



Council of the
European Union

147637/EU XXVII. GP
Eingelangt am 03/07/23

Brussels, 3 July 2023
(OR. en, fr, es)

11218/23

VISA 138
COMIX 320

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Visa Working Party/Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/Liechtenstein)
No. prev. doc.:	11202/22
Subject:	Local Schengen cooperation between Member States' consulates (Article 48(7) of the Visa Code) - Compilation of 2022 annual reports

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

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC)**ANNUAL REPORTS – 2022**

<u>ALBANIA</u>	4
<u>ALGERIA</u>	6
<u>ARMENIA</u>	10
<u>AUSTRALIA</u>	13
<u>BANGLADESH</u>	16
<u>BELARUS</u>	19
<u>BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</u>	22
<u>BOTSWANA</u>	27
<u>BRAZIL</u>	30
<u>CABO VERDE</u>	33
<u>CAMEROUN</u>	36
<u>CHILE</u>	41
<u>COLOMBIA</u>	43
<u>COSTA RICA</u>	45
<u>CÔTE D’IVOIRE</u>	57
<u>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</u>	59
<u>ECUADOR</u>	52
<u>GHANA</u>	54
<u>HONG KONG AND MACAO</u>	57
<u>INDIA</u>	60
<u>INDONESIA</u>	65
<u>JORDAN</u>	69
<u>KAZAKHSTAN</u>	72
<u>REPUBLIC OF KOREA</u>	76
<u>KOSOVO*</u>	80
<u>KYRGYZ REPUBLIC</u>	85

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

<u>LEBANON</u>	87
<u>SRI LANKA and THE MALDIVES</u>	89
<u>MALI</u>	92
<u>MEXICO</u>	97
<u>MONGOLIA</u>	101
<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	103
<u>MAROC</u>	106
<u>NAMIBIA</u>	110
<u>PANAMA</u>	113
<u>PERU</u>	114
<u>RWANDA</u>	117
<u>SAUDI ARABIA</u>	119
<u>SENEGAL</u>	122
<u>SOUTH AFRICA</u>	126
<u>SUDAN</u>	129
<u>TANZANIA</u>	131
<u>THAILAND</u>	134
<u>TUNISIA</u>	138
<u>TÜRKIYE</u>	141
<u>TURKMENISTAN</u>	144
<u>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</u>	146
<u>UNITED KINGDOM</u>	150
<u>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</u>	155
<u>UZBEKISTAN</u>	159
<u>VIETNAM</u>	162



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO ALBANIA

26 May 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ALBANIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Sixteen 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 issue Schengen visas in Albania but in neighbouring countries.

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

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), Czech Republic (Saranda), Hungary (Shkodra and Durrës), Italy (Gjirokastra, Shkodra) and Romania (Korca). Italy also has one Consular Correspondent in Berat.

Some Member States without an Embassy in Albania have Honorary Consulates: Belgium (Lushnja), Finland (Tirana), Malta (Tirana) and Portugal (Tirana).

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The EU Delegation organised and chaired two hybrid meetings of the Local Schengen Cooperation in 2022. These two meetings were well attended – nine Member States attended the June meeting, 14 attended the December meeting. The LSC meetings were organised back-to-back with the Local Consular Cooperation meetings.

Agendas and reports for LSC meetings have been prepared by the EU Delegation with inputs from Member States' Embassies.

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. All Member States have started to apply the list as of 13 December 2021 and throughout 2022.

3.2 Exchange of information

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

After the loosening of the Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions, the number of Schengen visas issued by Member States in Albania in 2022 has increased in comparison to previous years. Based on the information received, out of around 1 700 uniform visa applications lodged, around 1 500 have been issued (including MEV).

3.3 Any other initiative taken in LSC

As the task of drawing up a harmonised list of supporting documents for Schengen visa applicants was finalised by the LSC in 2021, the 2022 meetings largely focused on less LSC specific, but still related topics of migration flows, asylum applications by the Albanian citizens, perceived abuses by the Albanian nationals of the Schengen Information System (SIS) rules, the future entry into force of the Entry-Exit System (EES) and European Travel Information and Authorisation system (ETIAS), developments in the area of EU visa policy, and Albania's alignment with the EU list of visa-free and visa exempt countries.

4. Challenges

On the issue of the seemingly abusive requests by the Albanian nationals to access their personal data stored in the Schengen Information System (SIS), further action or guidelines, if any, are to be received from HQ level, with a view to possibly approaching the Albanian authorities on this matter. This may be relevant in particular since the entry into force of ETIAS has been postponed to 2024.

Challenges set out in the European Commission's annual visa suspension mechanism reports will continue to be addressed by the LSC.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION EN ALGERIE

28 février 2023

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) ALGERIE RAPPORT 2022

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. HR, intégrée dans l'espace Schengen à partir du 1 janvier 2023, est aussi représentée en Algérie. Parmi les Etats Membres de l'UE qui ne font pas encore partie de l'espace Schengen, BG 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 2022

Si la pandémie de COVID-19 a continué à avoir un impact sur les opérations de visa des Etats Membres pendant le premier trimestre de 2022, la normalisation graduelle de la situation s'est achevée au courant des trimestres successifs. Le volume des demandes traitées et des visas délivrés a augmenté de manière considérable par rapport à 2021 (+178% de demandes traitées et +127% de visas délivrés) mais il reste globalement bien en dessous de la situation précédente à la pandémie en 2019.

En 2022, neuf (9) réunions LSC ont eu lieu. La participation des Etats Membres est généralement élevée : la majorité des Etats Membres prennent part aux réunions de façon régulière. Les Etats Membres de l'UE qui ne font pas encore partie de l'espace Schengen sont invités et parfois participent 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 par courriel toutes les informations relatives aux activités du groupe LSC, y compris les rapports des réunions.

¹ EM= pays Schengen

Les deux réunions LSC organisées pendant le premier trimestre 2022 ont porté principalement sur l'échange d'information et les efforts de coordination concernant la reprise des opérations de visa dans le contexte post-pandémie de COVID-19. Lors des autres réunions, les principaux sujets abordés incluent : les échanges sur les statistiques, le phénomène du « visa shopping », les taux de refus, les modalités de prise de rendez-vous, et la lutte contre la fraude documentaire. En novembre 2022, une réunion spéciale a été organisée sur ce dernier sujet.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

En 2022, 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'emails et à travers une application de messagerie instantanée.

Les problèmes spécifiques liés aux opérations de visas en application du Code de Visas tels qu'ils ont été discutés lors des réunions LSC concernent notamment : le phénomène du « visa shopping », l'impact négatif du rôle des intermédiaires sur le système de prise de rendez-vous, et la fraude documentaire.

