visa has fluctuated. For a short period in September 2018 there has been a decrease of applications, linked to Visa liberalisation expectations. Requests have picked up again toward the end of the year and high demand for Schengen visas continues in 2019. Meanwhile, some Member States already turned to outsourcing of the visa application process to address the challenge.

Most participants reported about the challenge of intermediaries mainly travel agencies and most recently parallel Visa Centres which build business schemes around the visa application process and continuously misinform people. The travel agencies also abuse the online booking system by booking all the slots that are later sold for extra fee to their clients. The challenge in Kosovo also remains the use of falsified supporting documents, bank accounts, TATIM and Trusti documents or fake transactions for the visa fee.

Challenges were also reported in dealing with local administration, tax authorities and Civil Registration Agency especially as regards timely responses to requests related to visa applicants.

One of the challenges also debated in the context of the visa liberalisation is the relatively high visa refusal rate for Kosovars on average 20-30% and a result of multiple factors.

In order to deal with the abuse of the Schengen visa it was suggested by the destination countries to set up more thorough controls at first Schengen entry/exit points and raise public awareness about the strict visa rules.

The LSC meetings continue to contribute to exchange of experience and best practices and examples to fight other phenomena and challenges in the Kosovo context such as fake and forged visa supporting documents and this will remain a priority for the next reporting period.

It is clear that many of the current LSC challenges will be tackled by the introduction of the visa free regime, which might in turn bring new challenges.

5. Other issues

Koordinaciona Uprava (KU) passports are passports issued by Serbian Coordination Directorate (in Serbian Координациона управа / *Koordinaciona uprava*) to Serbian citizens residing in Kosovo.

These KU passports are not recognized by Kosovo but accepted by most EU Member States and Schengen participants. They are not biometric and their holder will not be able to benefit from eventual visa liberalisation for Kosovo just as they currently do not benefit from the Serbian visa free regime with the EU. The question is whether this category of persons will be able and willing to get the Kosovo documents and are not left behind if Kosovo becomes visa free. The issue of KU passports should be addressed in connection with the update of the current visa rules.



April, 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Lebanon 2018-2019 REPORT ³⁴

1. Introduction

In Lebanon sixteen Member States (MS) are issuing short stay visas: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and Sweden. Eight MS represent other MS on issuing visas: Belgium (Luxembourg), Spain (Portugal), France (Estonia), Norway (Iceland), Italy (Malta), Hungary (Latvia, Slovenia), Austria (Lithuania, Finland) and Switzerland (Liechtenstein).³⁵

Eleven MS use external service providers (ESP). There are no LSC consular sections in Lebanon outside Beirut.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

LSC meetings were held every three months at the EU Delegation (EU DEL) and are generally well attended. However, one particular MS does not attend to LSC meetings. Agenda and minutes of meetings are prepared and shared with MS. The EU DEL chaired the LSC meetings, MS and the Regional Schengen Cooperation officer (RSCO)³⁶ submitted input for the agenda. Recognised travel documents, draft harmonised list of supporting documents, visa shopping and trends have been recurrent items on the LSC agenda. Most MS consider the LSC meetings to be useful.³⁷

Ad hoc meetings were organized for interested MS on specific subjects. A single topic meeting for MS using VFS as ESP and a (network) meeting for MS processing Syrian applications were organised. Other ad hoc meetings focused on the exchange of information on document fraud and fraud in visa processes. In March, November 2018 and February 2019 extended anti-fraud meetings were organised by MS.³⁸ Furthermore, immigration liaison officers (ILOs) provided training for MS on the new Schengen visa sticker and modi operandi on visa fraud. The European Migration liaison officer (EMLO) organised several meetings on migration issues. For example, in March 2019 a regional conference on irregular migration was organised.

³⁴ April 2018 – March 2019

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/docs/list_of_consular_presence_and_representation_en.xlsx

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs processes Schengen Visa applications centrally in The Hague.

³⁶ Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer, project funded by the Internal Security Fund of the EU. Based in Lebanon from October 2018.

³⁷ Based on MS responses to questionnaire on LSC that was distributed by the RSCO in November 2018.

³⁸ Participants included UK, US, Canada, Australia and Pacific Alliance countries.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS are well equipped to apply the Visa Code and share information on different kinds of visa matters. Most MS have outsourced the receipt of visa applications to ESPs. But MS reported an increase of visa shopping in the peak season due to differences in capacity, waiting time for appointments and processing time of the applications.

MS exchange information with each other on a regular bases and when needed, for example on refusals. However, there is room for improvement of the implementation of other requirements of Article 48 of the Visa Code, like the regular exchange of statistics.

The EU DEL organises and chairs the LSC meetings according Article 48 of the Visa Code, but has expressed to lack in depth knowledge of visa processes and the Visa Code.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The initiative of a working group of MS that resulted in a draft (but not approved) harmonised list in 2017 was reinforced. The previous draft version was discussed by the RSCO with the MS on a bilateral level and plenary level at LSC meetings. The input given by MS has resulted in an updated version which will be further discussed during the LSC meeting in May 2019. When approved by MS it will be submitted to the Visa Committee for formal adoption.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

A template for the exchange of visa statistics was introduced to compile and share the statistics on a quarterly basis. The LSC has approved the establishment of a local warning list for MS to report travel agencies involved in visa fraud and document fraud has been approved.

An initiative will be taken to discuss differences in issuing of multiple entry visa (MEVs) with a long validity. According the 2017 MEV visa statistics, the percentage of issued MEVs differ significantly between MS in Lebanon.³⁹ When the 2018 statistics are published, differences could be discussed during an LSC meeting.

3.4 Exchange of information

The meetings have been using as a platform to exchange information on

- *statistics*; format to exchange statistics on a quarterly bases has been introduced. Statistics are a recurrent item on the agenda of LSC meetings.
- *cases of fraud*; fraud cases are shared ad hoc and during extended anti-fraud meetings between MS. A warning list to exchange information on travel agencies involved in visa fraud is being implemented.
- *travel medical insurance (TMI)*; no exchange of information on TMIs takes place.
- *cooperation with local authorities and companies*: MS detected a significant number of fraudulent bank statements. As a result a workshop with the major local banks will be organised. MS furthermore expressed the need to receive training on Syrian documents. Therefore a training session by the Lebanese General Security is scheduled for May.

³⁹ See statistics on https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy_en#stats

- *use of the Visa Information System*; MS operate with VIS systems based on national requirements, biometric features from EU-VIS are actively used to identify a visa applicant and to share information amongst MS of applicants who have been previously refused a short stay visa.
- *use of VISMail*; some MS use VISMail but others do not. Nordic MS took the initiative to assess if and why other MS not make use of VISMail yet.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

An overview of meetings and initiatives taken by MS is described in paragraph 2 of this report. In addition it is worth mentioning that due to the expressed need of MS to receive information on verification methods of Syrian documents, the Frontex Handbook was made available for MS.⁴⁰ Furthermore, in May 2019 a seminar with the Lebanese General Security on Syrian document fraud is scheduled. In June 2019 the next extended anti-fraud meeting is foreseen to take place. A workshop with the major local banks on verification of bank statements is to be organised.

4. Challenges

Two main challenges were repeatedly reported:

1. Discrepancy in refusal rates and average waiting time

The total number of Schengen visa applications slightly decreased in 2018 with a total number of 151.233. Some MS received more or less the same number of applications, other MS even registered decreases between 9%-19% whereas others received an increased number of applications, ranging from 10%-20%.

The overall refusal rate in 2018 was 11% but differs significantly between MS. It ranges from 40% to only 1%.

Waiting times also significantly differed, especially in the summer period. MS reported that the above mentioned factors led to increased visa shopping. More information is needed to be able to analyse the reasons behind the substantial differences for increased or decreased numbers of applications and for the differences in refusal rates. Regarding the waiting time, it is reported to be due to differences between MS in capacity and workload.

2. Migration pressure of Syrian nationals

Due to the Syria crisis, many MS handle Syrian visa applications in Lebanon. With almost 8,000 applications in 2018, Syrian applications represented around 5,5% of the total number of applications.⁴¹ Because of migratory risks and/or fraudulent documentation, the refusal rate for Syrians are significantly higher than the overall refusal rate. The highest rates range between 68% and 94%. Other MS had relatively low refusal rates with 21%-34%. As the Lebanese government has started to encourage Syrians residing in Lebanon to return home, it is foreseen that the demand for visa and other ways of migration of Syrians from Lebanon to EU MS will increase.

⁴⁰ Distribution of the Frontex Handbook on Syrian documents 2017 is limited to expat staff of MS' visa sections only.

⁴¹ Two of the sixteen visa issuing MS could not submit separate statistics for Syrian and Lebanese applicants.

5. Other issues

Several MS deal with ongoing transit abuse of Palestinians traveling from Lebanon via EU MS to third countries. During transits in the EU they claim asylum. As a result some (but not all) MS have implemented airport transit visa requirements for Palestinians.

The content of this report has been approved by the Member States



27/5 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Libya 2018-2019 REPORT⁴²

1. Introduction

Two Member States are present in Tripoli. One has a VAC in Tobruk. 13 Member States are represented in Tunis.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

In the reporting period, April 2018 - March 2019, the EUDEL to Libya held four Schengen Cooperation (LSC) Meetings. They were well attended although some MS never attend. The meetings were chaired by EUDEL.

1. In October 2018 the first LSC meeting since 2016 was held in Tunis.
2. In December 2018 this was followed by LSC working-group meeting aiming at providing a venue for discussing and comparing examples of fraudulent documentation provided by applicants.
3. In February 2019, a LSC meeting was organized with a briefing by IOM on the challenges related to the setup of a VAC in Tripoli.
4. In March 2019, VFS Global was invited to brief on the same topic at the LSC meeting. Reports were compiled by EUD. The MS present in Tripoli attended most meetings in person or via VTC to Tripoli.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code have been discussed in the LSC meetings.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

This has not been discussed at the LSC.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No attempt has been made at the LSC meetings to harmonise visa-issuing practices. Most MS were unable to provide figures regarding multiple entry visas (MEV), but all report that the most frequent length of MEVs is 90 days/6 months. The below figures for MEVs issued for 1 year or more are only indicative.

⁴² April 2018 – March 2019

MEV	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
	75%	22%	3%	0%	0%

3.4 Exchange of information

- Issues with applications from business persons due to challenges related to verification of the provided documentation leads to a high amount of refusals. Some MS only accept invitation letters from well-renowned companies having long-standing business relations with Libya. The refusal rate has increased in 2018. For some MS it is close to 50%.
- Problems with falsified documentation, the validity of the Libyan green and blue passports, note verbales etc. MS have on several occasions received falsified copies of travel insurance. Moreover, several travel agencies issue fake confirmations of flights tickets and hotel bookings.
- The issues around bank statements; due to the collapse of the banking system in Libya it is difficult for Libyans to present bank statements and the credibility of the presented documents is questionable.
- Several MS in Tunis have mentioned the challenges stemming from allowing Libyans to provide the consulate with a copy of their passport. This practice has led to multiple open cases in the Schengen system as the applicants often failed to pick up the final decision. Due to this, many MS have decided to keep the passport while processing the visa application.
- In Libya the concerns reported have been related to security and logistics, including electricity cuts.
- Challenges with medical visas due to the prevalence of non-payment.
- Concerning the challenges related to opening VAC in Tripoli for an embassy based in Tunis, the fact that it is illegal in Tunisia to transport passports without the passport holder has been mentioned as a major challenge. Moreover, the lack of monitoring has been mentioned as a major challenge due to the lack of daily contact with the ESP if the VAC located in Libya. Finally, operational costs in Libya are extremely high as well as the man-hours needed by the embassy to support and properly monitor the VAC are significant.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

- Creation of an email group to share information between the consuls.
- Due to several requests received by the Libyan MoFA to explore opportunities to setup VACs in Tripoli to enable Libyans to lodge applications closer to their place of residence, two briefings with VFS Global and IOM were held at the LSC to discuss the challenges of opening VACs in Tripoli.

4. Challenges

Since the eruption of armed clashes in Tripoli, the discussion to establish VACs in Tripoli has been less relevant.



UNION EUROPÉENNE

DÉLÉGATION AUPRES DE LA REPUBLIQUE DE MADAGASCAR ET
DE L'UNION DES COMORES

31 mai 2019

COOPERATION LOCALE SCHENGEN (LSC) A MADAGASCAR PROJET DE RAPPORT 2018-2019

1. Introduction

Trois Etats membres de l'UE sont présents à Antananarivo : l'Allemagne, la France et le Royaume Uni. Deux autres Etats européens membres de l'Espace Schengen sont également représentés : la Suisse et la Norvège. Depuis 2012, seuls la France et la Suisse assurent la représentation Schengen et délivrent à ce titre des visas Schengen.

La répartition de la représentation Schengen entre ces deux Etats à Antananarivo est la suivante :

France: En 2018, 24.495 demandes de visas ont été traitées par le Consulat Général de France en 2018 (23.184 en 2017), y compris des visas pour DOM, CTOM, pays africains représentés ou visas de long séjour pour la France. L'Ambassade a délivré 18.508 visas et refusé 5.987. Une partie de l'augmentation du nombre de demandes de visas est due à l'augmentation des mariages mixtes franco-malgaches, ainsi qu'aux étudiants et au nombre de chercheurs océaniques.

L'augmentation du nombre de visa Schengen délivrés pour l'Italie est, dû au nombre de marins malgaches travaillant pour des entreprises italiennes, aux religieux allant à Rome et aux mariages mixtes italo-malgaches.

En 2019, le Consulat a reçu 2.839 demandes de visas ordinaires et officiels au total entre janvier et mars, dont 2.198 visas délivrés et 664 visas refusés. 1.403 sont des visas Schengen.

La France représente les Etats Schengen suivants (les chiffres sont le nombre de visas Schengen délivrés en représentation):

- Espagne: 229 (2018); 30 (janvier – mars 2019)
- Italie: 1.121 (2018); 87 (janvier – mars 2019)
- Belgique: 342 (2018); 55 (janvier – mars 2019)
- Allemagne: 605 (2018); 56 (janvier – mars 2019)
- Autriche: 44 (2018); 6 (janvier – mars 2019)
-

Et pour le reste, avec moins de 100 demandes en 2018 et 23 demande en 2019

Le Consulat Général de France se montre satisfait de l'externalisation des prises de rendez-vous et du dépôt de dossier pour les passeports ordinaires qui sont délégués, depuis le 27 avril 2016, au prestataire "*TLS contact*." L'objectif de délivrer plus rapidement les visas et dans les meilleures conditions, soit 48 heures après dépôt des dossiers, a été largement atteint. Pour les passeports diplomatiques et de service, les modalités de dépôt des demandes de visa restent inchangées et se déroulent à la chancellerie de l'ambassade. Depuis novembre 2014, les visas sur passeports officiels (diplomatiques et de service) suivent la même procédure avec appel à un numéro dédié (087007). Le rendez-vous est obligatoire.

La demande en dehors de la capitale est trop faible pour une décentralisation du service visa Schengen qui se limite actuellement à Antananarivo.

Le projet de mettre en place TLS à Tamatave a été abandonné après des études faites par rapport aux coûts que cela engendrerait par rapport au nombre estimatif des demandes. Selon la politique du ministère en France, le coût des frais de dossier ne devrait pas dépasser les 25€.

Suisse : En 2018, l'Ambassade de Suisse a traité 797 demandes de visa Schengen, dont 175 refusées. En janvier et février 2019, elle a enregistré 76 demandes de visas Schengen et en refuse 51.

Le dépôt des demandes de visa se fait en principe sur rendez-vous (sans frais) depuis le site internet : www.swiss-visa.ch. Ce site internet offre également aux demandeurs la possibilité de faire leur demande en ligne.

La présence personnelle n'est pas requise pour les demandeurs dont les données biométriques ont été déjà recueillies – titulaires de visas délivrés avec la mention «VIS», ainsi que pour les enfants de moins de 12 ans. Si les empreintes digitales recueillies précédemment se révèlent être de qualité insuffisante, l'Ambassade de Suisse se réserve le droit de convoquer le demandeur pour un nouveau rendez-vous, de même si un entretien est jugé nécessaire.

Depuis le 26 mars 2018, les clients de visas ont la possibilité de payer on-line pour les visas Schengen (e-payement) avec leur carte de crédit.

L'Ambassade de Suisse a repris l'établissement des visas Schengen pour les pays suivants (les chiffres sont le nombre de visas Schengen délivrés en représentation):

- Norvège: 49 (2018); 11 (janvier-février 2019)
- Suède: 23 (2018); 0 (janvier-février 2019)
- Pays-Bas: 89 (2018); 5 (janvier-février 2019)
- Pologne: 45 (2018); 0 (janvier-février 2019)
- Hongrie: 8 (2018); 1 (janvier-février 2019)

2. Réunions LSC en 2018-2019

La Délégation de l'UE a organisé, dernièrement, des réunions sur la coopération locale Schengen le 11 juin 2018 et le 27 mars 2019. Y participent la France, la Suisse, la Norvège et l'Allemagne. La réunion de juin 2018, a servi à l'échange des informations courantes, y compris les statistiques sur la délivrance des visas à Madagascar.

