



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 14 July 2022
(OR. en, fr, es)

11202/22

VISA 124
COMIX 365

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Visa Working Party/Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and
Switzerland/Liechtenstein)

No. prev. doc.: 7422/21

Subject: Local Schengen cooperation between Member States' consulates
(Article 48(7) of the Visa Code)
- Compilation of 2021 annual reports

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

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EUROPEAN UNION - BASHKIMI EVROPIAN

DELEGATION TO ALBANIA
DELEGACIONI NE SHQIPERI

European Integration, Political, Press and Information Section

28 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Albania 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

16 Member States have diplomatic representations in Albania and six (Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, and Slovakia) are represented by other Member States for Schengen visas.

Some of the Member States represented in Albania do not however issue Schengen visas in Albania but in various neighbouring countries.

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

Outside Tirana, Greece has two General Consulates (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), Bulgaria (Vlora), France (Korca), Hungary (Shkodra and Durres), Italy (Gjirokastra, Shkodra) and Romania (Korca). Italy also has one Consular Correspondent in Berat.

In 2021, Czech Republic opened an Honorary Consulate in Saranda, covering also for the regions of Vlora and Gjirokaster.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to drastically reduce the number of Schengen visas issued by Member States in Albania in 2021.

The EU Delegation organised and chaired two online meetings of the Local Schengen Cooperation in 2021. These two meetings were well attended – nine Member States attended the June meeting, 14 attended the December meeting. Agendas and reports for LSC meetings have been routinely prepared by the EU Delegation with inputs from Member States' Embassies.

Online LSC meetings have allowed Member States whose consular services responsible for applicants from Albania are located in neighbouring countries to participate in LSC meetings.

The June LSC meeting was used to coordinate the harmonised resumption of Schengen visa issuance in all Member States' Consulates following on the Council of the EU's Recommendation adopted on 18 June to lift restrictions on non-essential travels from Albania to the EU. A common agreement was reached to resume issuing Schengen visas enabling travels as of 15 July 2021.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

On 3 December 2021 COM Implementing Decision *C(2021) 8657 Establishing the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants for short stay visas in Albania and in Nepal* was adopted.

This marked a significant deliverable for the LSC group in Albania in implementing the revised Visa code and concluded a period of intense exchanges among LSC members to draw-up the draft list.

The December LSC meeting was used to coordinate among LSC members on a harmonised date for the implementation of the new list of supporting documents. A consensus was found to have all Member States apply the list as of 13 December 2021.

3.2 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The topic was tabled for discussion at the June LSC meeting, following on a previous non-conclusive initial discussion held in 2020.

The exchanges among Member States confirmed that there was still not enough experience gathered in the various Consulates on this issue due to the very limited number of Schengen visas issued.

The general assessment was that it was therefore premature to initiate a discussion within LSC on a possible adaptation of the general rules for "MEV cascades" as foreseen in the revised Visa Code.

3.3 Exchange of information

LSC meetings have continued to provide a useful platform for Member States to exchange experience on their consular functions in Albania, being it on statistics, trends, or cases of frauds.

LSC meetings have also been useful to compare notes on the sanitary measures put in place by Member States' Embassies to resume the issuance of visas.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The EU Delegation initiated a discussion within the LSC group on the issue of Afghan evacuees hosted in Albania since August 2021. The discussion allowed to exchange information in particular on the number of Afghans who had approached EU Member States' consular services in Tirana in view of their relocation.

An exchange of views was also held on the phenomenon of Albanian citizens filing asylum applications in EU Member States, in view of the increased numbers of these applications after the lifting of travel restrictions for non-essential travel from Albania to the EU as of June 2021.

4. Challenges

The LSC in Albania will revert to the issue of the “MEV cascades” in the course of 2022, with a view to implement the provisions of the revised Visa Code on this point, provided enough experience will be gathered among LSC members on this issue in the coming year.



27 février 2021

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC)
ALGERIE
RAPPORT 2021**

1. Introduction

Dix-huit (18) Etats Membres¹ sont présents en Algérie (AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE). En dehors de la capitale Alger, FR et ES disposent des consulats à Oran, et FR à Annaba. Pour la délivrance des visas, AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, HU et PL représentent, respectivement, SI, LU, SK, LT, EE, LV et SE. Etant donné que NO avait suspendu ses accords de représentation à cause des restrictions liées à la pandémie de COVID-19, DK et IS n'ont pas, de façon ordinaire, délivré de visas en 2021. DK assure son propre traitement des demandes de visas à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2022. Parmi les Etats Membres de l'UE qui ne font pas encore partie de l'espace Schengen, BG, HR et RO sont présents en Algérie.

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

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2021

La pandémie de COVID-19 a continué, pendant l'année 2021, à avoir un impact majeur sur les opérations de visa des Etats Membres. Pendant les premiers mois de l'année, les opérations relatives aux visas Schengen / de court séjour sont restées suspendues, à l'exception des cas portant sur les voyageurs ayant une fonction ou un besoin essentiel, conformément aux communications et aux lignes directrices de la Commission. Entre les mois de juin et septembre, la plupart des Etats Membres a entamé graduellement la reprise, souvent partielle et avec des modalités spécifiques, des opérations relatives aux visas Schengen / de court séjour. Enfin, il est à noter que la plupart des Etats Membres, pendant toute la période de la pandémie, ont continué à traiter les demandes des visas nationaux (notamment études, travail, retour), ce qui a sans doute eu un effet positive sur la mobilité vers l'Europe, malgré les contraintes liés à la pandémie.

Le volume des demandes traitées et des visas délivrés reste bien en dessous de la situation précédente à la pandémie, ce qui peut s'expliquer entre autres par les modalités partielles de la reprise des opérations, par les restrictions de voyages toujours en vigueur dans plusieurs Etats Membres, notamment pour les voyageurs non vaccinés en provenance de l'Algérie, ainsi que par le nombre limité des liaisons (aériennes et maritimes) entre l'Algérie et l'Europe (le nombre de vols opérés entre l'Algérie et les pays européens équivaut à environ 10% des vols effectués avant la pandémie).

¹ EM= pays Schengen

En 2021, neuf (9) réunions LSC ont eu lieu. La participation des Etats Membres est généralement élevée : presque tous les Etats Membres prennent part aux réunions de façon régulière. BG, HR et RO ont assisté souvent en tant qu'observateurs. La Délégation de l'UE préside les réunions et rédige les rapports, qui sont ensuite partagés avec les Etats Membres. Les équipes des consulats en dehors d'Alger reçoivent toutes les informations relatives aux activités du groupe LSC, y compris les rapports des réunions.

La majorité des réunions LSC organisée en 2021 (six sur neuf) a porté sur l'échange d'information et les efforts de coordination concernant la reprise des opérations de visa suite à la suspension causée par la pandémie de COVID-19.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

En 2021, les Etats Membres et la Délégation de l'UE ont continué leur coopération, qu'on peut qualifier d'étroite, régulière et efficace, en conformité avec les dispositions du Code des Visas et les recommandations des manuels des visas I et II. En plus des réunions LSC, qui ont lieu avec cadence mensuelle, la coopération se fait par échanges d'email et à travers une application de messagerie instantanée.

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

Le 26 août 2021, la décision d'exécution de la Commission européenne établissant la (nouvelle) liste des documents justificatifs devant être présentés par les demandeurs de visa de court séjour en Algérie a été adoptée. Une date commune pour l'application concrète de la nouvelle liste par les services consulaires des Etats Membres a été convenue au sein du groupe LSC. Lors de la réunion LSC de septembre 2021, les Etats Membres ont confirmé que la nouvelle liste est appliquée et que les références aux documents justificatifs sur les sites web des consulats et des prestataires ont été mis en conformité avec la nouvelle liste.

3.3 Estimation du besoin d'adapter les règles générales relatives à la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples aux demandeurs en vertu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas (« cascades MEV »)

Le groupe LSC a finalisé en 2020 son évaluation du besoin d'adapter les règles générales relatives à la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples aux demandeurs en vertu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas (« cascades MEV »), en établissant une proposition d'adaptation locale. Lors d'une réunion LSC en 2021, les questions et commentaires reçus de la part du comité des visas ont été discutées et les réponses du groupe LSC ont été transmises.

La décision d'exécution de la Commission européenne portant sur l'adaptation locale en Algérie de la cascade pour les visas à entrées multiples a été adoptée le 5 janvier 2022.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Tout au long de l'année 2021, les Etats Membres, avec le soutien de la Délégation, ont utilisé le cadre LSC pour se coordonner, dans le respect des instructions des autorités centrales respectives, par rapport à la reprise des opérations de visas après la suspension causée par la pandémie de COVID-19.

3.4 Echange d'informations

En ce qui concerne les statistiques trimestrielles, à la fin de chaque trimestre, la DUE demande aux Etats Membres de fournir leurs statistiques qui sont consolidées par les collègues d'un Etat Membre. En 2021, la responsabilité a été assumée par la BE et ensuite par la FR. Le groupe a convenu, lors d'une réunion LSC en 2021, que ce rôle sera assuré pour la durée d'un semestre par l'Etat Membre de la Présidence tournante du Conseil (pour les prochains trois semestres : FR, CZ et SE). Les statistiques consolidées du trimestre précédent sont discutées lors de la réunion LSC au début de chaque trimestre.

En 2021, les services consulaires des Etats Membres ont traité environ 126 000 demandes et délivré près de 71 000 visas Schengen. Ces chiffres confirment que le volume des demandes traitées et des visas délivrés reste bien en dessous de la situation précédente à la pandémie, pour les raisons évoquées dans le paragraphe 2. Le volume reste même en dessous des chiffres de l'année 2020 (136 000 demandes et 87 000 visas), dont les premiers 10 semaines étaient dans une situation de « normalité ». En 2021, la grande majorité (83%) des visas délivrés est constituée de visas à entrées multiples et le taux de refus a été de 31%. Ces chiffres reflètent les spécificités de la situation et les modalités de la reprise des opérations : pendant les trois premiers trimestres de l'année la grande majorité des visas délivrés a concerné des voyageurs « bona fide » dont les visas à entrées multiples avaient expiré pendant la période de la pandémie. Par contre, le dernier trimestre de l'année peut être considéré comme étant plus représentatif des tendances générales.

Les Etats Membres échangent régulièrement des informations sur les cas de fraude. A la demande de certains Etats Membres, une des réunions LSC de l'année 2021 a été consacrée, pour une grande partie, à cette question. A cette occasion, les Etats Membres ont échangé en particulier sur deux cas de filière de fraude documentaire et sur les mesures prises par les différents consulats en matière de lutte contre la fraude.

D'autres sujets sur lesquels portent les échanges des Etats Membres au sein du groupe LSC comprennent, en particulier, la coopération avec les autorités algériennes, les relations avec les prestataires de service et l'utilisation du VISMail et du Visa Information System.

3.5 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Lors de deux réunions LSC en 2021, certains Etats Membres ont évoqué le sujet du retour et de la réadmission des ressortissants algériens en situation irrégulière en Europe. Pour en discuter de façon approfondie, la Délégation a organisé, en décembre 2021, une réunion thématique dédiée à ce sujet. S'agissant d'une question qui touche à la coopération Schengen mais va au-delà de cela, la réunion a vu la participation des conseillers LSC, ainsi que des conseillers politiques et des conseillers de sécurité des Ambassades des Etats Membres. La réunion a permis un échange d'informations sur la situation dans les différents Etats Membres.

4. Défis

Le principal défi de l'année 2021 a été, comme prévu dans le rapport 2020, la reprise coordonnée des opérations de visa et, pour les services consulaires des Etats Membres, la gestion de la demande en considération des arriérés cumulés à cause de deux facteurs : 1) le nombre très élevé des demandeurs en attente déterminé en particulier par l'expiration, en 2020 et 2021, de la quasi-totalité des visas Schengen (90, C1 ou C2) émis en Algérie jusqu'à 2019 ; et 2) une capacité de traitement des dossiers (consulats) et d'accueil (consulats et prestataires) des demandeurs encore limitée à cause de la pandémie. Les services consulaires des Etats Membres et la coopération Schengen seront encore confrontés à ce défi en 2022.

Plusieurs Etats Membres ont continué, en 2021, à exprimer leurs préoccupations relatives à l'étendue et à l'impact du phénomène du « visa shopping » en Algérie. Par ailleurs, il a été souligné que les mesures en matière de délivrance des visas, annoncées par le gouvernement français à la fin de septembre 2021 vis-à-vis l'Algérie, le Maroc et la Tunisie en réaction à la coopération jugée insuffisante sur le retour et la réadmission, sont susceptibles, déjà du fait de l'effet d'annonce, d'accroître ultérieurement le phénomène du « visa shopping ». Ceci continuera probablement à représenter un défi tout au long de l'année 2022. La coopération et l'échange d'information, au sein du groupe LSC et de façon bilatérale entre les Etats Membres concernés, restera un outil essentiel pour faire face à ce défi et pour mitiger, dans la mesure du possible, ses conséquences.

5. Divers

Rien à signaler.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO ARMENIA
Political, Press and Information Section

17 February, 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN YEREVAN, ARMENIA REPORT

1. Introduction

12 MS have resident embassies in Armenia; 8- France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Poland- issue Schengen visas in the location, Austria is represented outside capital Yerevan (Moscow).

For visa purposes, apart from their own countries they generally represent:

France- Portugal, Norway, and Iceland (suspended in 2021)

Germany represents Belgium, Luxemburg and Sweden (suspended in 2021)

Italy represents Finland and Malta (resumed in 2021)

Lithuania represents Spain, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia, Estonia and the Netherlands (suspended in 2021)

Poland represents Slovenia, Slovakia, and Switzerland (suspended in 2021).

Czech Republic and **Greece** issue Schengen visa only to their respective countries.

Lithuania, Greece, Austria and Italy co-operate with external service providers: VFS Global (LT, GR, AT) and TLS Contact (IT).

In the reporting period, the EU Delegation coordinated LSC meetings.

2. LSC meetings held in 2020

Three LSC meetings took place in the reporting period; they focused mainly on the epidemiological situation, harmonization practices, ways to address existing challenges and the impact of COVID-19 crisis on their operations. The EU Delegation chaired the meetings, which were well attended. Meeting reports were prepared by the Delegation. The LSC coordination during the pandemic can be assessed as good.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Despite current circumstances, the MS ensured tasks under the Visa Code.

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

The MS did not mention any particular need to further harmonise the existing list of supporting documents.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The MS generally applied the cascade system; however, due to travel restrictions and the COVID situation the system may not be fully implemented. Also, in view of the fact that issuance of MEVs for Armenian citizens is also regulated by the visa facilitation agreement between the EU and Armenia, adaptation of general rules to practically accommodate both regulations- the Visa Code and the Agreement-would be useful. The MS indicated further harmonization need on the ground with this respect.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The pandemic required more efforts for harmonization of visa processes, in particular for categories for essential travel, requirement of vaccination, PCR tests, self- isolation, and especially visa representation. Therefore, the coordination within the LSC was of special importance in 2021.

3.5 Exchange of information

The MS regularly exchanged information on visa statistics. However, there was a desire to make it more comprehensive so that it reflects i.a. various tendencies, cases of fraud etc. The email remained the main means of communication, as VIS mail is not always user friendly and malfunctions sometimes. A technical upgrade of the system could make it more efficient.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

In July 2021, the Council added Armenia to the EU list of epidemiologically safe countries, and this led to an increase in the number of visa applicants with still limited capacities of the Visa Sections. Re-opening of some Schengen countries for non-essential travel resulted in a small-scale visa shopping. Fake and forged documents, and migration risks remain actual in Armenia. COVID situation and sanitary rules still have impact on the daily work of the visa sections.

5. Other issues

N/A



15 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) AUSTRALIA REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 23 Schengen countries represented in Australia (AT, BE, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, LI, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SK, SI, ES, SE and CH) who regularly participate in the meetings of the LSC Group. These have embassies in Canberra and consular networks of varying extent across the country; some Embassies are not empowered to issue Schengen visas. All meetings in 2021 were held in Canberra and were in part held via a mixture of in-person and WEBEX, in order to ensure full compliance with COVID-19 measures). Meetings in Sydney could not be convened due to COVID-19 measures. Observer Countries represented in Australia attended on a semi-regular basis (BG, HR, CY and RO). LSC group meetings are run back-to-back with the Consular Group, a formula that 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 2021

The LSC Group met three times during 2021, two during PT Presidency and one during the SI Presidency. The attendance of the LSC meetings for the period under consideration was high. The Head of the Political, Press and Information Section of EUDEL chaired the meetings. Draft minutes were prepared by EUDEL, shared for approval with the Group under silent procedure and then submitted to HQ. We confirm that the Schengen countries normally share these minutes with their HQ.

3. State-of-play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EUDEL shared with MS the information pertaining to the revised Visa Code and the Visa Code Handbook, No apparent problem has arisen The item is included as standard on all LSC Group meeting agendas. Due to COVID-19 restrictions in Europe and Australia, all visa operations ceased for the major part of 2021; visa services have resumed in reduced scale during the last quarter.

3.2 Assessment of the list of supporting documents

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). To date, there has been no suggestion that said list should be amended.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The issuing of MEVs was not discussed in any detail during LSC Group meetings (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, hence low security risk).

3.5 Exchange of information

Since 2018, the rotating Consular Presidency has been collecting the visa statistics using the updated template provided by HQ. PT collected the statistics during the first six months of 2021 and SI during the last six months. Similar to 2020, and given the COVID-19 related travel restrictions and the overall travel disruption, the number of Schengen visas issued in AUS have registered a substantial reduction throughout the year.

Most MS provide the data in a timely fashion; however, there are a few who still need to be reminded.

There have been no reported cases of fraud during 2021 and TMI has not been an item up for discussion. As advised previously, there were issues with insurance companies not offering adequate insurance. Since the EUDEL with the assistance of the LSC group drew up a list of insurance companies who offer adequate TMI and shared it with the group (including both onshore and offshore companies), this issue seems to have been resolved.

EUDEL shares information with Schengen countries on a regular basis with most information 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.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EUDEL and the LSC Group 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".

EUDEL advised the LSC Group that the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) had linked their Smart Traveller Website to the EUDEL's website - <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/before-you-go/the-basics/schengen?>

4. Challenges

Other than COVID-19 travel restrictions in place throughout the year, there have been no significant challenges.

5. Other issues

No other issues at present.

*This report has been approved by all MS



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO AZERBAIJAN

Baku, 7 April 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN AZERBAIJAN 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

The reporting period covers the seventh year of the implementation of the EU-Azerbaijan Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA), signed on 29 November 2013 and which entered into force on 1 September 2014, in particular the period from 1 January to 31 December 2021.

There are 21 diplomatic missions (16 embassies and 4 embassy offices) of EU Member States, including the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Azerbaijan (EUDEL), accredited to Azerbaijan². Among non-EU Schengen countries, Switzerland has a diplomatic mission in Baku.

The following 12 LSC Member States are physically present and issuing visas in Baku: Austria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia as well as Switzerland.

The following Schengen countries are represented by other Member States as follows: Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden are represented by **France**; Estonia and Slovenia are represented by **Latvia** and Malta is represented by **Italy**. The **Norwegian Embassy in Ankara** represents Denmark, Finland and Iceland in Baku³. The representation agreements for Denmark, Finland and Iceland which had been temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were resumed by **Norway** as of 1 December 2021.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic affected local LSC meetings to a lesser extent than in 2020. LSC meetings were held in Baku on 3 March, 30 June, 22 September and 9 December 2021. All meetings were well attended. Some non LSC EU Member States participated in meetings as observers upon common agreement in the LSC group. One ad hoc meeting was held with representatives of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs on visa-related issues.

² Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Slovenia have their diplomatic representations accredited outside of Azerbaijan.

³ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the representation agreements were temporarily suspended and resumed on 26 November 2021.

All meetings were held in person in the building where the EU Delegation is located in Baku or at the EU residence. All meetings were convened and chaired by a representative of the EU Delegation. The burden of compiling visa-related statistics locally was shared among LSC members. France took over the compiling of visa-related statistics locally in the first semester of 2021 and was followed by Germany.

Reports of meetings were prepared by EUDEL and shared with LSC members locally. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, coordination of the LSC group has worked smoothly, including via email and a mobile application.

The following main issues were discussed during the LSC meetings: (i) visa-related trends; (ii) implementation of VISA Code; (iii) visa fraud; (iv) visa overstays; (v) VIS/VIS Mail system; (vi) modes of payment of visa-related fees; (vii) travel medical insurances.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code has been applied since May 2010 and is being implemented by the LSC states consular offices located in Azerbaijan.

One LSC Member reported cases of visa overstays with some service passports.

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

No developments.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

With reference to Article 24(2) of the Visa Code on so called "cascade rule", LSC members had an exchange of views and noted that the cascade system was applied but that there have been a few exceptions. All agreed that the "cascade rule" is obligatory.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

LSC members regularly exchanged on various issues and sought to harmonise practices. For instance, the issue of not granting the so-called 15-day "grace period" was raised. The existing rules in place (rule 8.2.1) in the Visa Code Handbook I were recalled.

3.5 Exchange of information

- *Quarterly statistics*

Exchanges on monthly visa-related statistics and trends continued. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 recorded a significantly reduced amount of short-stay visas issued by Schengen countries for Azerbaijani citizens compared to the pre-pandemic period. For instance, 9,445 short-stay visas were issued by Schengen countries in Azerbaijan in 2021 in total, among which 4,980 multiple entry visas (MEVs). For comparison, 10,651 visas in total were issued in 2020, among which 4,952 MEVs, whereas in 2019 (prior to the pandemic) 57,550 visas (among which 24,550 MEVs) were issued by Schengen countries in Azerbaijan. In the second half of 2021, the number of MEVs significantly increased as part of the total number of C uniform visas issued. Some Schengen countries continued to issue MEVs for special categories of persons in particular in the area transport, healthcare and education. In 2021 the share of MEVs compared to a total number of C visas issued reached almost 60% which is a significant increase compared to the previous year. Despite relatively low numbers, throughout 2021 the number of visas issued has followed an increasingly rising trend, in particular in the second half of 2021. Although proof of COVID-19 vaccination is not required to Schengen visa applications, travel restrictions in place in Schengen countries have rendered travel of Azerbaijani citizens more difficult. This has also been due to the fact that the majority of Azerbaijani citizens have been vaccinated with the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine whose acceptance in Schengen countries is not uniform. Also the fact that Azerbaijan was listed by the EU from 1 July until 9 September on the list of third countries from which non-essential travel to the EU had been recommended has, likely due to a short period of time of that listing and subsequent new pandemic waves, not led to levels visa activity known prior to the pandemic although it has overall increased in the second half of 2021. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has progressively lifted its travel restrictions for non-essential travel for all Schengen countries in 2021, provided travellers were vaccinated and provided proof of a valid negative PCR upon entry into Azerbaijan. This was a marked change of policy compared to early 2021 when third nationals were required to obtain a special permission from the Azerbaijani Cabinet of Ministers to travel to the country.

- *Cases of fraud*

Exchanges were held on some visa-fraud attempts whereby a few LSC Member States reported cases of fraudulent visa applications, bank statements and fake work certificates.

- *Travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI) and any problems linked to the implementation of TMI rules*

A few LSC members reported they accepted a cap of EUR 1,500 for travel medical insurances while some others reported that they stopped accepting some local travel medical insurances due to low coverage as opposed to some foreign ones that offered coverage up to EUR 30,000. The rules in the Visa Code Handbook I (rules 5.3-5.3.2) and Visa Code Handbook II (rule 1.3) were recalled.

- *Cooperation with local authorities and companies (banks, employers, transport companies)*

Cooperation with local authorities has been good overall. A meeting of the LSC members with two representatives of the Azerbaijani MFA (the Head of the Consular Department and the Head of the Visa Unit at the MFA) took place in March 2021.

- *Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises)*

The majority of LSC members reported the use of external service providers but there were a few exceptions. One LSC member noted increased fees of external service providers due to the pandemic. Another LSC member reported that due to the pandemic and the ensuing low number of visa applications, some services of the relevant external service provider were temporarily suspended.

- *Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System*

On Visa information system (VIS), LSC members confirmed it worked well. However, regarding the use of VISMail system, some noted it was rather user unfriendly and time consuming. The rules in place in the Visa Code Handbook I (rule 6.8) were recalled.

- *Other issues*

LSC members called for sharing of information on legislative initiatives related to the visa policy in Azerbaijan. Representatives of Azerbaijani MFA noted that, after the pandemic, changes in visa policy to facilitate visa procedures were envisaged. They noted Azerbaijani citizens faced difficulties with various entry/exit procedures across Schengen countries / EU Member States.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

4.1. Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2020 report

- On the basis of input from LSC members, two LSC members effectively shared the burden of compiling visa statistics.
- Updates on national legislation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan were requested.
- Regular exchanges on suspected cases of visa fraud have taken place.

4.2. Describe issues to be addressed within the next reporting period (2022)

- Ensuring the continuity of LSC meetings in person, following the easing of pandemic-related rules in Azerbaijan.
- Monitor visa-related trends and any cases of “visa shopping”.
- Monitor any developments related to the war in Ukraine, following which some Azerbaijani citizens who had resided in Ukraine prior to 24 February have returned to Azerbaijan and among whom some are seeking to relocate to Schengen countries / EU Member States.
- Monitor any issues with Azerbaijani travel medical insurances for travel to Schengen countries / EU Member States.
- Monitor any issues with readmission as well as any developments regarding plans announced by Azerbaijan to conclude bilateral readmission protocols with EU Member States.



25/02/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Dhaka / Bangladesh 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

9 Member States are present and 18 are represented in Dhaka.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

EU Delegation, Head of Administration Chairs the LSC meetings and draws up the reports.

Meetings are scheduled on a bi-monthly basis, with the possibility of additional ad hoc meetings if an urgent need arises. Meetings are generally well attended. Occasionally a MS may be absent due to staffing constraints or a heavy workload. Due to the COVID19 Pandemic the meetings took place in a semi virtual format with some MS attending physically and others via WebEx.

The LSC discussed on the frequency of meetings and concluded to hold them as planned 5-6 times a year only. As there is a regular exchange via WhatsApp /Signal groups and email in between meetings a more frequently LSC meeting schedule would not improve the quality of exchange nor was deemed necessary. Furthermore, many of the participants meet in other formats (Admin, Consular, DHoM, Security) as well.

Nevertheless the group agreed that an ad hoc meeting would be scheduled whenever the local circumstances change.

Resumption of normal visa operations from a logistical point of view is possible within a relatively short time, whenever the Council recommends to lift the travel restrictions.

Some MS (CH, DK, ES, SE) have resumed visa operations taking into account that in some countries no entry restrictions are in force for vaccinated travellers. In some cases, an additional PCR negative test result is necessary as well but as this is a departure requirement from most airlines, it does not create the impression of an additional burden to travellers.

Some have reactivated representation activities (e.g. DK for NO, SE for 7 out of previous 8 countries, except Luxembourg). MS honour visa requests for essential travel, if necessary with ad hoc representations as some representation agreements are still suspended.

All MS report that numbers of visa applications have been extremely low since March 2020 and have only started to raise a bit during the last quarter of 2021.

Due to the extreme low number of applications, no new trends in applicants' behaviour or profiles (e.g. trying to avoid travel restrictions by presenting –fraudulent- documents that try to indicate medical problems or family connections to be eligible for a visa) have been recognised.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and EUD's are well prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code and beside the COVID 19 pandemic that stopped or significantly reduced visa operations no specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code focusing on the revised rules applicable since February 2020 have been reported.

Some MS have reactivated representation activities (e.g. DK for NO, SE for 7 out of previous 8 countries, except Luxembourg). MS honour visa requests for essential travel, if necessary with ad hoc representations as some representation agreements are still suspended.

No challenges to respect of the deadlines set by the Visa Code for the different steps of the lodging and examination procedure have been observed so far.

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

The harmonized list of supporting documents for visa applications in Bangladesh was adopted on 30.8.2017 and implementation started in September 2017. None of the MS has raised any difficulty with the implementation. The topic has been discussed during in 2020, but none of the MS sees any need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

All MS are prepared to apply the new rules once visa operations recommence, but they could not be applied yet because of the COVID19 pandemic.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Although no cases of visa shopping or problems with different visa fees have been observed, MS attempt to harmonize the visa fee in line with the Visa code article 16(7). However, the different national systems do not allow for full implementation of article 16(7).

Currently the BDT price for a Schengen visa is between 7.500 and 8.000 BDT (+/- 5 EUR difference) depending on the MS where the application is logged.

3.5 Exchange of information

MS exchange the following information:

- quarterly statistics are shared by MS via email and afterwards collated by Chair LSC and circulated to all MS and discussed in LSC meetings;
- cases of possible fraud or practical cases or difficulties encountered (during LSC meeting or ad hoc if deemed urgent);

- a common list of insurance companies / policies offering adequate travel medical insurance (TMI) has been discussed, but is difficult to be implemented, therefore individual checks on coverage are preferred for now,
- Only a few companies appear to be regularly used by applicants, often policies with international insurance companies outside Bangladesh are subscribed.
- In general the cooperation with local banks to cross check documents is good, but depends on the ability of the local staff charged with that task
- cooperation with external service providers works well in general
 - o ES uses BLS and
 - o IT, SE and DK use VFS
 - o DE wanted to start with VFS from March 2020, but it has been delayed because of COVID
 - o FR and CH: direct applications at the Embassy
- limited monitoring necessary due to very limited application numbers in 2021
- The chair has informed the LSC that all consulates worldwide should only use VIS Mail and stop communication of applicant data by non-encrypted email as from 2 February 2020.
- Sharing of latest information on the local epidemiological situation on COVID19
- Regular and lively ad hoc information exchange (especially on local developments, press articles, NV from MFA) on non-sensitive issues is taking place via email and in WhatsApp / Signal groups

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The EURLO (European Return Liaison Officer), funded by the AMIF (till 2020) / FRONTEX (from 2021) and hosted by NL is posted in Dhaka since 2017.

The EMLO (European Migration Liaison Officer), funded by DE and hosted by EU (SNE post) is posted in Dhaka since October 2020.

Both are an integral part of the LSC Bangladesh and as such invited to all LSC meetings and contribute with their experience especially about migration topics.

Usually Guest speakers have been invited from time to time, but no such initiatives took place in 2021 due to the COVID 19 restrictions.

4. Challenges

Restart of visa operations in 2022 under post COVID19 circumstances, especially coordinated timing of such a restart to avoid visa shopping

5. Other issues

This annual report was drafted by the LSC Chair and commented by LSC MS. All MS in the LSC Bangladesh have approved the final version.



11 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Belarus
2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

14 EU Schengen Member States are present in Belarus: Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovak Republic and Sweden. From non-EU Schengen MS Switzerland is present as well. Ten Schengen Member States (MS) deliver visas (Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovak Republic).

Latvia has a consulate in Viciebsk, Lithuania has a consulate in Hrodna. Poland's consulates in Hrodna and Brest operate with limited staff. Due to expulsion of LV embassy from Belarus, only the consulate in Vitebsk continues to work. LT also saw a drastic reduction of consular staff and operates with very limited capacity. Eleven MS operate visa application centres (Austria, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Estonia, Slovak Republic).