Les consulats des Etats Membres sont très souvent confrontés à des demandeurs qui soumettent leur demande auprès de services consulaires d'un Etat Membre alors qu'il ressort du dossier ou bien de leurs demandes de visa précédentes que la destination principale de leur voyage serait, en réalité, un autre Etat Membre.

Des intermédiaires (agences, officines, etc.) réservent les rendez-vous en ligne dès qu'ils sont rendus disponibles sur les sites des consulats ou de leurs prestataires. Ces intermédiaires vendent en suite aux demandeurs les rendez-vous avec d'autres « services » qui souvent incluent la constitution de dossiers de visa et parfois la fabrication de documents falsifiés. Tout cela impacte négativement les opérations de visa, en rendant indisponibles les rendez-vous en ligne et contribuant à la mauvaise qualité des dossiers.

Les Etats Membres sont confrontés à des niveaux importants de fraude documentaire, avec des graves conséquences sur l'efficacité du travail des services consulaires qui doivent déployer des efforts et des ressources considérables dans la détection des faux documents. Ce phénomène contribue également au niveau élevé du taux de refus.

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

En 2022, les Etats Membres ont continué à assurer l'application de la (nouvelle) liste des documents justificatifs devant être présentés par les demandeurs de visa de court séjour en Algérie, adoptée le 26 août 2021 par une décision d'exécution de la Commission européenne, suite aux discussions au sein du groupe LSC en 2019 et 2020. La liste est disponible sur les sites des consulats ou de leurs prestataires.

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 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, suite aux discussions au sein du groupe LSC en 2020.

Les Etats Membres présents en Algérie sont informés du contenu de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas et de l'adaptation locale de la cascade.

Alors que l'automatisme de la cascade a été limité à la délivrance des visas de deux ans, certains Etats Membres délivrent, en vertu de l'article 24 (2 quater) du Code des Visas, des visas à entrées multiples d'une durée de validité allant jusqu'à cinq ans à des demandeurs faisant preuve de leur intégrité et de leur fiabilité.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Pas d'autres initiatives réalisées relevant de l'harmonisation des procédures.

3.5 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. La DUE consolide les statistiques sur la base du format partagé par le siège. Les statistiques consolidées du trimestre précédent sont discutées lors de la réunion LSC au début de chaque trimestre.

En 2022, les services consulaires des Etats Membres ont traité environ 390 000 demandes et délivré près de 191 000 visas Schengen. Ces chiffres montrent que le volume des demandes traitées et des visas délivrés a augmenté de manière considérable par rapport à 2021 (+178% de demandes traitées et +127% de visas délivrés) mais il reste bien en dessous de la situation précédente à la pandémie en 2019 (environ 668 000 demandes et 374 000 visas).

Les principaux sujets abordés lors des réunions LSC de l'année 2022 incluent : le phénomène du visa shopping, les modalités de prise de rendez-vous, et la lutte contre la fraude documentaire. L'échange d'informations sur ces sujets permet aux Etats Membres de répondre de façon plus efficace aux problèmes récurrents et communs. Par exemple, ils apprennent, grâce aux échanges au sein de réunions LSC, les mesures prises par d'autres Etats Membres pour essayer de contrer le rôle des intermédiaires dans la prise de rendez-vous et peuvent s'en inspirer pour étudier des mesures similaires. En matière de lutte contre la fraude documentaire, l'échange d'informations et d'expériences permet d'identifier certaines fraudes répétitives et d'apprendre qu'il est possible de coopérer avec des entités locales qui sont susceptibles d'aider à détecter les faux documents (banques, sécurité sociale, etc.).

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Les Etats Membres échangent régulièrement des informations sur les cas de fraude. A la demande de certains Etats Membres, une réunion en novembre 2022 a été entièrement consacrée à cette question. A cette occasion, la France a partagé l'expérience de leur cellule interservices de lutte contre la fraude et d'autres Etats Membres ont partagé leurs expériences dans ce domaine.

4. Défis

Le défi lié à l'impact de la pandémie de COVID-19 sur les opérations de visas ne s'est concrétisé que pendant le premier semestre de l'année 2022. La situation s'est normalisée au cours de l'année.

Plusieurs Etats Membres ont continué, en 2022, à exprimer leurs préoccupations relatives à l'étendue et à l'impact des phénomènes du « visa shopping » et de la fraude documentaire en Algérie. Ceux-ci continueront à représenter des défis tout au long de l'année 2023.

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 ces défis et pour mitiger, dans la mesure du possible, leurs conséquences.

Parmi les éventuelles initiatives à envisager au courant de l'année 2023, les points suivants ont été évoqués par le groupe LSC. Une formation sur la lutte contre la fraude documentaire pourrait être réalisée en Algérie en 2023 par des experts de Frontex, au profit des services consulaires des Etats Membres. Une réunion sur la lutte contre la fraude pourra être organisée avec les pays « like-minded ». Le groupe explorera les options pour communiquer davantage de façon coordonnée en matière de lutte contre la fraude documentaire.

5. Divers

Rien à signaler.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO ARMENIA

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ARMENIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

13 MS have resident embassies/ official (non-honorary) representations in Armenia; 8 out of them - France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Poland - issue Schengen visas on location.

Spain is the 13th EU country that has opened an office in Yerevan, so far on level of chargé d'affaires.

Austria has been represented outside the capital Yerevan (in Tbilisi starting from January 1 2023).

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

- **France** represents Portugal, Norway and Iceland;
- **Germany** represents Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Sweden;
- **Italy** represents Finland and Malta;
- **Lithuania** represents Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Spain and Denmark;
- **Poland** represents Slovenia, Slovakia, and Switzerland.
- **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 2022

Two LSC meetings took place in the reporting period, i.e. on February 9 and November 29. Both meetings were organized by the EU Delegation and chaired by the Head of the PPI Section. The attendance rate was high (at fullest). For both meetings, reports were written and shared with all participants.

Currently COVID-related situation is stable, low number of new cases has been observed for a quite long period; most of the restrictions have been lifted, and the number of visa applicants has increased accordingly.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The MS managed to ensure 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 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 Commission defines a MEV cascade as the 'agreed approach of how many previous visas/trips the applicant has to prove to qualify for a long-validity MEV and how the length of validity for each subsequent visa would increase'.

Member States have developed diverging, mostly restrictive practices when issuing MEVs in Armenia.

The MS generally applied the cascade system; however, due to travel restrictions 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

Regulations related to pandemic are getting less strict and limited; however, some harmonization of visa processes is still needed. Therefore, the need for coordination within the LSC was in place in 2022.

Unstable situation on the borders made us coordinate with Security managers' meetings too. Contingency planning is needed and evacuation plans for EU MS and its citizens were discussed.