Durant la réunion du 27 mars 2019, la Délégation de l'UE a informé sur la nouvelle politique de l'UE en matière de visas, ainsi que sur le projet de règlement du Parlement européen et du Conseil sur la modification du règlement existant (CE° n°810/2009 établissant un code communautaire des visas). L'objectif étant de faciliter et simplifier les procédures de demande de visa, de rendre les déplacements plus aisés pour les voyageurs fréquents, de renforcer la sécurité de la procédure de visa et d'améliorer la coopération en matière de retour et de réadmission.

Les rapports sont établis en coopération entre la Délégation de l'UE, l'Ambassade de Suisse et le Consulat Général de France.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

La Délégation informe régulièrement les Etats concernés de l'évolution du développement en espace Schengen, des activités et des instructions reçus de Bruxelles et transmis par la DG HOME (et par d'autres services pour les autres sujets couverts par la coopération locale).

Les visas demandés au Consulat Général de France ainsi qu'à l'Ambassade de Suisse sont intégrés dans le programme VIS (Visa Information System) depuis le 6 juin 2013. Suivant ce système, les dossiers déjà refusés par l'un des États le seront probablement par l'autre, cela marche dans les deux sens.

3.2 Harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs

Seuls deux pays sont actifs dans ce domaine.

Le Consulat Général de France annonce les changements du taux consulaire à l'Ambassade de Suisse qui modifie en conséquence les frais de visa. La liste des pièces justificatives demandées est échangée régulièrement pour harmonisation qui semble suffisamment réalisée.

Les deux Etats Schengen demandent des documents qui leur permettent de justifier le motif du voyage, les ressources financières, l'hébergement et l'assurance.

En ce qui concerne l'Ambassade de Suisse, les actes d'état civil ne sont pas requis. L'Ambassade se réserve toutefois le droit d'exiger d'autres justificatifs, notamment des copies d'acte d'état civil, si elle le juge nécessaire. Les justificatifs concernant l'hôte (preuve des moyens financiers) sont envoyés par email ou par fax directement à l'Ambassade.

Pour le Consulat Général de France, les actes d'état civil sont systématiquement requis (livret de famille pour les personnes mariées). Les attestations d'hébergement ne sont pas suffisantes, les vérifications des ressources et du nombre d'occupants du logement de l'hébergeant par les mairies n'étant pas toujours probantes.

3.3 Echange d'informations

Les statistiques sont communiquées régulièrement entre la Suisse, la France et la Délégation de l'UE. La France et la Suisse se consultent sur les dossiers individuels (sur les demandes de visas de personnes de nationalité d'un Etat tiers, par exemple). La collaboration est efficace et rapide.

Dans la mesure où seuls deux Etats sont concernés, une coordination informelle s'opère par échanges directs entre les deux services concernés pour autant que si besoin. Cette coordination informelle fonctionne bien.

Si le Consulat de France continue à constater des cas de fraude sur les visas Schengen, une diminution des cas de fraudes peut être observée en 2018 par rapport à 2017. Ce résultat est le fruit du renforcement de la vérification des documents reçus, ainsi que d'une formation à la fraude documentaire effectuée en février 2018 à laquelle trois fonctionnaires suisses ont participé.

Le nouveau passeport biométrique est émis par les autorités malgaches depuis décembre 2013. Depuis le 1^{er} janvier 2015 il est le seul accepté par les autorités malgaches qui ne reconnaissent plus le passeport biométrique délivré avant décembre 2013. Par conséquent, les demandes de visa ne pourront être déposées qu'avec le nouveau modèle de passeport électronique⁴³.

4. Défis pour 2018-2019

Les deux Etats concernés continueront à assurer la mise en œuvre des règles relatives aux visas Schengen. La Délégation de l'UE continue à informer sur les développements en espace Schengen. Des améliorations éventuelles de la coopération seront examinées autant que de besoin.

Le défi pour le service des visas du Consulat général de France est la mise en place opérationnelle de la dématérialisation (demande de visas on line), vers la fin de l'année 2019, début 2020. Il n'y a pas encore de demande online : les dossiers continueront à être déposés à TLS, mais seront traités de façon dématérialisée. TLS enregistrera et enverra les dossiers directement au Consulat de France. Cela faciliterait également le suivi.

La France est sur le point de réfléchir sur l'augmentation de la délivrance de visa de circulation de 1 an à 5 ans, pour faciliter la circulation pour pouvoir gérer les urgences, et aussi pour l'image du Consulat.

En ce qui concerne la Suisse, la suspension de la représentation par la France aux Comores a représenté un défi, surtout pour les visas officiels.

5. Divers

L'Ambassade de Suisse est également accréditée aux Comores et aux Seychelles. A Moroni elle est représentée par l'Ambassade de France en matière de visa Schengen.

⁴³ Un passager avec un visa à entrées multiples encore valable sur l'ancien passeport, peut continuer de voyager avec ce visa jusqu'à la fin de sa validité, il faudra simplement voyager avec les deux passeports.

Le nombre absolu des citoyens français à Madagascar a légèrement diminué en 2018. Dans l'ensemble peu de ressortissants français viennent s'installer, notamment pour des raisons de santé et de l'insécurité, le nombre total de Français sur place diminue de quelques centaines sur environ 20 000 personnes chaque année.

Ce rapport finalisé par la Délégation de l'UE a été établi en étroite coopération et avec la contribution des deux Etats Schengen directement concernés: France et Suisse. La Norvège et les deux autres Etats membres de l'UE présents à Madagascar ont été tenus informés.



Nouakchott, le 13 mai 2019

**COOPERATION LOCALE EN MAURITANIE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES
CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC)
RAPPORT⁴⁴ 2018-2019**

1. Introduction

Trois Etats-membres sont présents et 16 autres sont représentés en Mauritanie.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2017-2018

Deux réunions sont organisées par année, en général à la Délégation UE, avec la participation de tous les trois Etats-membres sans présidence désignée.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

- Le niveau des droits de visa est harmonisé selon les possibilités prévues dans l'article 16.5.a) et b) du Code de Visas: les 6-12 ans (35 EUR) et les passeports de service (gratuit). En ce qui concerne les passeports diplomatiques, un Etat-membre a un accord bilatéral d'exemption mutuelle de visas, pour les deux autres Etats-membres présents ces visas sont gratuits.
- Seulement un Etat-membre a une version en arabe du formulaire de visa.
- Il n'y a pas besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents de voyage car la Mauritanie possède d'une liste exhaustive ne laissant pas de doute.
- L'échange des statistiques se fait annuellement.
- Pas de problèmes avec les compagnies de transport et d'assurance donc une liste commune n'est pas une priorité pour le moment.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

A ce stade, la mise en place d'une liste harmonisée ne semble pas nécessaire car la liste des pièces sollicitées est sensiblement identique et que la situation du pays ne fait pas appel à la production de documents particuliers.

⁴⁴ Avril 2018 – Mars 2019

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

La validité maximale des visas est limitée en raison de la validité des passeports ordinaires et officiels mauritaniens qui est de 5 ans. La durée moyenne des MEV est 1-2 ans, étendue de façon exceptionnelle à 3 ans (ou 4 ans pour un Etat-membre).

3.4 Echange d'informations

- Statistiques : échange annuel.
- Cas de fraude : signalement des cas individuels par e-mail.
- VISMail et Visa Information System ne sont pas utilisés pour l'échange d'informations.
- Il n'y a pas de prestataire de service commun. L'un des Etats-membres fait appel à un prestataire exclusivement pour les prises de rendez-vous. Un autre Etat-membre utilise un prestataire de service pour les prises de rendez-vous, les dépôts de dossiers et la délivrance de passeports aussi bien à Nouakchott qu'à Nouadhibou.

3.5 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

N/A

4. Défis

- Application des nouvelles instructions UE à partir de fin d'année 2019 dont les modalités sont attendues.
- Manque de contrôle par les (24 !) banques locales de leurs extraits de compte ; possibilité d'une évaluation conjointe des fraudes.

5. Divers

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO MEXICO

Mexico City 28 March 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Mexico City (MEXICO) 2018-2019 REPORT⁴⁵

1. Introduction

The Delegation of the European Union to Mexico is responsible for the organisation, chairing and following up on the Local Schengen Cooperation meetings. The LSC group in Mexico consists of 22 members: Austria (representing Malta), Belgium (representing Luxemburg and Slovenia), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark (representing Sweden, Norway and Iceland), Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia (representing Latvia), Spain (representing Estonia), Sweden, Norway, Switzerland (representing Liechtenstein)

Lithuania is neither a present nor represented in Mexico, so visa applicants must apply at the Lithuanian Embassy to the United States of America and to the United Mexican States.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

In the reporting period three regular LSC meetings were held in Mexico City, and one ad hoc meeting (for the harmonisation of supporting documents). Meetings were well attended, although certain MS never attend. The LSC group always met at the EU Delegation premises. The meetings were chaired by the EU DEL (with minutes and follow up dealt with by the chair). MS do not draft their own minutes, but some of them forward LSC meeting reports to their capitals.

Outside the capital, only Spain has consular representations (General Consulates) in Guadalajara (State of Jalisco) and Monterrey (State of Nuevo León), therefore there are no additional regional LSC groups in Mexico.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

VIS is fully operational in Mexico. The majority of Consuls does not tend to use VIS Mail frequently, although there are also Member States that use VIS regularly.

⁴⁵ April 2018 – March 2019

Due to the EU-Mexico tourist visa waiver agreement (VWA), Mexican nationals are exempted from Schengen visas. Therefore, there is reasonably low number of Schengen visa applications in Mexico (and by third country nationals only). Larger Member States issue approx. 150 Schengen visas per year (refusal rate ca. 2%), with the special case of ES issuing over 200 Schengen visas a year (with a refusal rate of ca. 10%). Medium/smaller Schengen States do not issue more than 40 Schengen visas annually, with the exception of Switzerland that issued 100 visas in 2018.

As far as the visa fee, MSs apply different exchange rates and also update them with different regularity, mostly according to instructions from their capitals, thus it is impossible to have one uniform visa fee in the local currency. However, the differences in fees for Schengen visas are insignificant and they do not lead to visa shopping.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

In 2018 the LSC group Mexico continued its work on the harmonised list of supporting documents for short-stay visas. A draft list was agreed upon and forwarded to DG Home in December 2018 and approved by the Visa Committee in early 2019. The implementing decision formally adopting the harmonised list for Mexico is expected in the coming months (DG HOME to inform LSC Mexico ahead of adoption).

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

As far as multiple entry visas (MEVs), many MS have different regulations and practices concerning the length of validity of Schengen visas (some may only issue 1-year MEVs, while others tend to issue MEVs with longer validity). To the question whether a harmonisation of practices in this regard was useful, some MS opined that such an exercise would not have much added value in Mexico, where the number of Schengen visas issued each year is limited.

3.4 Exchange of information

Some Schengen Consuls maintain regular working contacts between themselves (also due to their close cooperation in broader consular issues). EU DEL has been encouraging a regular exchange of Schengen-related information, including statistics, tips (e.g. on best/worst insurance companies), warnings etc. Schengen Consuls cooperate well via informal contacts (email, phone and what's app group). There were no reports of attempted visa frauds at the Schengen Consulates in Mexico in the past year.

According to shared statistics, most applicants in Mexico came from Ecuador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Bolivia; and there have also been some nationals of African and Asian countries (India, Russia, China, Nigeria, and Morocco).

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

The treatment of EU nationals entering Mexico in general terms was good in the last year, although there were also reports of EU travellers denied entry (Mexican authorities at times did not even reveal motives for such refusals, but these could include: "an alert issued by the US authorities" or "not fulfilling migratory requirements" (be it due to expired passports or not passing the migratory interview on arrival for any other reason). Some Consuls raised concerns about the treatment of EU nationals denied entry (who were being held for hours in a small room, without access to food or water, without any information or contact with an Embassy/Consulate, before being put back on a plane to Europe). However, in general it can be stated that MEX authorities comply with the VWA.

It was reported by some MS, that the new Schengen visa sticker created some technical difficulties for Schengen Consulates. There is also not enough space to write additional comments.

5. Other issues

- Since July 2016 Mexico has been applying a unilateral change of its immigration policy. Mexico has opened its borders to non-EU tourists/business people/artists/students, who are permanently residing in the Schengen area or who have a valid visa from one of the Schengen States. Interestingly enough, the United Kingdom was also included in the scope of this new policy, while the Republic of Ireland was not.

Done on 28 March 2019 by EU DEL MEXICO, with the approval of LSC Mexico.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MONTENEGRO

Podgorica, 15 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONTENEGRO 2018-2019 REPORT⁴⁶

1. Introduction

In addition to the EU Delegation to Montenegro, there are now 19 member states (MS) with diplomatic representation in Podgorica (14 embassies: GR, AT, GB, CZ, FR, SI, IT, BG, HU, SK, PL, DE, RO, HR and 1 Consul Général (HR in Kotor's consulate) and 6 Honorary Consuls representing 8 countries (DK/SE, BE/LU, MT, BG, SL, HU) in the country.

For the purpose of issuing (Schengen) short stay visas, 15 member states (MS): AT, BE, DK, EE, ES, FR, LV, LT, LU, HU, NL, PL, PT, SK and SI agreed to turn the consular function of processing of short stay visas to the Common Application Centre Podgorica (CAC) which works within the structure of the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia.

During this period two Local Schengen Group meetings were held, following the Consular protection meetings. They were both well attended by the representatives of MS of the Schengen agreement and the representatives of the observers' countries (Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria). The EUD organized the meetings, drafted minutes, compiled and circulated relevant information. Meetings were chaired by the EUD's Consular Correspondent and the Deputy.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

At **first meeting held on 18/06/2018**, participants shared the statistics of issued/refused visas for first semester of 2018:

For the first five months of 2018, CAC/Slovenian Embassy issued 219 visas. For the same period, the Italian Embassy issued 99 visas and the Croatian embassy issued 16 visas.

Table with records on MS issued/refused visas is continuously updated.

Second meeting was held on 21/11/2018 and the following subjects were covered:

For the first 10 months of 2018, CAC/Slovenian Embassy issued 489 visas, among them 5 D visas, 3 applicants were refused. For the same period Greek Embassy issued 86 visas - 66 C visas and 20 D visas.

For the first 9 months of 2018, Italian Embassy issued 210 visas and 1 was refused.

With regard to "flight reservation", CAC/Slovenian and EL Embassies require flight ticket to be issued and does not accept reservation.

German and Italian embassies require only a reservation.

⁴⁶ April 2018 – March 2019

Service fee for visa issuance is harmonized (35 EUR if there is an agreement and 60 EUR if there is no agreement).

At the forum organized by Montenegrin Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Podgorica from 15 to 17 November, ETIAS – European Travel Information and Authorisation System was mentioned⁴⁷. It is completely electronic system which allows and keeps track of visitors from countries who do not need a visa to enter the Schengen Zone. In a way, it resembles the U.S Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), which serves a similar purpose. The legal procedures to pass the ETIAS have started in 2016, and the system is expected to be in place by 2021.

According to the information received, in 2018, CAC, Italian and Greek Embassies issued 972 visas and refused 8 (CAC refused 4 applicants in 2018):

CAC issued 591 visas; Italian Embassy issued 295 and refused 4 visas; Greek Embassy issued 86 visas.

Third LSC meeting took place on 14 March 2019.

In 2018, 984 visas were issued by the CAC, Italian and Greek Embassy.

Out of this number, CAC issued 586 C visas, 5 D visas and refused 4 applicants; Italian Embassy issued 295 and refused 4 visas; Greek Embassy issued 75 C and 23 D visas.

In January and February 2019 CAC issued 56 C visas and 2 D visas and refused 1 applicant.

From 1 January – 14 March 2019, Greek Embassy issued 5 C and 1 D visas.

It was pointed by the CAC that they received a great help from colleagues around the world through VIS email communication. During the last few months there were more applicants of third countries, who had several visa refusals. With VIS mail CAC clarified the reason of refusal and was able to decide upon applications properly.

3.State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Visa Code revision – CAC received a draft of a changes of the information for visa applicants which are going to be more friendly for users and will be published on MFA and embassies' web pages. The embassies and the ministries webpage will be much more informative and there will be less need for support from embassy staff.

Final Visa Code is expected to be applicable October/November this year and will include in particular:

- More flexible procedures
- Multiple entry visas with longer validity
- Additional resources for strengthening security and
- Improving cooperation on readmission

⁴⁷ Regulations 2018/1240 and 2018/1241 in force on October 9, published in the EU Official journal on 19/09/2018

<https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/etias-regulation-enters-into-force/>

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The list of supporting visa documents is in the line with CONSOLIDATED version of the Handbook for the processing of visa applications
https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/policies/borders/docs/c_2010_1620_en.pdf
(page 42)

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

EUMS (SI (CAC), GR, IT) issue visas under regulation of Visa Code.

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC includes annual statistics, cases of fraud, communication problems with local authorities, reasons for visa refusals, travel documents issued by the host state.

The CAC reports to the EUMS about all these subjects every month.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC Annual report – The report covers the period from April 2018 to March 2019. Participants sent their contributions to the EUD. The EUD sends to DG HOME by 26 April 2019.

4. Challenges

MS will continue to jointly resolve outstanding issues (period of registration of foreigners, online registration form for the registration of foreigners) with Montenegrin authorities.