As representation is concerned, please note the following:

1. Estonia represents Finland and Sweden;
2. France represents Iceland and Norway;
3. Germany represents Belgium, the Netherlands and Slovenia as well as Luxembourg and Latvia on ad hoc basis;
4. Hungary represents Switzerland and Liechtenstein;
5. Italy represents Malta;
6. Latvia in Viciebsk represents Poland, Austria and the Netherlands. Currently Poland is represented for certain categories of visas, such as truck drivers, business visas. Austria and the Netherlands are represented on a case-by-case basis;
7. Lithuania represents Greece only for official delegations and diplomatic passports; representation of Latvia, Portugal and Czechia in Hrodna is frozen;
8. Slovakia represents Portugal.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Due to expulsions of diplomatic and consular staff of EUMS, several EU Member states (MS) have limited resources and capacities for issuing visas. Consulate work in teams due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, the situation is manageable because the number of applications was still low due to COVID-19.

During the reporting period, two LSC meetings were held (1 June and 10 September 2020). The meetings are generally well attended – 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. EUDEL draws up the meetings' reports and disseminates the draft among LSC members for comments before their final adoption. 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).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States reported no problems in implementation. The Visa Code is being implemented in a well-coordinated manner by the LSC states' consular offices located in Belarus, although the smooth implementation was significantly impacted by restrictions linked to COVID-19.

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

The Commission Implementing Decision as regards the list of supporting documents to be submitted by visa applicants for short stay in Belarus (C(2020) 6149 final) started to be implemented on 21 September 2020. No problems were reported by EUMS in 2021, and there is no need at the moment to amend the existing list.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The Group agreed that currently there was no need to adapt general rules locally in Belarus. Article 24 of the Visa Code and Article 5 of the Visa Facilitation Agreement cover most of categories. At the same time, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no real opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the Visa Code and VFA. EUMS agreed to revert to this issue at a later stage.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Entry into force of the EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement helped ensure a harmonised approach, in particular in the area of visa fees.

Member States do not see any need for additional harmonisation exercises at the moment.

3.5 Exchange of information

The LSC and EUDEL regularly shared relevant information in accordance with art 48.3 of the Visa Code. EUMS sent statistics to EUDEL on a quarterly basis. The regular exchange of information within the LSC covered implementation of the Visa Information System, use of VIS Mail, cases of fraud and other relevant issues.

Due to COVID-19, most MS continue to issue C visas only for the purpose of essential travel with travel restrictions remaining in place. Many MS reported on a growing number of issued D visas. The total amount of issued visas is very low as compared to the situation before the pandemic and the flight ban. Linked to COVID-19 restrictions, mostly business visas were issued as short-term visas. Refusal rate is very low, around 1% of the total number of applications.

The political crisis in Belarus has its impact. Latvia, Lithuania and Poland continued to issue the so-called visas for humanitarian reasons for the Belarusian citizens suffering from political repressions. Latvia and Poland issue only D category visas. Also C type visas can be issued for humanitarian reasons by Lithuania, upon a special permission by the Minister of Interior.

4. Challenges

1. The EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA) entered into force on 1 July 2020. However, its implementation continued to be seriously compromised in 2021 by the pandemic as well as the political situation, including COVID-19 related entry restrictions to the EU and exit restrictions via land from Belarus, a flight ban and sanctions imposed by the EU on the national air traffic controller. As a response to the migrant crisis orchestrated by the Belarusian regime, the Council adopted on 11 November 2021 a decision partially suspending the application of the EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement. The suspension targets specific category of beneficiaries, officials of the Belarus regime, in the exercise of their duties. MS did not report on attempts to circumvent this Council decision.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic remains the biggest challenge for 2022. During the next reporting period, some Member States expect surge in visa applications once some restrictions are lifted - for example, if locally applied vaccines Sputnik V and Sinovac are recognised by the European Medicines Agency. The implementation of the revised Visa Code and the Visa Facilitation Agreement has been delayed, and their real impact and possible challenges will be only seen after the situation is stabilised.

The report was approved by the Member States on 18 February 2022.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN (LSC) A COTONOU (BENIN) - RAPPORT 2021

1. Introduction

Quatre Etats membres sont représentés à Cotonou: l'Allemagne, la Belgique, la France et les Pays-Bas. 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 Lettonie, la Hongrie, Malte, l'Autriche, le Portugal et la Suisse.

Même si depuis le 1^{er} février 2018, 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.

Depuis le 24 avril 2019, les demandes de visas réceptionnées par l'Ambassade des Pays-Bas sont traitées par un service central au sein du Ministère des affaires étrangères à La Haye.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2021

La Délégation de l'UE a assuré la Présidence et le Secrétariat du groupe LSC au Bénin pendant 7 ans, avant de passer le flambeau à la France fin 2019. Le groupe se réunissait en moyenne trois fois par an, mais en 2021 comme en 2020, en raison de la crise liée au Covid-19, une seule réunion s'est tenue le 19 mai 2021.

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** (production de faux diplômes et fausses inscriptions dans le cadre de demandes de visa long séjour pour études).

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 appliqué par les 2 EM. Les différents EM publient les documents sur leurs sites web.

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

La réunion LSC de mai 2021 a permis un échange d'informations entre les représentants des EM sur la délivrance des visas Schengen à Cotonou pour l'année 2021, en particulier comme l'année précédente quant à l'impact de la COVID-19 sur le traitement et les statistiques: le nombre des visas délivrés et les taux de refus. Les échanges ont aussi porté sur les nouveaux passeports biométriques béninois.

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).

5. Divers

Rien de particulier à signaler



2 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Bolivia 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Six Member States (MS) are present, i.e. France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Spain and Switzerland. Since 16 August 2021, Sweden has a new Ambassador in La Paz, Mr. Nicolas Weeks. 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 2021

During the reporting period, four regular LSC meetings were held in February, May, July and October. They were held in virtual format due to the Covid-pandemic and well attended. EU Delegation (EUDEL) chaired the meetings and drew up the meeting report.

Coordination with the General Consulate of Spain in Santa Cruz was ensured via the Spanish Embassy in La Paz.

The COVID-19 crisis affected Member States' visa operation, for example drastically reducing the visa requests for Germany as of March 2020. Numbers are now rising again, since German regulations allow entry when fully vaccinated with a Covid-19 vaccine, which is recognised in Germany. Germany never interrupted its service, but reduced office hours.

Spain did not issue tourist visas until summer 2021, but has returned to a normal situation as before the pandemic.

With the arrival of the covid-pandemic in Bolivia, the agreement the Spanish Embassy had with its Swiss and French counterparts on representation in the issuance of Schengen visas for Switzerland and France for Bolivian nationals had been suspended until further notice. All applications for Schengen visas to Switzerland had to be submitted in person to the Andean Regional Consular Center in Lima - Peru. This decision had great repercussions for Bolivian citizens who needed to travel to Switzerland for urgent reasons and – in most cases (there were some exceptions) - had to travel to Peru for the issuance of the visa. On 04.11.2021, the agreement with Spain was renewed and Spain confirms having renewed and now applying all representation agreements.

France suspended the issuance of long-term visas for foreigners without residence in France. France equally informed that short-term visas, demanded more during the pandemic, were rejected due to the closure of European borders.

There is an entry ban in effect for travels to Sweden until 28 February 2022 for entry from an EU/EEA country, and 31 March 2022 from elsewhere. From an EU/EEA country, a valid Covid certificate is sufficient to be exempted and be allowed to enter. Some exemptions apply to the entry ban regarding non-EEA countries. Those covered by an exemption will need to present a valid Covid certificate, if they are not also exempted from the certificate requirement.

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 principle, MS welcomed the clarity of the new Visa Code, adopted on 28 January and applicable since 2 February 2020.

MS did not indicate specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code.

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

The list of supporting documents was adopted on 24 October 2018 and – according to information provided by Member States – is applied for visa application procedures. A need to amend the list was not identified and Switzerland specifically expressed support for the list.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

MS expressed satisfaction and even gratitude for the Art. 24 (2) cascade rules, underlining that this would make visa issuance much easier.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

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

3.5 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings provided the opportunity to exchange information on best practices on how to handle visa applications during the Covid-19 pandemic. Representation agreements between Member States were often suspended during the pandemic.

In addition, LSC meetings served as an information exchange platform on travel restrictions for each Member State, including the acceptance of Bolivian Covid-19 vaccination certificates and the acceptance of specific vaccinations. In Bolivia, the majority of vaccinations administered in 2021 were Sinopharm and Sputnik.

Member States also indicated the risk of fraud attempts based on fake documents and questionable reasoning for travel.

Not all Member States present in Bolivia have introduced the VIS system as of 2 February as foreseen.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

1. Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2020 report

Member States did not report specific additional measures taken in response to challenges listed in the 2020 report (risk of falsified documents and handling of visas in general during the Covid-19 pandemic), except for applying additional vigilance and flexibility.

Spain reported having renewed and now applying all representation agreements, which was considered challenging by another Member State in the previous report.

2. Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2022).

The challenge to detect falsified documents will remain a concern for 2022.

Germany expects travel restrictions to persist at least until end of 2022, resulting in more complicated visa applications. Handling each case will take more time than usual, given that visa rules change regularly and on short notice and are thus sometimes difficult to apply.

Germany would encourage the same Covid-19 entry regulations and thus same visa regulations for all Schengen member states to unify visa application requirements, e.g. that all member states accept the same vaccines etc.

As other Member States, Sweden sees as a future challenge the reactivation of Schengen-visas for Bolivian citizens and others. There will be a great demand for visas and Spain highlights the high amount of visa applications to deal with.

5. Other issues

N/A

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



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND SADC

26/04/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Botswana 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Two Member States (DE and FR) are present with Embassies in Gaborone. France has no consular competence. Most EUMS are side-accredited from South Africa, Namibia, or Mozambique, with Honorary Consuls in Botswana.

The German Embassy has outsourced the application process for Schengen visas in Botswana to a service provider (TLS Group S.A.) with a Visa Application Centre (VAC) based in Gaborone, from 2 March 2020. Only visas for the Schengen countries represented by Germany in Botswana (Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Luxemburg, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland) can be obtained in Gaborone. Thus, Schengen visa procedures for these countries are handled at the VAC as well.

Applications for most other Schengen countries are in Johannesburg/Pretoria, but a few can be much farther (e.g. Namibia for Spain, Mozambique for Italy, Egypt for Slovenia). There are ongoing negotiations between Botswana and several Schengen countries for visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports. The issue comes up regularly in our contacts with the Botswana authorities.

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

In addition to challenges for Botswana citizens, and 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 2021

No formal LSC meetings have been held because only one MS issues Schengen visa. Information is exchanged whenever needed.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

See under 3.3

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

For the locations where work on this has not been completed

N/A since only one MS issues visas.

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

N/A

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Germany applies the Article 24(2) in principle as such. The minimum requirements can be waived in the following cases:

- a justified interest of Germany or another MS, for example senior members of government or officials (President, Minister, Chief of Protocol, etc.),
- the applicant has carried out investments in one of the MS and is considered to be able to cover the costs for multiple travels into the Schengen area, during the remainder of the validity of the visa, for example a South African citizen resident in Botswana who is building a hotel in Malta,
- spouses of EU citizens resident in Botswana, who demonstrably and regularly travel into the Schengen area for visits.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

N/A

3.5 Exchange of information

Exchange of information

There is no formal exchange of information, given that Germany is the only representation in Botswana which issues visa. No cases of fraud have occurred in recent times. Submitted local TMIs are normally in order and are recognised if they fulfil all the requested criteria. Implementation of the TMI rules has been unproblematic. The German Embassy is not cooperating with local authorities or companies. Since March 2020, Schengen visa applications have been collected via an external service provider, the cooperation with whom has so far been satisfying. VISMail and VIS are seldom used, except in cases where it is appropriate.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

1. *The following challenge was listed in the 2018-2019 report:*

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.

The issue has not been solved. Botswana is a vast country the size of France. Thus visa applications from rural areas present a significant challenge, especially if travel abroad for the visa, e.g. to Pretoria/Johannesburg is required.

The aspects of private visa facilitation offices (VFS, Capago, etc.) in Gaborone should be further investigated.

2. *Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2021).*

The challenge described under 4.

5. Other issues

An LSC meeting in Pretoria to include non-resident MS Embassies could be envisaged.

The Delegation reports upon instruction weekly on the Council recommendation on the lifting of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU, sharing information with EEAS HQ on the situation related to the pandemic.

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



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BRAZIL

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BRAZIL 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

24 Schengen Member States are present in Brazil and 24 have a representation in the capital, Brasilia. Latvia, Lithuania, Iceland and Liechtenstein do not have embassies in Brazil, but Lithuania does have a Consulate in São Paulo.

17 Schengen Member States (AT, BE, CZ, DK, EL, ES, FI, F, DE, HU, IE, IT, LIT, NL, PT, SE and CH) have official Consulates in **São Paulo**.

11 Schengen Member States (BE, CH, ES, F, DE, HU, IT, NL, NO PT, RO) have official Consulates in **Rio de Janeiro**.

3 Schengen Member States (DE, F, IT) have official consulates in the city of **Recife**; 2 Schengen Member States (DE, ES) have official consulates in **Porto Alegre**; 2 Member States (IT, PL), have official consulates in the city of **Curitiba**. Italy also has a Consulate General in **Belo Horizonte**, and Spain also has an official consulate in the city of **Salvador**.

HU is represented for Schengen visas by CH, and LUX is represented by BE. Schengen visa applications for NO are centralised at the Norwegian Consulate General in New York, USA.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to have a significant impact on the number of visas issued; the demand for visas was very low. Member States' consulates at times had to work with reduced staff, or even to close their offices, in order to respect the necessary quarantine measures. Combined with travel restrictions, this also led to lower number of Schengen visas issued. Consulates nevertheless made an effort to cater to visa requests for close family members, students, diplomats, and emergency cases. Towards the end of 2021, visa operations started normalising.

In the course of 2021, nine (9) online LSC meetings organised by the EU Delegation and well attended. All Schengen Member States and those that are currently in the process of joining the Schengen area (BG, CR, RO), were invited. Meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation and at times co-chaired by the EU Council Presidency. Thanks to LSC meetings taking place online, colleagues in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and other cities can take part, thereby facilitating information sharing and coordination. In addition, coordination is facilitated through relevant What'sApp groups. Some Member States would welcome more coordination meetings at local level. Reports of the LSC meetings were drawn up by the EU Delegation.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Thanks to the EU-Brazil Schengen visa waiver agreement, Schengen visa-related problems do not constitute a major issue in the local consular work. The Visa Information System (VIS) is implemented in Brazil. The requirement for collecting biometric details meant that in some cases visa applicants needed to travel farther, in order to satisfy this requirement.

Member States apply different exchange rates and update them with different regularity, mostly according to instructions from their capitals, which makes it difficult to have one uniform visa fee in the local currency. However, the differences in fees are not significant and they did not lead to ‘visa shopping’.

In the framework of the pandemic, Schengen Member States at times applied different entry rules for travellers coming from Brazil (e.g. acceptance of the Coronavac vaccination by some, but not all Member States). This opened the possibility for travellers to enter the Schengen areas through the more flexible countries, in order to access the stricter ones.

A number of Schengen countries were singled out in the press and by the Brazilian government around the summer of 2021, when the issuance of visas to students had experienced some delays due to the travel bans. The situation was eventually resolved well in time for the start of the academic year.

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

For the locations where work on this has not been completed

The European Commission adopted the decision on harmonised list of supporting documents for Brazil in September 2016. Member States are currently monitoring the harmonisation of practices. So far, there is no need stated by Member States to amend the existing list.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code (‘MEV cascades’)

Due to the pandemic, the demand for multi-entry visas continued to be low. Some Member States encourage the delivery of multiple-entry visas under Article 24(2) of the visa Code (MEV cascades). There is for the time being no perceived need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Most visas are issued in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, followed by Brasilia. As mentioned above, thanks to the EU-Brazil Schengen visa waiver agreement, Schengen visa-related problems do not constitute a major issue in the local consular work. So far, no harmonisation of practices has taken place.

3.5 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC group worked well. EU DEL updated Member States on Schengen acquis when new developments took place at EU HQ. The online nature of LSC meetings facilitated the participation of non-Brasilia based colleagues. Member States used VIS Mail.

Almost all Member States maintained regular working contacts with each other. The EUDEL was included in the exchange of consular information between the Member States, both on Schengen and consular issues. The EU Delegation continued to share information with consular offices outside the capital, including via dedicated WhatsApp groups.

One Member State Consulate based in the city of São Paulo detected several cases of visa forgery and fraud, as well as over-compliance. The cases were identified thanks to local exchanges of information with airlines and with the US Consulate, via a dedicated What'sApp group.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Not applicable

4. Challenges

The continental size of Brazil, the distribution of consulates amongst several cities, and the limited human resources at the EU Delegation dedicated to Consular and Schengen issues, made coordination of Schengen matters at times challenging.

As the pandemic will hopefully slowly subside in 2022, Schengen visa applications will pick up again and it will be useful monitor statistics and possible trends more closely.

5. Other issues

Not applicable

Brasilia, 25 February 2022

Author: Valerie Bandeira de Lima Sax, with input from EUMS in Brasilia

The report has been approved by all EU MS in Brazil through silence procedure.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION AUPRES DE LA REPUBLIQUE DU BURUNDI

Janvier /Décembre 2021

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS
ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AU BURUNDI
RAPPORT 2021**

1. Introduction

17 Etats Membres sont présents et 4 sont représentés au Burundi.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2021

Le 16 novembre 2021, la délégation a organisé une réunion des Consuls et Consuls honoraires des Etats membres au Burundi (Local Consular Cooperation Meetings (LCC)).

La réunion faisait notamment l'état des lieux sur le nombre de ressortissants européens sur le territoire burundais et les problèmes rencontrés par les Etats membres dans la représentation des citoyens européens. Suite à la crise de la COVID-19 et l'interruption du traitement des visas par la Belgique au nom des autres Etats membres, la coopération consulaire pour les visas Schengen a pleinement repris en 2021. Etant donné la particularité du Burundi que la Belgique est entièrement en charge des visas Schengen, la coordination en matière de Schengen est limitée.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

La mise en œuvre du Code des Visas est sans objet dans la mesure où il y'a absence d'EM ayant compétence en matière de visa Schengen à l'exception de la Belgique.

La Belgique a souscrit à des accords de représentation pour délivrance de visas Schengen de court séjour (90 jours maximum) au Burundi avec 17 pays européens dont seulement la France, les Pays Bas et l'Allemagne sont représentés au Burundi sans que ces derniers aient des compétences au titre de Schengen.

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

En l'absence d'un EM ayant compétence en matière de visa Schengen, on ne peut pas estimer le besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

3.3 Estimation du besoin d'adapter les règles générales relatives à la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples aux demandeurs en vertu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas (« cascades MEV »)

La réglementation conformément à l'Article 24 (2) du Code des Visa est respectée pour ce qui est la délivrance de visas à entrées multiples d'une durée de 2 voire 3 ans. Toutefois, vu le risque important d'immigration illégale- demande d'asile dans les pays européens, la délivrance de visas à entrées multiples au-delà des 3 ans est limitée et très rarement appliquée. Pour les raisons ci-dessus énoncées (points 3.1 et 3.2), ceci n'a pas fait l'objet d'une concertation dans le cadre LSC.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Aucune initiative n'est à signaler en raison de la situation ci-haut cité.

3.5 Echange d'informations

La Belgique ayant le monopole local sur la délivrance de visas Schengen et donc vu l'absence des représentations d'EM ayant compétence au titre de la délivrance de visa Schengen, l'échange d'information LSC ne peut avoir lieu au Burundi.

Toutefois, tout européen ayant besoin d'assistance peut s'adresser aux différents consulats et ambassades EM représentés au Burundi.

En matière de rapatriement, la Belgique s'occupe des pays de l'Europe du Nord, leurs agents de sécurité font une reconnaissance de la composition familiale en cas d'évacuation.

La France quant à elle s'occupe des pays du Sud plus le Japon, l'Australie et le Canada.

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Un exercice de « *Joint EU Crisis Preparedness Framework* » va être organisé au cours du premier trimestre de l'année 2022. Cette session sera aussi l'occasion de renouveler l'analyse des risques au Burundi.

4. Défis

La situation sécuritaire dans le pays reste tendue et le risque d'attaque terroriste a augmenté dernièrement. Par conséquent, le nombre de demande de visas pourrait également augmenter. La Belgique doit déjà faire face à une charge de demandes très importante ce qui pourrait davantage compliquer une délivrance de visas de manière courte et efficace. Par ailleurs, la protection des citoyens européens devient également un enjeu prioritaire pour la coopération consulaire.

Une prochaine réunion LCC fera donc le point sur la protection consulaire des citoyens et notamment l'analyse des risques.

5. Divers

Aucun



UNION EUROPÉENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN ET POUR LA
REPUBLIQUE DE GUINEE EQUATORIALE

Mars 2022

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) – CAMEROUN RAPPORT 2021

1. Introduction

Six Etats Schengen sont représentés au Cameroun (Allemagne, Belgique, Espagne, France, Italie, Suisse). Tous ces Etats ont une section visas au sein de leur Ambassade ou Consulat à Yaoundé et la France dispose en outre d'une section visas au sein de son Consulat général à Douala. Certains pays Schengen ont des accords pour en représenter d'autres (la Belgique avec l'Autriche, le Luxembourg et les Pays-Bas; la France avec la Grèce, la Lettonie, la Lituanie, Malte, la République tchèque et le Danemark; l'Espagne avec le Portugal et la Slovénie; l'Allemagne avec l'Estonie).

Seules la Belgique et l'Italie ont recours à un prestataire de services externe, en l'occurrence la société VFS pour l'Italie (transition de VFS à TLS Contact pour la Belgique depuis le 15 septembre 2021), pour le traitement de certaines demandes de visa de court séjour sur passeport ordinaire⁴. Cependant, à cause de la pandémie le service externe a été suspendu et depuis le mois de mars le traitement de tous les visas se fait à l'Ambassade (sauf Italie). Au total, sur 8151 demandes, 6799 visas Schengen ont été délivrés au Cameroun en 2021 (5083 par la France, 316 délivrés par l'Italie, 215 par l'Allemagne, 676 par la Belgique, 146 par la Suisse et 363 par l'Espagne).

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2021

Brève description de l'impact de la crise du COVID-19 sur les opérations de visa des Etats Membres et sur la coordination LSC.

La crise COVID-19 a conduit à la fermeture des frontières terrestres et aériennes du Cameroun en mars 2020 et donc à l'arrêt de la délivrance des visas vers l'espace Schengen pendant près de trois mois. Cette délivrance de visas a repris progressivement après l'été 2020 avec de nombreuses restrictions. La délivrance a repris de façon partielle pour la France et ce, jusqu'au 9 juin 2021. Pour l'Italie, les visas Schengen pour tourisme ont été suspendus pour toute l'année 2021 (réouverture le 1er mars 2022), à l'exception des visas pour les membres de la famille des citoyens de l'Union, tels que définis aux articles 2 et 3 de la Directive 2004/38/CE du Parlement européen et du Conseil.

⁴ Pour l'Italie l'outsourcing concerne les visas de court séjour sur passeport ordinaire pour motif de tourisme et d'affaires et visas de long séjour pour études. Pour la Belgique tous les visas de court séjour et long séjour sur passeport ordinaire.

Concernant la réglementation nationale en matière d'entrée et de séjour en raison de la pandémie COVID-19 et leurs applications, il est à noter un assouplissement progressif des règles européennes contrairement au Cameroun qui continue d'appliquer des procédures parfois lourde et peu compréhensible (exemple de la nécessité de faire un test PCR pour partir en Europe alors que les compagnies aériennes ne le demandent plus).

Deux réunions consulaires ont été organisées à la Délégation de l'UE au Cameroun en 2021 (restrictions sanitaires COVID) au niveau des chefs de section consulaire/visa.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas – Utilisation de Visa Information System (VIS)

Le déploiement VIS au Cameroun est effectif depuis le 14 mars 2013. Il est de plus en plus utilisé.

Les pratiques relatives à l'application du Code des Visas sont parfois différentes quant aux procédures de refus des visas. Certains pays ont l'obligation de motiver tous leurs refus d'accorder un visa à l'aide d'un formulaire spécifique qui est joint au formulaire Schengen habituel.

La principale difficulté observée dans l'application du code réside dans la lutte contre les fraudes de documents justificatifs. Le Cameroun est particulièrement exposé à cette problématique.

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

La liste commune n'est pas toujours utilisée par les représentations Schengen sur place. Les Etats Schengen considèrent d'une façon générale que l'harmonisation des pratiques est une initiative profitable afin d'éviter le « visa shopping ». Néanmoins, pour certains, il serait utile de rendre plus flexible la liste des documents justificatifs qui date de 2014.

3.3 Adaptation des règles générales relatives à la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples aux demandeurs en vertu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas (« cascades MEV »)

Les Etats appliquent les règles du nouveau Code des Visas (CCV) avec les positions suivantes :

Depuis le 1^{er} février 2020, la France applique les règles du nouveau CCV, hormis pour les demandes de visa sur passeports diplomatiques et de service, qui sont examinées au cas par cas. Elle considère qu'il pourrait être opportun de durcir ces conditions d'application, au regard des nombreux abus (visa shopping, faux documents...).

L'Italie applique aussi les règles du nouveau CCV, en particulier pour les visas « affaires ». Cependant, elle considère qu'il faudrait plus de flexibilité dans l'application en fonction des cas spécifiques qui parfois se présentent.

L'Allemagne applique la nouvelle règle CCV aux voyages d'affaires. Dans tous les autres cas, un examen au cas par cas doit être effectué, car les réglementations nationales en matière de regroupement familial sont souvent mises à mal.

La Belgique applique aussi la nouvelle règle CCV mais particulièrement pour les voyages d'affaires. Pour tout autre catégorie de demande de visa, il s'agit d'un examen individuel. Plus de vigilance aussi pour les passeports diplomatiques et de service car de plus en plus de visa shopping.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Les Etats encouragent à l'harmonisation des procédures et à la mise en place de nouvelles initiatives, en particulier pour lutter contre la fraude documentaire qui a connu une forte expansion au cours de ces dernières années.

Il convient aussi de constater que les services officiels au Cameroun ne répondent pas toujours aux demandes de clarification ou prennent beaucoup de temps. Aussi, certains Etats membres (Allemagne) ont introduit une procédure complète de vérification des documents au niveau du ministère des affaires étrangères de leur Etat (Berlin).

Aussi, et sans remettre en question les procédures de contrôle de chaque Etat, il est proposé de renforcer les capacités de divers organismes publics (BUNEC, Impôts, ...) afin d'obtenir de nouveaux moyens de lutte contre la fraude documentaire. A ce titre, il convient de souligner que l'UE et la GIZ ont engagé un programme sur l'Etat civil auprès du BUNEC qui devrait servir de levier pour essayer d'améliorer la situation. Une évaluation de ces programmes est nécessaire. Actuellement, le BUNEC fait face à des dysfonctionnements qui ne pourront être résolus à court terme.

3.5 Echange d'informations

L'échange d'information LSC se déroule principalement pendant les rencontres semestrielles des chefs de section consulaires/visas à la Délégation ou sur des cas particuliers directement entre Etats. Elles permettent des échanges approfondis concernant les préoccupations dans le cadre de la délivrance des visas, ainsi que de comparer leurs données respectives. Dans des circonstances normales, une consultation semestrielle est suffisante. Cependant, et compte tenu de la situation sanitaire actuelle et des enjeux autour de la fraude documentaire, il existe un besoin aigu d'échanges supplémentaires, de sorte que la fréquence devrait être augmentée à trois ou quatre sessions par an.

- *statistiques annuelles* : les échanges statistiques se font plus régulièrement. Voir tableau annuel en pièce jointe.
- *cas de fraude* : les échanges sont très élevés sur ce sujet en particulier sur les cas de fraude documentaire (omniprésente) et les profils présentant un risque de détournement de l'objet du visa.
- *assurance médicale de voyage* : de nombreuses compagnies locales et étrangères (AXA, ...) offrent des conditions de prise en charge adéquates et conformes aux conditions posées par le CCV.
- *quels sont les problèmes liés à la mise en œuvre des règles relatives à l'assurance médicale de voyage* : de nombreuses attestations sont falsifiées. De nombreux demandeurs ne respectent pas la durée du séjour annoncée et l'assurance ne couvre donc pas leur séjour en cas d'hospitalisation. Les détenteurs de passeport officiel sont dispensés de présenter une assurance maladie, ce qui pose problème lors des hospitalisations imprévues, qui sont une réalité fréquente. Par ailleurs, dans le cas des visas de longue durée (1-4 ans), les voyageurs ne prennent pas d'assurance maladie avec eux pour les séjours ultérieurs.

- *coopération avec les autorités locales et les compagnies locales (par exemple : banques, employeurs, compagnies de transport) : Satisfaisante pour les organismes privés (banques, compagnies aériennes, ...). Les organismes sollicités répondent habituellement rapidement et efficacement à nos demandes d'authentification de documents ou de personnes. Elle est également plus délicate avec les organismes publics (ministères, BUNEC, mairies, ...) qui tardent à répondre. Les vérifications d'acte d'état civil peuvent ainsi nécessiter plusieurs mois voire rester sans réponse, faute d'outils de communication adéquats ou d'implication dans les fraudes : adresses électroniques fiables, numéros de téléphone etc.*
- *coopération avec les prestataires de service et contrôle : Pour la Belgique, partage d'informations (carnets d'adresses), descentes sur le terrain pour le compte de certains Etats membres et analyse de documents envoyés par certains Etats Membres.*
- *utilisation du VISMail et du Visa Information System : l'usage de VISMAIL par l'ensemble des partenaires tend à s'améliorer. Les échanges s'effectuent parfois par mail car il n'est pas possible d'envoyer des dossiers entiers avec tous les documents relatifs aux requêtes de visa.*

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Pour l'année 2022, les différentes sections visas des Etats Membres continueront leurs échanges entre sections, afin d'échanger les meilleures pratiques, commencé en 2021.

4. Défis

La **fraude à l'état civil** constitue toujours une source de complications et de contentieux. Les vérifications s'avèrent souvent longues et malaisées notamment auprès des centres d'état civil de régions et la plupart des participants font part de leur regret de ne pas bénéficier de moyens suffisants pour mener à bien ces vérifications.

La lutte contre la fraude sera un point important à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2022). La France a entrepris certaines démarches qui associera les pays volontaires.

Des contacts ont déjà été pris au BUNEC et dans les mairies d'arrondissement de Yaoundé afin de simplifier la procédure des levées d'acte et réduire les délais de réponse. Néanmoins, l'efficacité du BUNEC est loin d'être effective. Sous l'autorité du ministre de la décentralisation, le BUNEC se heurte à des défis d'interopérabilité ou de partage d'information avec les autres ministères (MINFI, MINEPAT, MINJUST, DGSN, ...).