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, occurring challenges, i.e. a dramatic increase of the number of Russian nationals applied for Schengen visa. The email remained the main means of communication, which some MS described as "challenging."

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

Currently the pandemic-related situation is stable, a number of restrictions within Schengen area have been lifted or eased, which, in its turn, led to an increased number of visa applicants. Among main challenges, MSs indicated lack of free slots, visa shopping and re-sale of slots, which had been observed previously. As a new and most serious challenge, MSs named a dramatically increased number of Russian nationals applying for visa, including those who hold dual citizenship, i.e. Russian and Armenian. If an applicant has an Armenian citizenship, then their application should be considered. For Russian nationals procedures are very strict, embassies require to provide proofs of residency, i.e. a lease agreement, bank account statement, etc.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO AUSTRALIA

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN AUSTRALIA 2022 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. 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 2022

The LSC Group met twice during 2022, once during each 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. This item is included as standard on all LSC Group meeting agendas.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists 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). During the last LSC meeting, a discussion took place regarding the documents required MS agreed that a marriage certificate will no longer be required as a supporting document for Schengen Visa application as a general requirement irrespective of the purpose of travel.

A marriage certificate in original version remains mandatory only for family members of citizens of the EU. This will require an amendment to 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 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).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

EUDEL and the LSC Group drafted 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?>

3.5 Exchange of information

Since 2018, the rotating Consular Presidency has been collecting the visa statistics using the updated template provided by HQ. FR collected the statistics during the first six months of 2022 and CZ during the last six months.

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

The EUDEL has shared information on the upcoming ETIAS and the new QR code on Schengen Visas.

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.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Briefly describe such initiatives (background-results achieved).

4. Challenges

No particular challenges presented themselves during 2022.

5. Other issues

No other issues at present.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BANGLADESH

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BANGLADESH 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

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

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

EU Delegation, Head of Administration Chairs the LSC meetings and draws up the reports backed up by the European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO).

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. The Covid19 restrictions were eased and the meetings were mainly held physically, with the hybrid option of attending via WebEx.

The LSC discussed on the frequency of meetings and concluded to hold them as planned 4-5 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 or need arises.

After the travel restrictions were lifted throughout the year, normal visa operations have resumed at all MS representations in Dhaka and no more entry restrictions are in force for vaccinated travellers. In some cases and mainly for unvaccinated persons, an additional PCR negative test result is necessary but as this is a departure requirement from most airlines, it does not create the impression of an additional burden to travellers. Moreover, all representation activities have been reactivated.

The numbers of visa applications have continuously increased in 2022 and are back to pre-Covid19 level or even higher as many travellers have waited for the travel restrictions to be lifted.

A new trend has been observed as regards visa shopping. In particular SE and IT have noticed an increase in visa shopping since August/ September with the main destination DE, but also FR. Many of these applications were refused but a number has been granted due to good profiles.

Moreover, IT reported a decrease in fraudulent applications for business visa and an increase of requests for applications for whole families.

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 since the lifting of the travel restrictions in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, no specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code focusing on the revised rules applicable since February 2020 have been reported.

All MS have reactivated representation activities and MS honour visa requests for essential travel, if necessary with ad hoc representations as some representation agreements are back into force.

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 2022, but none of the MS sees any need to amend the existing list.

The visa issuance practice sheet has been updated in November 2022 and is attached to the annual statistic sheet.

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')

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 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 lodged.

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 still 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 will start working with VFS from May 2023 after it has been delayed since March 2020 due to COVID.
 - o FR and CH: direct applications at the Embassy
- Regular 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 has ended his post in January 2022 and a new EURLO has not been appointed.

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. In the absence of the Head of Administration, the EMLO chaired the LSC Group in Q4.

Usually Guest speakers have been invited from time to time, but those initiatives were not yet revived in 2022.

4. Challenges

Restart of visa operations in 2022 under post COVID19 circumstances, especially coordinated timing of such a restart to avoid visa shopping which has been observed for DE and FR.

All MS representations frequently face last minute applications submitted by Government representatives. The EUDEL Dhaka has sent a Note Verbale in November 2022 delivering the common message of the Local Schengen Cooperation Group requesting to respect the minimum processing times which has improved the situation since.

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.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BELARUS

1 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BELARUS 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

13 EU Schengen Member States are present in Belarus: Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, 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 (Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovak Republic).

Due to expulsion of LV embassy from Belarus, only the consulate in Vitebsk continues to work. Lithuania closed its consulate in Hrodna due to drastic reduction of all staff and operates with extremely limited capacity. Estonia was requested to decrease its staff to one expat that means minimum operational activity. The Poland's consulates in , Minsk, Hrodna and Brest operate with significantly limited staff.

As representation is concerned, please note the following:

- Estonia represents Finland and Sweden;
- France represents Iceland and Spain (only VIP and urgent);
- Germany represents Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia;
- Hungary represents Switzerland and Liechtenstein;
- Italy represents Malta;
- France represents Iceland and Spain (as of 1 March 2022 and only in VIP and urgent cases) ;
- Latvia temporarily suspended all visa representation since March 2022;
- Slovakia represents Portugal.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Due to expulsions of diplomatic and consular staff of EUMS, several EU Member states (MS) have limited resources and capacities for issuing visas. As of spring, AT, FR, HU, LT, EE, CZ, PL, SK, IT, LV lifted all COVID restrictions for the issuance of Schengen visas.

During the reporting period, two LSC meetings were held (24 May and 18 October). The meetings are generally well attended – 12-14 MS attended the meetings in the reporting period. Bulgaria and Romania are invited to the LSC meetings and usually 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 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

- **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 somehow impacted by restrictions linked to COVID-19 in the beginning of the year, and then by the start on the Russian war on Ukraine.

- **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 2022, and there is no need at the moment to amend the existing list.

- **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 war on Ukraine, there was no real opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the Visa Code and VFA.

- **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. EUMS do not see any need for additional harmonisation exercises at the moment.

- **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. EUDEL coordinates a dedicated Signal group for urgent exchange of information.

After the war on Ukraine started, a number of MS (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, Czech Republic) continued issuing Schengen visas only for citizens wishing to visit family members in the EU, as well as on humanitarian grounds, e.g., Belarusian citizens suffering from political repressions, serious illness or funeral of a close relative, or other exceptional cases. C type visas can be issued for humanitarian reasons by Lithuania, upon a special permission by the Minister of Interior. Some MS focused on issuing D visas.

Other EUMS reported an important increase of the number of applicants, especially after the war in Ukraine started. There were some cases of visa shopping, however, with EUMS changing an appointment system, these challenges were almost overcome. Refusal rate is low, around 1% of the total number of applications.