Rabat, le 17 mai 2019
Ares(2019)3256122

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN
ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC)
AUPRES DU ROYAUME DU MAROC
RAPPORT⁴⁸ 2018-2019**

1. Introduction

17 Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique/consulaire au Maroc: AT (Rabat), BE (Rabat, Casablanca), CH (Rabat), CZ (Rabat), DE (Rabat), DK (Rabat), EL (Rabat, Casablanca), ES (Agadir, Casablanca, Nador, Rabat, Tanger et Tétouan), FI (Rabat), FR (Agadir, Casablanca, Fès, Marrakech, Rabat et Tanger), HU (Rabat), IT (Rabat, Casablanca), NL (Rabat), NO (Rabat), PL (Rabat), PT (Rabat), SE (Rabat).

Accords de représentation pour les questions de visa: AT, BE, DK⁴⁹, SE, IT représentent respectivement SK, LU, NO, IS, MT. DE représente SI et LT.⁵⁰ CZ reçoit et traite également les demandes de visa des ressortissants mauritaniens.

Recours aux prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visa: AT, HR, NL, PT et SE utilisent les services de VFS Global; DE, BE, DK/NO, FR, IT et NL utilisent les services de TLS Contact; ES fait recours aux services du prestataire BLS.

Spécificités locales relatives à la délivrance de visas:

- Le Maroc est le **7^{ème} pays au monde** par rapport au nombre de demandes de visa Schengen déposées en 2018 (avec 662,578 demandes) et le **6^{ème} pays** par rapport au nombre de visas uniformes effectivement délivrés (528,608 visas). Le nombre de demandes a pratiquement doublé par rapport à 2010, quand il y avait seulement 330,277 demandes. **La plupart de visas** ont été délivrés en 2018 par FR (303,361, soit 57.38% du total), par ES (157,322, soit 29.76%), par NL (20,703, soit 3.91%), par IT (16,648, soit 3.14%), par DE (12,771, soit 2.41%) et par BE (6,322, soit 1.19%). Le taux de refus moyen enregistré en 2018 a été de 17.6%, contre 15.3% en 2017 et 13.1% en 2016⁵¹.

- **221,335 visas à entrées multiples (MEV)** ont été délivrés en 2018 au Maroc, représentant 41.9 % du nombre total de visas délivrés. Les consulats des Etats membres au Maroc délivrent le plus souvent des MEV avec une durée de 6 mois, 1 an et 2 ans. Les MEV de 3, 4 et 5 ans sont délivrés moins fréquemment.

⁴⁸ Avril 2018 - Mars 2019

⁴⁹ DK reçoit et traite également les demandes de visa des ressortissants mauritaniens et tunisiens.

⁵⁰ En cas d'opinion négative DE contacte les deux pays en question qui renvoient le dossier et émettent le cas échéant le refus officiel.

⁵¹ Selon les statistiques visa pour l'année 2018, publiées par DG HOME (http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm#stats)

- Dans le cas de certains consulats, **les délais de rendez-vous peuvent dépasser pendant la haute saison 3 mois**. Le manque de ressources humaines suffisantes pour traiter la très forte demande semble être la cause principale de cette situation. Dans ces conditions, la mise en œuvre des dispositions pertinentes du Code Visa représente de plus en plus un véritable défi. Les longs délais de rendez-vous ont un impact négatif sur l'image et la crédibilité du système Schengen, de l'UE et des Etats membres concernés au niveau de l'opinion publique marocaine et des médias, qui s'interrogent sur les éventuelles raisons politiques à l'origine de cette situation (la presse marocaine spéculé sur une "volonté politique de fermeture" ou de "limitation du nombre de Marocains" dans certains pays européens). Cette situation a aussi des répercussions ("visa shopping") sur les autres consulats Schengen présents au Maroc.

- La plupart des Etats membres offre cependant des rendez-vous en régime d'urgence pour certaines demandes considérées prioritaires (missions, hommes d'affaires, urgences, etc.).

- **De nombreuses tentatives de fraude**, notamment la falsification des justificatifs relatifs à la situation socio-professionnelle (attestations de travail) et financière (relevés de compte bancaire) des demandeurs de visa, mais aussi des cas **de mariage suspect** (mariages "blancs" ou "gris") avec des ressortissants UE. Dans la période de référence, la police marocaine (DGSN) a arrêté deux employés d'un consulat d'un Etat membre, soupçonnés d'appartenance à un réseau spécialisé dans la falsification de documents afin d'obtenir des visas Schengen.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2018-2019

La coordination des réunions LSC est assurée par la Délégation de l'UE au Maroc.

4 réunions ordinaires ont été organisées dans la période de référence (en mai, septembre, décembre 2018 et février 2019). La participation des Etats membres représentés au Maroc aux réunions est nombreuse. BG, HR, RO, UK sont invités systématiquement en tant qu'observateurs pour échanger des informations sur des questions relatives aux visas.

1 réunion extraordinaire du groupe de coopération locale au titre de Schengen s'est tenue le 17 avril à la Délégation de l'UE à l'initiative d'un consulat d'un Etat membre à Rabat au sujet de l'arrestation par la police marocaine de deux employés du consulat, soupçonnés d'appartenance à un réseau spécialisé dans la falsification de documents afin d'obtenir des visas Schengen.

Les rapports des réunions LSC sont établis par la Délégation de l'UE avec des contributions des membres LSC et ensuite partagés avec les missions diplomatiques des Etats membres. Les Etats membres communiquent les rapports à leurs capitales.

Les consulats des Etats membres en dehors de Rabat sont invités systématiquement aux réunions. Ils reçoivent les rapports et les conclusions des réunions LSC à travers leurs missions diplomatiques à Rabat et/ ou directement de la Délégation de l'UE. Pendant la période de référence le groupe a pris l'initiative d'organiser une réunion de coordination en dehors de la capitale (à Tanger).

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les missions diplomatiques des Etats membres et la Délégation de l'UE ont activement collaboré dans le cadre de la coopération consulaire au titre de Schengen, en conformité avec les dispositions du Code des Visas. Dans la période de référence, l'activité de coopération a été axée principalement sur l'échange d'informations concernant:

- la mise en œuvre de la Décision d'exécution de la Commission C(2015)6940 et la révision de celle-ci;
- les cas de fraude et l'utilisation de faux documents pour l'obtention de visas;
- la délivrance et l'utilisation des visas à entrées multiples;
- les délais de rendez-vous et de décision relative à la demande ;
- l'analyse du risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité;
- les statistiques sur les visas délivrés/ refusés;
- l'application de la Directive 2004/38/CE (relative au droit des citoyens de l'Union et des membres de leurs familles de circuler et de séjourner librement sur le territoire des États membres), y compris dans le cas des enfants qui font l'objet d'une procédure "kafala";
- les signalements dans le système SIS, d'autres échanges d'informations (signalements/ alertes) entre les consulats concernant les demandeurs de visa, la protection des données personnelles des demandeurs de visa;
- la relation avec les prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visas.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs

Le LSC a travaillé sur la révision de la liste des documents justificatifs devant être produits par les demandeurs de visa au Maroc, établie par la **Décision d'exécution de la Commission C(2015)6940**. Le processus de révision s'est focalisé sur l'élargissement de l'harmonisation de la liste afin d'inclure des nouvelles catégories de demandes, en particulier pour les voyages de nature culturelle, sportive, religieuse, pédagogique, de recherche ou de formation professionnelle, les voyages officiels, les voyages entreprises à des fins de traitement médical; le transit aéroportuaire. Le projet de la liste a été finalisé et suit actuellement les procédures en vue de son adoption formelle.

3.3 Echange d'informations

L'échange d'informations entre les membres de LSC se déroule à l'occasion des réunions de coordination et/ou via e-mail. Les membres de LSC échangent régulièrement et/ou ad-hoc, en fonction des besoins, des informations statistiques sur les visas délivrés/ refusés, les cas ou les suspicions de fraude et d'utilisation de faux documents, le fonctionnement du système VIS, les articles de presse concernant la problématique Schengen. Le LSC a réussi d'assurer pendant la période de référence un système par rotation - sur base de volontariat - pour la compilation des statistiques visa échangées localement. Cette fonction a été assurée pendant la période de référence par DK.

Les membres LSC disposent d'un groupe WhatsApp pour échanger de manière rapide et informelle des informations non-classifiées et d'intérêt commun sur les questions de visa (et aussi sur les questions consulaires).

Utilisation du VISMail: Le système reste très peu utilisé par les membres de LSC, pour différentes raisons. Premièrement, toutes les représentations Schengen n'ont pas accès à VISMail. Deuxièmement, certains consulats estiment que le système est peu fiable, car difficilement accessible et sans confirmation de réception du courriel. Néanmoins, un nombre réduit de consulats utilisent le VISMail, notamment pour la correspondance avec la police des frontières de certains États membres ainsi que pour solliciter des informations sur les refus de demandes de visa par les autres consulats.

3.4 D'autres initiatives

Dans la période de référence les Etats membres ont participé à **3 réunions consacrées à la fraude documentaire** (organisées en juin 2018 par CA, en septembre 2018 par NL et en mars 2019 par ES). Ces réunions, très appréciées par les participants, sont élargies à d'autres partenaires non-Schengen ou non-UE (US, CA, AU, JP, mais aussi certains pays des Caraïbes et d'Amérique Latine). Les réunions ont porté sur le traitement des cas de "kafala" d'un point de vue consulaire/visa (y compris le risque d'abus de procédure, quand l'enfant est confié à d'autres membres de la famille en Europe), des échanges sur la fraude documentaire (y compris des présentations de cas de fraude par les consuls au Maroc ou par des experts invités depuis les capitales), le processus de centralisation dans la prise de décision de visa dans certains Etats membres, la procédure de "profilage" automatisé. Le secrétariat de ce groupe a été assuré jusqu'à présent par DK. La thématique abordée (la fraude documentaire dans le domaine des visas, l'analyse du risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité, le phénomène de « visa shopping ») est similaire ou complémentaire à celle des réunions Schengen.

En mai 2018, la Délégation de l'UE a invité les Etats membres à **1 réunion** de présentation d'un projet de coopération entre l'UE et le Maroc, visant à améliorer les capacités de la DGSN (la police marocaine) pour **la détection des faux documents** (financé par l'UE et animé par des experts de la Police National Espagnole et de l'ICMPD). Les présentations ont porté sur l'accord de coopération existant entre l'UE et le Maroc dans ce domaine, sur le projet de renforcement des capacités de la DGSN pour la lutte contre la fraude documentaire, sur **l'identification de faux documents** à travers des exemples.

A l'initiative de la Délégation de l'UE, la question de l'harmonisation des pratiques concernant **le traitement des demandes des bénéficiaires du programme "Erasmus+"** a été discutée par le LSC. Environ 1000 Marocain(e)s voyagent chaque année en Europe dans le cadre de ce programme. Certains d'entre eux sont confrontés à des difficultés liées à l'obtention de visas Schengen ou de visas nationaux (en fonction de la durée du programme). Certains bénéficiaires ont signalé à la Délégation la difficulté d'obtenir un rendez-vous de visa en temps utile. En revanche, certains consulats ont signalé que les Universités des pays européens tardent à envoyer la lettre d'acceptation aux étudiants, avec le résultat que les demandes de visa sont déposées trop tardivement.

Plusieurs Etats membres ont décidé ou envisagent de mettre en place **le système de prépaiement** afin de réduire le "no-show".

4. Défis

Réponses apportées aux défis mentionnés dans le rapport 2017-2018

- **Le groupe a réussi à réviser la liste des documents justificatifs** devant être produits par les demandeurs de visa au Maroc. Le processus d'adoption de la nouvelle liste est en cours.
- Les dispositions du Code Visa par rapport aux **délais de rendez-vous** ont été régulièrement rappelées et discutées lors des réunions LSC. Cependant, le respect de ces dispositions demeure toujours le défi le plus important pour certains consulats et la crédibilité de l'UE. Une amélioration de la situation actuelle semble difficile sans un renforcement en ressources humaines.

- Les meilleures pratiques en termes de réaction aux cas de **fraude documentaire/visa** ont fait l'objet des échanges dans toutes les réunions Schengen, mais aussi lors des réunions spécialisées consacrées à la fraude documentaire. En mai 2018, la Délégation de l'UE a organisé avec les experts de la Police National Espagnole une présentation sur l'identification de faux documents. Dans la période de référence les Etats membres ont participé à 3 autres réunions consacrées à la fraude documentaire.

- Les consulats et la Délégation ont continué à renforcer le dialogue technique avec les autorités marocaines (en particulier avec la Direction Affaires Consulaires et Sociales du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération internationale) et les autres institutions d'intérêt pour l'activité de LSC (banques, sociétés de transport international, d'assurances).

- Afin d'améliorer la coordination locale en dehors de la capitale le groupe a préparé dans la période de référence la tenue d'une réunion de coordination à Tanger (qui s'est tenue effectivement en avril 2019).

Points à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2019-2020)

- Le principal défi restera la mise en œuvre des dispositions du Code Visa concernant les délais de rendez-vous et le signalement des besoins des consulats en termes de ressources humaines.

- La mise en œuvre de la nouvelle liste des documents justificatifs devant être produits par les demandeurs de visa au Maroc, dont l'adoption est attendue au deuxième semestre 2019.

- La mise en œuvre du nouveau Code Visa suite à son entrée en vigueur, ainsi que la communication publique sur les nouvelles dispositions.

Ce rapport a été approuvé par tous les États membres présents au Maroc.



April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) MOZAMBIQUE 2018-2019 REPORT⁵²

1. Introduction

Of the 12 EU resident Member States Embassies in Maputo, capital of the Republic of Mozambique, 7 of them: DE, ES, FR, IT, NL, PT, FI, plus NO are issuing Schengen visas for a total of 22 Schengen MS (out of the 26). PT has two General Consulates in Maputo and in Beira, both issuing Schengen Visas. NO will no longer issue Schengen visas in Maputo after the end of 2019.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

The LSC continued to meet and articulate Schengen relevant issues. The LSC had two meetings in the reporting period, which were well attended. In between meetings, LSC coordination and exchange of information is ensured by e-mail exchanges.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The EU Delegation is chairing the LSC since June 2012, working closely with MS and with the full support and cooperation from the European Commission (DG Home).

The LSC fosters exchange of information, coordination and cooperation in carrying-out the tasks foreseen in the Visa Code, including harmonised application of the Visa Code provisions and implementation of the Visa Information System (VIS).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Mozambique LSC harmonised list of documents supporting a visa application was adopted by a Commission Implementing Decision of 4/9/2014, and in 15 September 2014 all MS started applying it, as joint agreed starting date. Harmonisation of practice is thus acquired. During the reporting period no amendments were deemed necessary by the LSC. Nevertheless the LSC has further considered the list would require a review in 2019 which is identified in the section 4 of this report.

⁵² April 2018 – March 2019.

3.3. New harmonization of practices

No particular additional measure of harmonisation of practices has been taken in addition to what is in place.

The average length of validity of MEVs is difficult to assess as breakdown of statistics of some MS do not include the length. One member state would roughly estimate that the average length of MEVs issued is of one year.

DE started using the new visa sticker in February 2019, other MS to follow. Having the harmonization in mind, it would have made sense to provide all MS with the new stickers at the same time in order not to create any confusion with the local authorities.

3.4. Exchange of information

Exchange of information is encouraged in the LSC, namely on: (i) visa statistics trends, based not only on the yearly official statistics as well as quarterly when possible; (ii) the trends regarding the few instances of migratory risk or visa fraud were discussed in the meetings; (iii) overview of the general VIS functioning; (iv) best practices and relevant experiences. In practical terms room for improvement remains as regards exchange of visas statistics between MS.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC meetings and Consular meetings are now held together to avoid extra-burden of meetings. Agenda distribution allows for division of labour.

4. Challenges

As regards challenges of the previous reporting period, it should be acknowledged that Mozambican authorities have officially shared the updated list and one set of specimens of Mozambican travel documents where a visa sticker may be stamped with the EUD. The sharing of other sets with MS continues to be a challenge.

For the year ahead, LSC will continue to strive for early notice and information by the Mozambican authorities on the implementation details of their legislation as regards visa issuing at borders, as well as reinforcing overall internal coordination, including through meetings of the Group with the competent authorities. LSC has also identified as a task for 2018 the revision of the list of supporting documents that dates from 2014.

5. Other issues

No other issues to address.



EUROPEAN UNION

• DELEGATION TO THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA AND
• TO THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES
•

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in NIGERIA 2018-2019 REPORT⁵³

1. Introduction

Key information on the location and number of Member States (MS) and non-MS issuing Schengen visas are as follows (see Annex 1 for details):

- Schengen visas are issued in both Abuja and Lagos;
- in Abuja there are seventeen Schengen States (sixteen MS and one non-MS) of which fifteen issue visas (fourteen MS and the one non-MS); and
- in Lagos there are seven Schengen States Consulate Generals (or similar) (six MS and one non-MS), of which four issue visas (all MS).

In 2018-2019, Norway moved its Schengen Visa office in Abuja to Accra, Ghana.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Nine LSC meetings were held in the year 2018-2019, six in Abuja, and two in Lagos, as well as one joint workshop of staff from Abuja and Lagos.