Concernant les centres d'état civil situés à l'extérieur de Yaoundé, principalement ceux dont les délais de retour sont particulièrement longs et qui nécessitent des relances trimestrielles, la section consulaire de l'ambassade de France a demandé au BUNEC une liste des officiers d'état civil avec leurs coordonnées téléphoniques et adresses électroniques. L'objectif serait de créer un groupe de travail avec la direction de la Normalisation du BUNEC (soutenu par l'UE) et de mettre en place des sessions régulières d'information.

Une démarche a également été effectuée auprès de la Direction générale des Impôts en décembre 2020, afin d'obtenir un code d'accès permettant de vérifier l'authenticité des déclarations fiscales présentées. Or ces codes d'accès ne fonctionnent pas sur le site de la DGI.

5. Divers

Ce rapport a été préparé par la Délégation de l'UE et approuvé par l'ensemble des représentants des Etats Schengen présents au Cameroun.



UNION EUROPÉENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DE COTE D'IVOIRE

25 mars 2022

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN CÔTE D'IVOIRE RAPPORT 2021

1. Introduction

Six Etats membres de l'espace Schengen (BE, CH, DE, ES, FR, IT) délivrent des visas et au moins 14 (AT, EE, EL, FI, HU, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SK) sont représentés en Côte d'Ivoire.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2021

L'année 2021 a été marquée par un fort redémarrage de la délivrance de visas. Bien que le principal consulat (FR) ait limité initialement la délivrance au renouvellement des visas de circulation, ce « stock » a, à lui seul, représenté un flux important. Le niveau atteint au dernier trimestre 2021 dans les différents consulats atteint environ 80% de la même période de 2019.

Deux réunions de la LSC ont eu lieu en 2021, en mai et en octobre, sous la présidence du chef de section politique de la DUE, qui produit les projets de compte-rendu. L'ensemble des Etats membres étaient représentés à ces deux réunions, à l'exception de l'Italie.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

- Les consulats ont constaté que le délai allongé à six mois avant départ n'a eu qu'une faible influence sur le délai de dépôt des demandes – toujours à la dernière minute !

- Certains consulats rencontrent des difficultés avec la délivrance des visas Schengen pour les étrangers résidant en Côte d'Ivoire et qui ne sont pas nationaux de la CEDEAO. En effet, l'instruction Schengen dit que le visa de résidence/titre de séjour doit être valable 3 mois après l'expiration du visa Schengen demandé. Toutefois, certains demandeurs de visa, en attente de leur carte de séjour, reçoivent un récépissé valable 3 mois et qu'ils doivent renouveler chaque 3 mois. Or, en Côte d'Ivoire, l'obtention de la carte de séjour prend un temps indéfini pouvant dépasser les deux ans. En outre, des accords semblent exister entre pays africains dispensant de carte des séjours leurs nationaux respectifs.

- La délivrance de passeports diplomatiques par les autorités ivoiriennes reste très/trop généreuse – y compris aux enfants majeurs de détenteurs de passeport diplomatique et à l'ensemble de la descendance des anciens présidents.

La délivrance de visas sur passeport officiel, notamment pour des voyages personnels, pose parfois des difficultés, en particulier pour des personnes possédant en parallèle un visa sur passeport ordinaire (overstay).

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

Même si elle n'est pas formalisée, les EM considèrent que l'harmonisation est déjà réalisée en pratique. On ne constate pas de « visa shopping » sur la base des documents demandés.

3.3 Adaptation des règles générales relatives à la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples aux demandeurs en vertu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas (« cascades MEV »)

Pas de difficulté particulière signalée.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Des échanges réguliers ont lieu concernant les modes de vérification des pièces justificatives. Les consulats ont chacun leurs propres méthodes. Cela ne pose pas de problème significatif. De très légers écarts de tarif entre consulats Schengen existent, mais ils ne paraissent pas problématiques.

3.5 Echange d'informations

L'échange d'informations dans le cadre des réunions LSC inclut en temps normal:

- partage des statistiques
- cas de fraude
- coopération avec les autorités locales et les compagnies locales
- utilisation du VISMail et du Visa Information System
- offre de formation concernant la fraude documentaire

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

N/A

4. Défis

Le principal défi pour 2022 sera d'encaisser la pleine relance de l'activité visas dans un contexte où les moyens humains dans certains consulats ont été réduits en raison du creux généré par la pandémie. D'autant plus que le gouvernement ivoirien vient de lever l'exigence de test PCR au départ pour les voyageurs vaccinés à destination des pays ne l'exigeant pas.

Par ailleurs, l'identification des faux documents reste un défi d'envergure, nécessitant une mise à jour et un partage constant des informations.

5. Divers

Les Consuls suggèrent que le formulaire de demande de visa vers l'espace Schengen soit unifié. La seule différence est actuellement la partie concernant les organismes nationaux en charge du traitement des données personnelles. Il suffirait de les lister tous sur une même page pour régler le problème et offrir une image plus unie.



UNIÓN EUROPEA

**DELEGACIÓN DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA EN LA REPÚBLICA
DOMINICANA**

18th February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (DR) 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are seven EUMS/SAC diplomatic missions present in the DR: Germany (DE), Spain (ES), France (FR), Italy (IT), the Netherlands (NL), Switzerland (CH), and Austria (AT, only a Consulate). EUMS/SAC not present in the DR may join all Schengen Cooperation Meetings virtually.

In terms of visas:

- NL covers Luxembourg (LU), Belgium (BE), Finland (FI), Norway (NO), Hungary (HU), and Latvia (LVA).
- FR covers Denmark (DK).
- DE covers Estonia (EE) and Slovakia (SK).
- ES covers Portugal (PT), Greece (GR), Czech Republic (CZ), Lithuania (LT), Sweden (SE), and Malta (MT).
- CH covers Austria (AT), Slovenia (SL), and the Principality of Liechtenstein (FL).

Several EUMS continue outsourcing visa applications, including biometric recording. In an effort to centralise visa processing regionally, some EUMS reorganised internally and now conduct the processing of visas at their larger missions - for example the US - while the physical aspects of this process (sticker print, shipping, etc.) remains at either the local missions, or outsourced companies in Santo Domingo.

In 2021, the number of visa applications and issued visas increased. Relaxed travel restrictions and global COVID-19 vaccination efforts were two deciding factors. Italy is taking the necessary preparations to resume the emission of Schengen visas in 2022 in the Dominican Republic, and not in Panama as it is currently done.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on EUMS/SAC visa operations has been profound. However, numbers have steadily increased: by the end of 2021, EUMS/SAC issued visas to passengers vaccinated with one of the EMA-approved vaccines. To date, only AT, CH, ES, FL, GR, NL and Sweden accept the Sinovac vaccine, which most citizens of the DR received.

Meeting coordination improved last year as well. In 2021, the EUDEL organised 5 LCC/LSC meetings on:

- February 4th
- April 29th
- June 10th
- September 8th
- November 4th

Meetings had favourable attendance. Like last year, EUMS not represented in the DR and non-EUMS with representation in the country participated either virtually or in-person. After EUMS began lifting travel restrictions, LCS discussions focused on forged visas and visa shopping cases, visa processing time and other internal procedures. Last year, the EU Delegation also chaired the abovementioned meetings and reported their outcomes.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EUMS did not report any issues regarding the application of the EU Visa Code, including its last changes [Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of 20 June 2019].

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

EUMS did not report any problems regarding the harmonization of documents.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

No problems reported on application of Article 24 in the reporting period.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Based on information received from EUMS/SAC, all practices remain harmonized to the highest possible extent following the Visa Code provisions.

3.5 Exchange of information

During the peak of the pandemic, EUMS pointed out to flaws in the Schengen system entry checks with respect to EUMS COVID-19's mitigating measures. When Schengen visa holders travelled to a country with tighter travel restrictions, EUMS transiting countries were not properly checking travellers for these COVID measures. The fact that not all EUMS had recognized the same vaccines was part of the problem – ES and CH recognized Sinovac vaccine, largely administered in DR, while the other countries only authorised EMA-approved vaccines.

EUMS also reported cases of visa shopping, and many cases of forged documentation. The most important case was the detection of an organization of human trafficking through false employment letters of a maritime company in Portugal. Unfortunately, this is a well-known practice in the DR.

The civil registry is aware of the problems with forged documentation. The Civil Registry has recently introduced changes to improve the trustworthiness of their documentation. This has been possible thanks to the inclusion of QR-codes for all certificates issued by the Registry.

In the case of passports, DR has also increased their security items, such as watermarks, the type of paper used for passports and other security-related elements included in their passports. There is still no date for the issuing of biometric passports.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No initiative taken.

4. Challenges

For the next annual report, relevant subjects to be addressed are:

- Visa expedition returning to pre-pandemic levels;
- Adherence of the DR to the EUDCCG;
- Continuous demand from local authorities to enter the visa waiver list of countries in the next revision by the Commission.

5. Other issues

No issues of a specific importance raised by the EUMS/SAC in the reporting period.



UNIÓN EUROPEA

DELEGACIÓN DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA EN ECUADOR

Quito, /02/2022

COOPERACIÓN LOCAL SCHENGEN (CLS) EN ECUADOR INFORME 2021

1. Introducción

Seis Estados miembros del tratado Schengen están presentes (Alemania, España, Francia, Hungría, Italia y Suiza) y catorce son representados en Ecuador por alguno de los países antes citados: Austria (representado por Alemania), Bélgica (representado por Francia), Eslovenia y Polonia (representados por Suiza), Estonia (representado por Italia), Eslovaquia (representado por Hungría), Finlandia, Grecia, Lituania, Luxemburgo, Malta, Países Bajos, Portugal, la República Checa (representados por España). Hay Consulados Generales de España en Quito y en Guayaquil. El Consulado General de España en Quito recibe solicitudes de visado para España, Países Bajos, Finlandia y Lituania, únicamente de residentes en las provincias de su demarcación consular, y representa a Grecia, Luxemburgo, Malta, Portugal y República Checa⁵ para los residentes en todo el Ecuador. El Consulado General de España en Guayaquil recibe solicitudes de visado para España, Países Bajos, Finlandia y Lituania, únicamente de residentes en las provincias de su demarcación consular. En el periodo de restricciones temporales para los viajes a Europa debido a COVID-19, la mayoría de los acuerdos de representación quedaron temporalmente suspendidos por iniciativa del país representado o de la capital; sin embargo, ya se reactivaron.

2. Reuniones de la CLS celebradas en 2021

Durante el 2021, en Quito se han llevado a cabo 7 reuniones CLS (20/01, 23/03, 07/04, 20/04, 01/06, 09/09, 08/12), 6 virtuales e un mixto virtual / presencial, con la asistencia de mayoría las Embajadas/Consulados presentes en el país y los representantes de la DUE. La Delegación de la UE organizó y presidió esas reuniones y se encargó de la redacción de los informes.

3. Situación actual

3.1 Aplicación del Código de visados

El intercambio de información y la coordinación entre los Cónsules en relación con el Código de Visados y su aplicación son satisfactorios.

⁵ Desde febrero de 2022, España y la República Checa han suspendido el acuerdo de tramitación de solicitudes de visados Schengen, con carácter inmediato. República Checa en adelante estará representada por Hungría.

3.2 Evaluación de la necesidad de armonizar la lista de documentos justificantes

El trabajo de armonización de la lista de documentos justificantes fue terminado en Ecuador con la adopción de la Decisión de ejecución de la Comisión de 24.10.2018 por la que se establece la lista de documentos justificativos que deberán presentar en Bolivia, Corea del Sur, Ecuador y Pakistán los solicitantes de visado para estancia de corta duración. Los Estados Miembros confirman que la decisión se aplica debidamente. La lista existente ha sido actualizada recientemente y los Estados Miembros no sugieren modificarla en corto plazo.

3.3 Adaptación de las normas generales sobre la expedición de visados de entrada múltiple para los solicitantes en virtud del Artículo 24(2) del Código de visados (“cascadas”)

En el curso de año, el grupo CLS elaboró una propuesta de adaptación a las condiciones locales de las normas sobre las “cascadas”. La propuesta fue enviada a Bruselas en septiembre 2021 y la primera discusión de Comité de Visados sobre la propuesta tuvo lugar el 6 de octubre de 2021. El Comité de Visados remitió comentarios e preguntas a grupo CLS, el grupo CLS las examinó e envió respuestas en principios de 2022.

Hasta la adopción de casadas adaptadas a las condiciones locales, los Consulados y las Embajadas aplican las normas generales sobre la expedición de visados de entrada múltiple para los solicitantes en virtud del Artículo 24(2) del Código de visados.

3.4 Armonización de las prácticas

El grupo CLS comparó las prácticas de los consulados en aplicación de las normas Schengen en el periodo de las restricciones temporales de viajes no-esenciales a Europa que siguieron en fuerza para Ecuador en todo el periodo de informe para lograr la armonización de prácticas en medida de lo posible, en vista de las instrucciones diferenciadas que cada consulado recibe de su sede en virtud de reglas nacionales.

Se discutió el tema de medidas de bioseguridad y aforo aplicadas por todos los consulados y embajadas, con estándares mínimos.

3.5 Intercambio de información

En las reuniones CLS los Cónsules de EM han intercambiado información sobre:

- recopilación de las estadísticas trimestrales;
- la emisión de documentos que justifiquen la necesidad esencial de viajar a Europa (con visado y sin visado) exhortados por las compañías aéreas que pueden ser emitidos por los Consulados y Embajadas; las distintas prácticas de compañías aéreas particulares.
- la aplicación de directrices para servicio mínimo de visados en el periodo de restricciones de viajes no-esenciales a Europa;
- la aplicación de directrices sobre extensión de posibilidad de viajes no esenciales para personas vacunadas, aplicación de reglas en cada país;
- la presión migratoria por los viajeros que no tienen justificación debida para viajar a Europa en el periodo de restricciones temporarias y asociado fraude.

3.6 Cualquier otra iniciativa tomada en la CLS

Grupo LSC se encontró con las líneas aéreas europeas (Iberia, KLM) para aclarar las reglas vigentes para viajes a los estados europeos, las políticas aplicadas por las líneas aéreas.

4. Dificultades

En 2022 seguía presente un significativo impacto de la crisis del COVID-19 en las operaciones de visado. Los consulados y las embajadas necesitaban seguir implementando los requerimientos de bioseguridad y aforo, y trabajar con presencia limitada de personal o por teletrabajo en turnos; hubo casos graves de COVID entre el personal de los consulados. Emisión de visados Schengen se reestableció gradualmente, con algunos estados permitiendo viajes solo por razones esenciales e algunos otros también para turismo.

5. Varios

El tema de la exención de visados Schengen para los ciudadanos ecuatorianos sigue siendo de alta prioridad para Ecuador en las relaciones con la UE; se ha abordado en todos los intercambios de alto nivel y de dialogo político con la UE, y también con los EM.

Todas las Embajadas/Consulados participantes en la Cooperación Local Schengen han aprobado el presente informe.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

07/03/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Egypt 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

In Egypt 26 Member States are present and 26 are represented in Cairo. Additionally, 8 Member States have consulates in Alexandria; 2 Member States have consulates in Hurghada; 2 Member States have consulates in Sharm El Sheikh; 1 Member State has a consulate in Port Said; 1 Member State has a consulate in Luxor and 1 Member State has a consulate in Suez..

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

During the reporting period six LSC meetings were organised. Five of them took place in Webex format, and in the last meeting of 15 December 2021 the group returned to physical meetings.

Given the growing number of contaminations and the uncertainties surrounding the official figures (around 2000 daily infections and 24 000 deaths and 460 000 cases), consular activities and visa operations were profoundly disrupted during 2021 for most of the Member States. All embassies open for visa or consular activity have taken precautions, such as hygiene measures (disinfectant, masks, gloves), temperature checks, physical distance and pre-booked/limited time slots for visitors. Most of consular services are now reopened and in fully operational as travel restrictions recently eased in the Schengen zone. MS used the LSC meetings to exchange information on their current visa operations.

LSC meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation Political adviser. The EUDEL Political Section takes minutes, which are shared with MS locally and with Brussels. Usually, the EUDEL hosts the meetings in person back-to-back with meetings in the Local Consular Cooperation format to facilitate attendance for smaller embassies (noting of course that the members of the group do not completely overlap).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC group did not identify any problems with the application of the new Visa Code during 2021. Noting, however, that the application is difficult to assess due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of borders to Schengen with exception of essential travel until late 2021. Thus the MS consulates are still adapting to the new code, and the practices are not yet consolidated.

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

The harmonised list of supporting documents has been drafted and approved by the LSC group in 2021, and is currently pending approval by the Visa Committee. MS discussed during LSC meetings in 2021 all issues and difficulties related to the application of the Visa Code. The proof of the financial means and health documents were notably mentioned by many delegations.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Other initiatives taken to ensure harmonisation of practices?

In the regular LSC meetings, MS compare practices and seek a common approach. MS noted, however, that the harmonisation of practices also depends on instructions from national headquarters.

The LSC/LCC groups have an active joint Signal group, where information and practices are exchanged on ad hoc basis.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC group meetings have been the main forum for exchanges of information, during which experiences have been exchanged over cases of fraud (i.e. on health documents and bank statements), cooperation with local authorities and companies, external service providers, the functioning of VISMail, statistics and the travel medical insurance (TMI).

On TMI the debate focused on criteria for accepting a list of an Egyptian Pool for Travel Insurance set up in coordination with the Ministry of Interior Affairs responsible for issuing travel insurance policies deemed to provide the same terms and conditions as the ones required by Schengen visa requirements.

Information are exchanged on daily basis on a Signal Group gathering EU and Schengen MS since December 2021.

VISMail: As in 2020, due to some technical problems, some MS reported difficulties in sending/receiving VISMail messages. In some cases, colleagues have resorted to regular mail or phone calls for the exchanges. The technical problems hinder smooth communication via VISMail also for MS that do not themselves experience the technical issues (i.e. no replies received etc.).

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Under the Slovenian Presidency the Local Consular Cooperation Group visited Hurgada in October 2021. Schengen visa matters were also discussed with the local authorities during the visit.

4. Challenges

Ensuring a harmonised re-opening of MS visa sections after all travel restrictions to the Schengen area are lifted after Covid-19 will be a challenge. One challenge already identified is the different approach to the re-opening of the MS to tourists and other non-essential travellers. The non-harmonised approach currently in use has already been reported to be a cause for cases of visa-shopping from MS that are not as restrictive as others anymore regarding non-essential travellers.

Another identified challenge regards the different requirements for Covid-19 vaccination for entering the countries or even the consulates for the Schengen visa application. The group will continue to discuss these issues during meetings in 2022.

While agreement on the harmonised list of supporting documents was reached in 2021, discussion on the “White List” of accepted Travel Medical Insurance has proven to be a challenging one, with different views regarding the acceptance of the mandatory insurance for new Egyptian passport holders. The issue is to be discussed in the LSC meetings in 2022.

5. Other issues

Not applicable.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO ETHIOPIA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ETHIOPIA 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa. The Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa serves as a regional hub for the continent, with Ethiopian Airlines having daily connections to numerous African countries and several direct flights to Europe. The massive expansion of the Addis Ababa airport over the past years has increased the number of transit passengers travelling to Europe.

22 EU Member States, as well Norway and Switzerland, are present in Ethiopia (Malta opened a new Embassy during 2021). In total, 20 Member countries of the Schengen-area have a representation in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, with 8 of them making use of visa outsourcing services to receive Schengen visa applications. Since November 2017, a prior consultation procedure for Schengen visa is in place for Ethiopia.

Since November 2020, a civil war has been ongoing in Ethiopia. Because of the conflict, combined with the effects of the COVID-pandemic, normal Embassy work and provision of Schengen visa services were severely disrupted at various points throughout 2021. Several Embassies have only been delivering essential visa for a limited number of categories of travellers. In early November 2021, most EU Embassies decided to evacuate all staff and families. Furthermore the VFS Visa Application Centre in Addis Ababa remained closed from 25th November 2021 until 10th January 2022. A gradual reopening of visa sections is foreseen to take place starting from January 2022

2. Schengen visa and LSC meetings held in 2021

The number of Schengen visa applications received during 2021 was much lower than usual (lower even than during the already unusual year 2020). While it is difficult to have complete data, it is estimated that the number of applications received during 2021 will be at least 80% lower than during a “normal year” such as 2018 or 2019. For the biggest part of 2021, travel between Ethiopia and the Schengen area was restricted, which mostly limited the introduction of visa applications to categories such as officials and diplomats, immediate family members of EU-citizens, students and urgent applications on medical or humanitarian grounds.

The LSC Group in Ethiopia met 7 times during 2021. Because of the civil war and the COVID situation, it was not always possible to maintain the regular schedule of having a meeting every six weeks (but this was not necessary also given the very low number of visa applications). Some of the meetings also had to be organized virtually in a WEBEX-format. All LSC-meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation to Ethiopia and well attended (15 – 20 participants for each of the meetings). The meetings of the LSC-group in Addis Ababa are usually organized back-to-back with the meeting of the EU Consular Group in Ethiopia

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Since 2020, the Schengen countries represented in Addis Ababa are implementing the new Visa Code. During 2021, the number of visa applications was so low that no significant challenges with regard to the application of the new Schengen visa code could be recorded.

3.2 Implementation of Harmonised List of Supporting Documents

The Harmonised List of Supporting Documents for Ethiopia was adopted in August 2017. The LSC meetings regularly share experiences on the implementation of the Harmonised List. No specific challenges were reported in this regard.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Already in early 2020, the Schengen countries represented in Addis Ababa signalled a need to adapt the general rules on issuing multi-entry visas to the specific situation of Ethiopia. The overall political, economic and security situation of Ethiopia, which is very volatile and can change from one day to the next, does not allow for the generalized application of the "MEV cascade system" foreseen in the new Visa Code, which is seen as being too generous towards the applicants and potentially causing increased risk for asylum claims by the applicants. The civil war in Ethiopia is a perfect illustration in this regard: politicians or officials which held high Government positions until last year are now fugitives hunted down by the Ethiopian Federal Police with their bank accounts frozen and assets confiscated.

After consultation with the LSC group, it was decided in February 2020 to develop a proposal for adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas specifically for applicants in Ethiopia. The proposal would differentiate between two categories of applicants:

- AU officials, Researchers from Universities and official research Institutes, Religious leaders: for these categories the MEV cascade system foreseen in the new visa code would apply, but the maximum validity of the multi-entry visa would be limited to a duration of three years instead of five years.
- All other categories of applicants would be limited to receiving multi-entry visa with a maximum validity of one year.

Because of the conflict and the COVID-pandemic, the proposal for a locally adapted MEV-cascade system for Ethiopia was never finalized nor submitted to Brussels. The problem became also much less relevant in 2021, because of the extremely low number of visa applications. It is expected however that the issue of the MEV-Cascade system will come back on the foreground as soon as the number of applications for Schengen visa in Ethiopia starts picking up again.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

During 2021, Schengen countries had several exchanges on the treatment of visa applicants introduced by applicants of Tigray origin, as this category presented particular challenges because of the ongoing conflict.

3.5 Exchange of information

During the LSC meetings, the EU embassies regularly share information about the number of visa applications, trends observed in the applications and the main challenges faced by the visa sections. During 2021, there were additional exchanges and coordination with regard to the closure of visa sections and travel restrictions to Europe because of the COVID-pandemic. In addition to the LSC meetings, there is also a dedicated What's App group where Schengen-related matters can be discussed.

In Addis Ababa, there is also an active Fraud Working Group that brings together also non-Schengen countries and where practical cases of detected fraud are discussed (the Fraud Working Group did not meet regularly in 2021, because there were hardly any cases of fraud to report on because of the overall very low number of visa applications).

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

NTR

4. Challenges

The main challenges with regard to Schengen visa and the application of the Visa Code that were noted during 2021 correspond to those already observed in 2020:

- 1) Some applicants found it difficult to understand the distinction between “essential travel” and “non-essential travel” that was introduced because of the COVID-19 related travel restrictions. This resulted in a relative high number of refusals (on a very low number of applications);
- 2) A relative high number of numerous overstaying and asylum cases was reported (considering the very low number of applications). This is probably related to the ongoing conflict in the country;
- 3) Dialogue, communication and technical cooperation with Ethiopian administration, especially with the Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency (INVEA), remains very challenging. There was little or no communication possible and it was difficult to obtain written confirmation – even just for confirming the applicable rules and regulations.
- 4) The Center for Refugees Return Services (RRS) of the Ethiopian Government remained closed for several months, creating problems for refugees who needed an Ethiopian exit visa before travelling to Europe.

5. Other issues

This annual report was discussed in the LSC meeting on January 27th, 2022 and approved by Member States.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO GEORGIA

22 March 2021

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Tbilisi, Georgia 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

17 Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden) are present in Georgia and 10 Member States (Belgium, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia) are represented from abroad.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Due to COVID-19 crisis and the continuation of travel restrictions imposed by both Member States and Georgia, meetings had to be limited and visa operations were reduced to the minimum by most member states. In the second part of 2021, member states began issuing mostly long-term visas and resumed the C-visa services to third nationals. One LSC meeting was held in 2021. Further coordination of LSC was conducted via emails and “WhatsApp” group. Representatives of Member States outside of the capital were also included in this group to ensure relevant coordination and up-to-date information exchange. Given that the pandemic situation and restrictions changed quickly, this form of communication proved to be more successful than communication via emails. EUD continued to collect information provided by the Member States and inform about relevant updates from the EU side.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States and the EUD have fully implement the Visa Code.

Referring to the Annual report of 2020, the situation remains unchanged; member States noted the particular provisions related to the implementation of the articles 6 and 7 of the Visa Code, as per February 2020, influenced by the specifics of the Georgian migration policy.

Before the restrictions related to pandemics came into force, a significant number of countries were listed in the category, determining the countries whose nationals do not need a visa to enter Georgia and who can stay (work and study) in Georgia for up to one year. Thus, in practice, if a third country national does not have a resident permit and is legally staying in the country based on his visa-free days in Georgia, the term ‘legally residing’ is subject to interpretation on how to determine whether the applicant is legally residing in Georgia (and what kind of documents could prove this case). Though para 2 of Article 6 allows to accept an application of a person who is legally present, but not legally residing in the country, it requires a justification, therefore, it should be used more like an exception. A working contract, the entry and exit stamps in the passport, company papers were listed as possible means of guidance in these cases.

Many Embassies in Tbilisi continue to receive phone calls, e-mails and applications from citizens of third countries (Iran, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Egypt, Lebanon) seeking obtaining a Schengen visa at their Embassy. These are mostly persons who have a residence permit in Georgia and whose declared intention to leave the Schengen area after the expiry of the validity of the granted visa can be reasonably doubted. In these cases, operational cooperation of MS facilitates exchange of information.

More extensive general rules with regard to third country nationals would help to take the decisions.

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

The implementation of the COM Decision on the list of supporting documents, art 24m lid 2, was assessed as good and none of the Member States at this stage has expressed a need to amend the existing list of supporting documents. This remains unchanged compared to the findings in the annual report of 2020. The EU Travel ban did not interfere with this part, as the traveller itself is responsible for a timely return to the country of origin.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code (‘MEV cascades’)

Due to ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the limited number of Schengen visas issued, Member States agreed that at this stage it was difficult to evaluate the practical implementation of the revised general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24 (d).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No other initiatives have been taken in 2021.

3.5 Exchange of information

Member States have no reports about particular irregularities in cooperation with local authorities, companies, or any particular cases of fraud.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, intensive - almost daily - e-mail, SMS and (rarely) VISMails communication of MS regarding epidemiological measures, conditions of entry into the country, etc. This mode of communication continues to be frequent and exchange of information is essential to effectively respond to all measures taken by the Georgian authorities towards the COVID-19 pandemic.

The use of VISmail is sufficient and accessible in regard of issued or refused visa.

Member States emphasised the remaining need (also ref annual report 2020) to be able to see in the Visa Information System not only applications of Schengen visas, but also National visas and Resident permits issued by other Member States. This would undoubtedly contribute to tackling security and migration related challenges more efficiently. Member States emphasized the need for these amendments (currently under preparation) to enter into force as soon as possible. This need, also addressed in 2020, remains. Awaiting the rescheduled implementation in 2023.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC has discussed the asylum requests from Turkish nationals, residing illegally and legally in Georgia having no other options for legal stay left in Georgia. Other third country nationals are also increasingly experiencing difficulties of keeping the residence in Georgia, such as Iranians. As Georgia is a safe third country, these kind of requests represent a sort of a “grey zone”, notably, as the government uses the “security reasons” argument for denying residency to third country nationals, thus preventing any clarifications on the particular cases of refusal.

4. Challenges

Main challenges for LSC in 2022 will continue to be following closely the COVID-19 related travel restrictions, timely exchange of information and mutual updates. Member States will agree on restarting fully accepting Schengen visa applications if or when the circumstances allow.

5. Other issues

It should be emphasized that the Georgian authorities have cooperated very well with the readmission of Georgian citizens. GoG has also been very efficient in implementing the “Law on the Rules and Procedures for Georgian Citizens Exiting and Entering Georgia”, which entered into force on 1 Jan 2021.

A problem persists with the employment permits of some of the Member States, the authenticity of which is difficult to establish by the border police. It can not be excluded that these employment permits are used to then travel to other Member States to ask for asylum.

At the same time, continuous trend of denying residence permits to third country nationals, on the basis of security reasons, has contributed to an increasing demand for Schengen visas and asylum requests in Europe. Thanks to an active lobbying by both the UNHCR and the EU, the government has for the first time accepted ten asylum requests from Syrian nationals. The asylum management policy, however, has not been improved.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Ghana 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Nine (9) EU Member States are present (CZ, DE, DK, ES, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL) and 11 are represented by residing MS in Accra (FI, IS, PT, PL, LT, LU, MC, SE, SK, IE, CY). Other Schengen partners present in Ghana are Norway and Switzerland.

There are no LSC outside of Accra. MS issue visas in Accra for residents of neighbouring countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo among others). Exchange also with regard to applicants and documents from these countries.

2. LSC meetings held in 2020

Four LSC meetings were held in 2021, of which two virtual and two physical. The meetings were well-attended by all LSC partners. Meetings were chaired by the EUDEL and hosted by EUDEL and Germany. The reports of the meetings were drawn up by EUDEL.

3. State of play

Since the beginning of the pandemic and until today (December 2021), **Ghana's land border remain closed**. However, ECOWAS ministers recently proposed to reopen land borders in January 2022. The Accra Kotoka International Airport (KIA) is open, but the **country maintains strict entry procedures**. These include an online questionnaire and PCR tests prior to and upon arrival (the mandatory PCR test at KIA cost \$150 at the traveler's own expense). As of 13 December 2021, **full vaccination is mandatory for all adults entering Ghana**. EU COVID-19 certificates are recognized by Ghanaian authorities.

Most MS are back to issuing national visas, MS issue Schengen visas only on specific cases. Some countries (CZ, HU, MT, IT) are currently still only issuing **visas for essential travel**, family members, students and business. Other missions have begun to issue **tourist visas for fully vaccinated persons** (DK, DE, CH, FR, NL, NO). NL, FR, DE and ES recognise Ghanaian COVID-19 vaccination cards for travel purposes.

There appears to be issues with the QR code of the Ghanaian vaccination card. False vaccination cards have also been detected and there are reports of a widespread network providing such falsified certificates.