4. Challenges

- The EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA) entered into force on 1 July 2020. However, its implementation continued to be seriously compromised in 2022 by the political situation, especially after the war on Ukraine started. The Council decision of 11 November 2021 on partially suspending the application of the EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement remained in place. MS did not report on attempts to circumvent this Council decision.
- The understaffing of some EUMS consular sections, especially of neighbouring MS with BY caused by deteriorating bilateral relations and BY requesting to decrease the number of diplomatic staff, significantly increased the burden on operating EUMS and limited access of Belarusian citizens to Schengen visas.
- The unilateral visa free regime by BY for LV, LT and PL continued to be in place. Despite warnings by the authorities, people used quite actively this opportunity and some were detained. Due to worsening political relationships, EUMS consular staff was unable to provide effective consular support.

The report was approved by the Member States on XXX March 2023.



EUROPEAN UNION

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF EUROPEAN UNION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

30 January 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 17 EU MS/SAC diplomatic missions present in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) [Austria (AT), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Sweden (SE), Switzerland (CH) and Norway (NO)]. The consular section of NL covers Luxembourg (LU) and Belgium (BE) in terms of visas, while the consular section of HU covers Lithuania (LT) and Estonia (EE), AT covers Malta (MT), SE covers Denmark (DK) and Slovenia covers Switzerland (CH) and Portugal (PT). Even though BG and RO are not yet part of the Schengen area, they have diplomatic missions in BiH and are invited to participate the LSC meetings.

In the beginning of 2022 Covid-19 restrictions further continued to limit visa operations in most of the EUMS/SAC, causing limited consular operations in most of the EUMS/SAC. However, trend of increased number of visas issued has continued in 2022 as well, especially in category of 'D' visas that recorded a significant increase. Most of 'D' visas were issued by the Embassy of Germany (15.300).²

In 2022 there were no changes in visa-free regime between BiH and EU. There were no changes in document security policy since local authorities still have not made appropriate changes in related legislation. Visa policy was additionally harmonized with the EU Acquis through adoption and implementation of the new Book of Rules on Issuing "C" and "A" Visas in Diplomatic - Consular Offices of BiH. EU financially supported development of the Migration Profile of BiH 2022. EU was actively engaged in development of strategic framework on migration and asylum and development of legislation in the border and migration management policies in BiH. EU invested intensive efforts in renewed talks on the (Model) Status Agreement between BiH and EU/FRONTEX. Most of the aforesaid processes are still ongoing.

In the reporting period implementation of the Readmission Agreement and Implementation Protocol signed between BiH and Pakistan had tangible results, effectively returning two Pakistani migrants back to Pakistan. In addition, local authorities continued with multiple readmission talks with some other countries of origin of migrants, primarily Bangladesh and Egypt.

² Based on statistics received through 26 January 2023. EUMS/SAC that provided statistics were: AT, HR, CZ, FR, DE, HU, NL, RO and SE.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

In 2022 the EU House (EU Special Representative's Office and EU Delegation) hosted one well attended in-person LSC meeting on 12 December 2022. The EU House continued to cooperate with the EUMS/SAC on different subjects using regular information channels, including in cooperation with EU institutions in MHQ/Brussels as well.

Meeting report was done and distributed with EUMS/SAC and appropriate institutions in MHQ/Brussels. No ad-hoc meetings were organized in 2022.

Being that BiH is on the Western Balkans migratory route, the EUMS/SAC were regularly informed on trends, prospects and potential implications of security nature primarily. Primary discussion subjects were related to the Post-Visa Liberalization Monitoring Mechanism (PVLMM) and other country-specific issues as specifically defined within the Visa Code, Article 48, Par. (3).

It is important to say that EUMS/SAC were provided opportunities to proactively discuss open issues in the meeting on wide variety of subjects, especially security and political situation that might have effects on daily operations of the missions.

On concrete activities since the 2021 report, it is important to emphasize limited but tangible results achieved in improvement of border and migration management capacities of local authorities.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

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

Accession of the Republic of Croatia to the Schengen Zone as of 1 January 2023 did not cause any significant changes in application of the Visa Code or implementation of visa policy in daily consular operations.

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

In the meeting, EUMS/SAC briefly discussed the issue, especially related to verification roles of the 'Chambers of Commerce' for short-stay visa applications. The issue has been resolved in the way that EUMS/SAC received e-links on precise lists of all harmonized documents for all visa-required third countries. EUMS/SAC did not report any other harmonization issues on supporting documents.

EUMS/SAC were reminded of the Commission Implementing Decision C(2011) 7192 on establishing the list of supporting documents to be presented by visa applicants in BiH, Sri Lanka and Turkey (Ankara, Istanbul, Edirne and Izmir) of 30 October 2011.

Communication with the Visa Committee did not reveal any related issues neither.

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')

EUMS/SAC did not report any problems on application of Article 24 in the reporting period.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Information received from EUMS/SAC suggest that all practices were harmonized to the highest possible extent following the Visa Code provisions, including its annexes.

With regard to situation in BiH, local authorities did not suspend limited (30-days) visa-free regime with Russia in framework of the EU sanctions.

3.5 Exchange of information

Analysis of visa revealed that number of visas issued by EUMS/SAC in 2022 significantly increased compared to 2021, as provided in the following discussion:

- Multiple entry 'C' visas (2021 - 1404) / (2022 - 1363) = 2,92 % decrease,
- Single-entry 'C' visas (2021 - 35) / (2022 - 260) = **642,8 % increase**,
- Limited Terr. Validity (LTV) visas (2021 - 1) / (2022 - 5) = **400 % increase**, and
- Long-term (D) visas (2021 - 3194) / (2022 - 18.555) = **480,9 % increase**.

Visa application percentages proportionally correspond the aforesaid issuing statistics, with a slight deviations for a longer visa application assessment processes, including leftovers from 2021. We have to take in consideration the fact that some of the EUMS/SAC did not provide their visas statistics until the moment of writing this report.

Compared to the previous reporting period, the most important changes the EUMS/SAC were informed on were explained as in the following text:

Visa policy in BiH

In the reporting period BiH authorities adopted the Book of Rules on Issuing 'C' Visas and 'A' Visas in Diplomatic - Consular Offices (DCO) of BiH and started with its implementation. BiH authorities did not make any contracts with external service providers or commercial intermediaries. The Council of Ministers passed the decision on granting visa-free regime to holders of biometric diplomatic and official passports of Thailand. Local authorities received a part of planned equipment in framework of preparations for introduction of biometric visas.

Document Security policy

The legal issues on procurement and manufacturing of biometric passports are still pending. Supply contracts for biometric passports, state ID cards and driving licenses have been concluded for the next four years.

Integrated Border Management (IBM) policy

The new Law on Border Crossing Control is in the Parliamentary adoption process. Risk Analysis training process is in its final phase of implementation. In January 2023 local authorities received invitation for official start of negotiations on the new Model Status Agreement from the European Commission. In July 2022 local authorities also received the new Working Arrangement between Border Police and Frontex.