1. 13th April 2018 (Lagos)
2. 27th April 2018
3. 16th – 17th May 2018 – LSC/ILO Workshop co-organised with DG HOME
4. 29th June 2018
5. 31st August 2018
6. 12th October 2018 (Lagos)
7. 26th October 2018
8. 7th December 2018
9. 1st March 2019

All meetings which take place in Abuja are scheduled, in principle, to take place on the last Friday every other month (starting in February), and are chaired by the EU Delegation. Meetings in Lagos are less frequent. All meetings are well attended. Minutes of meetings are prepared and shared with Member States at the subsequent meeting. For the second year running an Annual LSC/ILO meeting was held in Abuja, co-organised with DG HOME.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Schengen Area States and the EUD both carry out the tasks mentioned in the visa code. During 2018-2019 some steps have been taken to follow-up on some of the aspects of Article 48 of the visa code.

⁵³ April 2018 – March 2019

- *Annual LSC/ILO Meeting*: this meeting provides an opportunity in collaboration with HQ staff to have more in-depth discussions of some of the challenges of issuing Schengen visas, including the close collaboration expected with Immigration Liaison Officers (or equivalent).
- *Common criteria for examining applications for exemptions (Art 48(1)(b))*: this matter was not to be pursued, since the responsibility does not lie at the level of LSC.
- *Exhaustive list of travel documents issues by host country (Art 48(1)(c))*: The Immigration Regulations 2017, 1st March 2017, identifies five types of “Passport”: (i) Standard Nigerian Passport; (ii) Nigerian Diplomatic Passport; (iii) Nigerian Official Passport; (iv) Nigerian Pilgrim’s Passport; and (v) Seaman’s Passport or Seaman’s Certificate of Identity. More recently, on 28th March 2019, diplomatic missions were informed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that “new improved” passports were introduced with a poly-carbonated data page and other security features, with a view that would be introduced from 29 April 2019. The new passports cover (i), (ii), and (iii) mentioned above. In addition Nigeria issues Emergency Travel Certificates, notably for return flights.
- *Common Information Sheet (Art 48(2))*: A Common Information Sheet exists; however, use of the Common Information Sheet varies between different Member States (see Annex 1 for the current situation).
- *Quarterly Statistics (Art 48(3)(a))*: The collection of statistics in an agreed format has taken place every quarter. Some MS are still faster than others in supplying timely information.
- *Assessment of migratory and/or security risks (Art 48(3)(b))*: These matters have been raised in discussions but no systematic collection of information has been initiated.
- *Information on cooperation with transport companies (Art 48(3)(c))*: ILOs regularly identify some problematic airlines, but no systematic or collective response has been judged necessary.
- *Information on insurance companies (Art 48(3)(d))*: The agreed format has been circulated, and the revised table from the information supplied by Member States was circulated at the 8th September 2017 meeting. This table is to be updated in 2019-20.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The harmonised list of supporting documents (Art 48(1)(a) of the Visa Code) was approved by a Commission Implementing Decision of 6.8.2012 C(2012)5310 final. No formal monitoring has been undertaken of the harmonised list, but observations on the list include:

- the list covers minimum requirements – you could ask for more;
- sometimes unclear what is meant by some phrases - such as, "proof of employment";
- there is no reference to Travel Medical Insurance, even though this is required by Art 15 of the Visa Code;
- there is no distinction between official mission/official purposes that could be used to differentiate between diplomatic passports and official passports; and
- the requirement for flight reservations was “outdated” and that it was more important to check other aspects such as the validity of documents, travel dates, and travel medical insurance.

With the forthcoming revision of the Visa Code it has been agreed that the harmonised list would be reviewed with the intention of updating it so that a new list would be finalised to coincide with the introduction of the new Visa Code.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Other initiatives to encourage harmonisation of practices include the following::

- *Common Information Sheet/Frequently Asked Questions*: this was agreed in 2015 and is used with mixed success (see Annex 1);
- *Reducing the number of Limited Territorial Visas (LTV)*: the sharing of information on visa statistics has encouraged an approach to reduce the LTVs (which appear to be overused in a manner to avoid the normal Schengen procedures), although 2018 has seen an increase of 35% in LTVs from 909 in 2017 to 1,227 in 2018. ;
- *What do you do with false, counterfeit, or forged documents?* There has been much discussion about what to do with false documents, such as passports, or passport that contain false visas...Although different practices have been identified and documented it has not been possible to harmonise the approach. Some Schengen States return documents to their owners on the grounds that any punishment might be "disproportionate", whilst others regularly handover to (different) law enforcement services.
- *improving the use and treatment of Note Verbales from MFA*: following two sessions of discussions that were held in the previous year with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), some have reported that there has been an improvement in the use of NVs.
- *Multiple-entry visas*: No attempt has been made to harmonise the approach to the issuing of Multiple-Entry Visas (MEVs).

3.4 Exchange of information

Exchange of information takes place in a number of areas. The following observations can be made:

- *pertinent issues*: regular exchange of information both through the LSC meetings and through a larger "anti-fraud" group meeting (involving non-EU Member States);
- *visa statistics*: these are examined on a quarterly basis through an agreed format which looks at visa applied for, issued, and denied (see above, section 3.1).
- *sensitive issues*: there has been some discussion of sensitive issues;
- *cost of Schengen visas*: exchange of information on the cost of Schengen Visas has continued with the observation that the €60 costs has not been changed for many years and furthermore is considerably cheaper than the cost of obtaining a visa for Nigeria (Annex 1 contains information on the cost of Schengen visas for each State).
- *Legalisation of documents*: there has been much discussion about different approaches to legalisation of key documents that may be required for visas (birth certificates, marriage certificates, and so on). Discussion has taken place with the National Population Commission on their method of registering births and deaths, the MFA's legalisation process, and the use of lawyers to check the veracity of documents.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Initiatives that deserve mention include the following:

- *LSC/ILO/Visa Workshop*: the second of what has now become an annual event was held on 16th – 17th May 2018 co-organised with DG HOME, and involving the participation of Frontex, and Europol. Extensive discussions have taken place on visa fraud, fake marriages, document verification, birth, marriage and death certificates. Particular attention has been paid to cooperation with ILOs and the forthcoming revision of the ILO regulation. Agreements have been made on further training, outreach to Nigerian banks, smuggling and trafficking, and Directive 2004/38 were agreed.

- *Frontex training on document fraud, 18, 19, 20 September 2018*: training was organised in Abuja covering: detection and remarks, security features, printing techniques, printing inks, printing safeguards, passport production, MRZ and Laminates, Schengen BCP stamps, personalization, biometrics, Visa supporting documents, profiling and impostors. The training brought attention to some key features of the Schengen system in Nigeria: very different staff numbers and equipment from one mission to another; difficulties of handling information in a way that respects confidentiality; obligations that can be seen as burdensome, and difficulties for ILOs to access the required databases when dealing with flights outside normal working hours.
- *Smuggling and trafficking*: at the workshop of May 2018 it was agreed to carry out a pilot with EUROPOL to see if information could be obtained from visa applications that might be useful for investigations on smuggling or trafficking. However, although yielding useful results from those who supplied information, very few Schengen States participated. The matter is to be discussed further at the next workshop planned for end-June.
- *Directive 2004/38*: the implementation of this Directive, which provides for the rights of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the Union, has been the subject of discussion because of concern that fraudulent applications have been made under this directive. Provisions for strengthened cooperation in this area have been made in the previous year and they remain in place.
- *Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer (RSCO)*: a new RSCO (an initiative supported by NL, PT, and IT) took up his post based in Accra in November 2017. The post came to an end in Sept/Oct 2018. Some "RSCO Catalogues" prepared by the RSCO were circulated to Schengen States in August 2018, which drew some commentary from DG HOME and DG JUST. Both DGs made some observations which questioned whether the "Catalogues" were sufficiently balanced, adding that many of the issues raised would be addressed through revision of the Visa Code Handbook (eg family members of EU citizens under Directive [2004/38/EC](#)). In addition the GDPR raised issues that need to be addressed.

4. Challenges

The year 2018-2019 was marked by considerable exchange of information, intense collaboration between different parties, but a number of challenges remain:

- *The overall working environment*: with such a high level of false/counterfeit/fraudulent documents presented during visa applications, around 50% (compared to 9% worldwide) are rejected. It is believed that much of this is facilitated by organised criminal groups.
- *Administer or investigate?* Given the challenges of smuggling and human trafficking in Nigeria, one major challenge is moving from an "administrative" approach to issuing visas to a more "pro-active" one in which, if there are good grounds for suspecting malpractice action can be taken. Tentative steps taken with Europol, although showing some promise, are yet to give fruit. Continuing to strengthen cooperation with NAPTIP and NIS remains pertinent.
- *Improving harmonisation*: although there was much discussion about handing of false/counterfeit/fraudulent documents, approaches are not harmonised; similarly there was much discussion about the legalisation of documents, but each Schengen State adopts its own approach. In addition all countries do not use the Common Information Sheet/FAQ.
- *Coordination with ILOs* has continued in Lagos and is likely to be strengthened with the forthcoming directive.

5. Other issues

No other issues to be raised.

Table: Representation of Schengen Area countries in Abuja and Lagos⁽ⁱ⁾

No	Abuja				Lagos (Consulate General) ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾				Schengen Visa Costs (Naira, unless otherwise stated)		
	Present	Issuing Schengen visas	Use of external service provider	Use of CIS/FAQ ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾	Present	Issuing Schengen visas	Use of external service provider	Use of CIS/FAQ	Visa Cost (Naira)	Service Provider Cost	Comments
1	AT	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes					20,700	10,350	
2	BE	Yes + EE, LT, LU, NL	Yes - VFS	Yes					25,200	10,920	Rate set by Brussels
3	CZ	Yes	No	No					24,000	0	€60 paid in "..."Naira according to actual exchange rate.
4	DE	Yes - mainly government officials	No	Yes	DE	Yes	No	Yes	24,000	0	€60 equivalent mentioned on website, updated according to exchange rate movements
5	DK	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes	DK	No			24,000	12,100	Visa fee and service fee checked every 2 weeks using Qanda converter. Fees are changed if difference is significant.
6	EL	Yes	No	No		No	No	No	24,000	0	€60 equivalent
7	ES	Yes - mainly government officials	No	No	ES	Yes	Yes - BLS	No	24,800	6,800	BLS Service charge fee: NGN 6,400 (BLS sms service: NGN 400)
8	FI	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes					21,100	10,550	Changes if price moves by more than 5%
9	FR	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes	FR	Yes + NL, LT	Yes - VFS	Yes	22,185	10,000-12,000	Rate set by Paris (last up-date on 01-05-2019). VFS fees depend on service provided.
10	HU	Yes + SL	No	No					21,462	0	Rate set and reviewed by Budapest, equivalent of €60, NGN 21,462 paid via deposit slip in bank since 1.4.19
11	IT	Yes - mainly government/officials	No	No	IT	Yes + MT ^(iv)	Yes - VFS	No	21,000	8,400	€ 60 paid in Naira. Exchange rate revised quarterly
12	NL	No - visas issued by BE	na	na	NL	No - visas issued by FR	na	na	0	0	
13	PL	Yes	No	No					€60	0	Paid only in euro and only in cash
14	PT	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes					21,460	10,730	
15	SK	No	na	na					0	Na	
16	SE	Yes + LV, SK	Yes - VFS	Yes					21,900	10,950	
17	CH	Yes	No	No	CH	No	No	No	25,200		N22,500 DHL charges for delivery; change due to exchange rate changes if greater than 5%
18	NO	No - handled by NO mission in Accra	Yes - VFS	Yes					€60	10,350	Paid in Euro through online portal

Notes:

(i) The non-Schengen MS present in Nigeria are: (a) Abuja: Bulgaria, Ireland, Romania, and the UK; (b) Lagos: UK

(ii) CIS/FAQ: Common Information Sheet/Frequently Asked Questions (Art 48(2) of the Visa Code) agreed in the LSC meeting, 24th June 2015

(iii) VFS has offices in Abuja and Lagos for receiving visa applications; BLS has offices in Lagos; applications for Croatia visas can be submitted at VFS Abuja but are issued from South Africa

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ISLAMABAD (PAKISTAN)
2018-2019 REPORT⁵⁴**

1. Introduction

In Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, the following Member States issue Schengen visas: Austria, Belgium (also representing Luxemburg), Czech Republic (also representing the Slovak Republic), Denmark (also representing Iceland), France, Germany (also representing Latvia and Slovenia), Greece, Hungary (also representing Lithuania and Estonia), Italy (also representing Malta), Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands (also representing Finland), Switzerland (also representing Liechtenstein) and Norway. Germany and Italy furthermore issue Schengen visas in Karachi through their respective Consulate General in that city.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Meetings were held on a monthly basis during the reporting period. The LSC meetings are well attended, with about 70 to 90% of Schengen missions being represented at any given meeting. Since Norway has relocated the visa section in Islamabad to the UAE, Norway has been attending the LSC either in person by staff in Abu Dhabi/video link or by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Islamabad (see below). The meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation. The "European Migration Liaison Officer" assigned to the EU Delegation attended the LSC meetings in Islamabad on a regular basis as well. Agendas and minutes prepared by the EU Delegation are promptly circulated. There is no formal LSC coordination outside Islamabad in Pakistan.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Schengen Member States missions are well equipped to apply the Visa Code, with in many cases very seasoned consular officers in charge. An increasing number of missions use the services of collection centres (with branches in several cities) to receive visa applications in view of the ever increasing number of applications and security considerations. The Netherlands continues to rely on a regional centre for visa decisions while Norway shifted its decision making visa section to Abu Dhabi (UAE) since August 2018. Portugal suspended issuance of visa on a temporary basis from end of July 2018, relying for some exceptional cases on Spain to issue visas.

However, like observed in the previous annual report, staff remains overstretched in face of an increasing workload regarding Schengen visas in Pakistan, but also often Schengen visa applications from Afghanistan, not to mention national visas, where there is an important case load, sometimes by applicants who want to avoid the Schengen visa application requirements, but also family reunion cases and student visas. Vigilance needs to be exerted in view of the context of generalised fraud. Fake and false documentation remains most problematic. Missions keep on being confronted with imaginative fraudulent schemes. Interviews are conducted on a routine basis.

⁵⁴ April 2018 – March 2019

Consistent with a regular increase year on year, some 90000 visa applications were received by all Schengen missions in 2018 (+ 3% compared to 2017). Some 58000 visas were issued, meaning that the refusal rate is 34%. This rate is however an average as there are important variations amongst the emitting missions. In addition, Member States also reported the emission of some 21000 national visas, in sharp increase compared to the previous year.

The EU Delegation has demonstrated its capacity to ensure the expected LSC tasks under the Visa Code.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

After an extensive work at the LSC in the previous and current reporting period on its preparation, the harmonised list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in Pakistan (Annex III of Implementing Decision C(2018)6863) was adopted on 24 October 2018. Outreach to stakeholders was organised, including to the main visa collection centre in Islamabad as well as dissemination of information on internet and social media. Initial monitoring indicates that the implementation of the decision went smoothly.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

As observed previously, there is no harmonised practice regarding issuance of Multiple Entry Visas (MEVs), and no systematic statistics for short term visas. Generally, missions issue single or 2-entry visas. For MEVs of 1 year and above validity, the practice consists in issuance of 1-year MEV for roughly 80 to 90% of the cases, and the remainder spread in 2 up to 5-year MEVs (to well-known contacts). New requirements in the harmonised list should encourage missions to issue more MEVs to some applicants whose credentials can be better ascertained.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings have been used as a platform to exchange information on

- cases of fraud and attempted fraudulent schemes, including exploitation of Directive 2004/38/EC, and cases of human trafficking;
- Pakistan visa policy (and the changes announced at the turn of 2018-2019) that features different approaches towards nationals of various EU Member States;
- Services offered by visa collection centres and fees levied by such providers;
- Travel medical insurance (TMI) companies and update of the list of approved companies;
- Contacts at banks (to verify bank statements);
- Implementation of the Visa Information System, use of VIS Mail and confidentiality of information;
- Statistics and trends in visa applications (including a detailed presentation and very well received made by a Member State);
- Polio vaccination certificates for visa applicants;
- New Schengen Visa sticker roll out (and information of Pakistani authorities);
- Biometrics (exemption of collection);
- Humanitarian visas;
- Updates on the legislative process regarding the new EU visa policy;
- Issues regarding visa applications from Afghanistan;

- Information on Erasmus+ (to avoid difficulties when visas applications by recipients of Erasmus+ scholarships are submitted), including raising awareness on Directive 2016/801/EU;
- Collection of local information on Member States practices regarding handling visas (“Schengen Information Sheet”) and updates;
- Information on Commission’s funding (“Specific Actions”, under Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) or Internal Security Fund (IFS) -Border instruments);
- Review and validation of the LSC Annual Report.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The LSC welcomed the DG HOME sponsored “EU Consular Officer and Anti Visa-Fraud Workshop”, with a regional ambit (Afghanistan and Pakistan) that took place in Islamabad on 18-19 April 2018, gathering more than 30 participants. The training was provided by FRONTEX trainers, two Swedish police officers for the first day, and a member of FRONTEX Risk Analysis Unit for the second. The objectives of the regional seminar were to increase the participants’ knowledge and understanding of relevant regional document fraud threats; understand how and when to share relevant intelligence with EU partners, law enforcement and EU Agencies; and provide examples of tools and techniques to assist in developing relevant risk profiles to assist visa decision making. In addition, it was also an opportunity for FRONTEX to share counter migrant smuggling priorities in relation to their region.