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS are well-equipped, rapid exchange between MS possible through up-to-date contact list. Some MS still have no external service provider but deadlines can be met.

No significant challenges relating to the implementation of the Visa Code.

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

Harmonised list of supporting documents is in place since 2019. Currently no need to update or amend the existing list.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

MS try to make generous use of these rules, also to reduce their administrative expenses.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

3.5 Exchange of information

- *Quarterly statistics:* Good exchange, statistics are summarised at the German Embassy and shared quarterly with other missions (practice currently suspended due to COVID, but will resume in 2022).
- *Cases of fraud:* Fraudulent student transcripts and efforts to get scholarships on false basis. Fraudulent birth certificates and bank statements. False COVID-19 vaccination cards. Fraud detected in applications which qualify for (national) exemptions of the EU (COVID) travel ban. Forged entry or exit stamps of African countries often discovered in applications. Several forged copies of genuine Schengen visas issued by French missions in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Frequent fraudulent employment statements, letters, payslips, job offers and work permits. NL noticed an increase in applications for Facilitation visa (Chavez) to join a family member in the EU. It appears the fast track system is being abused by people who don't qualify for this type of visa (to evade D visa procedure or even for family visits).

Some MS lack competence to detect fraudulent passports and birth/marriage certificates.

- *Travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI):* A list of credible travel medical insurance companies for Schengen compiled by Norway.
- *Any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules:* No problems.
- *Cooperation with local authorities and companies (e.g. banks, employers, transport companies):* Good cooperation with GIS (especially DFEC) and Births and Deaths Registry, though in this latter case it often takes time to receive a feedback. Bank statements can be checked via email at almost every bank, however some of these banks are not always reactive. Airlines partially reluctant to carry passengers with valid visas because of insecurity with regard to entry ban regulations. Some MS issue a declaration specifying why the passenger is allowed to travel.

- *Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises):* DE and HU: No external service provider is used, not planned for the near future. Some MS cooperate with law firms to verify documents (DE). Verification fee has to be paid by applicants.
- *Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System:* Not used by all MS, some technical problems. DE, HU, IT and CZ are using VISMail.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EU proposes the drafting of a **Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework**. The aim of this document is to establish a framework for cooperation between EU Member States and the EU Delegation, making cooperation and coordination more efficient and effective in the event of a consular crisis. The plan does not replace the existing national crisis plans, but sets plans for coordinating crisis management. The template and guiding points have been shared with the group. Drafting the document is a joint effort, hence the EU proposes to form a small core group to prepare the first draft.

4. Challenges

International networks have informed the EU missions in Ghana about a large number of incidents involving **forged Ghanaian diplomatic and service passports**. These forged documents were intercepted at airports in several countries on the European, African and Asian continents and used to attempt to board flights bound for the Schengen area. After the EU DEL sent a Note Verbale on the issue, Ghana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs replied expressing awareness and concern about the problem. People are also travelling for private trips with their diplomatic passports.

5. Other issues

MS have noticed an **increase in the number of NVs** received with last-minute visa requests from the Protocol Department of the Ministry Foreign Affairs. Often the requests are made both for diplomatic and non-diplomatic staff. In general, NVs do not always include a clear signature, so MS are unable to verify their origin or validity. EU DEL may ask the Ghana MFA for a full list of officials with NV sign off rights.

There has also been an increase in the number of **large groups applying for short-term visas** on the cover of conferences or sports championships. Often these applications show discrepancies that point towards applicants going for other purposes, including tourism/holidays or plans to overstay their visa.

Government added "Cooperation on Consular Matters" to the agenda of the **2021 EU-Ghana Partnership Dialogue**. During the discussion they raised some bilateral concerns regarding Ghanaians on work visas returning from EU MS, reflecting some tensions on consular matters.

In terms of recognising the legality / veracity of Ghanaian documentation, the **ICAO-compliant Ghana Card** will be a way to ease the recognition process for partners.



EUROPEAN UNION

OFFICE TO HONG KONG AND MACAO

01.01.2021/31.12.2021

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Hong Kong and Macao 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

14 Member States of Schengen are present in the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong (AT-BE-CZ-DE-EL-ES-FR-HU-IT-FI-NL-PL-SE-CH), one in the SAR of Macao (PT). DK is represented in Guangzhou, other MS are in Beijing.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Meetings were held on 13 January, 11 March, 12 May, 15 July, 4 November (in presence). All MS and CH attend.

The meetings are chaired by the EU Deputy Head of Office and the EU Head of Administration. The two MS holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2021 were not physically present in Hong Kong and could not co-chair the meetings.

Reports were drawn up by the EU Office, and sent for approval/comments to the MS. There is no coordination with the MS that are not present in HK and Macao as this falls outside of the scope of the EU Office.

The Covid-19 crisis had a major impact on MS visa operations with most visa services significantly curtailed. The cessation or limitation of visa operations was not put in place in a coordinated way. In 2021, normal services resumed, with some restrictions on Schengen visa applications (mandatory vaccination).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

2021 was plagued by traveling restrictions due to the pandemic. The number of visas issued dropped significantly.

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

In general, MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is acquired, but would welcome common practice on the matter of Schengen visas for domestic helpers.

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

n.a.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

This rule is applied.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

n.a.

3.5 Exchange of information

- *Quarterly statistics show that very few visas were delivered in 2021 due to the impact of the pandemic;*
- *Cases of fraud are exceptional, as HK residents do not need a visa to access the Schengen area; MS have raised some issues with visa requests from Philippino nationals;*
- *MS make use of VISMail and the Visa Information System*

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other significant initiatives were taken.

4. Challenges

In the previous reporting period (2020), it was agreed by the LSC that the issue of visas for domestic workers accompanying European families to Europe for holidays should be addressed further. It was noted that the issue raised concerns about compliance with labour laws in Europe, which varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. There was no change in 2021 hence this challenge remains true for 2022.

5. Other issues

Some discussions occurred regarding mutual recognition of vaccines between HK and the EU, but it never materialised.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO INDIA

27/01/2022 - final

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in India **2021 REPORT**

1. Introduction

All Schengen Member States (SMS) are present in New Delhi, India except LI which is represented by CH. The four prospective SMSs (BG, CY, HR, RO) also have a consular presence and issue visas in New Delhi. In addition, a number of SMSs have additional consulates processing Schengen visas: Mumbai (BE, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, PL), Kolkata (DE, FR, IT), Bengaluru (DE, FR), Chennai (DE), Pondicherry (FR) and Goa (PT). DE is in the process of gathering most visa processing through its section in Mumbai, while keeping a residual capacity in Delhi.

All SMSs outsource non-judgemental tasks to an external service provider (ESP). With the exception of ES and EL, they all use the same ESP, which has 16 visa application centres (VACs). Each Member State selects in which VAC they wish to be represented: 14 MS are represented in 12 or more of these VACs. ES is represented in the 10 VACs of the other ESP. Three prospective SMSs also avail of the service of an ESP (RO is not using any).

Many consular sections of SMS in India also have the jurisdiction to process Schengen visa requests of applicants from neighbouring countries (NP, BT, LK, MV, BD, AF, MY, MM, SG).

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Short description of impact of the COVID-19 crisis' impact on Member States' visa operations and on the coordination of LSC.

8 virtual LSC meetings have been held until October 2022, followed by two in-person and hybrid meetings (at the NL residency and at the EU Delegation in New Delhi respectively) in November and December. On average, 21 States were present at each meeting, and all SMS or prospective SMS attended during the year. The meetings are chaired by the EUD, who also drafts and shares the minutes. The virtual or hybrid format allowed to open the attendance to Consulates in other locations: several representations in Mumbai were often present at the meetings.

In two occasions, LSC meetings were organised back-to-back with local migration group meetings, where IE was invited, as well as representatives from the International Labour Organisation and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, giving talks on their activities within the project supporting the EU-India Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility. IE was also invited at a LSC meeting in July 2021, where we discussed the recognition of Indian vaccines for the purpose of travel (both for sanitary measures on arrival, and for resumption of non-essential travels).

Representatives of the main ESP were invited in April, but called off their participation due to major disruptions due to Covid-19 infections in their team.

Airports or immigration liaison officers (ALOs/ILOs) of the Schengen MSs are also invited to the meetings (DE has one ILO in Delhi and two in Mumbai; CH and AT have one immigration liaison officer in Delhi; FI and NL have an ILO located abroad (Helsinki and Bangkok respectively), who also cover India).

The LSC invited officials from DG HOME to participate to the virtual LSC in July to discuss sanitary requirements and control of vaccination. In October, an ad-hoc session was organised with an official from DG HOME to discuss the visa cascade.

The Covid-19 delta variant hit strongly India in April/May, with hospital capacity overflowed. This led to a severe lock-down and disruption of operations; many visa sections suspended or severely restricted their visa operations for several months.

India has maintained all throughout 2021 a restriction of operation of commercial flights, keeping limited number of flights under “air bubble” agreements only with three EU countries (DE, FR, NL) for most of the year, opened also to FI in December. This, in addition to the sanitary restrictions for travel (emergency brake introduced by the EU to address the Delta variant crisis in April 2021), severely limited the options for travelling to SMSs.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The application Article 48 of the Visa Code is done through two channels: regular meetings, and access and sharing of information through the platform AGORA. No training session has been organised for visa officers, because it requires physical presence, which was not an option for most of 2021.

The issues related to the application of the Visa Code discussed in 2021 related to:

- Level of operations of visa sections;
- Interpretation and local adaptation of MEV cascade under article 24(2) (see below);
- Operations of the ESP, including digital transfer of biometrics, increase of fares, management of restricted slots for application;
- Management of expiration of biometric data;
- Restriction of non-essential travels, vaccine and vaccination recognition, sanitary requirements for travel and on arrival, control of vaccination;
- Management of limited opportunities for visa application;
- Verification tools of documents and possible resumption of training;
- Relations with LSCs in neighbouring countries;
- Cybercrimes related to visa scams;
- Analysis of statistics.

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

The last revision of the harmonised list of supporting documents in India was adopted on 27 May 2020. Considering the very limited operations and the successive crises, there has been no monitoring of its implementation.

Extensive discussions have been held on the need to include vaccination certificates as supporting documents for non-essential travels (for SMS resuming processing such requests for vaccinated travellers); DG HOME clarified that this is not within the scope of the Visa code, they are not a condition for obtaining visa but can be a condition for entering the country.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The MEV cascade is an opportunity to improve the harmonisation of approaches to MEV, currently subject to a wide variation of approaches across SMSs. The SMSs shared their experience, interpretation and doubts regarding application of the cascade. The ad-hoc meeting helped clarifying many issues (e.g. rules have to be applied and are non cumulative; can be more generous (reduction of work burden for bona fide visitors); attribution independently to intention to travel more than once, possible adaption of rules (extension of timeline) to take into account Covid-19 disruption). SMSs circulated their guidelines for application for discussion, and a working group was constituted to discuss possible approaches of local adaptation.

The discussions lead toward a possible differential adaptation, being more liberal for certain categories of travellers (eg. Seamen, business travellers, ...). Work will continue in 2022.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

LSC group has extensively shared information of the various stages of closing and reopening of visa sections, application of the "emergency brake", categories considered as essential travellers, and resumption of visas for non-essential travels (including vaccine recognition and controls).

3.5 Exchange of information

The common template for reporting quarterly statistics was shared with all SMSs at the beginning of the year. All visa sections are invited to share their statistics on the AGORA platform. The template was adapted so that all consulates could report their own statistics, including for long-term visas (on a voluntary basis).

The trends observed were discussed after the first and third trimester. The observation is hampered by the partial completion of the obligation of the visa sections (31 out of the 40 visa sections had shared data for 2020, 17 after the first quarter of 2021). The statistics shared at the end of the first quarter showed that the number of national visas largely outperformed the number of requests for uniform visas in the majority of consulates. An almost complete halt of visas being issued in the second quarter, and a very progressive return to visas issued in the third quarter only for few visa sections.

SMSs reported a significant increase of fraud, applications with fake documents, fake or forged vaccination certificates, leading to high rejection rate. Emails scams selling fake offers for "business Schengen visas" have been reported all along the year. The reduction of slots for appointments led also to agents selling early appointments.

The differential approaches of SMSs regarding reopening, and mainly regarding resumption of non-essential travels, led to increased "visa shopping",

Cooperation with the consortium of companies offering travel medical insurance is still working well, they offer an on-line verification tool, and guaranteed that all their members cover the Covid-19 risk.

SMSs and ALOs exchanged and updated information regarding verification tools available for accompanying documents; although no training session has been organised, the ALOs updated their presentation listing all the tools, and uploaded it in AGORA.

SMSs shared experiences with ESP, be it regarding the reopening (or closing) of stations, use of doorstep services, increase of fare of additional services, possible options for digital transfer of biometrics, but also issues related to limited appointment slots and allegations of selling early appointments. SMSs were reminded of the common check-list developed by LSC for monitoring ESPs, and that report of inspections can be shared in AGORA; the Covid-19 crisis disrupted operations of ESPs, and also of such monitoring from SMSs.

Apart from the difficulty to retrieve at times fingerprints, SMSs are facing increasing cases where applicants have passed 59 months of first taking of fingerprints in without realising the need for resubmitting them at the time of application, showing the need for increased information and awareness campaign.

LSC shared information regarding documents issued by India principally to Tibetan refugees, clarifying that these are not passports, and need either a return visa from India, or a no objection return to India stamp.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Following the 2020 survey revealing the extent of coverage of neighbouring countries for processing Schengen visa applications by SMS in India (Nepal (14), Bhutan (13), Sri Lanka (10), Bangladesh (9), the Maldives (9) and Afghanistan (3)), the chair entered in contact with LSC of neighbouring countries (NP, BD, LK), and shared reports received from these LSC groups with SMS in India which expressed interest. Some SMS are directly invited by other LSC groups to participate to their meetings.

4. Challenges

1. Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2021 report

The LSC addressed the challenge of coordination with LSCs in neighbouring countries (see above). Harmonisation of the application of the cascade was promoted by the numerous exchanges and the ad-hoc session organised on this topic. The continuous Covid-19 crisis disrupted the resumption of activities of ESPs. LSC was informed of improved dialogue with Indian authorities on return and readmission of irregular migrants.

2. *Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2022).*

The subjects that the LSC expects to address during the next reporting period are:

- Expand and improve use of verification tools for accompanying documents;
- Resumption of activities of ESPs: ensuring smooth operations, cooperation on controls;
- Proposal of local adaptation of the cascade under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code;

Hopefully, the sanitary situation will allow to organise again a “Schengen Visa Officers” Day, with visit of visa sections, exchange of practical tips, and social event improving direct contacts between visa officers.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO INDONESIA AND BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Jakarta, 1 April 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

22 EU/Schengen Member States are present in Jakarta (there are some honorary consuls in other areas of the country, notably in Bali-Denpasar). In Jakarta, Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings are held back to back with the EU Consular Cooperation meetings. The participants invited to LSC are thus Schengen MS Embassies (including Switzerland and Norway), with the participation open to the 5 non-Schengen EU MS Embassies participating in the Consular meetings⁶, which allows to compare points of view on visa issues and to address also the visa and immigration policies of the host country (Indonesia).

Several Consulates issue Schengen visas on behalf of other Schengen States under bilateral arrangements: Austria for Malta and Slovenia, Denmark for Iceland, Finland for Estonia, Germany for Latvia, Hungary for Lithuania, and the Netherlands for Belgium and Luxemburg. Several Schengen Consulates use external service providers for collecting applications.

2. LSC meetings held in 2020-2021

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic most of the meetings during the reporting period took place virtually. Indonesia was severely affected by the second wave of the pandemic in July 2021. Subsequently this had a major impact on consular tasks. Given the Indonesian government's strict guidelines pertaining to public activities, but also due to EU and national travel restrictions, EU MS were restricted in the number of visa applications they were able to receive. This curtailed the number of accepted applications and issued visas. It also created a significant visa application backlog in the visa registration systems of EU MS.

Vis-à-vis non-EU nationals, consular activities were limited to issuing visas only in emergency and humanitarian situations. However, the pandemic situation had no bearing on regular consular functioning with respect to EU nationals in need of assistance in Indonesia and other countries of accreditation. In general, LSC meetings covered COVID-19 related topics all along the reporting period. Meetings addressed specific Schengen visa related issues as well as interlinked Schengen/Consular topics (e.g. visa restrictions and non-essential travel from/to Indonesia).

⁶ There are 22 EU/Schengen Member States Embassies in Jakarta, all regularly attending the EU Consular/LSC meetings: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France
Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

There were *5 well attended LSC meetings held during the reporting period* chaired by the EU Delegation, back to back with the Consular meeting chaired by MS holding the EU Council presidency, by Portugal in the 1st semester of 2021 and by France, on behalf of Slovenia, during the 2nd semester. Four meetings took place in virtual format due to the pandemic situation, and one meeting in hybrid format. The Secretariat was ensured by the Delegation, with reports sent to local participants who shared them with their capitals, and to EU Headquarters (Commission and EEAS). Some MS regionalized the processing of Schengen visas, e.g. for SE all applications from Jakarta and Bali are now handled in Bangkok, including visa issuing.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Good cooperation was ensured via the LSC meetings and via communication with an ad-hoc LSC-Consular WhatsApp group. More difficulties were recorded for the collection of *visa and other statistics* by MS to be shared with the EU Delegation, for discussion in LSC meetings.

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 mailing list and WA group to exchange information, questions, answers and experiences on Schengen/Visa related issues.

Due to the restrictions imposed on public activities by the Indonesian authorities at the height of the pandemic, EU MS noted that visa applicants, when being unable to book appointment slots (for National – D visas) in one mission, often submitted their applications in other EU MS consulates (often for Schengen – C visas).

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

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is sufficient with no need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code (‘MEV cascades’)

During the reporting period there were no discussions about the revised EU visa code and the possible identification of common MEVs although in previous years the group had flagged the possibility to create an ad hoc working group to prepare possible proposals to be discussed at LSC meetings.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Coordination on *travel insurances requirements has continued*, with the EU Delegation receiving requests by insurance companies, checking compliance with visa code requirements and updating on a yearly basis, through written procedure with the MS, the list of insurance companies made available for information to visa applicants in the Schengen Consulates.

There is **limited local coordination** on the regular adjustment of **exchange rates** for Schengen visas fees as most MS indicate that their capacity to coordinate locally the timing and level of exchange rate adjustments is limited by the instructions they receive from their home administration. The EU Delegation circulates the regular adjustments done by the German Embassy based on BCE exchange rates for voluntary alignment. The currently uncoordinated adjustments did not result in major discrepancies as to the visa fees applied in Indonesian Rupiah.

3.5 Exchange of information

Often quarterly statistics are not reported timely. Available statistics for 2021 showed a **further decline of Schengen visas requests and Schengen visas issued**, probably **due to the persisting Covid -19 pandemic**. The **proportion of refused visa applications remained relatively low as compared to global refusal rates**. According to the LSC group, **cases of fraud** are not a serious problem in the country.

There was no change on *multiple entry visas (MEVs)* compared to the practice discussed in the previous reporting period. Some Schengen member States issue MEVs for standard short term visas as a matter of routine whilst other restrict MEVs to longer validity visas of 1-year or more.

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.

EU Delegation ensured proper communication of information from HQ, e.g., informing MS about **Article 25a of the Visa Code** and the Council Implementing Decision EU 2021/1781 on the suspension of certain provisions of (EC) 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council (Visa Code) with respect to Gambia.

4. Challenges

As mentioned in previous years' reports, there is limited staff capacity in the EU Delegation to carry out both consular and LSC activities and increase communication from/with HQ. Close local cooperation with the Schengen Consuls helps mitigating this challenge.

5. Other issues

Bilateral agreements on visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports are already in place with a majority of EU Member States. In several cases, the implementation of bilateral agreements is 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.

Visa-free access to the Schengen area for Indonesian citizens remain a topic of interest, 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. For EU citizens coming to IDN: due to covid, no visa on arrival have been issued and the evisa can only be obtained with an eligible sponsor or via an agent, resulting in excessive cost (200€/visa), so reciprocity still faces some challenges.

This report was approved by Member States via silent procedure on 1 April 2022.



24/03/2022

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) en République islamique d'Iran RAPPORT 2021

1. Introduction

20 Etats Membres de l'espace Schengen sont présents en Iran à Téhéran : Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Danemark, Espagne, Finlande, France, Grèce, Hongrie, Italie, Norvège, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, République Tchèque, Slovaquie, Slovénie, Suède et Suisse.

5 pays ont des accords de représentations. La Finlande représente l'Estonie, la Norvège représente l'Islande, la Belgique représente le Luxembourg et la Hongrie représente la Lettonie et la Lituanie.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2021

La présidence a été assurée successivement par le Portugal au premier semestre 2021 puis la Slovénie au deuxième semestre. Des pays-tiers non-membres de Schengen sont régulièrement invités : Croatie, Bulgarie, Roumanie.

La pandémie a eu un impact majeur sur les opérations de visas. Jusqu'en juin, la délivrance de visa uniforme a été restreinte aux requérants présentant un motif impérieux (soins médicaux, raisons humanitaires, grands événements) et au renouvellement des visas de circulation.

Puis l'ouverture des frontières en juin aux personnes vaccinées et aux visas touristiques, pour certains EM dont la France ont permis de relancer la dynamique de réunion de coopération locale. Le statut vaccinal ne fait pas partie des critères d'octroi de visa Schengen mais certains EM l'exigent afin de pouvoir effectuer une demande de visa.

La coordination des EM est effectuée par le membre ayant l'honneur d'assurer la présidence.

La présidence portugaise a organisé une réunion le 2 mars 2021, qui s'est tenue en visioconférence compte tenu de la situation pandémique en Iran à l'époque.

La présidence slovène a organisé 3 réunions lors de son semestre : le 17 août, le 5 octobre et enfin le 2 décembre 2021. Toutes ces réunions ont été tenues en présentiel avec à chaque fois une nombreuse participation.

Une réunion spéciale « afghans » a été organisée suite à la chute de Kaboul et l'afflux de millions de réfugiés afghans en Iran. Les pays membres de l'espace Schengen, de l'Union Européenne, mais aussi l'Australie, la Nouvelle-Zélande, le Royaume-Uni y ont participé.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les EM collaborent activement en conformité avec les dispositions du Code des Visas. Ces échanges concernent principalement l'échange d'information. :

- Cas de fraude et l'utilisation de faux ;
- La délivrance et l'utilisation des visas à entrées multiples dits visas de circulation;
- Analyse du risque en matière d'immigration ;
- Relation avec les prestataires de service extérieur pour la réception des demandes de visas.

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

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

3.3 Estimation du besoin d'adapter les règles générales relatives à la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples aux demandeurs en vertu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas (« cascades MEV »)

Adaptation en cascade de la délivrance des visas au niveau locale. Limitation à deux ans maximum de la validité des visas délivrés, conformément à la décision de la Commission.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures et échange d'informations

L'échange d'informations entre les membres se déroule lors des réunions de coordination et/ou via e-mail.

Les EM échangent régulièrement via mail sur les suspicions de fraude ou sur les raisons de délivrance/refus.

4. Défis

4.1 Décrivez le cas échéant les réponses aux défis mentionnés dans le rapport 2020. SANS OBJET – Pandémie covid-19 : frontières fermées.

4.2 Renforcer la coopération au niveau local afin de minimiser les risques de « visa shopping ».

4.3. Arrivée massive de réfugiés afghans en Iran depuis la chute de Kaboul en août 2021.

Les pays qui acceptent de recevoir les demandes de visas de la part de ressortissants afghans sont les suivants :

- AT, NL, EL, CY, HU, CZ : seulement les Afghans en situation régulière;
- FI, IT, SK, NO, DK, PL, CH, SE, DE : ces pays acceptant les demandes de visas de la part des Afghans en situation régulière ou se trouvant sur des listes d'évacuation ou demandant le regroupement familial ;
- FR, EL, ES : ces pays acceptant les demandes de visas de la part des Afghans en situation régulière ou se trouvant sur des listes d'évacuation ou demandant le regroupement familial mais aussi les demandeurs d'asile.

Les défis posés par cette présence massive de demandeurs de visas afghans sont nombreux :

- Absence de titres de voyage et d'identité, nombreuse fraudes (SE a recours dans certains cas à des tests ADN) ;
- Les demandeurs viennent d'autant plus en Iran qu'ils n'ont plus guère la possibilité d'aller au Pakistan qui a restreint l'ouverture de ses frontières;
- Les laissez-passer consulaires pour étranger valides 30 jours maximum, ou tout autre titre de voyage délivré par un pays de l'Union européenne pour les demandeurs afghans entrés illégalement en Iran, ne sont pas reconnus par les autorités iraniennes ;
- Taux de refus élevé et recours systématiques et chronophages ;
- Manque de personnel : les effectifs de la plupart des services des visas des ambassades des pays représentés sont insuffisants face à cet afflux non prévu.

4.4 Un problème croissant de fraude, constaté aussi bien parmi les demandeurs de visas aussi bien afghans qu'iraniens.

Lors de la réunion de coopération consulaire du 8 mars sous présidence française, deux experts de la police fédérale allemande, basés à l'ambassade d'Allemagne à Téhéran, ont fait une présentation très appréciée par tous les participants sur la fraude en Iran.

Une augmentation de la fraude à l'usurpation d'identité, de faux titre de séjour d'un pays Schengen, de faux titres de voyage pour réfugié ou de faux passeports (notamment dominicains) est constatée.

La coopération avec les autorités iraniennes en matière de lutte contre fraude est faible, voire inexistante. La police iranienne, à l'aéroport, vérifie uniquement la validité du visa iranien (pour les non-iraniens). Afin de procéder à une arrestation, la police locale exige une lettre de la compagnie aérienne certifiant les faux documents.

La conséquence pratique est que dans la plupart des cas, la police iranienne rend les faux documents aux fraudeurs sans conséquence.

Enfin, une centaine de faux documents ont été repérés depuis le 1^{er} janvier 2022 lors des opérations de check-in pour des voyageurs ayant pour destination finale l'espace Schengen.

5. Divers

Annexe :

Tableau statistiques relatifs aux visas délivrés par les pays Schengen en Iran au titre de 2021. Il manque les statistiques relatives au quatrième trimestre du service des visas de l'Ambassade d'Autriche, en raison d'un problème technique.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF ISRAEL

28/02/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Israel 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) covered by the EU Delegation in Tel Aviv (EUDELTA) applies to the internationally recognised territory of Israel and is performed by the EU Local Consular Correspondent (Political Officer) together with the Schengen MS consuls accredited to Israel. LSC in Tel Aviv does not cover the Palestinian Territories in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, where most of the MS have its own consulates located in East Jerusalem or Ramallah. Some MS (FI, CZ, SK, EE, LV and LT) cover abovementioned areas from their embassies in Tel Aviv. Visas are issued in the Consular Sections of the Schengen MS in their embassies located in Tel Aviv. IS and LU don't have their own embassies/consular sections in Tel Aviv. IS is thus represented by DK and LU is represented by BE. 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. Nationals from the occupied Palestinian territory are subjected to visa requirements, but usually apply for visa in the consulates located in East Jerusalem or Ramallah.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

In 2021 EUDELTA organised back in-person LSC meetings in its premises. They were held back-to-back with the LCC meetings. In 2021 two regular meetings were organised, one in June (under the PT Presidency) and one in December (under the SI Presidency). Discussion of the both meetings focused mainly on the resumption of the visa operations. With regard to the hostilities between Hamas and Israel in May 2021, EUDELTA organised also additional ad-hoc VTC LSC meeting to assess the security situation in IL and coordinate potential evacuation of the EU citizens. All LSC meetings met a high interest of the Schengen/MS with more of 20 of them being present in each of the meetings. LSC topics were also discussed on higher levels of HoMs and DHoMs.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS are already applying the rules of the Revised Visa code and revised rules since February 2020. No problems have been reported so far.

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

The Visa Committee has officially approved the Harmonized List of Supporting Documents for Israel in 2020. The current list of documents remains valid.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

MS have adapted to the general rules of multiple-entry visas under Article 24 (2), although most visa operations have been limited to emergency/limited cases during 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although on 30 August 2021 IL has been removed from the EU's safe travel list (Annex I to the Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic), it is still the Member/Schengen State's decision to allow or ban entries from the third countries. EUDEL informed that the EU recommends to resume visa operations in a joint and coordinated way. SK remains the only MS/Schengen State, which still bans travels from IL, while SE informed that lifted its restrictions imposed on IL. Visa operations have been proceeded smoothly, no MS reported any problems with this regard.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

MS 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.

3.5 Exchange of information

EUDELTA and MS keep regular exchange of information. EUDELTA remains in contact with Israeli authorities on regular basis, especially with the IL MFA Consular Department, Diplomatic Protocol and the Ministry of Health (director of the MoH International Relations Department was a special guest of the LSC meeting in December 2021). EUDELTA remains in a regular contact with the MS consuls also via e-mail list and LSC WhatsApp group, which is a daily forum to discuss issues concerning visa and other Schengen topics. All MSs present in Tel Aviv recognize Travel Medical Insurances (TMIs) issued by local Israeli companies for the purpose of visa applications. The VIS-Mail system is fully used by MS present.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

COVID-19 pandemic remained in the main scope of the LSC cooperation throughout 2021, both during the regular LSC meetings and through other channels of communications like WhatsApp group (on a daily basis). EUDELTA and MS shared their views on the procedures, restrictions and regulations regarding non-essential travels to and from IL. From the initiative of EUDELTA special ad-hoc LSC VTC as organised during the hostilities between Hamas and IL in May 2021. EUDELTA was also a trailblazer of the joint EUDELTA/EU MS demarche on the possibility to shorten the isolation of the diplomats arriving to IL, who, regardless from their vaccination status, were subjected for a 14-days quarantine, which impeded functioning of some missions, especially the smallest ones. Problems with travelling of some EU officials accredited to Israel (f.e. EU COPPS officials) and lack of recognition of the EU laissez-passer were among topics discussed by the HoD during his meeting with the vice-director of MFA Consular Department.

4. Challenges

Some MS indicated that the procedures regarding issuing visas for European spouses of the Palestinians should be clarified from the IL side. IL Foreign Ministry informed some time ago that regulations on this matter had been prepared and negotiated with the Ministry of Interior but with no outcome. EUDELTA will follow up on this matter.

5. Other issues

No other issues are reported from LSC Tel Aviv.

This report has been approved by all Member States present in Israel and cooperating within the LSC in Tel Aviv.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in JORDAN
2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

14 Schengen Member States have consulates in Amman and issue visas (AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IT, NL, NO, PL, SE). Among the non-resident Schengen countries (EE, DK, FI, IS, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, PT, SI, SK) the following 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. Non-resident Schengen countries 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 authorised to receive applications from Syrian nationals. Some countries have no restrictions on where Syrians should apply (FR), whereas others have authorised Beirut and Amman to receive the applications (PL, NL, IT, CH, BE, HU, CZ, EL, SE), with the majority being processed in Beirut. AT receives visa applications from Syrians in Beirut; DE in Ankara, Beirut and Amman. ES does not receive visa applications in Amman from Syrians who are not residents in Jordan; all Syrian citizens can apply at the ES Embassy in Beirut. FR also issues asylum visas only for Iraqi and Syrian residents in Jordan.