Migration policy

EUMS/SAC were also informed on *migratory trends and statistics*, including on illegal migration and *security situation* in BiH in general terms. Local authorities continued talks with multiple countries of origin of migrants, e.g. Bangladesh, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia.

It is important to mention that *accession of the Republic of Croatia to the Schengen Zone* did not cause significant changes in migratory trends. Meaning, currently decreased number of migrants and seasonal peaks cannot be correlated with the situation, but rather to changes of migratory routes in the region and weather conditions, as per usual practice so far.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No special initiatives taken in 2022.

4. Challenges

Since the last Annual Report, the EU House ensured its continued facilitation and advisory expertise in the following Key Priority areas:

- Continued with technical talks on the Model Status Agreement between EU and BiH,
- Initialized and facilitated talks with local authorities on the new Working Arrangement between BiH Border Police and FRONTEX,
- Intensively facilitated process of adoption of the new Strategy and Action Plan on Migration and Asylum, that resulted in adoption of the Strategy and putting Action Plan on hold,
- Intensively facilitated adoption of the new Law on Border Crossing Control and its harmonization with the EU/Schengen Acquis,
- Facilitated and monitored implementation of the Risk Analysis Training Cycle process, and
- Remained actively engaged in all aspects of migratory movements and trends in BiH, including fight against illegal migration.

In 2023, after formation of new governing structures in BiH (CoM, Parliament etc.) the EU House will set focus on the following:

- To support finalization of negotiations and sign the Status Agreement with EU/FRONTEX,
- To support signing of the Working Arrangement between BiH Border police and FRONTEX,
- To support adoption of the Action Plan on Migration and Asylum 2021-2025,
- To support finalize Risk Analysis Training Cycle and establish functional risk analysis process based on FRONTEX' risk analysis methodology,
- To support improvement of the Joint Risk Analysis Centre's capacities and related process,
- To monitor and support implementation of legislation and strategic documents currently in force,
- To support implementation and improvement of migration management policy in BiH, and
- To support improvement of visa and document security policies, especially their legal frameworks.

5. Other issues

No other issues of a specific importance raised by the EUMS/SAC.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND SADC

30 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BOTSWANA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Two Member States (DE and FR) are present with Embassies in Gaborone. France has no consular competence. 18 EUMS are side-accredited from South Africa, 1 in Namibia (Spain), 1 in Mozambique (Italy), and 1 in Egypt (Slovenia). Many have 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. Only visas for the Schengen countries represented by Germany in Botswana (Germany, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Luxemburg, Malta, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland) can be obtained in Gaborone. Thus, Schengen visa procedures for these countries are handled at the VAC as well.

Before June this year, the French Embassy should be in a position to process visa requests by Botswana and residents, through a one to two days' a month available service, outsourced to France's usual provider « Capago ». The service will be provided from within the premises of the French Embassy by the company « Capago ». For the time being, France will not represent other Schengen countries.

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). In a recent meeting with the EU Delegation, Honorary Consuls voiced frustration about the lengths of the visa processes in these cases. There have been negotiations between Botswana and several Schengen countries for visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports.

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

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 2022

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

N/A since only one MS issues visas.

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')

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

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

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 challenge mentioned above could be addressed within the next reporting period (2023).

5. Other issues

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

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



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BRAZIL 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Twenty-three Schengen Member States are present in Brazil and twenty-two have a representation in the capital, Brasilia. Lithuania has a Consulate in São Paulo. Estonia, Latvia, Iceland and Liechtenstein do not have embassies / consulates in Brazil.

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

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

Three Schengen Member States (DE, F, IT) have official consulates in the city of **Recife**; 3 Schengen Member States (DE, ES, IT) have official consulates in **Porto Alegre**; 2 Schengen Member States (IT, PL), have official consulates in the city of **Curitiba**; 2 Schengen Member States (IT and PT) have official consulates in **Belo Horizonte**, and 2 Schengen Member States (ES and PT) have official consulates in the city of **Salvador**.

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

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic subsided over 2022 and the Schengen Member States' visa operations returned largely to pre-pandemic levels. The pandemic had no impact anymore on LSC meetings.

Two hybrid LSC meetings took place and were well attended. All Schengen Member States present in Brazil 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. Thanks to LSC meetings taking place in a hybrid way, colleagues from outside Brasilia can take part, thereby facilitating information sharing and coordination. In addition, coordination is facilitated through What'sApp groups. 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, there are no Schengen visa-related specific problems and there is little perceived need to discuss visa code related questions amongst Schengen Member States. The Visa Information System (VIS) is implemented. The requirement for collecting biometric details meant that in some cases visa applicants needed to travel farther (considering Brazil's size), 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. However, the pandemic weakened as the year 2022 progressed, and the differences in entry rules subsided.

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

The European Commission adopted the decision on harmonised list of supporting documents for Brazil in September 2016. So far, Member States in Brazil have not expressed the 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')

As the pandemic receded, the demand for multi-entry visas slowly regained pre-pandemic levels. 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, nor is there appetite to do so.

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 hybrid nature of LSC meetings facilitated the participation of non-Brasilia based colleagues. Member States used VIS Mail. Information also continued to be shared via dedicated WhatsApp groups.

Out of 23 Schengen Member States present in Brazil, 13 Member States shared Schengen visa statistics for the 2022.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Not applicable.

4. Challenges

No particular challenges regarding the Schengen cooperation were observed. Schengen Member States are encouraged and invited to propose topics for the agendas of LSC.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF CABO VERDE

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in CABO VERDE 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Cabo Verde is a lower middle-income country with well-functioning democratic institutions and overall good governance. In 2007 it was launched a Special Partnership Cabo Verde/UE and in parallel it was agreed a Mobility Partnership (2008). A Visa Facilitation Agreement and a Readmission Agreement entered into force on 1 December 2014. The last amendment to the Visa Facilitation Agreement, entered into force on 1st July 2022.

There are four resident Member State Embassies in Cabo Verde: Spain, France, Luxembourg and Portugal. Many more MS have ambassadors in Dakar and Lisbon accredited to Cabo Verde and there is a dense network of honorary consulates in the different islands of the country.

Portugal runs the Common Visa Centre (CCV) in Praia, which receives Schengen visa requests for 19 Schengen countries. Spain does not participate in the CCV and has its own consular section in Praia. Both Spain (through honorary consuls) and Portugal offer the possibility to present applications in Sal and Mindelo, which are eventually processed in Praia. There is good cooperation between Portugal (CCV) and Spain in cases where further information on refusals/applicants is needed as well as any other question of common interest.