Fraud prevention is a priority for Schengen Missions in Islamabad. Many Member States (LSC participants, and/or Immigration Liaison Officers) and the EU Delegation (LSC Chair and/or EMLO) regularly attend the informal quarterly meetings of the "Anti-Fraud Group" that gathers representatives of Schengen MS, other missions (such as non-Schengen EU MS, US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Ukraine etc.). This group forms a useful and complementary platform for exchange of information regarding fraud schemes and illegal migration routes.

At the September 2018 LSC Meeting, US Embassy colleagues (Consul and Fraud Prevention manager) were invited for an interaction offering another opportunity to exchange information on fraud (and fraud trends) in Pakistan, while US colleagues shared tips and techniques they use for the “adjudicator” to assess application files.

At the March 2019 LSC Meeting, the Pakistani office of a private company, important worldwide supplier of passports, was invited to make a presentation on biometric passports.

4. Challenges

As for previous reporting periods, the issue of addressing fraud and fraudulent practices, including an abusive exploitation of Directive 2004/38/EC (maybe prompted by the “BREXIT” context), or other trafficking schemes remain the main challenge for Schengen missions in Pakistan. The LSC will continue to focus on these issues through regular exchanges of information. All missions are confronted with fraudulent documentation (including for long term national visa applications in particular) but are often faced with limited resources when it comes to in situ verifications that are the best tool to settle doubts.

5. Other issues

The Delhi-based officer deployed in the framework of the "Regional Schengen Cooperation Officers (RSCO) Project" funded by the Internal Security Fund followed the work of the Islamabad LSC until the completion of his mandate in September 2018 besides participating in person in one LSC meeting and the abovementioned Anti-Fraud Workshop. The minutes of the LSC meetings were systematically shared with the RSCO. Reports and documents produced by the RSCO were made available to LSC members.

Report adopted by the LSC at its 9 April 2019 meeting.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO PERU

11 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN PERU 2018-2019 REPORT⁵⁵

1. Introduction

The EU Member States represented by an Embassy in Peru are: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Each Embassy has a Consular Section/General Consulate.

As regards Schengen representation in Peru, the following agreements are in place: Germany represents Lithuania; Austria represents Malta and Slovenia; Belgium represents Luxembourg; Spain represents Slovakia; Finland represents Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

On 25 February 2016, Peru began issuing biometric passports. It ceased production of conventional/non-biometric passports on 31 July 2016. The older passports will remain valid until their expiry, allowing entry into the Schengen area.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

In March 2016, the EU-Peru reciprocal short-stay visa waiver agreement entered into force. As a result, the Heads of EU Missions decided that LSC-specific meetings would no longer take place from the second half of 2016 onwards. If and when necessary, Schengen-related issues would be dealt with in the EU Consular Group meetings as a separate item on the agenda. While Peruvian citizens will no longer require a visa to enter the Schengen area, there are foreigners living in Peru who will still require a Schengen visa.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 there were 4 consular meetings under different EU presidencies with the support of the EU delegation in Peru, at which Schengen-related issues could always be discussed if necessary. The meetings were well attended, with representatives from around 70 % of the 16 Member States present in Peru.

During the 2018-2019 period, no ad hoc LSC meetings were held. Nor were any meetings held outside of Lima during this same period.

⁵⁵ April 2018—March 2019

3. Current situation

3.1. Application of the Visa Code

The exchanges of information and coordination between the Consuls on matters relating to the Visa Code and its application have been constant and satisfactory.

3.2. Assessment of the need to harmonise the list of supporting documents

The list of documents used to prove the purpose and conditions of a planned stay has not been harmonised, but the differences are minor.

There is no common information sheet, but the information provided by Schengen Consulates is similar.

3.3. Harmonising practices

Harmonising practices is complicated since it does not depend on the Consulates. For example, the visa fee is set by each capital. However, since the differences in fees are slight, it has not been deemed necessary to harmonise them.

3.4. Exchange of information

- Monthly statistics: statistics are not systematically provided.
- Types of fraud recorded: alteration of visas, alteration of dates of entry and exit stamps, false certificates of employment, alteration of bank data taken from the internet and bigamy.
- Travel medical insurance (TMI): the Consuls have reported on specific instances of failure to activate the insurance and forged TMI documents.

3.5. Other initiatives taken in the LSC

Information is exchanged through LSC on issues covered by the EU-Peru reciprocal short-stay visa waiver agreement for Peruvian citizens.

LSC has drawn up a common information sheet on the requirements for Peruvians to enter the Schengen area without a visa, which is accessible on consular and embassy websites, and shared this information with the Peruvian authorities (Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Migration Office).

4. Challenges

During the first two years of the entry into force of the Agreement, no major problems have been detected at airports / points of entry to the Schengen area.

The main challenges expected for 2019-2020 are:

- Continued monitoring of the impact of the Agreement on Peruvian passenger traffic into the Schengen area, possible entry problems and illegal stays beyond the 90 days allowed for every 180 days.
- Continued direct contact between Schengen Consuls, and frank and constant dialogue leading to rapid solutions.
- Coordination with the national authorities to find solutions to any difficulties that may arise in the context of the Agreement.
- If the ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) enters into force in 2020, the publishing of information about the new system for entering the Schengen area on consular and embassy websites and the sharing of information with the Peruvian authorities (Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Migration Office).

All the Embassies / Consulates involved in Local Schengen Cooperation have approved this Report.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE PHILIPPINES

20 June 2019

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MANILA,
the Philippines
2018-2019 REPORT⁵⁶**

1. Introduction

A total of 14 Schengen members (BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, HU, ES, FR, EL, IT, NL, NO, PL, SE, and AT) are represented in the Philippines. The current representation arrangements on visa matters are as follows:

AT represents Lithuania, BE represents Luxembourg and Slovenia, CZ represents Slovakia. EL represents Portugal. NL represents Poland and Latvia. NO represents Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Estonia. Effective 1 May 2019, Norway will no longer represent Sweden on visa matters in the Philippines. All visa applications for persons travelling to Sweden will from now on be processed by the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok. Some Member States use external service providers for the collection of applications.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

LSC meetings take place on a quarterly basis at the EU Delegation (EUD). They are well attended. LSC meetings are organised and chaired by the EUD. The Minutes/Reports of the meetings are drawn up by EUD.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is followed by all Schengen Members States in the Philippines. A large number of Schengen visas are granted to Filipino seafarers.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

In September 2014, COM Decision C(2014) 6146 of 3.9.2014 establishing the list of supporting documents to be presented by visa applicants was adopted. To date, the LSC does not consider that updating of the supporting documents is necessary.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Harmonization of procedures on visa issuance for seafarers in the Philippines has been discussed at length during several LSC meetings.

⁵⁶ May 2016 – April 2017

Most Schengen Member States who are part of the LSC in Manila have expressed interest in making progress towards harmonization of visas for seafarers.

Based on the positions expressed by LSC members and by DG HOME on the matter, the topic will again be discussed at the next LSC meetings.

The length of validity of multiple entry visas (MEVs) issued varies according from one Embassy to the other and depending on the profile of the visa applicant. The overwhelming majority of MEVs issued by member states of the Schengen zone in Manila have a one to two-year validity. This rate amounts to between 43% and 99.8% depending on the Embassy. For 2-3 years MEVs, the rate amounts to 0%- 43% depending on the Embassy.

3.4 Exchange of information

3.3.1 Statistics

Most Schengen MS Embassies submit statistics on a regular basis. A discussion on the latest available statistics takes place at each LSC meeting. It was decided that consolidated data would be produced by the EU delegation twice a year for a discussion of the LSC group.

3.3.2 Cases of fraud

Information regarding specific or suspicious causes of fraud is pro-actively shared between European Embassies and in the LSC framework. Common cases encountered were on document fraud by applicants and/or the authorities.

3.3.3 Travel Medical Insurance (TMI)

The LSC and MS Embassies have a shared list of TMI agencies that they regularly work with. Most of these agencies are used by Schengen visa applicants. Only insurance companies offering the requirements of the Visa Code are accepted. A list of recommended insurance companies exists.

3.3.4 Others issues

Other topics that have been discussed during LSC meetings are the following:

- Handling of Filipinos who have illegally stayed in the Schengen area.
- Use of VIS-mail by Schengen Embassies.
- Exchange of best practices to check on the authenticity of documents.
- Philippine's accession to the Apostille Convention.
- Handling of minors at border controls.
- Loss of passport data by the Philippine government.

4. Challenges

Taking into account variety of practice, reaching a LSC consensus on harmonization of procedures on visa issuance for seafarers in the Philippines has been a challenge.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

01/04/2019

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC)
in MOSCOW, ST-PETERSBURG and EKATERINBURG
2018-2019 REPORT⁵⁷**

1. Introduction

All Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in **Moscow** with the exception of Liechtenstein which is represented by Switzerland.

15 Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in **St. Petersburg**⁵⁸. Belgium, Denmark, Malta, Portugal and Sweden only rely on external service providers (ESPs) in St. Petersburg. In addition, in St. Petersburg Austria is represented by Finland, Liechtenstein is represented by Switzerland, Luxembourg by the Netherlands and Slovenia by Latvia.

3 Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in **Ekaterinburg**⁵⁹.

At the end of March 2019, only few of the Member States do not use external service providers for the collection of visa applications, and representation arrangements have been established at least in Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, Pskov, Rostov on Don and Sovetsk.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period, 10 regular LSC meetings were organised in Moscow. All meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (EUDEL) and well attended by the majority of Schengen Member States (as well as by Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania). Some Member States did not regularly attend the meetings.

During the reporting period, 5 regular LSC meetings were organised in St-Petersburg. All meetings were chaired by the EUDEL and well attended by most (as well as by Bulgaria, Cyprus and Romania), but not by all Schengen Member States. Some Member States rarely attended the meetings.

⁵⁷ April 2018 – March 2019

⁵⁸ The Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland. Norway is since the beginning of 2018 represented through its Moscow consulate.

⁵⁹ The Czech Republic, Germany and Hungary. Hungary also issues Schengen visas on behalf of 4 other Member States – Austria, Denmark, Slovakia and Slovenia.

During the reporting period, 1 regular LSC meeting was organised in Ekaterinburg. The meeting was chaired by the EUDEL and well attended by three Schengen Member States (as well as by Bulgaria).

EUDEL continued to draw up detailed reports of all LSC meetings and consulted the LSC groups before transmitting the approved reports to the European Commission. Most of the Member States share the common reports with their respective capitals, while some drafted their own reports.

Alongside EUDEL's chairmanship of the three groups, consulates of the Member States in the three LSC locations regularly coordinate their practices with their colleagues in other locations across Russia. The EUDEL shares by email all relevant documents, letters, statistics, policy updates from the European Commission, LSC agendas and LSC reports simultaneously with all Member States' consulates – not only in Moscow, St-Petersburg and Ekaterinburg, but also with consulates present throughout Russia. Sensitive documents are shared with the Member States' embassies in Moscow via a special secured channel. Associated Member States collect the documents from the EUDEL in a sealed envelope.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code and other EU visa legislation

The Schengen Member States and EUDEL are generally well prepared and adequately staffed to ensure the proper fulfilment of their tasks under the Visa Code, the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement and the Crimea non-recognition visa guidelines. Practical interpretation of a multitude of visa procedures was discussed during the LSC meetings (see point 3.3).

Due to the overall very high volume of applications for some Member States visa staff numbers remain insufficient. Especially during the high season, in-depth and background verification of all applications can prove very challenging. Member States that experienced a strong decrease in the number of applications or received large staff reinforcements, reported a significant increase in the number of visa refusals due to more time spent on application verification.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The agreed harmonised list of supporting documents is legally binding and is being adequately implemented in Moscow following the COM Implementing Decision of June 2016. Practical implementation of different elements of the list was on the LSC meeting agendas intermittently during the reporting period. For flight tickets the vast majority of the consulates require just a booking instead of a bought ticket and the majority deems flight bookings as a useful supporting document. In the case of Crimean applicants, a harmonisation of the supporting documents required by consulates has been deemed as necessary.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

During the reporting period, the LSC discussions on the harmonisation of practices were dominated by questions relating to the issuance of MEVs, Crimea non-recognition policy and other visa issuance aspects:

- *Issuance of MEVs* – some Member States argue that in order to cope with the increasing number of visa applications, consulates should continue increasing the share of MEVs issued. In addition, many consulates have received instructions from their capitals regarding the issuance of MEVs, which naturally tend to be different from each other. The EUDEL encouraged consulates to double-check with their capitals the instructions for the issuance of MEVs regarding their compatibility with the Visa Code and the VFA. Some consulates apply a more favourable MEV policy for applicants that are deemed as 'bona-fide' due to, amongst others, a particular level of revenue, professional occupation and place of residence.
- *Treatment of VIPs* – disparities in treatment and visa conditions remain between consulates when facing high-level officials, politicians or oligarchs as applicants.
- *Visa revocation/annulment* – many Member States require the applicant to address the issuing consulate when he/she requests that a valid visa issued by another consulate be revoked, but other consulates do it without consulting/informing the issuing consulate. Also, consulates continue to apply different reasons for revoking visas, including at the convenience of the applicant.
- *70 euros fee* - very different practices exist when it comes to applying the EUR 70 'urgency fee', as some consulates never apply it and others apply it as a service of convenience for applicants, but few see it as a mean to discipline applicants.
- *Main country of destination* – in-depth discussions were held on the interpretation and application of the main country of destination and first country of entry principles, as implementation by Member States can vary extensively.
- *Crimea non-recognition policy* – Member States repeatedly expressed the need revise the non-recognition guidelines in order to cover the most frequent cases and scenarios when facing Crimean applicants and in order to reach a minimum level of harmonisation of MS' practices. The groups agreed that they lack the necessary guidance and legal basis to deal with applicants living physically and legally in Russia. Targeted communication of access to Ukrainian biometric passports offering visa-free travel to Crimean residents should be enhanced.
Several Member States requested the creation of guidelines for visa applicants from *South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria and the Donbass regions*.
- *Visa-shopping* - due to nuances in the interpretation of the visa rules, also partly caused by instructions from the capitals, Russian applicants may continue seeking the most favourable treatment, which as a result can lead to visa shopping. The problem can be compounded during high seasons when there is not always sufficient staff to check all applications thoroughly. Visa shopping is a concern shared by all consulates.

3.4 Exchange of information

Statistics

The LSC groups in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg have been gathering and discussing statistics on the visas issued in the two cities on a quarterly basis during 2018. As of 2019, the LSC in Moscow decided to start gathering statistics on a monthly basis and to discuss them on a quarterly basis. Many Member States do not have the technical capacity to provide MEVs statistics according to the length of their validity or purpose of travel, which represents valuable analytical information. Several Member States asked the EUD to extract statistics directly from VIS with the help of eu-LISA.

The share of multiple-entry visas (MEVs) issued remains very high and continued to increase during the reporting period, with a relatively strong difference between Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, in favour of the latter. Overall for Russia, the number of visa refusals remains very low, with a relatively strong disparity between Moscow and Saint-Petersburg.

The FIFA World Cup gave the option for many Russian visa applicants to stay the summer months in Russia, which lead to a stagnation over the summer months in the number of visa applications. The weaker rouble, the increasing share of MEVs issued over the years and the re-opening of the Turkish tourism market after a short period of Russian-Turkish political tensions also reduced the number of applications for some Member States.

Several MS experienced during the reporting period very strong increases or decreases in the number of visa applications that were stronger than variations recorded during the previous years.

Cases of fraud

Information on cases of fraud and refusals was regularly exchanged within the LSC groups. Falsified proof of economic activity, fake hotel bookings, fake travel medical insurances and financial documents are still detected on a regular basis. Some travel agencies or tour operators provide applicants with fraudulent or forged supporting documents, most of the time without their knowledge.

Some Member States reported on a elaborated illegal scheme involving job announcements and leading to the issuance of valid Schengen visas in Russia that are without the knowledge of the applicant subsequently unglued, forged and applied to passports of citizens of some Asian countries. Many cases were reported involving the forging by visa agencies of valid Schengen visa stickers (increasing of the length of validity) of bona-fide travellers.

Additionally, assessment of migratory and security risks, use of false/counterfeit/forged documents, illegal immigration routes and interruptions of airport transit were discussed mainly, but not exclusively at the meetings of the EU-Immigration Liaison officers network (EU-ILOs) in Moscow, in which several of the Member States' consuls take part.

When facing visa agencies offering fraudulent services to visa applicants (such as fake or forged supporting documents) Member States will report these businesses to the Russian authorities bilaterally. A suggestion to collectively send such cases to the Association Tour Assistance and the Federal Agency for Tourism was refused by the LSC.

Use of VISMail

The question of the transfer of applicants' data is becoming increasingly sensitive, not just for soft alerts (black lists) processing, but also for routine applicants' information exchange operated on a daily basis between consulates, necessary for the background verification of some visa applications. Several MS have received clear instructions from their capitals to exchange the personal data of applicants exclusively through VISMail and to refuse other means of exchange. EUDEL reminded Member States that black lists cannot be used and that applicants data should be circulated only via VISMail.

Discussions were held on how to process, exchange and take into account information regarding applicants such as alleged hooligans or fraudsters. Member States were encouraged to consult with their capitals on which cases deserve to be listed as SIS alerts.

At the end of the reporting period, all MS except two had VISMail fully operational and were making use of it. Some Member States complained of rarely receiving replies to their VISMail queries from certain Member States.