There are several Schengen countries that are not represented in Iraq or do not issue Schengen visas at their embassies there, and in some cases issue visas for Iraqi nationals at their embassies in Amman (BE, AT, CH, NO, SE).

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The LSC held two meetings in Jordan in 2021: one online in April and a physical in September. They were both well attended and chaired by the EU. The virtual meeting was attended by some non-resident Schengen countries as well (allowing for instance the presentation of SI Presidency priorities). Ad hoc meetings that had previously taken place on document fraud (with the participation of third countries and non-Schengen MS) were not organised during the year.

Most Schengen MS resumed visa operations early summer and witnessed a quick return to pre-COVID-19 level of applications before new restrictions and low season resulted in another decrease. One MS cancelled the contract with their external service provider while several other MS raised visa service fees in order to compensate for the loss of revenue and help the companies survive the pandemic.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The MS are well equipped to apply the Visa Code and share information on different kinds of visa matters. MS exchange information with each other on a regular basis and when needed, for example on refusals.

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

The LSC transmitted the last version of the harmonised list of supporting documents to the Visa Committee in September 2021 and received the VC's replies in October 2021.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

MS did not see the need to deviate from the cascade rules on multiple-entry visas but noted that Jordanian passports are usually issued for 5 years so in practice it is often not possible to issue longer validity visas.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

There have been consultations among LSC members on the resumption of visa services.

3.5 Exchange of information

- Quarterly statistics: Compiled by EUD and shared with HQ. From 2022 onwards, NO will not provide anymore disaggregated data for DK, FI and IS that they represent in JO, instead it will be all under NO in the table.
- Cases of fraud: The informal anti-fraud working group did not convene during 2021.
- Travel medical insurance (TMI): Falsified health insurances from one agency were reported by MS.
- Any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules: n/a
- Cooperation with local authorities and companies: n/a
- Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring: n/a
- Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System: Technical problems were reported by Schengen MS who complained about being bound by GDPR to use VIS-Mail for exchange of information regarding cases but the messages often did not arrive to MS counterparts.
- Other issues: n/a

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

1. External service providers raised service fees to compensate for loss of revenue and in some cases made courier services mandatory to reduce contact with clients and to earn extra money. MS had different positions regarding courier services with some concerned about liability in case of lost documents.
2. Keep an eye on visa shopping as the first Schengen entry sometimes happens in a different MS than the one that had issued the visa, which can be justified in case of low-cost carriers (frequent in JO) that do not offer correspondence.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

Nur-Sultan, 06/04/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Kazakhstan 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

21 MS (19 Schengen States and two observers BG and RO) have embassies, most with consular sections, in Nur-Sultan city (the capital). There are also five consulates (DE, LT, HU, PL, and FR) in Almaty, the former capital. The consulates in Almaty often also cover neighbouring countries, primarily Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Many embassies and consulates work with visa service providers. Some service providers⁷ have offices outside of Nur-Sultan and Almaty to reduce the travel time for applicants who do not live in proximity to the embassies or consulates. Due to the vast distances between towns and cities, most applicants are unable to apply for their visa in close proximity to their residency. The harsh climate conditions during the wintertime create an additional burden to applicants.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the LSC meetings were organised and chaired by the EU Delegation in Nur-Sultan in online format via WebEx. It was decided to keep the online format of the meetings to allow consulate representatives from Almaty (former capital and biggest city) to participate in the meetings. A hybrid format is not possible for the time being due to technical issues. Reports (summaries) were drawn up by EUD. The EUD has also been in charge of reporting and coordinating the follow-up steps when needed.

During the reporting period, the LSC group in Nur-Sultan held four regular online meetings on the following dates: 24 February 2021, 18 June 2021, 8 October 2021 and 8 December 2021. The LSC group meetings were very well attended.

Since the beginning of the COVID-related quarantine, most LSC group members have issued limited amounts of visas. Some LSC group members issue visa in essential cases, which include but are not limited to medical reasons and family reunion purposes. Certain LSC group members issue visa for specific business purposes and student visas. While some Member States had to suspend the activity of their visa centres due to COVID, others continued to work with theirs.

⁷ For example, service provider “PonyExpress” has twelve regional offices in Kazakhstan: Nur-Sultan (BD), Aktau, Aktobe (BD), Almaty (BD), Atyrau, Karaganda, Kokshetau, Kostanay, Kyzylorda, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, Semey. **BD** stands for collection of biometric data.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In Kazakhstan, the Visa Code is well implemented in a coordinated and synchronised manner. The Code proved its relevance as a single unified legal instrument, helping to address effectively common problems raised in relation to the Schengen visa application process. In Kazakhstan, VIS has successfully been applied since 14 November 2013.

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

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

No particular proposals to amend the existing list were raised in 2021. The work on harmonisation of documents may be taken forward in 2022, based on LSC discussions.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Since the worldwide travel ban was introduced shortly after the revised rules were applicable, most LSC group members were unable to test the adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas in the day-to-day work scheme. After the travel ban has been lifted, best practices should be shared and if necessary revised.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Nothing to report in 2021.

3.5 Exchange of information

LSC MS regularly exchanged views on flights, visa policies and travel regulations in view of COVID-19. They also regularly discussed changes introduced by the Kazakh Government (several regulations were adopted concerning travel).

LSC MS regularly shared their visa statistics and discussed issues related to the "Ashyq" mobile application⁸ and vaccination passports, as well as recognition of vaccines.

There are still restrictions for tourist visas issuance. The few exceptions in place mainly concern stable partnerships. For one of the MS, as regards Schengen visas, mostly business visas were issued, as well as a few visas for sport related events. As for national visas, there was 100% increase for students' visas with respect to 2020.

⁸ The "Ashyq" is a contact-tracing and COVID-19 status mobile application. It works through the use of a QR code and integration with the general database of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan, to determine the status of a visitor: whether he is currently a carrier of the virus or not. To enter public places, a citizen scans a special QR code by means of "Ashyq" and presents at the entrance a risk rating specified in the application.

CH issues tourist visas, but very low number, for instance, in 2020, 900 visas were issued which is 1/5 of pre-pandemic number. As for vaccines, applicants provide vaccination passports for Sinovac as well as Sinopharm (China). In this regard, CH raised the issue of false vaccination certificates, which is difficult to trace. CH noted that there were cases of false vaccinations in Nur-Sultan, Shymkent and Pavlodar. Some people also tried to use false certificates from Uzbekistan, while there were no stamps were present in their passports proving that they were in that country during the period of alleged vaccination.

Another MS informed that there is an increase in applications due to more sports groups travelling to Europe. As for tourist visas, despite the quarantine requirement, there is an increase in this type of applications in Kazakhstan. In this regard, they checked whether applicants really want to stay for quarantine.

As for representation agreements, as from October 1, 2021, AT started representing Luxembourg, Slovenia, Belgium and Hungary in Nur-Sultan; and the Netherlands as of November 1st, 2021.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Kazakhstan was asking EU MS to recognize COVID-19 certificates. The country announced that it recognizes vaccine passports from several states, including EU MS. EUD reminded the EU position concerning travel to the EU, explaining that the Sputnik-V procedure is going on within the EMA, and that according to the EU Council recommendations EU MS are encouraged to acknowledge vaccines from the WHO emergency list, however, it is only a recommendation and is not obligatory. In general there is a still quite restrictive rule for KZ citizens, Kazakhstan is on a red or similar list. However, there are exceptions in some EU MS who began to acknowledge Kazakh certificates.

One EU MS confirmed about mutual recognition of vaccination certificates/passports/cards with Kazakhstan.

Most MS allowed travel of persons fully vaccinated but only with vaccines recognized by EMA, WHO or internally (for the moment only the four Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson).

The procedure and development of the Digital COVID-19 certificate (DCC) among the EU MS got into force on July 1 and is rapidly going among EU MS.

4. Challenges

Most likely, travel and visa complications related to COVID-19 will become less important with easing of the pandemic. In particular, most of the representation agreements were already resumed or are expected to resume soon. With this, further harmonisation will need to be pursued in 2022. Possibly, the group could return to the standardised documents list, with a view to couples in long-term relationships who are currently not covered by the list. First discussions on this were already held in the beginning of 2022.

5. Other issues

Afghanistan

Some MS informed that they received requests to help Afghan nationals on humanitarian grounds. According to guidelines provided from their capitals on how to deal with such requests, based on the reasonable presupposition that Afghan nationals' applications for visas bear a very high immigration risk, requests for visas will only be processed within the framework of specific programmes for resettlement based on humanitarian grounds. NL made additional efforts for persons who have strong ties with the Netherlands, such as journalists and human rights activists with whom the Dutch mission has/had long-standing ties.

There is a group of Afghan women studying in Almaty under an EU funded programme (run by UN), and some of them were enquiring about possibilities of being resettled to Europe. The EU position was clear: as Kazakhstan is a safe country, the EU is not engaging in any (even potential) actions that may lead to any kind of refugee status in Europe. Currently, there is no discussion on the issue.

Overall, the Afghan issue took less importance in the group compared to LSCs in other Central Asian countries. The flow of (transiting) Afghan citizens, even earlier not very high in Kazakhstan, seems to have completely ended before the end of 2021.

The report was consulted with and endorsed by all the members of the LSC group in Kazakhstan.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

January – December 2021

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the Republic of Korea (RoK) 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

24 EU Member States (EU MS) out of 27 are present in the Republic of Korea (RoK). Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Malta cover the RoK from their embassies located in Beijing or Tokyo⁹.

The agreements of representation in Schengen visa matters¹⁰ were as follows:

- Embassy of Austria represents Malta;
- Embassy of Belgium represents Luxembourg;
- 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.
- Embassy of Poland represents Estonia.
- Embassy of Slovakia represents Latvia.
- Embassy of Italy represents Slovenia.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

From January to December 2021, four EU/LSC Consular cooperation group meetings were held on 12 April, 22 June, 8 September and 17 November.

For the first half of the period, the EU MS/Schengen local consular group meetings were chaired by Portugal as the local chair in its capacity of the rotating EU Council Presidency. The EU Delegation supported the chair with logistics, providing a meeting room at the EU Delegation, drafting minutes, etc.

For the second half of the period, at the request of the Embassy of Slovenia and in agreement with all Member States in the group, the EU Delegation assumed the duty of local chair due to limited capacity of the Embassy of Slovenia (which has not yet officially opened).

A large majority of EU MS participated in all meetings. Switzerland and Norway also attended the LSC meetings regularly (Iceland and Liechtenstein do not have diplomatic representation in the RoK).

⁹ The Embassy of Slovenia in Seoul has not yet officially opened, thus in 2021 the Slovenian Embassy in Tokyo remained responsible for RoK matters in general.

¹⁰ This does not necessarily imply the same arrangements for consular matters more widely.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The main issue dealt with by the consular cooperation and LSC group in 2021 remained the COVID-19 crisis, in particular travel and visa restrictions.

Following the RoK's suspension of visa waiver agreements with nearly all EU Member States in April 2020 as a public health measure and also in response to the original EU ban on non-essential travel, in the first half of 2021 the EU Delegation and Member States Embassies continued to coordinate on this issue in order to remove the bilateral irritant.

Thanks to the coordinated approach by the LSC/consular group (as well as at other levels such as Heads of Mission) vis-à-vis RoK authorities, this objective was achieved successfully: on 1 September 2021 the RoK reinstated the visa waiver agreement with the EU. At the same time, a new online authorisation system, called K-ETA came into force (resembling the US ESTA system).

Despite the lifting of the RoK visa measures, de facto travel remains depressed as other travel restrictions discourage travel, in particular a mandatory quarantine period upon arrival in the RoK for many groups of travellers, at own expense. Quarantine exemptions exist but are generally difficult to obtain, even more so in the post-omicron variant period. According to information from several EU Member States, interpretation of these rules by RoK embassies and consulates abroad can sometimes be arbitrary, which can discourage travelling.

As no visas are required for RoK citizens travelling to the EU/Schengen area, LSC discussions on the application of the EU Visa Code¹¹ have been relatively limited and discussed only when problematical cases were brought up by EU MS/Schengen countries.

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

The harmonised list of supporting documents for the RoK was adopted by Commission Decision on 24 October 2018¹², following discussion and agreement by the LSC. MS embassies in 2020 did not raise a need to update the agreed list. The Delegation was not made aware of significant issues regarding implementation.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

No major issues raised by Member States on this issue during the reporting period.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No further initiatives taken as the existing state of affairs is considered satisfactory.

¹¹ See <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/visa-code-consolidated-version.pdf>

¹² See https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/c_2018_6863_f1_commission_implementing_decision_en_v6_p1_994111.pdf and https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/c_2018_6863_f1_annex_en_v9_p1_994112.pdf

3.5 Exchange of information

Meetings of the group were appreciated as a useful platform to exchange information related to consular and visa issues. Exchange of information focused in particular on issues arising due to the COVID-19 situation, including RoK travel restrictions and issues such as unclear immigration procedures. The chair and other Member States regularly debriefed on meetings with RoK authorities on travel and visa restrictions, as well as other pertinent topics, such as an envisaged mutual recognition of vaccination certificates.

Discussions also included a general exchange of experience in dealing with Korean authorities such as the lack of official reaction from MoFA if approached by a Note Verbale. Electronic exchanges via e-mail and through a dedicated electronic group chat were also appreciated by the LSC, in particular during the rapidly changing situation in the COVID-19 context.

Despite the COVID situation, visa issuance in Member State embassies is generally operating effectively. As regards general trends in travel flows, based on statistics provided by MS embassies, the total amount of people travelling with a visa from the RoK to Europe in 2021 increased compared to 2020, although it remained significantly lower than 2019. However, as RoK citizens do not need a visa to travel to the Schengen area, the overall trends are somewhat hard to assess.

Cases of suspected fraud involved inter alia some visa applicants with refugee status in the RoK (from countries including Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, Morocco), sometimes accompanied by suspected “brokers”. Other cases included attempted misuse of working holiday programme visas.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

Following the RoK’s reinstatement of the visa waiver, the main challenge remains to make full use of the potential to restore EU-RoK visa-free travel to pre-pandemic levels by working toward softening remaining RoK travel restrictions such as the length and modalities of mandatory quarantine.

Other challenges will be related to continued COVID-related constraints, depending on how the pandemic situation will develop in the RoK and globally.

5. Other issues

This report has been cleared with the local EU/Schengen Consular group.



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN UNION OFFICE IN KOSOVO
EUROPEAN UNION SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

25 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KOSOVO 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Kosovo hosts Diplomatic Missions of 18 EU Member States. Schengen visas in Kosovo are issued by: Italy (representing also Estonia), Hungary, Slovakia, Greece, Germany, Finland and Slovenia (issues short stay visas for Latvia). Switzerland usually issues Schengen visas on behalf of Austria, Belgium, France, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Norway does it on behalf of Denmark and Iceland. Sweden, Austria and the Czech Republic issue and receive Kosovo's applications for visas in Skopje, capital of North Macedonia. Poland issues Schengen visas for Kosovo passports in Skopje and Tirana. Portugal issues Schengen visas for Kosovo passports in Sofia. An increasing number of EU Member States and Schengen participants have started to use external service providers (VFS Global and TLS Contact) and visas are processed through the Visa Centers in Pristina.

Generally in Kosovo, there has been high and continuously increasing demand for Schengen visa applications over the last three years in the absence of a pending decision on Kosovo's visa liberalisation. The COVID 19 pandemic and closure of borders from 16 March to June 2020 and other related travel restrictions throughout 2021 have resulted in decrease of Schengen visa applications and impacted the functioning of visa services provided by the Schengen participants. Throughout 2021, the unfavourable epidemiological situation in Kosovo and in Europe did not yet allow full resumption of the regular Schengen visa operations. Moreover, the representation mandates for Schengen visa issuance by Switzerland were partially suspended with the EU Member States (FR, NL, BE, AT, Liechtenstein, Lux) in the first half of 2021 and external service providers were also temporarily closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Norway also temporarily suspended the representation agreement with Denmark and Iceland.

2. LSC meetings held in 2020

From January to December 2021, the European Union Office in Kosovo convened three LSC meetings on 25 March, 16 June and 17 November 2021. The first two meetings took place virtually. In addition, the EU Office assured regular exchange on LSC related matters and updates from Brussels via a Whats App group and by email. The meetings were organised by the LSC political 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 Diplomatic Missions are located.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The New Visa Code applicable since February 2020 could not yet be fully tested and implemented due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions. Most visa sections were operating in shifts with overall reduced visa services until the first half of 2021. Some of them had to further reduce their services because of positive COVID-19 case among their staff. While some Schengen participants started to provide full services from end of June 2021 to fully vaccinated persons by EMA or WHO authorised vaccines two weeks after the second dose (CH, FR, DE). Most continued to issue only emergency and special categories visas (AT, SI, SK, HU, SE etc.), some of them throughout 2021. The EU travel restrictions for Kosovo were only lifted in the period of 30 June to 30 August 2021. Some Visa sections used the pandemic slow down to concentrate on backlog of national visas, work visas for skilled workers and only issued emergency Schengen visas. Since the start of the pandemic Switzerland temporarily suspended the representation mandates for Schengen visa issuance with the EU Member States (FR, NL, BE, AT, Liechtenstein, Lux) and provided support only on a case by case basis. The representation mandates were resumed in July 2021. Norway also temporarily suspended the representation agreement with Denmark and Iceland. The External Service providers remained temporarily closed for some periods in 2021. For Norway and Finland, VFS in Pristina reopened in summer 2021, while it remained closed for Sweden and Austria and it was necessary to go to Skopje for a visa appointment.

In the absence of and expectations for the delayed Visa Liberalisation decision for Kosovo over the last three years, the visa policy is quite a sensitive topic in Kosovo. As a result more Schengen participants are opting for External Service providers to manage the continuously increasing demand for visas, newly also DE announced the intention to start outsourcing in spring or summer 2022 using the Visa Metric Service provider without an appointment.

The differentiation of the visa fee in Kosovo among Schengen participants was further accentuated by the new Visa Code. While 14 Schengen participants raised the visa fees in accordance to the new Visa Code, 5 Schengen participants decided to keep the fee at €35. Moreover, when Schengen participants use a service provider the extra fee is for VFS Global €20 and for TLS Contact €23. No Schengen participant intends to completely exempt the minors from the visa fee, although variation of discounted policy for minors applies. The Schengen participants expected negative public reaction especially to the increase of the visa fee, however in the end, such reaction did not materialise.

Most Schengen participants welcomed the longer visa application period of 6 months prior to travel. As regards the simplified visa application procedures, there is currently no possibility to fill in and sign the visa application electronically. For most Diplomatic Missions it is possible to apply for visas in place of residence in Kosovo (except CZ-Skopje). This option was limited during the pandemic and also for AT, SE it was necessary to apply for visas in Skopje.

Some Schengen participants initially considered the Travel Medical Insurance as a challenge during the Pandemic, as most travel insurance companies in Kosovo did not include COVID-19 coverage into the travel medical insurance. A Joint LSC letter was drafted and sent to the umbrella organization Kosovo Insurance Bureau with a view to obtaining clarifications on the pandemic coverage in Kosovo while stressing that this is a requirement under the existing Schengen visa rules.

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 harmonised list of documents is being used, and sometimes other documents might be requested. There was a suggestion to amend and update the existing list during the reporting period to include the ATK document (tax administration of Kosovo's document) that proves if the company or the person has paid the taxes and the requirement to proof close family relations with the certificates.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Most Kosovars are interested in multiple-entry Schengen visas. However, some Schengen participants, quoting abuses of the previous visas or first time visas, only issue single or double entry visas. There was initial scepticism among some Schengen participants in relation to the issuance of multiple entry visas with longer validity. They see it as challenging in Kosovo as it is hard to check the correct usage of the visa and there is 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.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Full resumption of visa operations had materialized only partially in 2021 due to unfavourable epidemiological situation both in Kosovo and Europe. In 2021, LSC focused and spent a lot of efforts on preparation and coordination of harmonized visa services resumption but travel restrictions were never fully lifted for Kosovo travellers by all Schengen participants during 2021. The EU travel restrictions for Kosovo were only lifted in the period of 30 June to 30 August 2021. In view of improving harmonisation, an overview table of visa categories that can currently receive visas has been used and regularly updated among the Schengen participants.

3.5 Exchange of information

Member States continued to submit visa-related statistics. While not all of them have been doing it regularly, overall the practice of sharing monthly visa statistics has improved. There is certainly scope to improve the information exchange in this regard both on the timely reception and the dissemination part with the new unified visa statistics templates. 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.

As regards the VIS Mail, the 31 January 2020 was set as the compliance deadline for Kosovo. Some Schengen participants informed before the deadline that they do not have the system installed or face recurrent technical difficulties to use it on a daily basis.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

A questionnaire dealing with fraud had been consolidated within the LSC. A Joint LSC letter was drafted and sent to the umbrella organization Kosovo Insurance Bureau with a view to obtaining clarifications on the pandemic coverage in Kosovo while stressing that this is a requirement under the existing Schengen visa rules. The EU regularly informed about the EU digital COVID certificates as well as development of the Kosovo vaccination certificate and the process of its approval by the EU.

4. Challenges

In last years during normal visa operations the main challenges and breaches of the Visa Code in Kosovo were related to general high demand and long waiting periods, the admissibility of visa requests (art.19) and the validity of the visas issued (art. 24 par. 2, 3). High prevalence of visa shopping and relatively high refusal rate 20-30% linked to not harmonized list of appointments and other differentiated practices among Schengen participants linked to visa issuance (visa fee, visa duration, etc.) were also challenges. 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. Abuses of the visa appointment booking systems, reportedly by travel agencies that then sell the places to the applicants were also reported.

In the absence of a Visa Facilitation Agreement between Kosovo and the EU, the EU Member States continue to apply different visa application fees, which was further accentuated by the new Visa Code (see above). Some EU Member States use the €35 visa fee for Kosovo passports based on the EU-Serbia Visa Facilitation Agreement or on the basis of a political decision taken by their capitals, while most apply the €80 visa fee. The current practice of differentiated visa fees, even as regards children is one of the factors that contribute to visa shopping. Into consideration should also be taken the fact that apart from Kosovo passports, Serbs in Kosovo still have, in some cases, Koordinaciona Uprava passports (see below, 5.). Practices of visa fees vary also in this case.

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 has been long delayed and it remains to be seen if consensus on Kosovo visa liberalisation will be found in 2022. In the meanwhile, more Member States already turned to outsourcing of the visa application process to address the challenge of high demand.

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 EU offered to collect the information about the abusive practices of the travel agencies and parallel visa centres and to pass it on to the Kosovo Police for further investigation.

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. A questionnaire dealing with fraud had been consolidated within the LSC with recommendations on possible counter measures and this issue will continue to be on the agenda in the 2022.

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. In 2022, the LSC will reach out to establish better cooperation with local authorities.

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%, being the result of multiple factors. In order to deal with the abuse of Schengen visas 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.

In 2022, the LSC will aim to contribute to the harmonisation of resumption of visa operations, once travel restrictions are lifted. Focus will also be on the overall application of the new Visa Code-MEV cascades.

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.

It is clear that many of the current LSC challenges will be tackled by the introduction of the visa free regime, although this 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. KU passports are not recognized by Kosovo but accepted by most EU Member States and Schengen participants. They are not biometric and their holders will not be able to benefit from eventual visa liberalisation for Kosovo same as they currently do not benefit from the Serbian visa free regime with the EU. The question is whether their holders will be able and willing to get the Kosovo documents and are not left behind in case Kosovo reaches the visa free. The issue of KU passports might need to be considered also in connection with the update of the current visa rules.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

الاتحاد الأوروبي

مندوبية الاتحاد الأوروبي إلى
المملكة العربية السعودية

Riyadh, 20/2/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Saudi Arabia 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

A total of 18 Schengen Member States¹³ (MS) are represented in Riyadh. Four of them¹⁴ also have consulates in Jeddah. The majority of Schengen member states are making use of an external service provider (ESP) to collect and process visa applications. This is currently the case for Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. All the countries use the services of VFS Global with the exception of ES, which uses BLS International. The majority of these LSC MS use the company's visa application centres in Riyadh, Jeddah and Al-Khobar; a few others use the company's visa application centre only in Riyadh. Poland is the only country not making use of an ESP.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

LSC group met regularly either physically at the EUD or online (webex meetings) due to Covid-19 restrictions. The meetings were chaired by the EUD. In the reporting period, a total of seven meetings took place. LSC meetings are open to all EUMS as observers; Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland and Romania occasionally attended.

Meetings were always well attended with usually 15-16 MS present; none of the MS was regularly absent.

Following a practice introduced already in March 2017, a political officer from the EUD chaired the local MS LSC / Consular affairs coordination group meetings. LSC continued to hold its meetings back-to-back with Consular Cooperation meetings.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

On the 2/2/2020 the LSC MS introduced, in practice, the new Visa Code. However, due to the travel restrictions imposed both by LSC countries as well as the local authorities (which had suspended all regular air travels from mid-March to mid-September), the implementation of the new Visa Code has not been heavily tested by all states. Nevertheless, the LSC MS have already agreed that the new Visa Code is unnecessarily restrictive to KSA travellers and contrary to its initial purpose, it adds administrative burden on consulates. Therefore, they have proposed the adoption of a more generous 'local cascade' (see relevant section below).

¹³ AT, BE, CZ, DK, FI, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, ES, SE, CH, NO

¹⁴ FR, DE, EL, IT

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

In October 2018, the Visa Committee adopted the new harmonised list of supporting documents to be presented by visa applicants in Saudi Arabia, after three rounds of examination of the draft presented by the LSC. The new harmonised list of supporting documents replaced the previous harmonised list which dated back to September 2011. In December 2021, the Schengen MS agreed on an updated version of the list of companies approved for the travel medical insurance, necessary for the visa application.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades').

Following the implementation of the new Visa Code, LSC MS suggested a more generous local cascade, which should be applied only to KSA citizens and GCC nationals (citizens of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman), residing in KSA; KSA nationals represent very low migratory risk for Schengen states and they have not been a source of concerns for any other visa related matters. Rejection of visa applications for KSA nationals have been, in the recent years, rare. Equally, the GCC nationals residing in KSA seem to match the same criteria as the one met by KSA nationals. Contrary to these two categories, rejection rates are commonly related to applications by expat workers mostly from the MENA region, Asia and Africa, for which the Visa Code cascade will be applied, especially since the "Saudisation" process of the local job market has created instability and unpredictability to job security for non-Saudis.

General practice by Consulates of EU/ Schengen MS prior to the introduction of the new visa code had been more generous than the regular Visa Code cascade and it is expected that its implementation (as globally suggested) will create unnecessary administrative burden on consulates, contrary to the aims of the new visa code.

Furthermore, given the constant request of the KSA leadership for the country to be included in the Annex II list of the EU Regulation 2018/1806 (List of third countries whose nationals are exempt from the requirement to be in possession of a visa when crossing the external borders of the member states), MS agreed that a less generous cascade than the prevailing system until 02/02/2020, will send unintended and counter-productive messages, creating political frustration to the detriment of bilateral relations.

In addition, KSA appears to be one of the most lucrative markets for tourism purposes for all MS. Therefore they wish to encourage and facilitate, rather than impede, larger numbers of Saudi visitors.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Following the new harmonised list entered into force, LSC MS discuss and adopt practices to ensure a harmonised application of the new list and the need to keep its elements publicly available. LSC reviewed and ensured the correct implementation of the new harmonised list, including the consulates in Jeddah.

In the context of the regular challenges met by LSC MS in their relations with the External Service Providers, LSC MS have carried out inspection visits to the Riyadh, Jeddah and Khobar visa application centers to ensure harmonisation of practices as well as to verify the implementation of the Covid-19 related measures imposed by the local authorities on social distancing.

3.5 Exchange of information

LSC MS regularly discussed the gradual reopening the visa application process for non-essential travels, taking into consideration national decisions to contain and tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. By the end of 2021 the regular visa application processes were largely reinstated.

LSC MS regularly discussed the situation of Yemeni and Syrian visa applicants, in view of the guarantees given by a number of EU governments to refugees arriving on their territories.

MS regularly discussed their experience with the External Service Provider and exchanged best practice as to the enforcement of legal and contractual obligations.

MS circulated amongst each other cases of suspected fraud bilaterally or by means of the LSC mailing list.

LSC MS regularly inform their consulates in Jeddah of the outcomes of the LSC meetings.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EUD and EU MS decided, in the context of Brexit and the new Visa Code, to consider the redesigning, printing and distribution of the Common Information Sheet (article 48 (2) Visa Code) in English and Arabic.

In order to better understand all categories of residency status in KSA, the group agreed to pursue further information, especially related to the permanent residency status (not temporary residency status renewed with the Iqama cards)

LSC MS have regularly updated information on exceptional visa processing and local regulations and conditions in home countries for entering / exiting the EU / Schengen area, since the early stages of the pandemic.

4. Challenges

The greatest challenges for the LSC MS are related to the application of non-Saudi / non-GCC nationals. Their applications have to be thoroughly examined. Not only foreign low-skilled workers pose migratory risks, also white-collar-workers can be replaced by Saudi citizens anytime (Saudisation policies) and thus might lose their right to reside in KSA. In addition, residence permits for family members are costly. To many, life in EU MS seems more comfortable.

It has also be noted that often times travel agencies are tasked by KSA nationals with the preparation of their visa applications which result in fake airline tickets/ hotel reservations. More rarely in fake bank statements, even if KSA nationals are believed to be bona fide travellers, with significant financial capacity.

During the next reporting period the EUD and EU MS Embassies will also need to continue the follow up on the correct implementation of the new harmonised list and the new Visa Code.

Moreover, the ESP centres should be closely monitored with regards to the conveying of the message that all Schengen countries should receive a united, uniform approach from all ESP centres throughout KSA.

5. Other issues

During the reporting period the LSC MS commended Saudi authorities for their efforts to improve the procedures for visa applications from Schengen citizens, including with the possibility for visa upon arrivals.

In December 2021, the LSC group agreed to come up with a list of common concerns on visa procedures (as well as for Consular affairs) and request a meeting with H.E. Tamim Al Dosari, Head of the Consular Affairs Department at MoFA. This will constitute the fourth meeting of the joint Schengen-KSA technical working group on visa, which was established in 2011.

This report was discussed at the LSC meeting held on 20th of January and revised in written form thereafter; it was endorsed by LSC MS through a silence procedure on 20th of February 2021.



EUROPEAN UNION

**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
TO THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI**

Lilongwe, 24/2/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN MALAWI 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

A total of four Schengen Member States¹⁵ (MS) are represented in Lilongwe. None of them are processing Schengen visas in the country and Norway, who was in the past processing visas in Malawi, is now doing it from Pretoria in South Africa, using an external service provider (namely VFS) to collect and process visa applications.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Due to limited visa activity, the LSC group is not formed in Malawi and usually meets to discuss Schengen visa issues in the margins of the Local Consular Correspondents (LCC) group. The only meeting for 2021 took place on 30 September. The meeting was chaired by the EUD.

The next meeting is planned on 10 March 2021, this time only for LSC, and on the request of Ireland.