Cabo Verde being an archipelago with nine inhabited islands approx. 500km off the coast of West Africa, it is challenging for inhabitants of the other islands to request visas in Praia, but also for all citizens as regards visits to countries not covered by the CCV, and for longer-term national visas.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic severely hit the country. Among others, left about 5000 European tourists stranded in the different islands at the closing of borders in March 2020 and implied the collapse of the tourism sector (over 25% of the country's GDP).

The CCV and the Portuguese and Spanish consular sections only resumed regular issuing of Schengen Visas at the beginning of 2022. The number of Visa applications escalated since the beginning of the year overloading the CCV and the Spanish Consular section. The situation has progressively stabilized through the year with figures approaching pre-pandemic levels. The entry into force of the simplified procedures included in the amendment to the Visa Facilitation Agreement and the reinforcement of staff have contributed to cope with the situation, that nevertheless remain chronically difficult, and sensitive, in particular as regards the CCV.

During the reporting period, three regular LSC meetings took place, back to back to Local consular Coordination meetings. EU DEL chairs the meetings; always attended by all four resident MS. EU DEL drafts the meeting reports, and share them with Member States for comments.

Nevertheless, Portugal is by far the main reference in the area and the main contributor to local coordination meetings. The Portuguese Embassy manages the CCV and the country is the destination of most (over 90%) of the Schengen visa applications, besides their own National and CPLP visa schemes. Portugal is also the leading country on Consular Crisis preparedness.

Due to the very busy agendas of the participants, it is often difficult to find suitable dates for the coordination meetings, but all four Member States always attend at the adequate level. Consular issues are also, regularly evoked in EU Heads of Mission meetings.

No specific EU coordination is ensured out of the Capital City.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

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

Both the CCV and the Spanish Consular Section have, quickly integrated the new rules introduced by the revised Visa Facilitation Agreement, notably as regards, reduction of fees, simplification of required documents and facilitation of multiple entries visas.

On 9 March 2023, were successfully hold in Praia the (steering) committees foreseen in the Visa Facilitation and the Readmission EU /CV agreements.

EU DEL remains insufficiently staffed to ensure an optimal impulsion of Consular Coordination.

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

A harmonised list of supporting documents is in place, and has been updated in line with the Visa Facilitation Agreement.

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')

Article 4 of the amended Visa Facilitation Agreement EU Cabo Verde contains different provisions that greatly simplify and facilitate issuing of multiple-entry visas. Since its entry into force on 1st July 2022 the number and rapidity of multiple-entry visas has sensibly increased. The proportion of these visas was already high (about 50% of Schengen Visas issued) and it is expected a further increase.

A specific issue in Cabo Verde is the fact that national passports have a maximum validity of five years, which renders difficult issue 5-year and 4-year multiple-entry visas.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

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

Issues such as the treatment of visa requests related to binational marriages or to minors travelling without their parents have been discussed, but not specific harmonisation has taken place.

3.5 Exchange of information

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

- visa statistics;
- cases of fraud, in particular false documents and "mariages blancs" and an exchange of best practices how to discover and minimize such fraud;
- overall trends in visa applications, seasonal variations;
- public debates, information campaigns on visa issues;
- cooperation with local authorities and companies (e.g. banks, employers, transport companies).

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The meetings allowed for the monitoring of the long ratification process (negotiations concluded and texts initialized in July 2020) of the Amended Visa Facilitation Agreement in both Brussels and Cabo Verde.

LSC meetings were also instrumental in preparing the meetings of the Joint Committees of the EU-Cabo Verde Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements. The latest were held in Praia on 9 March 2023.

4. Challenges

N/A

5. Other issues

N/A



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION EN CAMEROUN

7 Mars 2023

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) – CAMEROUN RAPPORT 2022

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 : à Yaoundé et Douala, le Danemark et la République Tchèque, seulement à Yaoundé, la Grèce, la Lettonie, la Lituanie et Malte, et seulement à Douala la Slovaquie ; l'Espagne avec le Portugal et la Slovaquie ; l'Allemagne avec l'Estonie et la Hongrie).

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 ordinaire³. La France est dans un processus d'externalisation qui devrait aboutir en 2023. Au total (hors Suisse), sur 31.437 demandes, **13.745 visas Schengen ont été délivrés au Cameroun en 2022** (6.582 par la France, 1.799 délivrés par l'Italie, 2.234 par l'Allemagne, 2.532 par la Belgique et 598 par l'Espagne).

L'année 2022 a été marquée par des discussions avec la partie camerounaise concernant l'application éventuelle de l'article 25a du Code des Visas européen suite à un faible taux de réadmission constaté. Une session spéciale du Dialogue Politique Structurée a porté sur la migration en octobre 2022, notamment sur la migration illégale, les fraudes documentaires et les problèmes liés à la délivrance des visas. La partie camerounaise s'est montrée coopérative sur l'ensemble de ces points.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2022

Deux réunions semestrielles consulaires ont été organisées à la Délégation de l'UE au Cameroun en 2022 au niveau des chefs de section consulaire/visa. Aucune réunion extraordinaire n'a été planifiée.

Situation liée au COVID-19

Les effets de la crise COVID-19 sont derrière nous. La situation est revenue à la normale en ce qui concerne la délivrance des visas Schengen.

³ 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 que le Cameroun continue d'appliquer des procédures parfois aléatoire et peu compréhensible (exemple d'un « test » rapide obligatoire à l'arrivée sur le territoire camerounais, contrôle hasardeux de port de masque dans les trains, ...). La plupart de ces mesures semblent répondre davantage à une pratique de la corruption, régulière dans ce pays, plutôt qu'un impératif sanitaire.

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 utilisé par de plus en plus d'Etats Schengen.

Les pratiques relatives à l'application du Code des Visas sont parfois différentes quant aux procédures de refus des visas. La standardisation des remarques liées au refus pourrait être améliorée. Un problème lié au traduction est également à souligner.

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. Le système VISMAIL nécessiterait des améliorations.

La principale difficulté observée dans l'application du code réside dans la lutte contre les fraudes de documents justificatifs, liée à une pression migratoire, et l'évaluation des ressources des demandeurs de visas. 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 toujours pas 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 :

L'**Allemagne** applique les règles du nouveau CCV. Les dispositions légales de l'Article 24(2) du Code des Visas Schengen sont respectées. Dans tous les autres cas (Article 24(2c) Code des Visas Schengen), la délivrance des visas à entrées multiples est seulement effectuée pour des demandeurs qui sont particulièrement connus ou ont une importance politique ou culturelle particulière.

La **Belgique** applique aussi la nouvelle règle CCV, 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 elle constate de plus en plus de « *visa shopping* ».