Lack of reciprocity

Several MS continued expressing serious concern regarding the lack of reciprocity regarding the issuance of MEVs to EU citizens, due to Russia's restrictive visa policies and national legislation – the gap in the share of MEVs issued has continued increasing. Several MS complained of Russia's practice of issuing visas strictly limited to the dates present in invitations or hotel bookings.

Highest level politicians and officials from the Russian authorities made on several occasions public comments criticising the EU visa policy towards Russia and the practice of the Schengen consulates. The EU Delegation rebutted these allegations in bilateral meetings or through its own media statements.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The groups were informed of relevant events and developments such as expert meetings under the EU-Russia Migration Dialogue, EU-Russia Joint Readmission Committee and the EU-Russia Joint Visa Facilitation Committee. The LSC groups were tightly associated for the preparation of the December 2018 EU-Russia Joint Visa Facilitation Committee.

4. Challenges

Response to challenges, listed in the 2017-2018 report

The implementation of the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement based on fully reciprocity was raised with the Russian authorities with some commitments taken by the Russian side.

The use of VISMail has markedly increased and has reached almost 100% for most locations.

The different LSC groups provided detailed feedback on the current Crimea non-recognition guidelines.

Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2019-2020)

A relatively patchy implementation of EU visa legislation will continue to lead to a lack of fully uniform visa issuance of Schengen visas and to visa-shopping.

Russia's different interpretation of several key articles of the VFA will remain an issue for the next period.

The challenge stemming from the high number of visa agencies offering fraudulent services to visa applicants will remain.

LSCs will pay special attention on whether a draft bill on the mandatory accreditation of visa application centres will return to the Duma, which could severely impact the work of the existing ESPs.

The lack of use of VISMail and the lack of legal basis and systems to automatically exchange 'soft alerts' will remain an obstacle in effectively exchanging visa fraud information for first time applicants or for applicants not listed in EU-wide databases.

The uniform application of the Crimea visa non-recognition guidelines will continue to be on the agenda of the LSC meetings due to different practices when dealing with Crimean applicants. A revision of the guidelines could contribute to a harmonisation of the practices.

5. Other issues

With around 60 consulates and 350 authorised visa centres across Russia from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok, and with more than 3,3 million Schengen visas issued in 2018, the Schengen Member States aim at making the process simple, fast and safe for citizens applying for visa. The Schengen member states will continue to test some technical mobile alternatives and believe that the current network of visa centres already covers over 90% of the Russian territory in terms of demand. In the light of challenging economic situation in Russia and visa applications in 2019 probably increasing compared to 2018, the Schengen consulates and their visa centres will carefully assess how best to continue to ensure high quality of service for visa applicants in Russia while respecting the obligations of the Visa Code and the VFA.

The geographical size of the Russian Federation and the very high number of applications continues to pose particular problems for the Schengen cooperation, which requires extensive coordination efforts on the side of the Member States' consulates, their back-offices and the EUDEL. Furthermore, given that the EU's visa policies and issuance are matters of high public and political interest in the Russian Federation, regular negative and somewhat distorted reporting in the Russian media and statements by the Russian authorities make the working conditions of the Schengen consulates and the EUDEL more challenging. This situation has become worse with the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the consequent introduction of travel bans to a number of Russian individuals.

* * * * *

This LSC Moscow, St-Petersburg and Ekaterinburg report for 2018-2019 has been approved by all Member States and the EU Delegation to the Russian Federation.



UNION EUROPEENNE
Délégation en République du Sénégal

Dakar, le 15 mai 2019

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS DES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AU SENEGAL RAPPORT⁶⁰ 2018-2019

1. Introduction

Au Sénégal 13 Etats membres Schengen sont représentés: Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, Roumanie, Royaume-Uni, la République Tchèque et la Suisse.

11 consulats (Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Italie, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, Roumanie, Suisse) délivrent des visas aux ressortissants du Sénégal et des pays qui se trouvent sous leur juridiction respective (voir l'annexe). Les visas pour le Luxembourg sont délivrés par la Belgique. La plupart des Ambassades des Etats membres au Sénégal sont accrédités pour plusieurs pays de la région, pour certaines jusqu'à 9 pays.

Concernant les Etats Membres non-représentés à Dakar, 8 Etats Membres disposent des accords pour la délivrance des visas avec 3 EM représentés (l'Estonie, la Finlande et Slovénie avec la France; la Grèce, la Hongrie, Malte avec l'Autriche, la Suède et la Slovaquie avec les Pays-Bas). La Suisse représente la Lettonie.

2. Réunions LSC organisées pour la période 2018-2019

Les réunions de coordination, présidées par la Délégation de l'Union européenne, au niveau de Chef de la Section Politique, sont tenues régulièrement. Durant la période couverte par le rapport, deux réunions de coordination Schengen standard se sont tenues: en juin et octobre 2018.

Lors des réunions de coordination, les statistiques de visas sont partagées et analysées, des informations sur les cas de fraude documentaire et des filières d'immigration clandestine pour le Sénégal et les pays de la région: Gambie, Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Cap Vert etc. discutés. En 2018 les réunions se sont aussi concentrées sur les discussions autour du projet de liste harmonisé de documents justificatifs, mis à jour pour le Sénégal. En juin le projet a été validé avant envoi à Bruxelles, et en octobre les commentaires du Comité de visas ont été discutés et une version révisée approuvée pour discussion dans le Comité de visas de décembre 2018.

⁶⁰ Avril 2018 – Mars 2019

Une très bonne participation des Etats membres Schengen a été notée lors de toutes les réunions mentionnées. Jusqu'à octobre 2018 la Coordination Locale Schengen au Sénégal bénéficiait de la participation active de l'Officier de Coopération régionale Schengen (RSCO), basé à Accra et ayant dans son mandat le Sénégal, dans le cadre du projet de renforcement de l'efficacité de la coopération Schengen, maintenant finalisé. La Délégation se bénéficie du Manuel en coopération local Schengen transmis par le RSCO à la fin de sa mission, y compris des exemples de 'best practices' dans la région.

Les comptes rendus des réunions sont préparés par la Délégation de l'UE, qui établit également l'ordre du jour, incluant les contributions des Etats membres, et du RSCO pour la réunion de juin. Entre les réunions, la circulation de l'information est régulière grâce à une liste de diffusion constituée à cet effet. Plusieurs Etats membres prennent l'initiative de soumettre une question ou partager une information avec les autres EM. La Délégation de l'UE partage régulièrement les informations sur les initiatives prises à Bruxelles dans le domaine de la politique européenne des visas.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les Etats membres appliquent le code des visas. L'Espagne, la France, l'Italie, les Pays-Bas et le Portugal ont externalisé la réception des demandes de visas (société VfS Global pour la France, l'Italie, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal et la Belgique –depuis septembre 2018-, et la société BLS pour l'Espagne).

La tendance à l'augmentation du nombre total de demandes de visas s'est maintenue (19%) avec 85.139 pour 2018 par rapport à 69.250 de demandes en 2017. Les pays qui en 2018 ont reçu le plus de demandes sont la France (49.672), l'Italie (9.730) et l'Espagne (8.687). Le taux de refus de visas reste élevé (autour de 40% en général). Les taux les plus faibles de refus en 2018 étaient ceux de la Suisse (14%, en raison d'un grand nombre des visas officiels délivrés pour des réunions internationales à Genève), de la France (32%) et de l'Italie (33%). Les taux les plus importants de refus étaient ceux des Pays-Bas (63%), du Portugal (59%) et de la Belgique (47%).

La Belgique (+34%) et la Suisse (+31%) ont connu la plus importante augmentation de demandes de visas en 2018. Le Pays Bas (-29%) et l'Allemagne (-7%) ont noté une réduction du nombre de demandes de visas.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

Les pratiques concernant les documents justificatifs devant être fournis par les demandeurs de visas ont discutées et échangées lors des réunions de coordination.

Suite aux travaux préparatoires de la ‘Task force’ (avec les Etats membres volontaires: Allemagne, Espagne, France, Belgique, ainsi que la Délégation de l'UE et le RSCO) constitué en 2017 pour l'établissement d'une liste harmonisée des documents justificatifs des demandes de visas, un projet de liste a été discuté et approuvé par le Groupe de Coordination Local Schengen. Il a été présenté au Comité Visa du 5 septembre 2018 et ses commentaires discutés localement par le Groupe CLS en octobre 2018. Suite à ces échanges un projet de liste amendé a été transmis à la Commission européenne pour discussion au Comité Visa. Le 22 janvier 2019 le Comité a donné son avis positif au projet et la liste harmonisée de documents a été adoptée le 6 mai 2019. La Délégation a informé les Etats membres localement des avancées du processus et la prochaine réunion de coordination prévoit des échanges sur l'application locale de la nouvelle liste.

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

Les EMs qui délivrent de visas à entrées multiples ont de pratiques très disparates entre eux. Les visas de 4 ans octroyés par la FR ont augmenté de 26%, avec l'objectif de faciliter la circulation quand l'utilisation des visas est correct. L'ES concède de visas de 2 ans maximum, et le peu de cas de visas de 3 à 5 ans doivent être autorisés par le capital. La BE et l'IT accordent des visas de 1/2 ans, après une analyse cas par cas et progressivement après une bonne utilisation des visas. L'AT n'accorde pas de visas de plus d'un an. Cette diversité de pratiques rend difficile l'harmonisation de procédures en la matière.

3.4. Echange d'informations

Conformément aux dispositions du Code des visas, les réunions de coordination et la liste de diffusion servent à échanger les informations notamment sur les aspects suivants:

- La mise à jour des statistiques sur le nombre de demandes des visas et les taux de refus et les principales raisons de ces refus.
- Les cas de fraude documentaire (falsification des documents de voyage, manque de fiabilité d'actes d'état civil, utilisation de plusieurs identités et des passeports par la même personne, abus d'utilisation des passeports diplomatiques etc.)
- Les cas de fraude dans l'utilisation de visas et d'identification de falsification de visas.
- Les filières d'immigration clandestine (demandes de groupes avec faux buts de voyage: religieux, sportif, culturel, etc.).
- Le partage d'expériences sur la vérification d'authenticité des documents délivrés par les autorités du Sénégal et les pays sous la juridiction des Consulats basés au Sénégal.
- La viabilité des sociétés d'assurance de voyage.

3.4 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Système de compilation et partage des statistiques des visas: il a été convenu au sein de la Coordination Locale Schengen au Sénégal de maintenir le système de compilation et partage des statistiques des visas assurés par les EMs par ordre alphabétique à tour de rôle de six mois.

Partage d'information des cas de fraude documentaire et documents d'état civil non fiables: la fraude documentaire et la non-fiabilité des documents d'état civil au Sénégal et dans d'autres pays de la région (Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Gambie) a été identifiée comme un problème majeur. Les Etats membres partagent l'information disponible régulièrement et se sont accordés sur l'importance de renforcer cette pratique.

Extension des contacts aux pays tiers dans lesquels les EM résidant à Dakar sont accrédités: afin de échanger des informations et résoudre des possibles questions, le groupe de Coordination Local Schengen a accordé l'identification des personnes de contact au sein des consulats des Etats membres qui ont une présence permanente dans les pays tiers et que la plupart des autres Etats membres couvrent depuis Dakar (par exemple: Consulat du Portugal en Guinée Bissau, Consulat de France en Guinée etc.).

4. Défis

La fraude documentaire continue à constituer un défi important au Sénégal et dans d'autres pays de la région dans lesquels les Etats membres basés à Dakar sont accrédités. Des cas de fraude et fraude documentaire sont reportés par rapport aux applications de visas de toute sorte, court et longue durée (tourisme et affaires, accompagnants, conférences et groupes culturelles, visites familiales, réunification, etc.). De documents faux ou contenant de fausse information sont reportés: documents justificatifs, lettres d'invitation, et documents de voyage, y compris des passeports diplomatiques.

Ces pays se situent parmi les principaux pays d'origine de migration irrégulière en Europe. De véritables réseaux, de plus en plus professionnels, spécialisés en production ou légalisation de (faux) documents d'état civil se sont développés dans la région.

La non-fiabilité des documents d'état civil au Sénégal et dans certains autres pays de la région (Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Gambie) continue à être un défi. Pour le Sénégal sont en premier lieu concernés la zone frontalière avec la Mauritanie et les communes précaires de Dakar. Le cas spécifique des documents faux et fraudes liées à l'état civil des documents provenant de la Guinée est souligné.

Les services de visas rapportent des difficultés de gestion des listes d'attente à cause de l'augmentation du nombre d'applications (19% en 2018, 15% en 2017) et la multiplication des requêtes exceptionnelles des demandeurs pour éviter les attentes. L'impact de l'externalisation de la récolte de demandes reste à analyser.

5. Divers

Ce rapport a été préparé par la Délégation de l'UE au Sénégal et partagé avec les Etats membres de l'Espace Schengen. Il a été approuvé le 22 mai 2019.

Annexe: Tableau d'accréditation des Etats membres basés à Dakar

Tableau d'accréditation des Etats membres basés à Dakar

ETAT MEMBRE/ DAKAR	ACCREDITATION
ALLEMAGNE	Sénégal, Gambie, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert
AUTRICHE	Sénégal, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambie, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone
BELGIQUE	Sénégal, Gambie, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert + Mauritanie pour les visas long séjour uniquement
ESPAGNE	Sénégal, Gambie
FRANCE	Sénégal, Gambie + uniquement pour les aspects consulaires: Guinée-Bissau et Cap Vert
GRANDE-BRETAGNE	Sénégal, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert
ITALIE	Sénégal, Cap Vert, Gambie, Guinée (compétent pour les affaires consulaires même après l'ouverture d'une Ambassade à Conakry), Guinée-Bissau, Mali
LUXEMBOURG	Sénégal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso
PAYS-BAS	Sénégal, Gambie, Mauritanie, Cap Vert, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau
POLOGNE	Sénégal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Gambie, Guinée, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée Bissau, Cap Vert (en cours pour la Guinée et Mali)
PORTUGAL	Sénégal, Mauritanie, Gambie, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée, Sierra Leone, Libéria
RÉPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE	Sénégal, Guinée, Gambie (pas compétent pour des visas de Conakry ou Banjul)
ROUMANIE	Sénégal, Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Burkina Faso, Gambie, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Cap Vert
SUISSE	Sénégal, Mauritanie, Cap Vert, Gambie, Mali, Guinée-Bissau

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC)

in the REPUBLIC OF KOREA 2018-2019 REPORT⁶¹

1. Introduction

22 EU Member States (EU MS) out of 28 were present in the Republic of Korea (RoK) in the reported period. Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia cover the RoK from their embassies located in Beijing or Tokyo.

The agreements of representation in consular matters were as follows:

- Embassy of Austria represents Malta (Schengen visa issues),
- Embassy of Belgium represents Luxembourg,
- Embassy of Italy represents Slovenia,
- Embassy of Poland represents Estonia (Schengen visa issues),
- Embassy of Slovakia represents Latvia (Schengen visa issues),
- Embassy of Sweden deals with the visa requests that are addressed to Denmark, Iceland and Norway, as part of the agreement of cooperation of the Nordic Council,
- Embassy of Switzerland represents Liechtenstein.

The European citizens in the RoK were relatively small in volume. Overall 15.688 EU foreigners were registered in December 2018 in the RoK⁶². The exact number of expatriates in the RoK was not possible to draw based on the EU MS Embassies statistics as consular registration is generally not mandatory. EU MS/Schengen countries proceed with their consular work without any particular difficulty.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

From April 2018 to March 2019, four EU/LSC Consular cooperation group meetings were held on 17 April, 28 September and 5 December 2018 and on 29 January 2019. All meetings, except one, were held at the EUDEL and one meeting was held on the invitation of the chair at a hotel. Under the Austrian chair, on 28 November 2018 the group conducted a consular crisis communication exercise.

During the reported period EU MS/Schengen local consular group meetings were chaired by the local chair. Bulgaria exercised the local chair until the end of June 2018, followed by Austria in the second semester 2018. Romania continued to chair the meetings in the first half of 2019.

In supporting local chairs, the EU Delegation regularly issued the invitations and drafted or contributed to the meeting reports. The participation of MS in these meetings was satisfactory. Among the 22 EU MS presented in the RoK, around 20 country's representatives usually participated in the meetings. Switzerland and Norway attended the LSC meetings regularly (Iceland and Liechtenstein do not have diplomatic representations in the RoK).

⁶¹ April 2018 – March 2019

⁶² Data of the Korea Immigration Service for 2018

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC discussed the issue of outsourcing visa, pre-payment of the service fee when requesting a consular appointment, Visa procedures for interns, start of use of the newly designed Schengen visa sticker. The LSC also exchange views on increase of Schengen Visa applications having a similar pattern.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The LSC discussed and agreed on the harmonized list of supporting documents, which was finally adopted as the Commission Decision on 24 October 2018.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The LSC exchanged views on the issue of presenting "(confirmed) flight reservations" as included in the harmonized list. The discussion indicated difference in perception or interpretation of what "confirmed" means. The LSC also discussed the issue of a different exchange rate applied in order to calculate visa fees, the usefulness of translating the list of harmonized documents into the Korean language and the issue of accepting formal/informal translation of submitted documents.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings were appreciated as a good platform to exchange consular-related information. The discussion particularly included the exchange of experience in dealing with Korean authorities such as delivery of diplomatic pouches and the lack of official replies from MOFA if approached by a note verbale. The exchange of information via e-mail and particularly a mobile application WhatsApp (focused on security and safety issues) was highly appreciated by the LSC.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

During the reported period, the LSC also:

- In the framework of the joint EU Consular Preparedness Framework in Seoul continued exchanges on local crisis management preparedness with the US; kept the Handbook updated and conducted a successful consular crisis communication exercise. A map, indicated locations of local EU MS embassies in Seoul, was drawn by the EU Delegation.
- Draw lessons learned from the preparation and during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games;
- Discussed the implementation of the Council Directive 2015/637 of 20 April 2015 on coordination and cooperation measures to facilitate consular protection for unrepresented citizens of the Union in third countries and repealing Decision 95/553/EC in the RoK;
- Received a briefing by the Korean National Police Agency on the crimes committed by (European) foreigners in the RoK and discussed the procedures in case of an traffic accident as well as the recognition of the driving license of EU citizens in the RoK;
- Discussed the issue of interaction with RoK authorities in case of an EU citizen arrest/detainment.