3. State of play

A key concern for Malawian authorities, as expressed to us in our Art.8 political dialogue meeting on 4 June, is the fact that Malawians need to travel physically outside of the country to obtain a Schengen visa, either to Zambia or to Pretoria (via the Norwegian embassy). The latter has confirmed to us that in the future this would not be needed. Due to Covid Norway's Schengen visa processing services were closed since late 2020, and only opened again in December 2021. However, due to an element out of their control (a police investigation that locked their buildings), VFS is not delivering Schengen visas for Malawians at the moment, although they hope to resume anytime soon.

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

For all questions concerning applications of the Visa code, the Norwegian embassy in Pretoria is the one able to answer these questions. The Norwegian Embassy in Malawi cannot do it formally – even if they know the answers.

¹⁵ DE, IE, IS, NO

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

For all questions concerning applications of the Visa code, the Norwegian embassy in Pretoria is the one able to answer these questions. The Norwegian Embassy in Malawi cannot do it formally – even if they know the answers.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code (‘MEV cascades’).

For all questions concerning applications of the Visa code, the Norwegian embassy in Pretoria is the one able to answer these questions. The Norwegian Embassy in Malawi cannot do it formally – even if they know the answers.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Not applicable in the context of Malawi

3.5 Exchange of information

LSC MS regularly discussed the gradual reopening the visa application process for non-essential travels, taking into consideration national decisions to contain and tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. By the end of 2021 the regular visa application processes were largely reinstated.

LSC MS regularly discussed the situation of Yemeni and Syrian visa applicants, in view of the guarantees given by a number of EU governments to refugees arriving on their territories.

MS regularly discussed their experience with the External Service Provider and exchanged best practice as to the enforcement of legal and contractual obligations.

MS circulated amongst each other cases of suspected fraud bilaterally or by means of the LSC mailing list.

LSC MS regularly inform their consulates in Jeddah of the outcomes of the LSC meetings.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None.

4. Challenges

The main challenge is the fact that visas are not delivered in-country for the moment. Norway is working on a solution that should be in place shortly, as soon as VFS in Pretoria opens again (see point 3).

5. Other issues

None.



EUROPEAN UNION

**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN
UNION TO MEXICO**

24th March 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Mexico 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

The Delegation of the European Union to Mexico is responsible for the organisation, chairing and follow-up of Local Schengen Cooperation meetings. The LSC group in Mexico consists of 18 Schengen countries that are EU Member States (represented in Mexico-City through an Embassy) as well as two non-EU Schengen countries, Switzerland and Norway. For meetings that are held virtually, EU MS not represented in Mexico are also invited to participate. Nonrepresented MS have therefore attended some of the meetings. It is worth noting that MS maintain three Consulates General outside the capital Mexico City: ES has Consulates General in Guadalajara (State of Jalisco) and Monterrey (State of Nuevo León), FR opened one in Monterrey in 2021.

1. **Austria** (for Schengen visas also representing Malta)
2. **Belgium** (also representing Luxembourg and Slovenia for Schengen visas)
3. **Bulgaria** (not applying the common visa policy in full, always invited to LSC meetings)
4. **Czech Republic**
5. **Denmark** (also issuing Schengen visas for Sweden, Norway and Iceland)
6. **Finland**
7. **France**
8. **Germany**
9. **Greece**
10. **Hungary**
11. **Italy**
12. **Netherlands**
13. **Poland**
14. **Portugal**
15. **Romania** (not applying the common visa policy in full, always invited to LSC meetings)
16. **Slovakia** (for Schengen visas representing Latvia)
17. **Spain** (for Schengen visas representing Estonia)
18. **Sweden** (Schengen visas for Sweden are issued by Denmark)
19. **Norway** (Schengen visas for Norway are issued by Denmark)
20. **Switzerland** (also issuing Schengen visas for Liechtenstein)
21. **EU Delegation** (chair)

Since Lithuania has neither a representation arrangement nor consulates in Mexico, applicants for Schengen visas shall apply at the Lithuanian Embassy to the United States of America and to the United Mexican States, based in Washington DC.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Covid-19 led many MS to reduce their visa operations at various intervals during 2021 due to varying waves of the pandemic. The continued high incidence of the pandemic in Mexico during 2021 the country resulted in Mexico remaining outside the list of countries for which the Council of the European Union recommended to lift temporary restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU (annex I of Council recommendation 2020/912). Furthermore, Mexican citizens do not need a visa to enter the Schengen area, and therefore the issuing of Schengen visas by MS consulates was already limited prior to the start of the pandemic.

In the reporting period, **two** LSC meetings were held, in June (virtual) and September of 2021 (in person). Coordination of the LSC remained very positive through the exchange of information on the consular whatsapp group which continued to be very active and efficient. EUDEL shares the LSC meeting reports with the MS locally.

Outside the capital city, only ES and FR maintain professional consular representations (see above). For this reason, there are no additional regional LSC groups in Mexico.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Due to the EU-Mexico tourist visa waiver agreement (VWA), Mexican nationals are exempted from Schengen visas. Therefore, the number of Schengen visa applications in Mexico (by third country nationals only) is limited. Due to the entry restrictions to the Schengen area recommended by the Council since July 2020, the issuing of Schengen visas by Member States was drastically reduced. The Member States issued a bit more than 400 Schengen visas for 2021 (refusal rate ca. 2%), with the ES issuing 231 of them.

As far as the cost of Schengen visas is concerned, MS apply different exchange rates and also update them with different regularity, mostly according to instructions from their capitals. It is therefore impossible to have one uniform visa fee in the local currency. However, the differences in fees for Schengen visas are minimal and do not lead to visa shopping.

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

The harmonised list of supporting documents was adopted by the LSC in 2019 and its implementation has not encountered any major difficulties so far, although experience is limited due to the pause or slowdown in the issuing of Schengen visas during the pandemic.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

In 2020, the EUDEL had updated participants on Schengen-related information, recalling that the revised Visa Code came into force on 2nd February 2020 and that the revised Handbook became applicable as of 25 March 2020. No discussions took place in 2021 on ensuring a harmonised application of Multiple Entry Visas at the local level so as to prevent forum shopping.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Not applicable

3.5 Exchange of information

As a deliverable of a meeting held at the end of 2020 with airlines to establish a working relationship and information exchange that would facilitate the airlines' work in case of discrepancies among Member States in the way they interpret requirements for entering the Schengen area, the EUDEL set up a whatsapp group consisting of the MS consuls and the main airlines operating flights between Europe and Mexico. The chat group served as an important platform to solve issues related to entry into the EU in a speedy manner.

Furthermore, during meetings MS exchanged views on the issuing of visas for third country nationals, especially in relation to the acceptance of valid vaccination certificate given that Mexico did not file for a compliance decision with the EU Digital Covid Certificate.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None

4. Challenges

Provided the pandemic continues to recede and MS consulates are able to fully re-start visa operations, it would be worthwhile to assess and address any issues linked to the resumption of such services. It would also be pertinent to assess in more depth the application of the rules agreed locally for the harmonisation of supporting documents and seek to address any issues that may arise.

5. Other issues

None



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

25/02/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Chisinau 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

15 Member States are present in the Republic of Moldova (from which 13 are Schengen countries) and all are represented in Chisinau. Hungary manages a Common Application Centre for 16 EU MS who do not have visa sections in Chisinau. A few Member States have consulates or honorary consuls located outside the capital (such as Cahul, Ungheni, Balti).

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

There were no formal LSC meetings in 2021. Exchange of information took place mainly through the whatsapp group which is used extensively. The information was mainly in connection to entry/exit conditions for Moldova/EU.

No additional cooperation is needed in locations outside Chisinau.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS are well prepared to ensure all tasks to be carried out under the visa code.

Due to the visa free regime for citizens of the RM who hold a biometrical passport only a limited number of Schengen visa applications need to be dealt with. Due to the travel restrictions imposed by MS related to the COVID-Pandemic the general number of travellers and applicants decreased.

No problems mentioned about the implementation of the Visa Code (only a limited number of visa cases was dealt with during the reporting period).

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

A harmonised list of supporting documents is available: C(2014)2737/F1 (30/04/2014).

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Article 24(2) Visa Code is applied by all MS issuing Schengen visas.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Cooperation within the LSC meetings and bilateral consultations in case of doubt.

3.5 Exchange of information

Statistics, information on cases of fraud, TMI, cooperation with local authorities and external service providers as well as other issues are exchanged by bilateral consultations if need be.

VISMail can be used (a test mail was exchanged between Hungary and Germany in October 2018).

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

4. Challenges

Visa sections need more time for the information campaign (website, social media), in order to inform the applicants about the fast changing situation related to COVID-19 requirements.

5. Other issues

The issue of ETIAS appears regularly in the mass-media. EU MS would appreciate the provision of information on the status.



25/02/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

6 EU Member States are present and other 17 are represented in Mongolia.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Covid has continued to have a huge impact on the activities of Member States' consular sections since Mongolia has closed its borders in late January 2020. Local restrictions in addition to restrictions within Schengen area, different from country to country, increased the workload of the sections as the validity of visas expired before the traveller could travel to the EU. As the vaccination rate kept increasing over 2021, travel between EU and Mongolia resumed gradually and MS started to re-issue visas.

There have been 2 LSC meetings in 2021, on 25th February and on 21st October 2021.

Generally speaking, LSC meetings tend to have poor attendance. This has been increased by the sanitary situation and with the rotation of MS embassies' staff. LSC meetings are chaired by EUDEL.

3. State of play

Within the pandemic, there was a decrease of emission of all types of visas. There has been no particular issue with the implementation of the Visa Code and both MS Consular sections and local authorities have been cooperating harmoniously.

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All MS carry out their tasks under LSC's Visa Code normally according to the situation.

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

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already acquired

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

This topic has not been discussed in 2021.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

This topic will be discussed once the situation allows it.

3.5 Exchange of information

A specific functional mailbox has been created and all LSC matters (meetings' agenda and minutes, monthly visas statistics are sent from/to this email address (Delegation-Mongolia-LSC@eeas.europa.eu)

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

The main challenge remains the opening or not of Mongolia's borders and the evolution of the pandemic both in Mongolia and in EU.

5. Other issues

N/A



Podgorica, 25 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONTENEGRO **2021 REPORT**

1. Introduction

Currently, 13 EU MS Embassies (AT, CZ, GR, FR, SI, IT, BG, HU, SK, PL, DE, RO, HR), one Consul - Gerant (HR in Kotor's consulate) and six Honorary Consuls representing eight EU MS (DK/SE, BE/LU, MT, BG, SI, HU) are present in Montenegro.

The Common Application Centre Podgorica (CAC) continues to function within the structure of the Embassy of Slovenia and provide support to 13 EU MS (AT, BE, DK, EE, ES, FR, LV, LT, LU, HU, NL, PL, SK).

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The impact of the ongoing COVID -19 pandemics was regularly discussed in the framework of Local Consular Co-operation and Local Schengen Co-operation. EU MS continued to exercise the visa operations in 2021, ensuring implementation of 'business as usual' practises.

In 2021, two Local Schengen Group meetings took place in June and November 2021. Both meetings were organised by the EU Delegation (EUD) and chaired by the EUD Consular Correspondent.

The LSC meetings were well attended, with non-resident EU MS attending the meeting via WebEx. Non-Schengen EU MS observed both meetings. Reports were prepared by the EU Delegation and distributed to all resident and non-resident EU MS, as well as relevant HQ colleagues.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The issue of the Visa Code was discussed in both LSC meeting in 2021. No specific problems were noted with regard to its implementation.

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

Discussions are ongoing in the framework of the local Schengen co-operation. In general, the CAC is taking into account all the suggested documents foreseen by the Visa Code. No specific issues were reported by the EU Member States in this regard.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

SI re-confirmed that it already applies the so-called MEV cascade following the definition of the Commission (agreed approach of how many previous visas the applicant has to prove to qualify for a long-validity MEV and how the length of validity for each subsequent visa would increase).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No specific issues were reported by the EU Member States in this regard.

3.5 Exchange of information

In 2021, SI (CAC) continued to provide monthly statistics on the issuance of visas to the EU Delegation and 13 represented EU MS. SI also retrieved information and answered questions via VISMail when requested. No specific cases of fraud were registered.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

The co-operation on the LSC related issues has been well established in Montenegro and continued in the COVID context. The EU MS have not reported any specific challenges.

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.



UNION EUROPÉENNE
DELEGATION AU MAROC

Rabat, le 24 février 2022

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN
ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC)
AUPRES DU ROYAUME DU MAROC
RAPPORT 2021**

1. Introduction

17 Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique/consulaire au Maroc: AT (Rabat), BE (Rabat), 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), Irlande (Rabat) depuis octobre 2021.

Depuis le 1^{er} juillet 2021, les consulats FR assurent le regroupement des services visa (Fès et Tanger sont accueillis à Rabat ; Marrakech et Agadir à Casablanca).

Accords de représentation pour les questions de visa: AT, BE, IT représentent respectivement SK, LU, MT. FI, CZ reçoivent et traitent également les demandes de visa des ressortissants mauritaniens. DK assure l'octroi de visas long séjour de NO. SE représente IS.

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

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2021

La pandémie de COVID-19 a eu un impact majeur sur les opérations de visa des Etats Membres. L'état d'urgence sanitaire a continué d'être appliqué pendant toute l'année 2021. Dans le cadre de l'état d'urgence sanitaire, les frontières aériennes, terrestres et maritimes du Maroc ont été officiellement fermées entre avril et juin 2021 et à nouveau à partir de la fin novembre 2021. Toutefois, le Maroc a autorisé la reprise des liaisons aériennes au cas par cas (vols commerciaux spéciaux) pour permettre à certaines catégories de personnes d'entrer et sortir du territoire marocain.

Dans ces circonstances, les déplacements internationaux vers l'espace Schengen ont été très restreints toute l'année. La délivrance de visa uniformes (Schengen) a été en grande partie suspendue, sauf quelques exceptions : soins médicaux et raisons humanitaires, visa de circulation, visa pour des personnes ayant obtenu un visa auparavant. Certains Etats membres ont délivré les visas pour les sportifs professionnels de haut niveau en raison de qualifications aux jeux olympiques. Certains consulats ont sollicité une attestation de voyage essentiel pour motif impérieux, dont la délivrance se fait en concertation avec la police des frontières et sur présentation d'un dossier avec documents à l'appui. Le test PCR et la quarantaine sont obligatoires pour l'entrée dans plusieurs Etats membres mais ne font pas partie des conditions pour l'octroi de visa Schengen. En revanche, la présentation de certificats médicaux fait partie des conditions de l'octroi de visa Schengen pour certains Etats membres.

Malgré les contraintes, **3 réunions ordinaires** ont été organisées dans la période de référence (février, mai, et septembre 2021), dont une réunion en format virtuel et deux réunions en présentiel. La participation des Etats membres représentés au Maroc aux réunions est nombreuse. BG, IR (depuis octobre 2021) HR, RO sont invités systématiquement en tant qu'observateurs pour échanger des informations sur des questions relatives aux visas.

La coordination des réunions LSC est assurée par la Délégation de l'UE au Maroc. Les rapports des réunions LSC sont établis par la Délégation avec des contributions des membres LSC et ensuite partagés avec les missions diplomatiques des Etats membres. Les Etats membres communiquent les rapports à leur capitale.

Les consulats des Etats membres en dehors de Rabat sont invités systématiquement aux réunions virtuelles. Ils reçoivent les rapports et les conclusions des réunions LSC à travers leur mission diplomatique à Rabat et/ou directement de la Délégation de l'UE.

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(2019)5432 du 25 juillet 2019;
- 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 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.

Spécificités locales (avant la pandémie) :

- Dans le cas de certains consulats, les délais de rendez-vous peuvent dépasser 3 mois. Le manque de ressources humaines suffisantes semble être la cause principale de cette situation, dans un contexte de pression sans précédent au niveau de la demande.
- De nombreuses tentatives de fraude, notamment la falsification des justificatifs relatifs à la situation socio-professionnelle (attestations de travail, permis de séjour) 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.
- La saturation des capacités des consulats les plus demandés a aussi pour conséquence un phénomène de "visa-shopping" important au niveau des autres représentations Schengen au Maroc qui, à leur tour, voient leurs capacités saturées avec pour conséquence, entre autres, un impact négatif sur leur image/réputation. Dans ce contexte, NL a mené une enquête virtuelle sur les possibilités de renforcer davantage la coopération au niveau local entre les consulats des Etats membres afin d'améliorer les systèmes de prise de rendez-vous et minimiser les risques de « visa-shopping ».
- Les consulats portent plus d'attention à « overstaying » et aux enfants mineurs qui sont laissés dans sur le territoire des Etats membres.

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

Sur la base de la proposition du LSC, la Commission européenne a adopté le 25 juillet 2019 la décision d'exécution C(2019)5432 modifiant la décision d'exécution C(2015)6940, en ce qui concerne le titre et la liste des documents justificatifs devant être produits par les demandeurs de visa de court séjour au Maroc. L'ensemble des consulats des Etats membres au Maroc a mis en œuvre la décision d'exécution.

3.3 Estimation du besoin d'adapter les règles générales relatives à la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples aux demandeurs en vertu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas (« cascades MEV »)

Le sujet de l'adaptation éventuelle au niveau local des règles générales a fait l'objet de discussions lors des réunions de coordination. La plupart des Etats membres est satisfaite par le modèle de cascade prévu par le Code des Visas et déclarent le suivre. A ce stade, une adaptation des règles ne paraît pas nécessaire car la disposition de l'Article 24(2) est globalement respectée. En revanche, plusieurs consulats n'ont pas eu l'occasion de tester suffisamment la procédure en « cascade » proposée par le Code des Visas révisé, en raison de la pandémie.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures, échanges 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, sur les statistiques de visas délivrés/ refusés, sur les suspicions de fraude et utilisation de faux documents, le fonctionnement du système VIS, les articles de presse concernant la problématique Schengen.

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).

L'utilisation du VISMail par les membres de LSC reste sous-optimale. L'importance d'utiliser ce système pour les échanges entre les consulats a été soulignée à plusieurs reprises lors des réunions.

Dans le contexte de la pandémie les échanges au sein du LSC ont porté également sur d'autres questions spécifiques, en particulier la mise en œuvre de la recommandation concernant la levée progressive de la restriction temporaire des déplacements non essentiels vers l'UE, la reprise harmonisée du traitement et de la délivrance des visas Schengen, ainsi que les restrictions en vigueur au niveau des frontières marocaines et européennes.

4. Défis

Réponses apportées aux défis mentionnés dans le rapport 2020

Mise en œuvre du Code des Visas révisé : en raison de la pandémie, la période de référence n'a pas permis véritablement une analyse approfondie sur la mise en œuvre par les consulats des dispositions du Code révisé.

Points à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2022)

La reprise coordonnée des opérations de visas après la levée des restrictions de voyage vers l'UE.

La mise en œuvre du Code des Visas révisé : continuation des discussions sur l'harmonisation au niveau local des procédures de délivrance des visas à entrées multiples.

Renforcer davantage la coopération au niveau local entre les consulats des Etats membres afin d'améliorer les systèmes de prise de rendez-vous et minimiser les risques de « visa shopping ».

5. Divers

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



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO MOZAMBIQUE

February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MOZAMBIQUE **2021 REPORT**

1. Introduction

Of the 11 EU resident Member States Embassies in Maputo, capital of the Republic of Mozambique, 7 of them: **DE, ES, FR, IT, NL, PT, FI** are issuing Schengen visas for a total of 21 Schengen MS. PT has two General Consulates in Maputo and in Beira, both issuing Schengen Visas. NO is no longer issuing Schengen visas in Maputo and France since March 2020 no longer represents Sweden in visa matters so Schengen Visas for SE are not issued locally anymore.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The COVID-19 crisis' impact most visible on Member States' visa operations was the reduced number of demand /applications due to the unprecedented global travel restrictions. Some Consulates and consular sessions of MS Embassies had to close for short period of time due to infections among their staff. Dedicated agenda items on LSC were dealt with twice during the year, with an additional extraordinary meeting held virtually in early December to discuss the travel restrictions related to the emergence of the Omicron variant of Covid-19. The meetings in the reporting period were well attended. In between meetings, LSC coordination and exchange of information is ensured by e-mail exchanges. The PT Consul in Beira is also invited to the meetings of the LCC/LSC and attends virtually as possible.

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 EU Delegation writes the reports of the meetings and circulate it for comments and approval to the MS.

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).

The revised rules in application since 2nd of February 2020 are overall welcomed by MS as perceived as a big simplification. No particular problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code and its revised rules have been reported.

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

The Mozambique LSC harmonised list of documents supporting visa application was adopted by the 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.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

No issue has been reported.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

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

3.5 Exchange of information

As in the past, 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.

There has been a normal use of the new VISA Code and no problems have been observed. The exchange of information is correct. No cases of fraud were reported so far.

Cooperation with some private entities, notably banks that certify bank statements in order to demonstrate the means of subsistence of the applicant, is not easy, since, understandably, banks invoke data protection of their clients. The issue of detection of forged/fake documents from banks remains a problem as well as the lack of expertise in this specific area.

As regards the VISMAIL use, all consulates are using it since 20 January 2020 for exchanging personal data of visas applicants, even if for some cases this is managed by Capitals (NL). MS tend to mailing use it when a request raises questions or suspicions, particularly when the applicant, at a given moment, has requested a visa to another Member State outside Mozambique.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC meetings and Consular meetings continue to be held together to avoid extra-burden of meetings.

4. Challenges

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, as well as reinforcing overall internal coordination, including through meetings of the Group with the competent authorities.

This report was discussed and endorsed at the LSC meeting held on 24th of February 2022.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO NAMIBIA

12/05/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in NAMIBIA 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

3 Member States are present (DE, ES and FI), and 9 are represented by Germany, 2 by Spain, and 5 by Finland, for issuing Schengen Visa in Windhoek.

Five Member States are represented in Namibia (DE, FI, FR, ES, PT). 12 have Honorary Consuls present in Namibia: 10 in Windhoek, namely Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Sweden; and 2 in Walvis Bay, namely Cyprus and Greece. Norway, Switzerland and Iceland have also appointed Honorary Consuls in Windhoek.

Regarding Schengen visa issues, before March 2020, Germany represented of Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, France, Greece, Hungary, Luxemburg, Malta, and The Netherlands. Spain issues Schengen visas also for Portugal and Slovenia. Finland issues visas to Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, as they are all not present in Namibia. France only issues emergency travel documents (included to Monaco citizens).

The travel restrictions affected the number of applications, currently very limited.

Following a suspension of representation, Germany resumed for France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland; Finland for all 5 countries, and Spain represents again both Portugal and Slovenia.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The covid19 pandemics and related travel restrictions have certainly impacted on the MSs' visa operations, as Namibia was for long time on "red list" (only in November on the "positive list"), hence very few travellers were requesting visas. In 2021, the meetings included all three MS, and were called for and chaired by the EUD.

One "regular" LSC meeting took place in 2021, followed by one emergency meeting related to tightening of access rules to EU from Namibia.

Additional meeting was called upon request of Hungary, where a consul from South Africa and a visa officer from Kenya travelled to Namibia for a field visit and wanted to compare experiences. MS did not see any need of organising meetings with third parties, or specific topics. Consular meetings including FR and PT as well as honorary consuls are organised along with the LSC meetings.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

While the Covid19 circumstances considerably diminished the visa applications' numbers, most MS assess the "unification" of their work under the VISA Code as rather advanced, even if informally.

Due to the COVID-19, no dedicated discussion has been conducted on the specific issues related to implementation of the Visa Code. Nevertheless, the MS declare their readiness to:

- **Prepare a harmonised list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants**
- **Assess the need and modalities for a local adaptation of the general rules regarding the issuing of MEV under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code (the "cascade rules").**

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

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already acquired informally, as all follow Schengen visa code. However, the work on a common list has not yet started.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The three Member States concerned do not see a need for adaptation of general rules.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

3.5 Exchange of information

Monthly statistics exchanged, including on fraud attempts, satisfactory quality; low level of activity in 2021.

Given little irregular migration pressure, there is no need so far for greater exchange of info. Nevertheless, it might be helpful to add an AOB in the visa statistics for non-ordinary issues.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None

4. Challenges

5. Other issues

This report has been approved by the Member States participating in the Local Schengen Cooperation in Windhoek (Germany, Finland, and Spain).

2021 statistics:

Total issued: 875 (DE: 636, ES: 269, FI: 70)

Total denied: 96 (DE: 69, ES: 21, FI: 6)

Withdrawn: 40; other: 66.



28/01/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in NEPAL 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five Member States are present and two of them are issuing visas through their embassy in India.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The pandemic led to a decrease in visa applications during the first half of the year, thus easing the implementation of the new visa code. Two meetings were held in 2021, well attended, chaired by EUDEL. Owing the context, other interactions were organised remotely, mostly through e mails consultations, for instance linked to the setting up of an updated list of supporting documents. Reports were prepared by EUDEL and shared with MS.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No specific issues were reported in the implementation of the new visa code.

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

The updated list of supporting documents had been agreed by the Visa Committee on 3 December 2021. There was no particular remark or issue linked to its implementation so far. This recent list was the result of a long and sound dialogue between embassies.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

No specific issues linked to multiple entry visas were reported by MS.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

A major step forward in 2021 was the adoption of the list of supporting documents. However, exchanges between embassies allowed to harmonise the practices throughout the year.

3.5 Exchange of information

Describe the exchange of information within the LSC:

- *quarterly statistics: increase of applications during the second half of the year, altogether with a decrease of the quality of applications. 92% of the applications were done during Q3 and Q4, with a significant increase between Q3 and Q4.*
- *cases of fraud: significant increase, however interviews and controls on documentation allows easily to detect cases of fraud. Though, the surge of additional controls is time consuming.*
- *travel medical insurance (TMI) : no specific problems reported from health authorities in Europe.*
- *cooperation with local authorities and companies : good cooperation with financial institutions, however cooperation with authorities is hampered by a huge turn over.*
- *cooperation with external service providers and monitoring :there are no external service providers in Nepal, due to the relatively limited number of applications.*

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Owing the specific situation, not additional initiative was taken.

4. Challenges

1. *Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2020 report*
During the first two months of 2020, due to the increase of the demand, the DE appointment system was under stress and CH reached the maximal capacity delivery of its 2 counters. After the lockdown, working remotely became a challenge, as well as managing a team partly unemployed.
In 2021 the number of applications increased during the second half of the year. CH implemented a new appointment system and DE adapted its appointment system and increasing its counter capacity. However, this mechanism was saturated by intermediaries.
2. *Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2022).*
Two main challenges appeared in 2021 :
 - *The significant increase of bad quality applications, leading to a more focused attention on document forgery.*
 - *The detrimental role of intermediaries, representing a challenge for some MS appointment system.*

5. Other issues

No other issue was reported.

This report has been shared with and agreed by member states present in Nepal.



15/03/2022

COOPERACIÓN LOCAL SCHENGEN (CLS) en PERU INFORME 2021

1. Introducción

Hay 15 Estados Miembros representados en Lima a nivel de Embajada y 26 Estados miembros presentes en Perú a nivel consular o de cónsul honorario representados en la capital y en otras ciudades del país (Cuzco, Arequipa, Callao, Iquitos, Bagua, Chiclayo, Ica, Piura, Puerto Maldonado, Trujillo, Tacna).

Algunos Estados Miembros tienen acuerdos de cooperación ad hoc que permiten a un Estado Miembro expedir visados en nombre de otro.:

- Alemania representa a Lituania.
- Austria representa a Malta y Eslovenia.
- Bélgica representa a Luxemburgo.
- España representa a Eslovaquia.
- Finlandia representa a: Dinamarca, Estonia, Islandia, Noruega, Suecia.
- Grecia representa a Chipre.

Perú emite pasaportes biométricos desde el 25 de febrero de 2016 y terminó de producir los pasaportes convencionales / no-biométricos el 31 de julio de 2016. Estos seguirán vigentes hasta su vencimiento, permitiendo ingresar al Espacio Schengen.

2. Reuniones de la CLS celebradas en 2021

Con la entrada en vigor del Acuerdo sobre supresión recíproca del requisito de visados de corta duración entre la UE-Perú en marzo de 2016, los Jefes de Misión UE han decidido suprimir las reuniones específicas de la CLS a partir del segundo semestre de 2016 y tratar los temas Schengen como punto en la agenda de las Reuniones del Grupo Consular de la UE, si y cuando hubiera necesidad. Aunque los peruanos no necesitan más visado para entrar al espacio Schengen, hay extranjeros quienes viven en Perú que necesitan todavía visa Schengen.

Durante el año 2021 hubo 3 reuniones consulares bajo las diferentes presidencias de la UE (Portugal y Francia debido al hecho que Eslovenia no está representada a nivel de embajada en Lima) con el apoyo de la Delegación de la UE en Perú y donde siempre se mantiene un espacio de discusión alrededor de los temas Schengen, si necesario. La participación es excelente, con alrededor de 90% de los 15 Estados Miembros presentes en Perú. La DEL de la UE ha elaborado los informes. El Grupo intercambia información por correo electrónico y sobre todo vía el grupo WhatsApp. Durante el periodo 2021 no se han llevado a cabo reuniones "ad hoc" CLS y no hubo reuniones fuera de Lima tampoco. A excepción de la UE y de Suiza, ningún otro país participó.

Cabe mencionar que en Perú como en el resto del mundo, la crisis del COVID-19 sigue impactando los viajes y las conexiones internacionales entre Perú y Europa. En este contexto, aunque la actividad consular retomó en comparación de 2020, sigue más baja en comparación de 2019. Como consecuencia de la crisis, hubo muy pocos casos en cuanto a los visados C por personas extranjeras que residen en Perú, en mayoría casos de bolivianos, ecuatorianos o algunos ciudadanos chinos con motivo del Mobile World Congress de Barcelona 2022. También hubo puntualmente solicitudes de ciudadanos indios y vietnamitas.

3. Situación actual

3.1 Aplicación del Código de visados

La mayoría de los EM evalúan la "unificación" de su trabajo bajo el Código VISA como algo avanzado, aunque hay algunos elementos que todavía requieren un ajuste fino:

- uso completo y comúnmente aplicado del formulario de solicitud de visado de conformidad con el Código de visados modificado;
- discrepancias en los requisitos de presencia física al volver a solicitar una visa cuando ya se otorgó una anterior (y más específicamente en lo que respecta a la toma de huellas dactilares);
- discrepancias en el requisito de tener determinados documentos traducidos del español al idioma oficial del país de destino.

Problemas específicos relacionados con la implementación del Código de Visas, centrándose en las reglas revisadas aplicables desde febrero de 2020:

Debido al COVID-19 y otras necesidades consulares, no se ha llevado a cabo una discusión dedicada sobre este punto en particular. Sin embargo, los Estados Miembros informaron que implementaron el requisito de que cada sección de visas debe introducir medidas organizativas para que las quejas de visas se presenten, documenten y tramiten de la forma requerida por el Código de Visas.

3.2 Evaluación de la necesidad de armonizar la lista de documentos justificantes

Los Estados Miembros presentes consideran que ya se ha producido la armonización de las practicas.