L'**Espagne** applique aussi la nouvelle règle CCV, mais chaque cas est évalué individuellement, car le nombre de cas de « *visa shopping* » reste très élevé. Le principe de « cascade » de l'Article 24(2) est appliqué principalement lorsqu'il a été déjà confirmé que le demandeur de visa voyage régulièrement et principalement dans notre pays.

Depuis le 1^{er} février 2020, la **France** applique les règles du nouveau CCV, après examen au cas par cas et à de rares exceptions près.

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

La **Suisse** applique les règles du nouveau CCV en appréciant chaque demande au cas par cas.

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.

Un certain nombre de points en terme d'harmonisation pourraient être améliorés tels que la collaboration avec les banques, la mise en commun d'avocats.

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, 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 des comparaisons de leurs données respectives. Dans des circonstances normales, une consultation semestrielle est suffisante. Cependant, et compte tenu des enjeux autour de la fraude documentaire, il existe un besoin aigu d'échanges supplémentaires, de sorte que la fréquence pourrait 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. 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 diplomatique sont théoriquement dispensés de présenter une assurance maladie (Article 15 (7) Code de visas Schengen), ce qui pose problème lors des hospitalisations imprévues, qui sont une réalité fréquente⁴.** 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)* : Peu satisfaisante à satisfaisante pour les organismes privés (banques, compagnies aériennes, ...). Les organismes sollicités répondent habituellement rapidement et efficacement aux demandes d'authentification de documents ou de personnes mais parfois jamais. Elle est également 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* : Partage d'informations (carnets d'adresses, e-mail, ...) à développer.

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Pour l'année 2023, les différentes sections visas des Etats Membres continueront leurs échanges entre sections commencés en 2021, afin d'échanger les meilleures pratiques. Proposition de la Suisse et de l'Allemagne de tenir les prochains exercices.

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 (2023). La France a entrepris certaines démarches qui associera les pays volontaires (avec l'Attaché de Sécurité Intérieure).

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).

⁴ By German regulations, possessing an official passport does not exempt applicants from the necessity of meeting the requirements set by the Schengen visa code. The Schengen visa code explicitly exempts those in possession of a diplomatic passport from the requirement of a travel health insurance, but this does not apply for other kinds of official passports.

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, sans réponse à ce jour. 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 avait 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. Même problème avec les codes d'accès du MINREX (fin 2022) pour la légalisation des documents.

La **fraude documentaire** (relevés bancaires, diplômes, ...) reste un sujet de préoccupation majeur. Un exercice consulaire pourrait être réalisé en 2023 pour une mise en situation et un échange entre Etats Schengen (proposition Espagne).

La **lutte contre la création d'officines** devant les ambassades est un sujet sur lequel les Etats Schengen pourraient également travailler. Le sujet a déjà été abordé au sein du dialogue politique structuré de juillet 2022.

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.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO CHILE

30 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in CHILE 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

18 Member States are present in Chile (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden) with an Embassy in Santiago. A number of countries have honorary consuls across the country.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The meetings, chaired by the EU Delegation (Head of Political Section), have been held in a virtual manner, although less frequently than in 2021, and then back to physical meeting (one) due to the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions.

EU Member States present in Chile, and Schengen non EU Member states (Norway, Switzerland) participated in the meetings. EU Member States accredited to Chile from Argentina (Slovenia and Slovakia) participated in the virtual meetings. The EU DEL sent a report of the meetings to the participating countries.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EU Member States did not report any issues regarding the application of the EU Visa Code, including its recent changes [Regulation (EU) [2019/1155](#) of 20 June 2019]. The EU has an automatic tourist visa of 90 days for Chilean.

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

EU Member States did not report any problems regarding the harmonization of documents and related practices.

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 particular problem was highlighted on this topic.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Based on the information received by member states all practices are harmonized following the Visa code.

3.5 Exchange of information

All the meetings held provide a space to share information on visa practice and/or implementation of new regulations by the government of Chile.

The main agenda item of the meetings has been the travel restrictions in place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the complexity of the information available from local authorities, the requirements for vaccination and/or for lockdowns upon arrival as well as the rules to obtain the mobility pass that was necessary to get into the country during many months or later to be able to access closed locations (e.g. restaurants, cultural events, etc.).

There are little cases of fraud reported in the meetings.

Due to Chile's increasing number of immigrants from neighbouring and other countries (e.g. Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti etc.) there is slight increase of so far unproblematic Schengen visa applicants from foreigners resident in Chile.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The meetings provided an opportunity to exchange on the deterioration of the security situation in the country, and its impact on European citizens, as well as the procedures in place in Chile in case of natural disasters.

4. Challenges

A challenge in Chile has been the requirements for entry into the territory for diplomats, tourists or business operators linked to the restrictions imposed by the authorities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The gradual lifting of the restrictions has made the situation easier.

However, the new immigration act in force since February 12th, 2022 along with a new electronic visa and residence permits online application system has created a huge backlog and long waiting time which are specifically difficult for incoming students and expats working for European companies with branches in Chile.

5. Other issues

In 2022, a Joint Consular Framework (JCF) for Chile was agreed by the Heads of Mission in Chile and transmitted to the COCON working Group.

In 2023 the EU Delegation will continue to discuss with Member States the existing rules in place to travel to Chile.



UNIÓN EUROPEA

DELEGACIÓN EN COLOMBIA

24 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in COLOMBIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

16 Member States (MS) are present, i.e. Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Spain and Switzerland.

Eight MS are represented for Schengen visa applications, i.e.

- Slovenia and Latvia (via Germany)
- Malta (via Italy)
- Estonia (via Poland)
- Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway (via Sweden).

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic still affected the coordination of LSC in 2022. No coordination meeting was therefore held in presence. LSC meetings in presence are scheduled to resume in 2023, under the chair of the EU Delegation.

Regarding the post-pandemic development, one Member State noticed an increase in study and work visa applications, but not for Schengen visas. There are no statistics for tourism visas as there is no tourist visa requirement for Colombians.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS did not indicate specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code, given that the issuance of Schengen visas was rare. Colombians do not need a visa to enter the Schengen area for tourist reasons.

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

There were no specific needs identified.

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 express any concerns about the Art. 24 (2) cascade rules, also because tourist visas are not necessary for Colombians.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

N/A

3.5 Exchange of information

The resumption of LSC coordination meetings in presence will strengthen the opportunity to exchange information, including on best practices on how to handle visa applications despite the rare cases.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

There were no specific challenges identified for 2022.

One Member State described as one of the main challenges to promote the ETIAS system in Colombia and to describe well what its entry into force implies. The Member State has already received several requests from Colombians and it would be important that the EU continued to provide relevant information, including in social media etc.

Another Member State described as challenging the admissibility of applications from Russian citizens (given the war in Ukraine). The EU harmonised policy helped in this regard.