4. Challenges

In the upcoming period, the LSC decided to enhance information sharing of visa statistics (refusal rate, visa issued) and exchange views on various police-related issues.

5. Other issues

This report has been cleared with the local EU/Schengen Consular group.



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Republic of Maldives

24 April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in COLOMBO (SRI LANKA) 2018-2019 REPORT⁶³

1. Introduction

There are five Schengen diplomatic missions in Colombo (FR, DE, IT, NO, CH) which process their own visa applications and on behalf of other Schengen Member States as well as provide representation for both Sri Lanka and Maldives.

<i>Mission</i>	<i>FR</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>IT</i>	<i>NO</i>	<i>CH</i>
<i>Member States</i>	<i>FR, ES, PT, CZ</i>	<i>DE, AT, HU, EE, LV</i>	<i>IT, MT, SL</i>	<i>NO, SE, DK, FI, IS, LT</i>	<i>CH, NL, BE, LU, PL, SI</i>
<i>Service Provider</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>

All missions make use of the services of an external service provider VFS Global Lanka Pvt Ltd for the collection of applications but the process still needs supervision. The Schengen missions agreed that it is in their interest to have as many applications as possible handled via VFS although the applicant has the right to lodge the application at the embassy. However, Schengen missions encourage applicants to apply via VFS.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period, 3 LSC meetings were held (on 07/11/2018, on 4/12/2018 and on 7/3 2019), the first two took place in the EU Delegation premises in Colombo and the other at the Romanian Embassy. All meetings were well attended by the five missions that have responsibility for the Schengen missions that have no representation in Sri Lanka. UK and RO are invited to attend as observers as in previous years.

The EU Delegation's main role in the LSC has been to chair these meetings (exceptionally co-chaired with RO on 7 March 2019), to facilitate discussions, draft and share minutes as well as provide any other support requested by the participating missions. Cooperation from and among the missions is excellent and all LSC activities and tasks are carried out on a burden-sharing basis. All LSC members share the common Annual Report with their headquarters.

⁶³ April 2018 – March 2019

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Schengen missions confirmed that the implementation of the Visa Code was proceeding smoothly. Schengen missions are looking forward to the new Visa Code and are welcoming more room for flexibility in order to accommodate demand increases amid limited resources.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

According to the Schengen missions, the support documents they have been requesting from the visa applicants corresponded to the harmonized list shown as annex II of the Commission Implementing Decision dated 13 October 2011. The local Schengen Missions have had a local harmonised list of supporting documents that remains operational but is not consistently referred to. During LSC meetings, the possibility of establishing a new, updated local harmonised list of supporting documents has been explored..

During discussions, opinions diverged on the listing of insurance companies with a preference for flexibility on the choice of companies by applicants.

During LSC meetings, the relevance of requiring visa applicants to present "(confirmed) flight reservation" when applying for a visa was discussed. MS agreed that their preference is to have this requirement dropped as it is deemed neither functional nor practical.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Harmonisation of practices has regularly been discussed in LSC meetings. Applications are evaluated on a case-by-case basis and travel history of applicants is looked into thoroughly sometimes with the help of other MS.

No attempt has been made to harmonise visa-issuing practices, such as issuing of long-validity MEVs. Most missions are not in a position to provide statistical data on the average length of validity of MEVs issued. Detailed data compilation on MEVs and their lengths has not thus been consistent.

3.4 Exchange of information

Visa statistics

Schengen missions continued to compile and share visa statistics at and around the LSC meetings. EUDEL has noted that while all Schengen Missions have sent their statistics, there seems to be some inconsistency in terms of what kind of data has been shared. Schengen missions have reported varying difficulties in providing numbers for MEV and single-entry visas separately, as well as providing statistics separately for each MS.

Cases of fraud

Schengen missions continued to exchange information on cases of fraud. Local Schengen Missions will maintain the current policy of returning fake passports to the Sri Lankan issuing authorities.

During the reporting period, MS highlighted the issue of "visa shopping", traceable notably through fake hotel bookings. Instances of fraudulent documents being provided are said to be increasing, including fake passports. Also a spurt in forged documents in recent business registration was noted by MS (50% of applications for an exhibition in November were rejected). Generally the proportion of rejections is on the rise, ranging from 18 to 25 % depending on MS.

Travel medical insurance (TMI) providers

As per guidelines the establishment of a list of insurance companies is not mandatory, the MS have discussed the relevance in SL of such a list. During discussions opinions diverged on the listing of insurance companies with a preference for flexibility on the choice of companies by applicants. Maintaining a standard list and checking compliances of the listed companies was assessed as impractical. MS agreed to share negative experiences with any travel insurance should this occur. A MS proposed to share the list of insurance companies offering adequate TMIs. Future discussions of establishing a common, more regularly used list of recommended insurance providers has not been ruled out. There have been no reports of any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules.

Cooperation with local authorities and companies

Schengen missions have shared in LSC meetings their experiences of cooperation with local authorities, companies and other parties when dealing with bank statements as well as employment, birth and marriage certificates. Schengen missions are namely in touch with banks, the IOM and local authorities.

Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring

Schengen missions continued to exchange information on their experiences with the common service provider the VFS Global Lanka Pvt Ltd which continued to run the dedicated "Joint Schengen Visa Application Centre". In addition to VFS services in Colombo, two MS have also an application centre in Jaffna. Foreseen are also opening an application centre by a MS in Kandy and use of ARAMAX courier service by another MS in collecting applications.

Challenges with VFS are consistency and the high staff turnover rate resulting in loss of trained staff. Some MS would be favourable of prepayment of service fee to prevent that intermediaries sell appointments and to prevent "no shows", but VFS has not delivered on the several requests made over the past 1.5 years. MS agreed there should be more information sharing and communication on and with the organisation to improve functioning.

There has been no initiative on common monitoring exercises, but it has been agreed that there is a need to monitor VFS's work closely and that experiences with VFS should be exchanged regularly.

Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System

Schengen missions have in LSC meetings agreed that VISMail is working smoothly.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other initiatives have been taken in LSC.

4. Challenges

Identifying genuineness of some of the visa requests and the false documentation being submitted continued to be a challenge during this reporting period as well, however to a large extent the missions were able to mitigate such risks by close consultation and coordinating with each other bilaterally as well as during LSC meetings.

New forms of asylum seeking, identified as a potential challenge in 2017-2018 report, have been discussed in LSC meetings but the Schengen missions have not noticed consistent trends in the 2018-2019 reporting period. It has been agreed that even though there may not be an immediate risk on new forms of asylum seeking, it is good to be mindful of this possibility.

In the next reporting period (2019-2020), Schengen missions' experiences with VFS should be exchanged regularly and a possibility of common monitoring exercises could be explored as a need to monitor VFS's work closely has been identified.

Schengen missions have also expressed that establishing a local harmonised list of supporting documents and a list of reliable TMI providers should be discussed in the next reporting period (2019-2020).

5. Other issues

Schengen missions have confirmed that Schengen visas for Maldivians were all issued in Colombo, with the exception of one MS's mobile visa centre in Malé shortly in an ad hoc manner to serve increased demand due to a big event organised in Europe in March-April 2019. Maldives has communicated both to MS and to EUDEL their desire to have continuous visa office in Malé. A MS has had talks with VFS to explore if VFS would be willing to go to Malé but the discussion is still open. Option of application by Korea has been considered. A mobile station could also be a solution in long term. Another MS has a mobile centre in summer months, as September is the high season with students in particular. Generally MS give Maldives nationals priority in visa applications and try accommodating so that their visas are processed in one day if possible.

MS have sought clarification on Bulgaria's Schengen status which was answered to by EUDEL. BG has no diplomatic representation in Colombo



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in THAILAND
2018-2019 REPORT⁶⁴

1. Introduction

In 2018-2019, the number of EU Member States and Schengen Associated States remained unchanged in Thailand. In total, there are nineteen EU Member States and Schengen Associated States represented in Bangkok, namely Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Luxembourg (LU), The Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Slovakia (SK), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and Switzerland (CH). Visas are issued by FI on behalf of Estonia, by DE for Lithuania, by HU on behalf of Latvia, by AT on behalf of Malta and Slovenia. All non-Schengen EU Member States are invited to the LSC meetings as observers, without taking part in decision making. Romania (RO) attended all LSC meetings in the 2018-2019 reporting period.

Most EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have outsourced their visa application processing services to private companies primarily as a result of an increased number of visa applications. Currently VFS Global collect visa applications for AT, BE, CH, DK, FI, IT, NL, NO, ES and SE, while TLS Contact manages for FR and PT.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

LSC meetings have been held at regular intervals at the premises of the EU Delegation and at the embassies of Belgium and Austria. During the 2018-2019 reporting period, a total of four LSC meetings were held, on 3 May 2018, 29 August 2018, 31 October 2019, and 6 February 2019. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation and were well attended by EU Member States and Schengen Associated States. Reports of the meetings are drawn up by the EU Delegation and shared with EU Member States and Associated Schengen States and with the Commission (DG HOME). Non-Schengen EU Member States are always invited to attend as observers as well.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code was applied and no major deficiencies or problems were noted.

⁶⁴ April 2018 – March 2019

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

With the Commission Implementing Decision C (2017) 5853 of 30.08.2017 establishing the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants for short stay visas in Thailand EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have applied the list since 15 September 2017. EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have exchanged views on the practical application of the common list in subsequent LSC meetings.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Minor differences in practices have been discussed at LSC meetings, on which the EU Delegation with the help of the DG HOME found clarifications.

When issuing multiple entry visas a majority of MS issue them in average one year. Some states only issue for half a year in average, whereas others normally issue them for two years.

3.4 Exchange of information

Information regarding fraud and statistics was exchanged between the EU Member States and Schengen Associated States via email and discussed during LSC meetings. The EU Delegation compiles the data and circulates yearly statistics among the EU Member States and Schengen Associated States.

EU Member States and Schengen Associated States in Thailand have a common list of travel and health insurance companies and new applications are accepted in the LSC meetings. There are currently 40 companies on the list. There have been no reports from insurance takers of misconduct among travel insurance companies in the period 2018-2019 to the EU Member States, Schengen Associated States or the EU Delegation.

Some EU Member States and Schengen Associated States in Thailand reported cases of fraud in the 2018-2019 reporting period, which was discussed at LSC meetings. As a response to the challenge the EU Delegation organised a training provided by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency concerning fraudulent documents. The training received very good feedback from the participating states and the EU Member States and Schengen Associated States in Thailand expressed interest in similar trainings in the future.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

As a response to the challenge with reported cases of fraud, especially involving fraudulent documents, the LSC group agreed to set down an anti-fraud group that would meet regularly. In the 2018-2019 reporting period two such meetings have taken place under the already existing Immigration Control Experts group, which consists of EU Member States and like-minded non-EU countries.

4. Challenges

Most EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have experienced a significant increase in visa applications in 2018 compared to 2017. In response to this added workload, some EU Member States and Schengen Associated States had outsourced tasks, some would receive special personnel assistance in periods with an increased workload and others would work overtime.

Some EU Member States and Schengen Associated States reported challenges with illegal informal-sector workers and human trafficking in their respective countries, involving Thai nationals with valid Schengen visas sometimes issued by embassies of other EU Member States and Schengen Associated States than the country where the illegal activities were reported.

The above mentioned points remain challenges in the next reporting period (2019-2020). Another potential challenge in the next reporting period would be to insure a satisfactory exchange of information with Local Schengen Cooperation Groups in third countries other than the one of the visa centre, as some states will regionalise visa centres.

5. Other issues

No other issues to report.

This report has been approved by the Local Schengen Cooperation Group in Thailand

Port of Spain, 20 June 2019

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
2018-2019 REPORT⁶⁵**

1. Introduction

Five Member States are present and 13 Schengen MS are represented by them in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

Citizens of Trinidad & Tobago benefit from a visa waiver agreement with the EU since 28 May 2015 and no longer need a Schengen visa for short stays (90 days) within a six-month period. With regards to issuing Schengen visas for citizens of other countries residing in T&T and who do not benefit from the Visa Waiver Scheme, four EU Schengen MS present have agreements with Schengen MS presented by them in case this MS is the main travel destination.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

One regular meeting – on 4 October 2018 - was held in the reporting period. The meeting was chaired by the EU Delegation and attended by two member states. The regular meetings are usually held twice a year and well-attended. The next meeting took place on 10 April 2019, after the reporting period.

Ad hoc meetings did not occur as not deemed necessary.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All EU actors in Trinidad and Tobago are prepared to carry out their LSC tasks as described in the Visa Code. As Trinidad & Tobago is benefiting from a visa waiver agreement and only two MS represented are taking decisions on visas locally, these tasks are limited. There are no reported issues with regards to the implementation of the Visa Code.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already acquired on a practical level

⁶⁵ April 2018 – March 2019

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

If an applicant has previously received a Schengen visa, and depending on the circumstances of the applicant (financial means, relevance to the public interest or to the EU economies, etc.), MS usually issue a visa with a long validity, even if the first Schengen visa was issued by another MS. This visa is usually first a 1-year MEV, and if the applicant subsequently repeats his demand, MS tend to issue 2-3 year MEVs. MS did not provide numbers or statistics.

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC refers to:

- statistics;
- cases of fraud;
- travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI);
- any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules;
- use of the Visa Information System.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

MS had agreed on continued exchange of information, which took place on the topics above under 3.4.

Within the next reporting period (2019-2020) exchange on best practices for communication should take place. MS still receive many phone call enquiries by applicants despite the fact that the visa-waiver programme has been in place since May 2015.

5. Other issues

N/A

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Turkey 2018-2019 REPORT⁶⁶

1. Introduction

There are 24 Schengen Member States present in Turkey. 20 Schengen Member States are represented in the capital city of Ankara, 17 Member States are represented in Istanbul, 3 Member States are represented in Izmir and 1 Member State is represented in Edirne.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

There were 10 well attended regular meetings⁶⁷ (4 in Ankara, 5 in Istanbul and 1 in Izmir) held in the period of April 2018 – March 2019. However, certain smaller MS rarely attend due to lack of human resources. In the course of the reporting period some MS partially stopped issuing Schengen and national visas in Ankara which are now processed by their respective consulates in Istanbul. The LSC meetings were chaired by the EUD. One ad hoc meeting was dedicated to the opening of the new international airport in Istanbul with the participation of third parties and non-Schengen MS. Reports were drawn up by the EUD following consultation with the Presidency. Coordination with the LSC in locations outside the capital is ensured in Istanbul and Izmir via LSC meetings, e-mails and telephone. In Edirne, where only one Schengen MS is represented LSC meetings are not held but via the regularly updated LSC Turkey contact list communication is ensured as well as all meeting minutes are shared via AGORA with all registered LSC members.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Both MS and EUD are well prepared and cooperative to ensure that the tasks are carried out in the LSC as per the Visa Code.

In the course of the reporting period no specific problems were encountered pertinent to the implementation of the Visa Code.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

MS present in Turkey agreed that it is high time to update the list of supporting documents which was last updated in 2011, to that end with the lead of one LSC member the work has already been started in March 2019. Upon completion, the outcome of this work shall be further discussed in the Istanbul and Izmir LSC groups alike.

⁶⁶ April 2018 – March 2019

⁶⁷ 08.05.2018 Ankara, 10.05.2018 Istanbul, 10.08.2018 Istanbul, 05.10.2018 Ankara, 10.10.2018 Istanbul, 30.11.2018 Ankara, 10.12.2018 Izmir, 12.12.2018 Istanbul, 28.02.2019 Ankara 01.03.2019 Istanbul.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No attempt have been made to harmonise visa-issuing practices, such as the issuing of long-validity MEVs.

Depending on the applicant's profile, the most frequently issued visas are 1-year MEVs. Most MS do not have the technical means to extract information on the length of validity of MEVs; therefore the figure is an approximate calculation

3.4 Exchange of information

Exchange of information within the LSC in the reporting period took place on the following topics:

- statistics;
- cases of fraud (incl. document fraud);
- travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI);
- any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules;
- cooperation with local authorities and companies (banks, employers, transport companies);
- cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises);
- use of VIS Mail and the Visa Information System;
- diverging service fees charged by visa application centres for MS for identical services.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

- LSC Turkey members are debriefed on the ILO Turkey meetings;
- provision of demand driven trainings on document security;
- harmonisation of supporting documents for lorry drivers.

4. Challenges

- Update of the list of supporting documents;
- Document security.