3.3 Evaluación de la necesidad de adaptar las normas generales sobre la expedición de visados de entrada múltiple para los solicitantes en virtud del Artículo 24(2) del Código de visados (“cascadas”)

En Perú debido a la pandemia (y al cierre de las fronteras durante varios meses) hubo muy pocos casos de expedición de visados de entrada múltiple.

3.4 Armonización de las prácticas

Con la introducción de nuevas medidas de seguridad y varias restricciones nacionales debidas al COVID-19, se observaron casos individuales de aplicaciones destinadas a eludir las regulaciones vigentes en algunos países. Todos los EM ven el valor agregado de mantenerse mutuamente informados acerca de los riesgos de visa shopping, especialmente debido a las diferentes regulaciones sobre el procesamiento de solicitudes durante el momento específico de la pandemia.

3.5 Intercambio de información

En 2021, el uso regular del grupo WhatsApp debido a la pandemia ha hecho que el intercambio de informaciones y la coordinación entre los Cónsules se han hecho más constantes y regulares. El grupo se concentró más bien en intercambios de prácticas relacionadas a la crisis y nuevas reglas y otras limitaciones laborales.

Debido al COVID-19, la concentración de la actividad de los cónsules sobre los vuelos de repatriación y una interrupción prolongada en los servicios de visado, las estadísticas no se compilaron regularmente durante el año. Debido al pequeño número de visas emitidos en 2021, no se dedicó una discusión profunda a este tema. Es probable que en 2022 se lleve a cabo más trabajo sobre estadísticas si los EM lo requieren.

No se informó de casos de fraude a la DEL de la UE ni se llevaron a un foro amplio de LSC. Algunos intercambios individuales pueden haber tenido lugar directamente entre EM.

4. Dificultades

- 1. Describanse las respuestas a las dificultades, de haberlas, que figuran en el informe de 2020-2021.*

A lo largo del año, el Grupo tuvo especial cuidado en actualizar a los miembros sobre todas las regulaciones con respecto a los viajes y tránsitos UE-Perú. En este sentido, se distribuyeron tablas de contactos e información actualizadas; y grupos de correo electrónico, Whatsapp establecidos y utilizados regularmente para contactos informales y consultas inmediatas.

Cabe precisar que, no obstante la vigencia del acuerdo de liberalización de visas debido a las restricciones sanitarias de ingreso a los países Schengen que no contaban con vuelos directos de conexión desde Lima, algunas Embajadas tuvieron que emitir declaraciones consulares ad hoc a lo largo del año 2021 para facilitar la escala en el país de primera entrada en el espacio Schengen. Tal necesidad y su validez legal fueron discutidas en los foros correspondientes en Bruselas, así como en el grupo de coordinación local en Lima.

2. *Describanse los temas por tratar durante el próximo período de referencia (2022).*

El reto más importante previsto para 2022 sigue relacionado a la situación COVID y al regreso a una situación post-pandemia.

En caso de la entrada en vigor del ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System), habrá que poner un cuidado particular sobre difundir información sobre el nuevo sistema para ingresar al espacio Schengen en las páginas web de los Consulados y Embajadas, compartiendo informaciones con las autoridades peruanas (Cancillería, Superintendencia de Migraciones).

5. Varios

Todas las Embajadas / Consulados comprendidos en la Cooperación Local Schengen han aprobado el presente Informe.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE PHILIPPINES

8 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in THE PHILIPPINES 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

16 Schengen member States (BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, HU, ES, FR, FI, EL, IT, NL, NO, PL, SE, and AT) are represented in the Philippines.

The current representation arrangements on visa matters are as follows:

- BE represents Luxembourg and Slovenia (agreements suspended but essential travel applications will be processed).
- CZ represents Slovakia.
- DK represents Estonia (suspended in 2021)
- EL represents Portugal.
- NL represents Latvia.
- NO represents Iceland (pre-COVID) from Bangkok.
- AT represents Lithuania.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

There were four meetings in 2021: 15 April 13 July 30 September and 2 December.

Meetings are chaired by the EUDEL and are in general well attended. All meetings were held via Webex. This allowed many non-represented or present States to join the meetings. Reports are drafted by the EUDEL and circulated to the LSC.

2021 saw a resumption on the visa operations as non-essential travel was allowed under certain conditions. Metro Manila endured two lock downs in 2021 in March and August mirroring two surges in cases. Consular activities were affected by the lack of local staff and the difficulties of transportation. At the end of 2021, consular activities have resumed at 60-70% capacity with the required health protocols.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The **revocation of valid visas** in order to issue new visas of longer validity was discussed in two meetings. It was recalled that the revocation of valid visas was a malpractice as it had a “legal meaning” and negative impact on the holder’s visa history. Under Art 34(2) of the visa, a visa is revoked “if the conditions for issuing it are no longer met”.

The Schengen 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 Harmonisation of practices

The LSC had several exchanges on the multiple-entry visas for seafarers under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code (‘MEV cascades’) Practices are not aligned.

3.3 Exchange of information

In 2021, BE was in charge of checking the fulfilment of the requirements of the travel medical insurance (TMI) companies. The COVID-19 coverage proved to be tricky and the list had to be revised several times to ensure this case was covered. In December 2021, the LSC agreed on a list of eight TMI companies and MS were invited to publish it in their websites.

CZ will take over this task in 2022 to be followed by Denmark 2023, Germany 2024, Greece 2025, Spain 2026, France 2027 and Italy 2028, as agreed in December 2019.

A new issue discussed was the new phenomenon of **on-line marriages** (performed in Utah, USA) between EU/Schengen States and Filipino citizens. The issue of the validity of the marriage and visa fraud was debated.

4. Challenges

The harmonization of procedures on visa issuance for seafarers in the Philippines remains a challenge. In 2021, despite of some divergent procedures on this issue, visas for this type of essential workers continued to be issued. LSC will discuss in 2022 if there is a need of harmonisation of practices to ensure a level playing field.

5. Other issues

On 28 July 2021, the Commission adopted the implementing decision amending Annex III to Implementing Decision C(2014) 6146, as regards the [list of supporting documents](#) to be submitted by applicants for short stay visas in the Philippines.



EUROPEAN UNION

**DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE RUSSIAN
FEDERATION**

03/03/2022

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
2021 REPORT**

1. Introduction

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

15 Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in **Saint Petersburg**¹⁶. Belgium, Denmark, Malta, Portugal and Sweden rely only on external service providers (ESPs) in Saint Petersburg. In addition, in Saint Petersburg Liechtenstein is represented by Switzerland, Luxembourg by the Netherlands and Slovenia by Latvia.

Three Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in **Ekaterinburg**¹⁷.

Several Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in **Kaliningrad**.

Only a few Member States do not use external service providers (ESPs) for the collection of visa applications and return of passports. Representation arrangements between Member States are in force in Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, Pskov, Rostov on Don and Sovetsk.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

During the reporting period, 12 LSC meetings were organised in Russia. Of those meetings, 11 were held in online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed the participation of all Schengen consular locations across Russia. One offline meeting was held in Moscow. The EU Delegation (EUDEL) chaired all the meetings and they were well attended by the majority of Schengen Member States (as well as by Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania).

The 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 these reports with their respective capitals, while some drafted their own reports.

¹⁶ The Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and Switzerland. Norway is represented through its Moscow consulate.

¹⁷ The Czech Republic, Germany, and Hungary. Hungary also issues Schengen visas on behalf of 4 other Member States – Austria, Denmark, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

Consulates of the Member States in the different LSC locations systematically 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 the Member States' 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 of the Visa Facilitation Agreement

The Schengen Member States and the EUDEL were generally well prepared and adequately staffed to ensure the proper fulfilment of their responsibilities under the revised Visa Code, the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA), the Crimea non-recognition visa and passport guidelines and the Donbas non-recognition visa and passport guidance.

The massive decline in the volume of visa applications (up to 90% for some Member States), due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions introduced in the Schengen area, meant that visa sections had time to verify applications more thoroughly, which led to a strong increase in the number of visa refusals for several Member States.

LSC discussions demonstrated yet again that Member States have persistent and often fundamentally different interpretations of the binding obligations that stem from the revised Visa Code and the VFA. Member States' capitals send to their consulates in Russia instructions that often explain these differences. In addition, some outstanding questions on how the revised Visa Code cascade should interact with the existing VFA cascade remain.

A major issue throughout the reporting period was the proper and full application of the Visa Code and the VFA in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Frequently changing travel restrictions for non-essential travel and eligibility criteria for essential travel meant that several Member States found it impossible to apply fully the Visa Code and the VFA cascades (for instance issuing multiple-entry visas) without contradicting their national COVID-19 policies. To fight visa shopping and misleading country of destination, several Member States started issuing only single or double entry visas to travellers for tourism purposes. Moreover, Member States had different interpretations regarding the visa references periods and whether they should be reset because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

These issues were compounded by the non-binding nature of the Council recommendations regarding travel restrictions for third-country nationals. Some Member States opened their borders to Russian tourists, while others did not. Likewise, some Member States started recognising and/or accepting Russian COVID-19 vaccination and travel certificates for crossing their external borders. Furthermore, this created complications regarding the intra-Schengen travel of Russian non-essential categories and raised questions regarding the proper use of Schengen visas. To reduce such misuse of Schengen visas, some consulates asked applicants to sign notices or declarations, which call upon the respect of the initial travel purpose or destination.

In practice, Member State consulates were receiving different instructions from their capitals regarding the issuance of Schengen visas to Russian essential and non-essential travellers. This led to a heterogeneous implementation of the Visa Code and the VFA at the local level.

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.

Following the entry into force of the revised Visa Code, several changes have been made to the standard Russian supporting documents and an increased fraud of supporting document by visa agencies or applicants was observed. Most Member States deemed necessary to revise the list in 2022.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The LSC sent a report with a proposal for an adapted visa cascade for Russia to the Visa Committee in January 2021.

Some Member States expressed doubts that an adapted visa cascade for Russia, even if officially adopted, would supersede the default visa cascade present in the revised Visa Code. Other Member States consider that even if adopted, such an adapted cascade will not harmonise visa issuance practices in Russia, nor will it reduce visa shopping.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

During the reporting period, the LSC discussions on the harmonisation of practices were dominated by questions relating to:

- *Travel of essential categories* - Member States faced pressure from relatives of EU citizens or Russian nationals residing in the Schengen area to issue visas despite the COVID-19 travel restrictions. Discussions were held successfully to streamline the facilitations of visa issuance for seafarers and truck drivers. As Member States' health authorities had different assessment of the risks that Russian travellers represent, even essential categories were subjected in each Member State to different entry restrictions and quarantines. For several Member States, it is actually the back-offices that take the decisions whether a visa should be issued or not.
- *Travel of non-essential categories* – As the year 2021 progressed, the LSC discussions moved from which non-essential categories can travel to what documents the non-essentials need to provide to be issued a visa and then be granted entry at the EU external border.

- *Revocation of visas at the EU external border* – The border guards of some Member States regularly revoked the Schengen visas issued by another Member State as non-essential travellers from Russia were attempting to enter countries closed for them. This created debates on the proportionality of the measure, on the intention of travellers (knowingly breaking the rules or not) and whether it is compatible with Article 8.6 of the Schengen Borders Code Manual. This issue was particularly acute for bona-fide travellers with MEVs.
- *Visa revocation at consulates in Russia* – Some Member States readily revoke visas issued by other Member States when requested by an applicant. Others consider this as the exclusive competence of the Member States that issued the original visa. Member States still have different understanding on the grounds for revocation.
- *EUR 70 visa fee* – Member States continue to apply differently the VFA provisions with some never charging more than EUR 35 even if the application is made less than three days before the intended travel. Others offer the EUR 70 visa fee to applicants as a convenience or urgency option even if the intended date of travel is weeks or months ahead.

With the onset of the second year of COVID-19 travel restrictions, the practices of the individual Member States have further diverged and harmonisation of the visa policies and issuance in Russia seems unachievable at the local level. Only binding rules set from the European Commission and the Council can reverse this process.

3.5 Exchange of information

Quarterly statistics

As in 2020, the reporting period in 2021 was very strongly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and the related border, travel and visa restrictions, which greatly affected the work of all the Member States' consulates. Before the pandemic, non-essential travellers lodged the vast majority of the Schengen visa applications in Russia. As a result, the number of Schengen visas issued in 2021 was a fraction of the 2019 pre-COVID-19 numbers, although a few Member States recorded in 2021 strong growths compared to the last three quarters of 2020. This had an impact on the activity of the external service providers (ESP), but also required the consulates to adopt special sanitary measures and reorganise their internal processes.

Analyses of a new detailed breakdown of the annual figures for the Schengen visas issued in 2019 showed that in absolute and relative terms the vast majority of the Schengen visas issued in Russia were SEVs, MEVs of less than one year or one year MEVs. Hence, MEVs with a validity of 3, 4 and 5 years, represent for every Member State a very small share of the number of visas they issue. On the other hand, the vast majority of 4 and 5 years MEVs in Russia are issued only by a handful of Member States.

Some Member States provide quarterly statistics with two months delay, which complicates the timely and comprehensive identification of the local visa trends.

Employment of local staff in visa sections

In smaller visa sections, all visa officers are local staff, except the consul. Local staff are very experienced and know the specificities of Russian applicants and of the supporting documents. Based on data provided by the Member States in 2021, local staff represented more than 50% of all Schengen visa staff in Russia - around 300 persons. The visa sections in Russia of several Member States represent a source of income that brings substantial revenues that sustain loss-making consular operations in other third-countries. For the Member States that rely heavily on local staff, the Russian authorities ban on the employment of local staff would constitute a major disruption of their visa operations.

Cases of fraud

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions to non-essential travel, consulates registered regular attempts by applicants to present their travel purposes as essential – business or medical – where in reality they were not. In addition, a strong increase of faked supporting documents (air tickets and hotel bookings) was recorded. In parallel, Member States recorded a noticeable increase in the number of applications for national visas, in many cases as an attempt to circumvent the travel restrictions for non-essential travellers. As a result, the refusal rates for both Schengen and national visas increased substantially for several Member States (reaching between 10% and 21%).

Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring

Russian applicants regularly face the threat of being defrauded by visa agencies presenting themselves as the official visa application centres or as facilitators that reduce the risk of visa refusal. Sometimes these visa agencies clone the websites of the genuine ESPs. For this reason, in 2022, the LSC will approach Russia's Federal Consumer Protection Service as it concerns the protection of the interests of Russian consumers.

4. Challenges for 2022

In terms of harmonisation, the LSC will focus in 2022 on revising the harmonised list of supporting documents and then on agreeing on a common information notice for applicants.

An inconsistent implementation of the EU visa legislation in Russia will continue to lead to a lack of uniform visa issuance and will continue encouraging visa shopping. An adapted visa cascade will not improve the situation without stricter monitoring and effective sanctions in case of its non-respect.

Maintaining a uniform visa policy regarding the visa issuance to non-essential categories of applicants in the COVID-19 context will prove impossible without legally binding rules from the Commission and the Council.

The lack of proper implementation and sometimes disregard of the EU's passport and visa non-recognition policy towards Crimea and Donbas remains a major issue.

5. Other issues

The geographical size of the Russian Federation (60 consulates and 350 authorised visa centres across Russia from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok) and the very high number of visa applications in pre-COVID-19 times create unusual conditions and challenges for the local Schengen cooperation. It requires extensive coordination efforts on the side of the Member States' consulates, their back-offices and the EUDEL.

Furthermore, as the EU's visa policies 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 can make the working conditions of the Schengen consulates and the EUDEL unpredictable and complex.

* * * * *

The Member States' consulates and the EU Delegation to the Russian Federation have reviewed this LSC annual report for 2021. It does not necessarily reflect the position of the Member States' capitals, the European Commission or the European External Action Service.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO RWANDA

31 January 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Rwanda 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five Member States (BE, DE, FR, NL, SE) and one Associated Schengen State (CH) are present in Rwanda.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

EU Delegation and Member/Associated States in Rwanda held three Local Schengen cooperation meetings, chaired by EUD, in January, August and December 2021. Meetings were generally very well attended. EUD established reports, consulted these with all participants and submitted them to HQ.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Belgium represents 20 Schengen or Associated States in Rwanda. Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Slovakia handle visa applications through their competent Embassies in the region.

During the covid-19 pandemic, the representation agreements were suspended. The Embassies of Germany, France and the Netherlands issued C-visas during that period. SE and CH Embassies in Kigali do not issue any visas.

Gradually the representation was resumed. As at end 2021, Belgium issues visas without restrictions except for the Czech Republic, Greece and Hungary. For these countries, prior consultation and authorisation of the competent Embassy is necessary.

EU and MS in Rwanda are well prepared to ensure the execution of tasks as per the Visa Code, and there were no issues in implementing the new Visa Code.

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

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already accomplished. There is no need for an amendment at this time.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas of the Visa Code were applied among the Embassies concerned; however, given the limited number of actors, there are no coordination issues.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

There have been no further initiatives on the harmonisation of practices.

3.5 Exchange of information

Member States have exchanged on the number of visa applications and the number of visa issued. In 2021, MS processed and issued the following number of C-visas:

BE:	2411
DE:	409
FR:	93
NL:	29

There is a regular exchange of information on issues, such as the application of Council recommendations, acceptance of Rwandan digital certificate, cases of fraud, cooperation with banks, or the use of external service providers.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

p.m.

4. Challenges

There have been challenges regarding the authenticity and legalisation of documents electronically delivered by the authorities, which have been addressed through the group to the Protocol services in order to facilitate relevant visa and consular processes.

5. Other issues

p.m.



EUROPEAN UNION

**DELEGATION TO THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF
SRI LANKA AND
THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES**

Colombo, 28 February 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN SRI LANKA AND THE MALDIVES 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five Member States are present in Colombo, out of which, one delocalised its visa operations to New Delhi in July 2019. This change, however, has not had any impact on exchanges and synergies within the group.

Representation (up to 20 MS in the past) was put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of December 2021, only three Schengen MS had resumed representation, two fully, one partially.

In Sri Lanka, in addition to visa services in Colombo, two MS have a visa application centre in Jaffna (Northern Province), where numerous applications traditionally come from.

As regard the Maldives, three MS are present in Male with a visa application centre, an additional MS in Colombo is aiming at opening one.

2. LSC meetings in 2021

Coordination meetings were held as per past practice on a quarterly basis, a periodicity that seems to adequately suit the needs of MS. Five meetings were held in 2021 (January, March, July, October and December). Meetings are convened by the EUD who chairs the meetings and drafts the minutes. The group is well connected, MS participate actively and atmospherics are overall constructive.

However, members of the group continue to express the wish for a regular participation of one MS, which in 2021 participated in merely one of the meetings. In view of the commonalities of challenges faced, EUD recalled the need for all MS to be present at the meetings.

3. State of play

3.1 Implementation of the Visa Code

Some MS continue to find the new visa form rather impractical to use. When the issue was raised in the group, one MS has proposed to share with them a reformatted version that will facilitate the processing of applications.

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

As of now, the group continues to use the harmonised list of documents approved a decade ago (2011) that would now call for a review in view of the noted increase in frauds. MS agreed that this exercise should be carried out, taking the harmonised list currently in use in Delhi in consideration. The aim is to have an updated harmonised list in 2022.

Two MS have taken the initiative to draft a more “practical” questionnaire. In April 2021, the latter was circulated to MS locally and has so far faced no objection from any member of the group. In the MS’s understanding, provided there is a consensus locally between all MS, the use of an additional questionnaire can be accepted. Confirmation from headquarters as to whether such a questionnaire can be used, is still pending.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing MEVs for applicants under article 24 (2) of the visa code (MEV Cascade)

There is no uniform approach yet on the implementation of the cascade provision for Multiple Entry Visas (MEV) under art. 24. 2 of the Visa Code among MS. In initial consultations, half of the MS had reacted favourably seeing it as easing visa processing. While some missions were of the view that it allowed for more predictability on workload, others insisted on the political nature of the decision to provide MEVs. By the end of 2021, while one MS implements the cascade for both business and tourism Schengen visas and has integrated the cascade into its internal visa manual, two MS remain reluctant to use it for tourism.

3.4 Exchange of information

While there has been a significant improvement in exchange of statistics, bilateral information exchanges between MS, it has been reported, should still be improved

VFS services

MS are overall satisfied with the performance of VFS services in Sri Lanka that nevertheless need some supervision when staff changes. LSC members remain, however, concerned by the high rate of “no shows” for appointments. Discussions have shown that practices to tackle this problem have differed from one MS to another. One MS has imposed an upfront service payment to reduce the no show that had reached 70% and this had good results. While one MS is ready to apply the same method, another MS cannot accept service payment and thus has walk-in services to make up for missed appointments.

In contrast, VFS services are far from satisfactory in the Maldives where one MS pointed out its concern with regard to slow and unpractical arrangements that impede the process. This MS conducted a staff training with VFS staff in the last quarter of 2021. The services for three MS are located in a former building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Malé and if more join, the space will no longer be adequate.

Visa Shopping and Frauds

Two MS reported an increase in visa shopping in 2021 as other MS had closed their borders. The exchange of quarterly statistics by most MS has somewhat contributed to improved transparency on the issue.

In 2021, in addition to multiple frauds detected by the embassy, MS have reported serious loopholes in the detection of forged visas and documents at the Colombo airport. As understaffed consulates do not have the required capacity to address these issues, MS stress the need to appoint a Liaison Officer in Colombo after the termination in July 2021 of the contract of the LO hitherto posted in the DE Embassy. EUD had relayed this request to DG HOME in 2021 but no replacement is in place yet. In view of the current challenges and the under staffing of most embassies, MS concur that this should be made a priority.

Numerically strong and well connected, the Sri Lankan diaspora in Schengen MS has established efficient networks in support of these illegal flows. This issue should be tackled in close coordination with home ministries in MS capitals.

Over the past three months, three Sri Lankans were caught at the Colombo airport, two with fraudulently obtained Schengen PL visas (issued in India) and one with a counterfeit French passport travelling from Colombo to Paris. At Dubai airport, four Sri Lankans with respectively counterfeit FR, DE, PT and IT visas, and two Sri Lankan with counterfeit IT residence permits have been detected.

4. Challenges

Sri Lanka is an important country from the point of view of Schengen missions: as Sri Lanka is among the countries whose citizens need transit visas for all MS, there is a particularly heavy workload.

As most MS in Colombo are facing staffing issues, the liaison officer at the airport to detect frauds and assist missions in detecting fake documentation played a key role and this link with Department of Immigration and Emigration is now missing.

As of end 2021, barring one MS, all were in want of additional staff to cope with the situation.

This report was endorsed by MS on location.



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN UNION OFFICE TO SUDAN

17 March 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Khartoum/Sudan 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Nine Member States (MS) are present (Germany, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland), all have their consular services centralised in the capital Khartoum. Hungary and Norway do not however issue visas in Sudan. Hungary just handles the Hungarian citizens' cases.

In terms of local representation of non-resident Schengen: Germany also represents Estonia and Hungary; France represents Denmark; Italy represents Malta, Portugal and Slovenia; Netherlands represents Belgium, Luxembourg and Poland; Sweden represents Norway; and Switzerland represents the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria just for official visits for official passport holders.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Due to security reasons, due to the 2018-19 revolution and to Covid-19 restrictions, social distancing requirements, no formal LSC meetings were held for the past two years. The last LSC Meeting in Khartoum, which was hosted by the German Embassy, was held in 2019. Still, information is exchanged whenever needed. The consular WhatsApp group created by the EU Delegation (EUDEL) for consular colleagues Khartoum and beyond for non-residents proved to be an essential tool to exchange information rapidly.

On 3 March 2022, the French Head of Chancery organised and chaired the first LSC Meeting of 2022. The EUDEL drew up the meeting report and disseminated the draft among LSC members for comments before the final adoption.

The meeting was well attended by all MS represented in Khartoum. The MS acknowledged again the importance of exchanging information and reinforcing the good cooperation.

The Covid-19 crisis considerably reduced the number of Schengen visas applications. It has also negatively impacted visa operations. Most MS had to close temporarily their consular services to the public. All MS started recently to accept again short stay visa applications.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The tasks foreseen for Local Schengen Cooperation under the Visa Code are being ensured by MS and EUDEL. Most MS present have not highlighted any particular difficulties in the implementation of the revised rules of the Visa Code applicable. Germany reported that the applicants do not submit the required documents, although the consulate has an information sheet that explains in detail what is needed and under which format it has to be submitted. Sweden too reported that the applicants do not always submit all requested documents. The Netherlands reported that it remains difficult for applicants to provide all the necessary documents (at once), when applying for a visa. In addition, falsified documents are presented regularly. All MS are confronted on regular basis to this serious issue.

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

Most MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already acquired. However, Germany considers that the MS still request different documents for Schengen visas. Germany suggested that for comparison MS share a list of documents requested for the different visa types. The Netherlands underlined that they have a centralized process whereby decision to issue a visa is no longer made by the Embassy.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Given that in the past two years no LSC meeting took place, little experience could be exchanged on the new rules from the MS.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In the regular LSC meetings, MS compare practices and seek a common approach.

3.5 Exchange of information

Almost all MS maintain regular working contacts between themselves. The EUDEL is included in the exchange of consular information between the MS.

There was a consensus among most MS that the use of the VISMail does not work properly. Most of the MS present encountered problems when using the VISMail function.

None of the MS present cooperate with external service providers and they neither have accredited commercial intermediaries.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The representative of the consular section of the US Embassy was invited to the LSC meeting that took place on 3 March 2022.

4. Challenges

1. The MS present did not report any major challenges
 - Germany underlined that as the VIS code will no longer be inserted in the visa sticker, it will not be possible to see instantly, whether applicants applied for a visa at other Schengen Embassies. Germany reported further that some applicants cannot be found in the system. It was easier to track the visa history of applicants, when it was still possible to place a stamp on their passport upon application.
 - France highlighted again that efforts must be made to maintain close cooperation among the Schengen, UK and USA, particularly since some consular officers, including the French Head of Chancery, are leaving from Sudan soon.
 - France will be updating its visa system that will be linked with the official visa website; <https://france-visas.gouv.fr/en/web/france-visas/welcome-page>. Some of French consulates are already experimenting this dematerialized procedure.
 - All MS agree to maintain further cooperation between the Schengen countries.
2. The MS propose following subjects to be discussed within the next meeting:
 - Germany raised the question, whether the other MS accept the new Sudanese regular and business passports as well as the Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) that were issued recently;
 - Norway suggested to discuss again in-depth about the document issues, notably as the fake Sudanese official documents are getting better and more attention and understanding on how to tackle the growing problem is needed;
 - Switzerland recommended exchanging information among the other MS on the cases of family reunification of Eritrean Nationals, mostly how the other MS proceed with their documents and whether they have a lawyer, who verifies the documents.

5. Other issues

This annual report was drafted by the EUDEL and commented by LSC MS. All MS in the LSC Sudan have approved the final version.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO TANZANIA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Tanzania 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

12 Member States are represented in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. (*BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IT, NL, NO, PL, SE*).

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

COVID-19 imposed general restriction on non-essential travel.

Two LSC meetings were held in 2021, on 23 June and 9 September. Attendance was about 50%. EUD chaired both meetings and produced minutes.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The political section of the EUD lost its JPD post at the end of September and this affected capacity to ensure coordination.

Problems discussed included the use of VISMail, the harmonisation of practices, the rollout of service providers for some consulates, the shortage of consular staff.

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

The list of supporting documents was completed in 2016, and in 2021 it remained due for revision, while some of its aspects were discussed in LSC meetings.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

The issue was discussed in 2021 without raising overdue alert on the need to adapt rules. The "Cascade" system is used when applicable. For sequence of short stay (or "sandwich") some practices have developed.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Not applicable

3.5 Exchange of information

Statistics were not collected in 2021. There was some distrust in sharing information considered sensitive because it could lead to ‘visa shopping’ if leaked.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Not applicable

4. Challenges

1. One challenge identified concerned the issue of improving communication flow. There was little progress in 2021 because of the continued COVID crisis but the reduction of staff at the Political Section of the EUD will not help either. Also, in the 2020 report it was mentioned that visa applications for government officials may be sometimes problematic, but there was no further discussion in 2021 on this matter.
2. In 2022 the LSC group will seek finalisation of an updated List of supporting documents. Inviting external contributors to the meetings is also an option to share knowledge on topical issues.

5. Other issues

COVID measures and their relation with visa applications procedures were applied in different ways by different consulates. There seem to be no harmonisation possible at country level.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THAILAND

19.04.2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in THAILAND 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

19 Schengen States are present in Bangkok¹⁸ and 16 are represented outside of Bangkok in Chiang Mai and Phuket.

Most Schengen States have outsourced their visa application processing services to external service providers. Currently, in Bangkok, VFS Global processes visa applications for AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, FI, IT, NL, NO, and SE. VFS also processes visa applications for DE and IT in Chiang Mai and Phuket. TLS Contact manages for FR and PT, and BLS International for ES.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Schengen States received considerably less visa applications than pre-COVID-19. In 2020, there were 69,476 C visa applications, but this decreased to 31,234 applications in 2021, which constitutes a drop of 55 per cent.¹⁹ Applications progressively increased throughout 2021.²⁰ The refusal rate for C visas increased to 11.1 per cent from 6.9 per cent in the previous year.²¹ This is likely because of a) often-changing quarantine requirements within Thailand and b) fast changing entry-requirements for Schengen States due to the ongoing pandemic and the emergence of new variants. In September many States reported that they had shortened their opening times with the private companies they use to process visa applications. Visa applications picked up in October and December and one State extended their opening times with VFS Global again (DK).

The LSC group met regularly either physically at the EUD, online (Webex meetings), or in hybrid format due to Covid-19 restrictions. The meetings were chaired by the EUD. In 2021, a five meetings took place. LSC meetings are open to all EUMS as observers with Croatia (from Jakarta attending virtually) and Romania occasionally attending.

Meetings were always well attended with usually around 15-18 present. No MS was always absent. Reports of the meeting are drawn up by the EU Delegation and shared with EU Schengen States and with DG HOME in Brussels.

¹⁸ AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LU, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, SK

¹⁹ This excludes PT who have not submitted their 2021 visa statistics. Visa applications for PT were less than 1% of applications in 2020 so whether including or excluding, the drop is still 55 per cent.

²⁰ In Q1, 2,677 applications; in Q2, 6,527 applications; in Q3, 7,888 applications; and in Q4, 14,142 applications.

²¹ The refusal rate slightly decreased throughout 2021. In Q1, the refusal rate was 15.4%. In Q2, the refusal rate was 10.9%. In Q3, the refusal rate was 11.7%. In Q4, the refusal rate was 10.2%.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code have been identified.

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

EU Schengen States have applied the list since 15 September 2017 and have continued to exchange views on the practical application of the common list in subsequent LSC meetings. In 2021, they saw no need to change or amend the list.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Discussions on this topic have taken place with a view to finding agreement locally, but have not yet been successfully concluded. Most EU Schengen States implement the general cascade and don't see a need to adapt the general rules of the 'MEV cascades'. One State slightly deviated from the general cascade (FR).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a split between countries that were mostly open and countries which were more restrictive or not issuing visas. This changed repeatedly throughout 2021. For the mostly open countries all types of visas were issued, although in several Schengen states travellers would need to show proof of vaccination to either enter or take part in public life. Other countries issued all types of visas to fully-vaccinated travellers and for unvaccinated applicants would need a worthy purpose.

There was also a divergence regarding which vaccines were accepted by countries (either EMA approved or both EMA and WHO-approved vaccines) and which vaccine certificates were recognised.

3.5 Exchange of information

Schengen States in Thailand have a common list of travel and health insurance companies and new applications are assessed during the LSC meetings. There are currently 42 companies on the common list.

Due to the pandemic, no activities were undertaken with regard to external service providers. The LSC concentrated rather on exchanges of practices concerning the delivery of services under pandemic conditions.

The VISMail and the Visa Information System are used by Schengen States, with some embassies having instructions to only use VISMail for visa related matters. Schengen States reported that while they do use VISMail as it is not very practical and user-friendly (as no attachments are allowed) and emails sometimes take several days to arrive.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

The major challenges that emerged were due to different entry restrictions for Schengen States given the COVID-19 pandemic. One challenge that came up was that several states were not allowed to check the vaccination status of an applicant and would then issue a visa to a person who might not then met their country's entry requirements. Fast changing entry-requirements led to problems when passengers needed to be off-loaded in transit airports or be turned away at the borders of the destination country.

Due to different vaccines being recognised by different Schengen States the risk of visa shopping posed a challenge in the last quarter of the year. Travellers would apply for a visa in a country with fewer restrictions and upon arrival make their way to the country they had initially planned on travelling to.

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.

This report has been approved by the Local Schengen Cooperation Group in Thailand.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO TURKEY

28/2/2021

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TURKEY 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 4 consular constituencies in Turkey: 19 Member States issue visa at consulates in Ankara, 15 in Istanbul, 3 in Izmir, and 1 in Edirne. The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC Turkey) convenes, separately, in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, every other month in principle.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact on the work of the LSC Turkey in 2021, and measures restricting non-essential travel to the EU were in place for large part of the year to contain the spread of the virus. Yet the consulates and external service providers confirmed their resilience, resumed all visa services in the second part of the year, and with time noted higher numbers of applications compared to the peak of the pandemic.

The LSC Turkey largely continued to meet online, albeit with regular frequency. Meetings in Ankara took place in January, March, May, July, September, and December 2021. The LSC Istanbul convened in January, March, May, July, September, and December 2021. The LSC Izmir met in February, April, June, October, and December 2021. The LSC Ankara resumed face-to-face meetings in December 2021.

On an ad-hoc basis, the LSC Turkey took part in a seminar organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Transporters' Association of Turkey (UND) in February 2021, to discuss the situation services for Turkish truck drivers. In December 2021, the Finnish embassy organised two seminars for LSC Ankara and LSC Istanbul on visa fraud.

The LSC Turkey was chaired by the EU delegation, which also drew up reports.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC Turkey was well prepared to ensure tasks under the Visa Code, which entered into force in February 2020. The pandemic and a prolonged period of reduced activities by the consulates, however, rendered it difficult to assess the novelty of the Visa Code in all its aspects.

The LSC Turkey noted a steep rise in the rejection rate of visa applications (low quality of applications, fraudulent documents, increased no-shows and visa shopping), linked to general socio-economic situation in Turkey and high unemployment. Regional differences applied, with visa applications refusal rate in Istanbul and Izmir more in line with the past (5-15%), while peaking in Ankara (up to 50%).

The LSC Turkey took note of Turkish criminal organisations targeting embassy visa officers and local staff to influence examination of visa applications and procedures.

The LSC Turkey also took note of a negative role played by travel agencies used by visa applicants, with applications submitted with the help of the agencies accounting for up to 90% of visa refusals.

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

The LSC Turkey proposed changes to the harmonised list of accompanying documents in December 2020. The new list entered into force in July 2021. In September 2021, the LSC Turkey noted that limited period since the entry into force of the new harmonised list combined with generally low numbers of visa applications did not yet allow for a clear assessment.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

First discussion took place in November 2020 in Ankara and Istanbul. The LSC Izmir had an exchange of views in February 2021. The LSC Izmir underlined the potential scope for a possible facilitation of issuing conditions, notably to bona fide travellers, such as business with links to Schengen member states, cross-border employees and family members. This would also lessen the burden on consulates. However, political and economic situation in Turkey must be taken into account, and certain categories of travellers continue to be seen as risky, including truck drivers. The LSC Turkey (Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir) resumed discussions on Art. 24 in February 2022.

3.4 Exchange of information

Provision of visa services for non-essential travel: this topic dominated the discussions in the LSC Turkey until the second part of the year, with gradual lifting of restrictions for visa applications for tourism.

Visa statistics: with limited visa statistics provided by the consulates, it continued to be difficult to devise a clear trend despite an uptick in visa applications.

TMI: The LSC Turkey held discussion on insurance-related aspects of COVID-19: while a number of Member States require the insurance policy to cover the risk of the COVID-19, the majority do not have such an obligation and general rules apply. The LSC Turkey also focused on the question of insurance policies that explicitly exclude COVID-19 treatment and whether there is a need and scope for harmonisation of approaches.

VISMail: The consulates generally declared the use of VISMail, sometimes underlining the inefficiency of the system and difficult interface.

4. Challenges

EU-funded programmes (e.g. Erasmus): Turkish authorities continued their criticism of visa procedures for applicants of EU-funded programmes with mobility dimension. The LSC Turkey will draw up an inventory of current short-term Schengen visa applications practices, for future reference.

Truck drivers: discussions about visa services for Turkish truck drivers continued in 2021. The LSC Turkey looked in the substance of the issues of concern to Transporters' Association (UND): indeed, the scale of rejections was low and due to objective criteria. The vast majority of Turkish drivers did not encounter problems in obtaining a Schengen visa. The LSC Turkey also noted growing numbers of applications submitted with fake or falsified documents as well as cases of human smuggling, with voluntary and involuntary involvement of Turkish truck drivers. UND being a strong lobby, further pressure on the LSC Turkey is expected.

Service passports: the Turkish Ministry of the Interior launched investigations against six municipal administrations for the alleged involvement in human smuggling, with the use of service passports. Turkish nationals were allegedly smuggled to Germany, Italy and Greece. The Ministry of Interior gave orders to stop issuing service passport, except for government officials.

5. Other issues

EUDEL reached out to Turkish carriers on the issue of carrier registration for the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS).



24/02/2021

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

All 27 EU Member States are present in the UAE (all except for HR with a resident Embassy in Abu Dhabi). BG, DE, DK, FR, HR, IT, MT, NL and RO have Consulates / General in Dubai. Three EU/Schengen MSs (DE, CH, NO) have dedicated Airport Liaison Officers in Dubai who also inform other MSs by courtesy when relevant. European Migration Officer (EMLO) for the Gulf region (UAE, Qatar, Oman) was appointed at the DE Embassy in Abu Dhabi in cooperation between the European Commission and DE Federal Police in mid-2021.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

EUDEL organised three LSC/LCC meetings (online/Webex) and one informal meeting (in-person) at Expo2020 Dubai (LU Expo Pavilion) followed by another meeting/visit to the Dubai Police; the latter two primarily focused on the Crisis Preparedness (TJFW). The COVID-19 pandemic affected the frequency and format of the meetings as well as their substance – relevant to international travel restrictions and later on a progressive re-opening of the EUMSs Embassies' visa sections in autumn 2021. The LSC/Consular group was the prime forum of coordination for COVID-19 related matters during the ongoing pandemic, while relevant discussions also took place at HoMs or DHoMs level whenever required. EUDEL established WhatsApp Consular group also served to ad hoc exchange of expertise.

All EUMSs had stopped visa issuances at the outset of the pandemic, except for the categories permitted in the EU recommendations (“essential travel”) and most of them resumed visa sections operations in autumn 2021, a few MSs even earlier before the summer/travel season.

Overall, the LSC/Consular group performed well during the pandemic under challenging local and international circumstances. In 2021, UAE was the scene of a COVID-19 outbreak after the New Year and again after the end-of-Ramadan holidays (in May); another increase of positive cases had been witnessed towards the end of the year, coinciding with some major events – e.g. Formula1 in Abu Dhabi and Expo2020 in Dubai. This resulted in the EUDEL and MSs Embassies enhanced coordination and outreach to local health and admin authorities.

EUDEL coordinated exchange of updates on vaccination administration and certificates recognition and facilitated the UAE connection to the EU Digital COVID Certificate (09/12).

All LSC meetings were well attended (on average 20 out of 27 EUMSs present). They were chaired by EUDEL, in an efficient and helpful coordination with the rotating EU Presidency. CH and NO are usually invited to stay also for the non-Schengen parts of the meetings as observers. Reports were drafted by the EUDEL and circulated to EUMS. Besides the LSC meetings, regular coordination took place via email, e.g. updates on MSs travel restrictions.

Since August, several EUMSs have been supporting evacuation of compatriots and refugees from Afghanistan and later on facilitating Afghani people visa and asylum applications. (*NB: according to available data approximately ten thousands of the evacuated Afghans stayed, and to some extent still stay, at the huge Emirates Humanitarian City at the outskirts of Abu Dhabi.*)

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC regularly discussed the implementation of the Visa Code as well as other issues relevant to the Schengen-UAE visa waiver agreement (since 2015). Discussions have notably focused on discrepancies in MSs/VFS practices, which could locally lead to the visa shopping. Particular attention was dedicated regular exchanges on documents fraud trends in the country. Moreover, the LSC/LCC meetings were a useful platform to coordinate EUMSs updates on travel advice and alerts, in particular in the context of the pandemic and the Expo2020 Dubai.

In the context of the travel restrictions linked with the pandemic, the EUDEL held several outreaches towards the local authorities on behalf of the member states in order to request information on entry to the UAE and to clarify restrictions and assure facilitation / freedom of movement of the Embassies' personnel and of travel to/from Europe in general. The group had also discussed the implementation of the revised Visa Code (2020), in particular the application of the cascade system; these concerns are to be followed by concrete proposals in early 2022.

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

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

The LSC in the UAE approved a list of supporting documents for visa applications in 2020. The harmonised list had been approved in the HQs/COM and entered into force. It was later reviewed after discussions locally and there was no identified need to revise it at that stage in 2021, also given the fact that Schengen visa were not being issued or very limited throughout most of 2021. The LSC will monitor the implementation and discuss again as soon as visa operations increase – return to the normal, in principle ahead of the summer season 2022.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

In 2021, the group discussed in particular the application of the "cascade system" (ref. also to 3.1 above) related to longer validity of multiple entry visas: whether local circumstances would call for adapting the general rules for certain groups of applicants, esp. those who could carry increased irregular/illegal immigration risk. This issue will require further considerations.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the LSC discussed the handling of the "essential travel" visa applications and coordinated approach in the re-start of visa operations. It also exchanged best practise in assessing and processing visa applications of Afghani refugees (since August).

The LSC group was also informed, and kept up-to-date, on the bi-weekly questionnaire in the framework of the lifting of temporary restrictions on non-essential travel to the EU (ref. to the regular review of the Annex I of Council Recommendation 2020/912). The questionnaires were prepared by EUDEL in consultation with the local rotating EU Presidency (PT and SI).

3.5 Exchange of information

In the context of decreased visa applications due to the pandemic throughout most of the year, statistics were not collected regularly, although encouraged by the rotating local Presidencies, and hence any trends difficult to observe. Cases of fraud have apparently increased with re-opening of EUMSs Embassies visa section in the fourth quarter of 2021, the issue was discussed by LSC and a specialised training planned for the spring 2022.

Cooperation with local authorities and companies seems challenging, in particular as regards verification of visa applicants banks statements, employers testimonials, and travel medical insurance. General lack of reactiveness from the local authorities has been witnessed regularly.

There have been no reported major problems related to cooperation with external service providers (VFS Global, for instance) and no additional common monitoring exercise needed. However, a number of visa applicants faced problems when contacting the VFS Global (via its homepage or by phone), which led to an increase of complaints vis-à-vis some MSS' Embassies.

No issues required an LSC coordination as regards VISMail and the Visa Information System.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC - N/A

4. Challenges

1. Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2020 report

Resumption of visa operations in conjunction with the COVID-19 crisis slowdown has not been particularly challenging nor remarkable, esp. as it did not coincide with the peak tourist season.

2. *Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2022).*

As already indicated above, the LSC remains concerned about the pandemic necessitated travel restrictions (in both ways) and related health and safety rules, the possibility to further discuss and apply the “cascade system”, and several new trends in documents fraud and its prevention.

5. **Other issues - N/A**

All represented Schengen MSs' Embassies were informed about this report and approved it.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC TO UGANDA

Kampala 04/03/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in UGANDA 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

11 Members States present in Kampala.

For the purpose of issuing Schengen visas: The Netherlands representing Hungary, Slovenia; Norway²² representing Denmark, Lithuania, Iceland; Germany representing Estonia and Austria and Switzerland²³; Belgium, representing Luxembourg; Italy representing Malta, Slovakia; France representing Spain, Portugal, Greece, Czech Republic, Sweden.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

During the reporting period, three have taken place: 25th February, 29th April and 25th November 2021. They were well attended. A consular whatsapp group was created in 2020 focused mainly on the coordination and organization of the repatriation flights that continued to be in good use during the last lockdown (from May to June 2021).

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. MS 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

Nothing special to highlight neither from LSC nor from the MS in terms of preparedness and application of the Visa Code.

Within the main challenges remains the analysis of the “original supporting documents” that are either fake or genuine but obtained fraudulently in Uganda (bank statements, residence permits of non-Ugandans, employment letter, etc.). This obstacle carries forward to a second challenge, the uncertainty of what happens when such problem cases are handed over to local authorities (no follow up/feedback, etc.).

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

For the locations where work on this has not been completed

²² The reception of visa applications for Norway and the countries it represents is sent to Nairobi.

²³ Germany processes visa applications from holders of diplomatic and official passports only.

We are pleased to note that a draft standard document listing the minimal requirements for supporting documents exists for all Member States to adhere to. There is no negative feedback from applicants or the visa outsourcing center pointing to any deviation by other member state in Kampala in this point.

The only recurring point that still could be enhanced is the fact that Member States apply different euro exchange rates, resulting in different costs when paid in local currency.

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Overall, it was established that MS practices are harmonised. The length of validity of multi entry visas (MEVs) varies between MS from less than one year in some cases and 1 to 2 years in others.

The general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades') are being followed.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Exchange of information about visa applicants and files has now been constrained to the use of the VIS-mail. Unfortunately, not all member states appear to be at the same level of integration with this system as other. This therefore renders the process both very slow and at worst impossible to implement as set out on paper. A speedy harmonisation of this system needs to be envisaged.

3.5 Exchange of information

Describe the exchange of information within the LSC:

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

- EU Delegation succeeded to import Covid 19 vaccines from Brussels, in coordination with the Belgium Embassy.

4. Challenges

Main challenges:

- To update of the list of unrepresented EU countries so that we all know who is representing whom.
- To increase the exchange of information and statistics.
- Delays on Visa processing due to the difficulty to harmonize Visa rules and national anti – Covid rules.
- To complete the Joint Crisis Preparedness Framework.

5. Other issues

N/A.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC TO THE UNITED KINGDOM OF
GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

March 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) – UNITED KINGDOM (LONDON)
2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

During 2021, the Local Schengen Cooperation in the United Kingdom/ UK remains unchanged compared to the previous reporting period as all EU-MS and associated states remain present in the UK, with visa processing services available in London or at consular offices in territory. Several Schengen MS collaborate with an external service provider for the purpose of the collection of visa applications. Sixteen Member States are present in Edinburgh (eleven only 'via' an external service provider); eleven Member States are present in Manchester (nine only 'via' an external service provider); four Member States are present via an external service provider in Cardiff; one Member is present via an external service provide in Birmingham.

The LSC meetings have been extended to the Member States career Consulates outside London, that can now participate in the quarterly meetings via WebEx.

Despite resumption of normal visa services in 2021, there was a further decrease in the volume of applications received (67,091) compared to the previous year (77,341), with low applications registered in Q1-2, coinciding with the height of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and Europe and UK-wide travel constraints. The refusal rate decreased however, from 8.1% in 2020 to 4.7% in 2021, closer to the refusal rates pre-pandemic. There has also been a higher no. of MEVs issued in 2021, rates increasing from 81.3% compared to 48.1% in previous year.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Under EU DEL's coordination, the LSC group met four times in 2021 (once per quarter). In the context of EU DEL taking over in 2020 the coordination of LSC meetings from COM, there was a continued support ensured by a DG HOME representative for the duration of the year. Due to the ongoing public health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and local restrictions in effect, the group continued to meet virtually; however, normal visa services were resumed by the second half of 2021.

The meetings were well attended, with an average of 20+ Schengen MS per meeting; however there is no distinctive pattern or changes in MS attendance compared to previous years.

EU DEL has continued to ensure all Schengen MS are represented in our correspondence lists, incl. representatives from consular/ visa offices outside of London. Upon resumption of in-person meetings, EU DEL will continue to put at MS disposal joining links and accommodate a hybrid-style participation for representatives outside the capital. To support representation and information sharing, regular updates to the correspondence list are ensured at EUDEL level, with meeting summaries and guidances being distributed to the group as necessary.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

There have been no major problems regarding the implementation of the Visa Code reported to the LSC but only questions raised on specific implementation issues. Since the adoption on 6th September 2021 of the Harmonised list of supporting documents to be submitted by visa applicants in the United Kingdom, there have been a few questions raised in relation to specific documentation, such as bank statements or travel insurance for certain categories of applicants.

The first two meetings of the group continued to have on the Agenda the revision of the Harmonised list, whilst the last two meetings approached as a topic the implementation upon adoption and a brief overview of how the harmonised list has impacted visa services 3 months after its adoption.

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

The harmonised list has been adopted by COM on 6th September 2021, with immediate application. At the time of the Q3 LSC meeting – during the ‘transitional’ 2 weeks post-adoption, very few Schengen MS were yet to implement it at the UK level, with clarification questions being posed in-meeting to the DG HOME representative.

EU DEL continued to monitor and place on the agenda the issue of implementation and impact on services through the remainder of the year, taking note of specific issues regarding the list, such as travel medical insurance for specific applicants from the UK (specifically those who hold an European Health Insurance Card or Global Health Insurance Card issued by the UK) or nominative bank account statements vs. credit card account statements.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code (‘MEV cascades’)

Under EU DEL coordination, the LSC group benefited from DG HOME’s intervention during meetings, re-iterating that issuing multiple entry visa with a progressively longer validity visas to frequent bona fide travellers is mutually beneficial for applicants and for consular services, reducing over time the volume of applications.

Furthermore, EU DEL addressed the issue of harmonising practices in this area at the local level, by putting together a brief statistical comparison between MEV issuance figures, by location and by MS, for the local group to consider.

The figures for 2021 compared to 2020 already reflect a significant improvement in MEV issuance rates and a decrease in refusal decisions at the local level. There has also been a better distribution among MS in 2021, especially in Q3-4 when COVID-19 travel bans and restrictions were eased/lifted.

The LSC also signalled to DG HOME that one of the most common limitations regarding issuance of MEVs to applicants from the UK is the validity of the British resident permit (BRP) or passports or the immigration history of an applicant in the UK.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States continue to exchange information on various operational subjects. In 2021, the focus remained on resumption of pre-pandemic visa operations, the implications of the UK's withdrawal from the EU during the grace period and following the entry into force of UK's new immigration rules.

EU DEL continued to ensure with DG HOME support the group was provided with regular updates and relevant information from the **Visa Working Party** and other fora.

Within the LSC remains a good collaboration in the gathering and sharing of data on visa issuance, with regular statistics being collected by a member of the group. It was established at the final meeting in Q4 that the collection of statistics will be performed through a yearly rotation by a MS so as to ensure a fair burden sharing of tasks. DE performed this role again throughout the year, though FR agreed to coordinate it in 2022.

In terms of noticeable trends, the number of applications received each quarter reflected severity of the travel bans/ restriction policies in effect for Q1-2 and later in the year their ease or lifting, with MS receiving in Q4 of 2021 up to 7x the number of applications received for Q1. There is however a continued low number of applications overall, compared to the services provided pre-pandemic and almost 10,000 applications less in 2021 compared to 2020.

Visa services were also impacted by temporary suspensions of visa facilitation agreements with various third countries (Gambia, Belarus).

The travel medical insurance/TMI remains an issue to be monitored in the LSC, with UK applicants being often holders of EHIC or GHIC. As reported in 2021, there remained a need to clarify the legal basis and inform medical/ travel insurance providers what a TMI policy should contain in order to shift the burden of checking compliance of policies from consuls who review visa applications.

4. Challenges in 2022

EU DEL will continue to encourage and monitor the local adaptation of the general rules on the issuing of multiple entry visas with a long validity (Article 24(2) and (2b)).

In this sense it will continue to request and analyse the available local data and feature the topic regularly on the agenda. The consequences of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine on visas (both for Ukrainian refugees in the UK eventually or the partial suspension of the Visa Facilitation Agreement with Russia) will certainly require deepening the exchange of information between MS.



DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

28/02/2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Tashkent 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

Ten Member States are present in Tashkent, 13 are represented from Moscow, two are represented from Nursultan and two Member States are represented from their respective capitals Helsinki and Stockholm. France represents Belgium, Iceland, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Portugal, Germany represents Finland, Sweden and Austria (for diplomatic passport holders only), Italy represents Malta, Norway and Slovenia, Latvia represents Estonia and Switzerland.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

Three LSC meetings were held in 2021 in January, April and October. The meetings were well attended, with about 2/3 of MS present in Tashkent usually attended the meetings, in addition Switzerland also sometimes attended LSC meetings. There were no MS that would never attend. Meetings were chaired by the Head of Political, Press and Information section of the EU Delegation. No ad hoc meetings held in 2021. Reports were drafted by the EU Delegation. There are no consular institutions with visa issuance outside Tashkent.

Short description of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Member States' visa operations and on the coordination of LSC.

In 2021 EU MS represented in Uzbekistan were slowly returning to the normal process of Schengen visa issuance, although real resumption differed on a country basis depending on the pandemics related containment in a EU MS concerned. Most countries were still facing COVID 19 related travel restrictions. Some representation agreements were put on hold. MS are not coordinating their response to COVID 19 pandemic in terms of visa issuance operations. Most visas issued in Tashkent were still national visas.

Number of regular meetings held, attendance (ex: "well attended"- "poorly attended"- "certain MS never attend"). Who chaired/co-chaired? Ad hoc meetings organised on specific subjects and with the participation of third parties or non-Schengen Member States? Reports drawn up by whom (MS or EUD)? Is coordination with the LSC in locations outside the capital ensured? If yes, how. If no, why not?

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Describe MS and EUD's preparedness to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code.

EU MS expressed readiness to implement the Visa Code and to take part in the work of LSC.

Describe specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code as discussed in the LSC meetings.

Uzbek visa applicants often do not understand or accept that they have to apply for the Schengen visa at least 15 days before traveling, so the consul often has to make an exception, considering if the trip is important and if there is no way to postpone it.

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

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

*Describe the **monitoring of MS' implementation** of the COM Decision on the list of documents to be presented in [...] and indicate whether there is a need to amend the existing list.*

The harmonised list of supporting has been agreed by the MS in 2014 and approved by the Commission on 4 September 2014 by its decision C(2014) 6141. LSC twice discussed the need to update the lists, and offered only minor amendments, expressing overall satisfaction with the functioning of the harmonised list. MS confirmed their adherence to the provisions of the said Commission decision.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

Briefly describe the state of affairs of the assessment to be carried out under Article 24(2b).

EU MS discussed the issuance of MEV. It was noted that in the circumstances of pandemic this is the best way to reduce contacts, however, the LSC will return to the in-depth discussion on the need to adapt the MEV cascades during its next meeting.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Provide information on other initiatives taken to ensure harmonisation of practices.

There were no other substantial initiatives taken to ensure harmonisation of practices, except exchange of views during the LSC on various issues related to Schengen visa issuance. LSC had a more substantial discussion on the requirement to present bank account records for visa applicants.

3.5 Exchange of information

Most MS states present in Tashkent and outside the country provide quarterly statistics on visa issuance.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Briefly describe such initiatives (background-results achieved).

4. Challenges

1. *Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2020 report*
2. *Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2022).*

LSC did not face any particular challenges, except that some MS brought to the attention the issue of very slow consultation process among MS. The prior consultation (Article 22 of the Visa Code) takes 7 days, while previously when only two MS exercised their right of veto, it usually took 1-2 days.

Some MS informed about relatively large numbers of short-notice applications with Note Verbale from the MFA in support for high ranking officials and their family members.

Another issue brought to the LSC attention was that in the passports of Uzbekistan citizens introduced in 2019, the MRZ code also includes the third name (paternal name) of the passport holder, while the data of the visa applicant is recorded, as before, on the basis of family and first name.

Besides general exchange on practice, LSC will further discuss on the changes to the harmonised list of supporting documents, the need to adopt MEV cascade rules and cases of fraud which are specific in the host country.

5. Other issues

None



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO VIETNAM

28/02/2021

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Hanoi, Vietnam 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

17 EU Member States, together with Switzerland and Norway, are represented in Hanoi. LU is represented by BE, PT by DE and the three Baltic states by FR. For the rest of unrepresented EU citizens, consular assistance is provided by EUDEL.

DE, FR, HU, IT and NL have Consul Generals in Ho Chi Minh city. 10 MS have Honorary Consuls (HC) in HCMC (AT, CY, CZ, EE, FI, EL, LT, MT, RO, SK), 2 MS have HC in Hanoi (LV, LT), 1 MS has HC in Haiphong (CZ) and 1 MS in Danang (ES).

Several member states have engaged with private companies (Visa Facilitation Services - VFS) to handle the receipt of visa applications, including recording biometric data.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

1. As EU MS stopped most of their visa operations, only two LSC meeting were held in 2021. The very strict COVID restrictions in VN and lack of regular flights into the country directed our focus on the difficulty to return to VN within 90 days. This raised a possible issue whereby travellers to larger countries were more likely to be able to comply with the return period regulation given a higher volume of special repatriation flights, but other MS may have fewer travel links and therefore encounter greater uncertainty ensuring a return within the 90-day period. Updating of the harmonised list of documents was discussed but the need to add specific proofs of return was seen as a temporary situation only and so it was decided to wait until a more stable situation post-covid for a further update. Another issue was the extended closure of VFS offices due to stringent lockdowns in 2021.
2. All meetings have been very well attended and the level of coordination is generally excellent (exchange of information, joint outreach to VN authorities or drafting Note Verbales on common behalf regarding quarantine conditions, return flights or visa extensions).
3. The LSC meetings were chaired by EUDEL in 2021. Coordination work was extended to the non-represented countries, which were constantly updated via email and chat groups).

Reporting has been done by EUDEL.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is strictly applied, however, since mid-March 2020 very few C-visa applications were recorded.

No specific problem relating to the implementation of the Visa Code was brought to the attention of the group.

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

The Harmonised List was reviewed in 2021 taking into account the particular situation of Vietnam and the difficulty to return the country (poor flight connections, quarantine authorisation etc). However, as this situation is deemed temporary, it was decided that it should not be further updated until the situation stabilises post-covid. The LSC group is informed that the approved list is mandatory and must be advertised on the MS embassies' websites. It has been implemented and no particular issue has been raised.

3.3 Adaptation of the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

MS have adapted to the general rules for issuing MEV, although very few applicants from Vietnam were eligible for a long multiple entry visa based on Art 24(2) of the code.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No particular problem was flagged, besides one issue recurrently raised by EU MS:

Exchange rate: several MS raised the issue of the euro exchange rate so that they can harmonise their fees and avoid potential visa shopping. However, MS have many different formulas and rules for their visa fee calculation so the problem will be difficult to resolve. The suggestion of EUDEL is to point them to the "inforeuro" page on the Commission website: <https://ec.europa.eu/budget/graphs/inforeuro.html> . This issue could also maybe be discussed in HQ as it could also be a global issue.

3.5 Exchange of information

No cases of fraud were brought to the LSC forum, probably due to the very limited visa activity, tightening of border controls and limited travel opportunity.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The Group took special care of updating the members on all regulations with regard to EU-VN travel and transit, as well as transit restrictions in MS. In this regard, updated contacts and information were circulated, through email but essentially chat groups, which allowed more informal and immediate communication and sharing.

EUDEL regular reporting on the COVID-19 situation was shared among MS, including on efforts to recognise Digital Covid Certificates.

4. Challenges

Possible discrepancies between the national practices vis-à-vis entry into various MS will remain a problem during the pandemic (such as which vaccines are accepted). However, the coordination between the MS is well advanced and the consular officers usually manage to solve in practice all arising problems.

5. Other issues

	Visa C submitted	Visa C refused	Visa D submitted	Visa D refused
AT	104	3	131	0
BE	130	5	165	4
CZ	56	11	1142	380
DK	no specific data for VN			
FI	68	9	-	-
FR	743	16	1880	198
DE	128	26	4967	386
EL	72	0	13	0
HU	15	0	1524	188
IT	157	7	389	2
NL	411	34	696	1
NO	43	32	151	2
PL	8	0	1032	215
SK	1	0	640	7
SI			1	0
ES	265	4	146	8
SE	57	40	25	0
CH	157	0	281	0

This report has been compiled from the information provided by EU Member States in Hanoi



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA AND COMESA

02 March 2022

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Zambia 2021 REPORT

1. Introduction

A total of 9 Schengen Member States (MS) are represented in Zambia (CZ, FI, FR, DE, IE, IT, SE). There are no consulates in other cities.

2. LSC meetings held in 2021

The LSC group met occasionally in 2021 (physically and via videoconference). Meetings were well-attended by EU MS represented in Lusaka and were chaired by the EU.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Regular meetings and contacts via e-mail, phone and virtual meeting platforms (Webex) continued to provide relevant opportunities for carrying out the tasks requested from the Local Schengen Cooperation under the Visa Code. The LSC meetings in particular dealt with operational issues in relation to the application of the common visa policy.

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

The harmonised list of supporting documents for Zambia entered into force on 29 September 2017. A possible update of the list of supporting documents was discussed in the LSC meeting of June 2021.

3.3 Assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code ('MEV cascades')

There were no attempts to harmonise the issuing of long-validity multiple-entry visas (MEVs) in 2021. The issuing of long-term visas was very limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In the context of the travel restrictions for non-essential travel to the EU in place in 2021, the LSC exchanged on a harmonised approach for the issuance of visas under the exemptions to the travel ban into the Schengen area.

3.5 Exchange of information

Visa statistics and trends were discussed at the LSC meetings. The LSC group regularly discussed updates on the restrictions on non-essential travel to the EU. The LSC group also discussed suspected fraud cases, notably related to birth certificates.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other initiative was taken in the LSC group during the reporting period.

4. Challenges

Nothing to report.

5. Other issues

In June 2021, Sweden regionalised its visa applications through its Embassy in Nairobi. Sweden represents 14 countries in Lusaka. As the sending of the application from Lusaka to Nairobi will generate a cost, most probably, applicants will apply in other embassies in Lusaka, which could generate an increase of visa applications for the other embassies in Lusaka (“visa-shopping”). The regionalisation of the visa sections of Sweden is taking place globally.