Kampala, 7 May 2019

**Subject: LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Uganda
2018-2019 REPORT⁶⁸**

1. Introduction

10 Member States present in Kampala. For the purpose of issuing Schengen visas: The Netherlands⁶⁹ representing Hungary, Slovenia; Norway⁷⁰ representing Denmark, Lithuania, Iceland; Germany representing Austria, Estonia and partly Switzerland⁷¹; Belgium, representing Luxembourg; Italy representing Malta, Slovakia; France representing Spain, Portugal, Greece, Czech Republic and Sweden

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

During the reporting period, three meetings have taken place: 21 June, 20 September 2018 and 7 February 2019. They were well attended.

The LSC meetings are organised and chaired by the EU Delegation. The EU Delegation is also in charge of reporting and coordination of the follow-up steps when needed. Member States are free to share the EU Delegation reports with their capitals should they so wish.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Although issues of harmonising visa fees and insurance for diplomatic/service passport holders, school exchange, cultural visits and visas connected to scientific research, cf. art. 16 S. (4) letters b, c and d, S. (5) letters a, b and c, have been raised previously, no agreement has been reached. Drawing up of a common information sheet on visas and the exchange of monthly statistics, as per art. 48, Ss (2) and (3) to be relaunched.

⁶⁸ April 2018 – March 2019

⁶⁹ Visas are processed in the Hague and issued from Kampala.

⁷⁰ Visas issued in Nairobi as of 1st July.

⁷¹ Processing of applications from holders of Diplomatic and Official passports; all other applications for Switzerland are handled by the Swiss Embassy in Nairobi.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Member States met in July 2018 to harmonise documents which was then sent to HQ. Reply received in February 2019 requesting the list to be revised further with feedback on each point. Due to time constraints amongst respective Member States, this work has not yet taken place and is planned for the next meeting of the group in June.

Once finalised, it will be sent to the Visa Committee and adopted by COM. List becomes legally binding thereafter.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

On the whole it was established that Member States practices are harmonised. The length of validity of multi entry visas (MEVs) varies between Member States from less than one year in some cases up to 3, 4 and 5 years in others.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States make use of the Visa Information System, as it is possible to see if a visa application has been refused already. However, VIS-mail is not used among the MS in Uganda as a means of communication.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

N/A

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO UKRAINE

26/04/2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in *Kyiv, Ukraine* 2018-2019 REPORT⁷²

1. Introduction

25 Member States (MS) are present in Kyiv and six are additionally represented in consulates throughout the country. Two non-EU Schengen States are represented in Kyiv. Luxemburg (represented by Belgium for visa matters), Malta (Italy), Liechtenstein and Iceland (Norway) have no representation in Ukraine, while Ireland has announced the opening of an embassy in the course of 2019.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Five regular LSC meetings were held in the reporting period and were generally well-attended. Meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation and are regularly attended by non-Schengen MS. At some meetings guest speakers from state authorities were invited (State Border Guards Service, State Migration Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Reports are drawn up by the EUD.

Coordination with consulates in locations outside the capital is ensured through respective MS Embassies. Consulates located outside Kyiv regularly report on issued Schengen visas. As of 2019, MS report consolidated visa data per country to facilitate information flows and ensure the consistency of data provided.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is applied by MS in accordance with instructions received from their capitals.

LSC repeatedly discussed the procedures for issuance of visas to holders of multiple passports. Some countries continue to issue visas to holders of both non-biometric and biometric passports upon instruction from their capitals, despite guidance from the European Commission to not issue visas to applicants, who are known to also possess a biometric passport entitling to visa-free travel.

MS also discussed the placing of a visa application stamp in the passport upon receipt of a visa request, where practice differs across MS.

Together with non-Schengen EU MS discussions were held on the interpretation of the 90-day rule that is not handled uniformly. Some non-Schengen MS continue to count stays in the Schengen area towards their 90 day limit.

⁷² April 2018 – March 2019

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

As of 15 May 2014, a list of supporting documents is fully operational in Ukraine.

Given the introduction of a visa-free regime for Ukraine, discussion of this matter is not of major importance as visa applications have dropped significantly.

MS discussed the need to amend the harmonised list of supporting documents upon initiative of the EUD. There were no unanimous views on the need to maintain the requirement to provide flight reservations for tourist visa applicants. Some MS currently do not enforce this requirement.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Given the entry into force of the visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens in June 2017, this question has lost practical relevance as the overall number of Schengen visa has dropped significantly.

No complaints have been recorded as to a non-uniform application of rules for the issuance of Schengen visa.

However, some discrepancies remain to be observed, notably on the practice to issue C-visas for work purposes and the issuing of long-term validity MEVs. Validity of MEVs usually averages about one year, with exception for some countries that mainly issue longer-term MEVs, above all for family members and well-established foreign resident businessmen. At least one MS does not issue MEVs to Ukrainian nationals. Validity of MEVs is often restricted by the overall validity of the passport.

3.4 Exchange of information

The EU Delegation collects visa statistics in a template jointly agreed with MS. Statistics are presented in regular intervals and since January 2019 also include breakdown for applications by nationality (Ukrainian, non-Ukrainian) to capture possible differences in visa application rejection rates.

The LSC also discusses fraud practices and travel medical insurance, even though in October 2018 the list of insurance companies approved for Schengen visas maintained by one embassy was discontinued. This was due to the reduced demand for Schengen visas and the fact that national visas are guided by national provisions that are set by each country individually.

LSC members discussed the use of external service providers. Despite the visa liberalisation, the majority of Schengen-participating states continues to make use of ESPs.

Given visa liberalisation, discussions increasingly focus on matters related to the issuance of national (D) visas.

MS discussed the use of VIS (all but one MS reported to have full access) and raised cooperation with local authorities and companies as appropriate.

The EU Delegation regularly invites external interlocutors from the Ukrainian authorities to facilitate a direct exchange on matters of mutual interest, in particular in relation to the impact of visa liberalisation.

4. Challenges

The introduction of visa-free travel to the Schengen area represented the main challenge in the previous reporting period. Stark decreases in the number of visa applications have led to reduction of staff in some MS consular sections. Some MS have decided to cancel contracts with ESPs as a result of the lower demand for Schengen visas, while others see a steady demand for national visas and thus maintain contractual arrangements.

Other challenges remain broadly the same and require continuous attention by MS. These include cases of forgery of supporting documents and visa applicants being misled by service provider intermediaries, largely in the application for residence permits or national visas. MS have closely followed poorly justified searches and a – not yet finalised – court proceeding against VfS, one of the main ESPs.

Refusal rates for visa applications have seen an increase throughout the reporting period. This is largely believed to be due to the increased share of foreign (non-Ukrainian) applicants for Schengen visas. MS suspect that relatively lax provisions for foreign students in Ukraine may be used to then get access to the Schengen zone. The EUD provided a presentation on numbers and origin of foreign students at a dedicated LSC meeting. Going forward, disaggregated data on refusal rates should provide more clarity on increased rejection rates. In fact, this seems to be confirmed based on first data available for the first quarter of 2019.

The fact that some Ukrainian citizens continue to hold multiple passports represents a challenge for consular departments (see also above). Cases where Ukrainians hold both non-biometric and biometric passports make tracking of travel and the respect of the 90/180 days rule difficult. In addition, some Ukrainian citizens possess two biometric passports. Going forward, ways should be found to identify holders of multiple passports and Ukraine should be encouraged to undertake more efforts to tackle the matter.

While the illegal Russian annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol in March 2014 continues to impact consular activities of EU MS, consulates in Ukraine effectively receive only very few visa requests from residents of Crimea (<50 Schengen visa applications in the reporting period), presumably because most residents either apply for visas in third countries with foreign travel documents issued by the Russian Federation (partially issued elsewhere than in Crimea) or are in possession of biometric Ukrainian passports. According to latest reports by the State Migration Service of Ukraine, since 2015 more than 140,000 residents of Crimea have received a biometric passport entitling to visa-free travel.

In the reporting period, MS have not encountered any supporting documents issued by non-recognised entities in the non-Government controlled areas in Eastern Ukraine and largely stated that these would not be accepted, if presented as supporting documents in visa applications.

The present Report has been approved by the Embassies of EU Member States and Schengen Associated States present in Ukraine.



April 2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) – UNITED KINGDOM (LONDON)

2018-2019 REPORT

1. Introduction

As regards Member States and associated states' presence in the United Kingdom, the situation remains unchanged compared to the previous reporting period: All except for Iceland (represented by DK) are present in London for the purpose of issuing visas. Sixteen Member States cooperate with an external service provider for the purpose of the collection of visa applications. Fourteen Member States are present in Edinburgh (ten only 'via' an external service provider); ten Member States are present in Manchester (eight only 'via' an external service provider); three Member States are present via an external service provider in Cardiff.

The total number of visa applications handled in the United Kingdom in 2018 was 275 099 which is an increase of 3.6 % compared to 2017.

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

Since the last reporting period two meetings have been held (chaired by COM (DG HOME) and meetings are generally very well attended. Reports are drawn up by DG HOME after each meeting.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No major problems with the implementation the Visa Code has been noted, but questions are regularly raised regarding specific issues of implementation. The interaction between Directive 2004/38/EC on the free movement of family members of EU citizens is on the agenda of each meeting. A representative of DG JUST has participated in one meeting in 2018

3.2 Exchange of information

Thanks to the efforts of one Member State, the exchange of 'local' statistics continues but some Member States still omit to send their contribution timely. Member States have been encouraged to fulfil this requirement (provided by the Visa Code, Article 48 (3) (a)) so that information on fluctuations can be shared with the entire group.

Member States continue to exchange information on various operational subjects (e.g. cases of fraud) in the formal meetings and by e-mail.

DG HOME shares information from the relevant Council and Commission fora (Visa Working Party, Visa Committee etc.).



22/04/2019

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Hanoi (Viet Nam)
2018-2019 REPORT⁷³

1. Introduction

17 Schengen Member States are present in Viet Nam and *AT, BE, CZ, DK, EL, FI, FR, DE, HU, IT, NL, PL, SK, ES, SE, NO* and *CH* are represented in Hanoi. Moreover, several MS have Consulates in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) - *FR, DE, HU, IT, NL, CH*.

In 2018, Schengen Member State Consulates received 127,062 uniform visas applications (including MEV) and issued 113,580 of them (including 28,308 MEV).

Representation arrangements:

- Belgium is representing Luxembourg in Hanoi, while the Netherlands are representing Luxembourg in HCMC.
- Denmark is representing Lithuania and Iceland in Hanoi as well as in HCMC.
- France is representing Malta and Estonia.
- Hungary is representing Latvia, Slovenia in Hanoi and Slovakia, Czechia as well as Poland (HCMC). Czechia is also represented by Hungary in selected provinces in Southern and Central Vietnam (since September 2018)
- Germany is representing Portugal in Hanoi and in HCMC.

Several MS use external service providers for the collection of applications:

Austria: uses VFS both in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City.

Belgium: uses VFS in Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang.

Czechia: uses VFS in October 2018 in Hanoi.

Denmark: uses VFS in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.

Finland: uses VFS both in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City.

France: uses TLS contact in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Germany: uses VFS since February 2019 in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and since March 2019 in Da Nang (jurisdiction of Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City).

Italy: Outsourced collection of applications to VFS in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

The Netherlands: uses VFS in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Norway: uses VFS in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Spain: uses BLS International in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Switzerland: uses VFS in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

⁷³ April 2018 – March 2019

2. LSC meetings held in 2018-2019

The LSC group meets on a bimonthly basis at the EU Delegation premises in Hanoi. In the given timeframe from April 2018 to March 2019, 6 meetings were held (19.03.2018; 07.06.2018; 30.08.2018; 25.10.2018; 04.12.2018; 21.02.2019). One *ad hoc* meeting on the phenomenon and fight against human trafficking from Viet Nam to Europe was organised end of 2018 and Political Counsellors were invited to attend this meeting. In addition, the EURLO Officer to Vietnam was invited to present her work to MS in February 2019.

The meetings, which are chaired by the EU Delegation, are well-attended. The Chair circulates a draft agenda in advance of the scheduled meetings in order for participants to have the opportunity to add relevant points. The minutes of the meetings, drafted by EUDEL, are sent to MS which share the reports with their respective capitals. Coordination with the LSC in other locations outside the capital is ensured by MS sharing Hanoi's meeting reports with visa officers of Consulate-Generals throughout Viet Nam.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and EUDEL's preparedness to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code is good and there is an excellent collaboration between the members of the LSC Group.

Specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code as discussed in the LSC meetings:

Fraud: The lack of notoriety of documents and the cash economy that is still predominant in Vietnam makes it very difficult to assess the applicants' financial ties to the home country in most instances. Local anti-fraud coordination has been intensified *inter alia* under the lead of the DE Embassy.

Human Trafficking / Irregular migration: Irregular migration of Vietnamese citizens to the Schengen area is growing, promoted by local criminal networks which provide visa applicants with fraudulent papers and documentation to fulfil visa requirements. Additionally, irregular migration is taking place using alternative routes through Russia. The increase in seemingly highly-organized irregular movements by Vietnamese claiming to be minors is of great concern.

Visa shopping: Some visa applicants are submitting applications to consulates of countries contrary to the rule of sole destination, main destination or first entry (Visa Code Article Articles 5. 1. (a); (b); (c)).

Frequent introduction of last-minute visa applications by Vietnamese officials travelling for official or personal purposes: Despite several communications from EUDEL on behalf of EUMS, Vietnamese officials continue to use diplomatic channels to submit last minute applications for diplomatic or official passport holders. In addition, EUMS have reported cases where members of official delegations misuse their visas by overstaying in the area.

Visa fee harmonization: Some MS are in favour of the visa fee harmonization in Vietnam by applying the same exchange rate however, MS continue using the exchange rate applicable in their internal budgetary matters.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

A revised list of supporting documents has been agreed upon by MS present and forwarded to the Visa Committee.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The harmonisation of practices is regular topic of discussion in the Local Schengen Coordination group. This harmonization is carried out by sharing good practices and advice. MS maintain different policies with regards of the length and validity of Multiple Entry Visas (MEVs).

Austria: 1857-C visas were issued. Usually MEVs are only given for longer term visa (one year and more; 1 year: 24; 2 years: 1; and 3 years: 2).

Belgium: 1772-C visas were issued, the vast majority being single entry visas. It is the usual practice that MEVs are only granted for longer term visa (multiple years) and some official visits.

Czechia: 14 multiple-entry visas were issued, rarely granted to *bona fide* applicants proving necessity of frequent travels to Czechia and the Schengen area.

Denmark: 2626 visas were issued, and 2045 were given. 14 applications were withdrawn and 330 refused by the Mission in Hanoi (12,56%), while additional 160 refused by the Danish Immigration Service.

Finland: Finland treated 1407 dossiers, issuing 1090 C-visa and refusing 296 (21%). 989 one entry visas were granted, alongside 40 2-entries and 61 multiples entries visas. From the latter, 58 were MEV for 1 year and 3 MEV for 2 years.

France: Approximately 3,500 of MEVs were issued in 2018, which represents 11,5 % of France's total of Schengen visa issued. The breakdown is as follows: 1 year: 58 % (6,5% of total Schengen visas); 2 years: 20 % (2,3 %); 3 years: 14% (1,5%); 4 years: 2% (0,2 %) and 5 years: 6 % (0,8 %). These only include visas for ordinary passports as France almost systematically issues 1 year visa for official passports.

Germany: 5,1 % of the issued Schengen-visas were C1-visas and 12,5 % were C2-5 visas.

Greece: Regarding MEVs in 2018, 76.7% of visas issued were MEVs (1333 out of 1739 short term visas); more specifically 1-year MEVs:1320; 2-year MEVs: 10 and 3-year MEVs: 3.

The Netherlands: Of the total visa issued 2475 were multiple-entry (Hanoi – 975; HCM - 1500).

Norway: 2245 decisions were taken in 2018 and 2070 C-visas were issued, while 175 were refused (8.45%). 1895 were single entry visas and 170 were MEVs.

Spain: 2% of Schengen visas granted in 2018 were multiple entry visas. Of those, 73% were visas with a 3-month validity and the rest between 6 months and 2 years.

3.4 Exchange of information

Exchange of information is the backbone of the LSC group meetings; especially the topics of illegal migration, externalization of the collection of applications, use of online appointment systems are regularly discussed. MS also share their experiences with fraud cases as well as difficulties with Vietnamese authorities and companies (e.g. tourist agencies).

The group has starting collecting and sharing statistics of refusal rates as well.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Several Missions (e.g. DE, UK, US and AU) co-organise anti-fraud meetings (19.04.2018 and 03.12.2018). These meetings, which are not an initiative by the Schengen group, allow missions to share information on fraud cases as well as to discuss the current migratory situation in Vietnam from various viewpoints as *inter alia* EUMS, Singapore and Canada are among the attendees. In addition, 3 similar meetings were organized for locally employed staff.

4. Challenges for the next reporting period

Discuss ways to benefit from local presence of national Document and Visa Adviser/Airport Liaison Officers/Police-immigration officers.

Discussion on the refusal rates.

5. Other issues

- Length of examination of applications for short term visits for Vietnamese passport holders;
- Assessment of cooperation regarding travel agents / commercial intermediaries;
- Visa exemption for Vietnamese diplomatic passport holders (state of Play);
- Consultation procedure for Vietnamese Passport holders (state of Play);
- Not issued visa rate for uniform visas;
- Evaluation of representation arrangements and exchange of relevant statistics.