5. Other issues

N/A

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



UNIÓN EUROPEA

DELEGACIÓN EN COSTA RICA

27 de marzo de 2023

COOPERACIÓN LOCAL SCHENGEN (CLS) EN COSTA RICA INFORME 2022

1. Introducción

Cinco Estados miembros (Alemania, España, Francia, Italia y Países Bajos) están presentes en Costa Rica y 17 Estados miembros están representados en otros lugares: Colombia (República Checa, Dinamarca); Guatemala (Suecia); México (Bulgaria, Irlanda, Grecia, Chipre, Hungría, Austria, Polonia, Rumania, Eslovaquia, Finlandia); Nueva York (Croacia); Panamá (Bélgica, Portugal); Washington (Lituania, Eslovenia). 20 Estados miembros (BE, BG, CZ, DK, EE, FR, EL, IT, CY, LV, LU, HU, MT, AT, PL, PT, RO, SK, FI, SE) tienen cónsules honorarios en Costa Rica; FR e IT fuera de la capital San José.

En Costa Rica, cinco países (DE, ES, IT, NL, CH) emiten visados Schengen. La Embajada de España en Costa Rica es competente para visados Schengen a los siguientes Estados miembros: Estonia, Francia (No Departamentos y Territorios de Ultramar), Grecia, Letonia, Hungría, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Finlandia y Suecia. La Embajada de los Países Bajos es competente para visados Schengen a los siguientes Estados miembros: Bélgica, Luxemburgo y Eslovenia. La Embajada de Suiza es competente para los visados Schengen a los siguientes Estados miembros de la UE: Polonia.

2. Reuniones de la CLS celebradas en 2022

Las estancias de corta duración y el turismo hacia la Unión Europea (DE, ES) procedente de América Latina se ha recuperado con fuerza tras el fuerte impacto de la pandemia. En el año 2022 ya se han recuperado prácticamente los niveles anteriores al Covid-19.

En Costa Rica no se suelen organizar reuniones de la CLS. Las Embajadas no las ven necesarias, porque hay generalmente muy pocos casos de visados Schengen. Los ciudadanos costarricenses no requieren visado Schengen para viajar a la Unión Europea por periodos inferiores a 90 días. Por ejemplo, en 2022, la Embajada de IT emitió 11 visados Schengen (un visado a un costarricense para trabajo marino). La Embajada de DE tiene 20-25 casos de visados Schengen al año, sobre todo de China y de la India para viajes de negocio. La Embajada de ES suele tener un poco más casos; en 2022, la mayoría de los visados Schengen fueron emitidos para estancia (96), otros son principalmente visados de múltiples entradas (50).

3. Situación actual

3.1 Aplicación del Código de visados

No hay problemas en Costa Rica por causa del escaso número de visados Schengen que representan en general menos de un 10% de los visados expedidos al año, aunque se puede notar en 2022 un aumento de los visados Schengen expedidos para otras nacionalidades respecto a 2019. Las principales nacionalidades son: República Dominicana, Cuba, Ecuador y China, y en menor medida, India, Rusia y algún otro país árabe o de África subsahariana.

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

No se considera relevante armonizar ninguna lista de documentos, puesto que para todas las Embajadas se trata de trámites porcentualmente muy reducidos y prácticamente residuales. Todas las Embajadas piden básicamente la misma documentación y no hay ningún atisbo de visa shopping.

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”)

Ver el punto 3.2.

3.4 Armonización de las prácticas

No hay iniciativas de este tipo en Costa Rica.

3.5 Intercambio de información

Como hay tan pocos casos de visados Schengen en Costa Rica, no hay intercambios de estadísticas, no hay proveedores externos, etc. En general, no hay problemas con casos de fraude, documentos falsificados, etc.

3.6 Cualquier otra iniciativa tomada en la CLS

Nada.

4. Dificultades

Nada.

5. Varios

Nada.

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



UNION EUROPÉENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DE COTE D'IVOIRE

15 février 2023

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN CÔTE D'IVOIRE RAPPORT 2022

1. Introduction

Six Etats membres de l'espace Schengen (BE, CH, DE, ES, FR, IT) délivrent des visas et 16 (AT, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SK) sont représentés par ces derniers en ce qui concerne les visas.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2022

L'année 2022 a vu une reprise à plein régime des demandes de visas avec, d'un consulat à l'autre, des statistiques au moins équivalentes, mais souvent en forte hausse par rapport à la période pré-Covid. Cela a eu un impact sur les délais de rendez-vous et de délivrance, en raison du manque de personnel dans certains consulats, entraînant lui-même du visa shopping vers les autres, avec fraude à la clé (faux certificats d'hébergement...).

Trois réunions de la LSC ont eu lieu en 2022, en février, juin et novembre, 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 réunions (à l'exception de l'Italie en février et novembre, de la Suisse en novembre et de la France en juin).

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les consulats ont constaté que les demandes s'effectuent toujours à la dernière minute, malgré l'allongement du délai de dépôt.

Selon les cas, les consulats ou chancelleries diplomatiques qui traitent les demandes de visa sur passeport officiel constatent que leur délivrance par les autorités ivoiriennes est très généreuse (anciens dignitaires, enfants majeurs de détenteurs de passeport diplomatique, descendance des anciens présidents...). A noter que la Suisse a levé en 2022 l'obligation de visa pour les détenteurs de passeport diplomatique ou de service ivoiriens, sur la base de la réciprocité.

La délivrance de visas sur passeport officiel, notamment pour des voyages personnels, continue de poser des difficultés ponctuelles (overstay), en particulier pour des voyageurs possédant en parallèle un visa sur passeport ordinaire.

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. S'il y a du « visa shopping », ce n'est pas sur la base des documents demandés mais plutôt de l'encombrement du circuit de dépôt de visa (voir ci-dessus).

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 »)

Pas de besoin particulier signalé.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Des échanges réguliers ont lieu concernant les modes de vérification des pièces justificatives et les types de fraude constatés. 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

4. Défis

Comme anticipé dans le précédent rapport, la pleine relance de l'activité visas dans un contexte où les moyens humains dans certains consulats n'ont pas retrouvé le niveau pré-pandémie s'est traduite par un délai rallongé dans le traitement des demandes, d'autant plus que leur nombre ne cesse d'augmenter.

Par ailleurs, l'identification de la fraude documentaire reste un défi d'envergure, nécessitant une mise à jour et un partage constant des informations.

En 2023, outre l'absorption des retards de traitement accumulés, la communication concernant les nouveaux systèmes frontaliers UE (ETIAS et surtout EES), et leur mise en place concrète, vont probablement constituer les principaux défis.

5. Divers



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

6 febrero 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC (DR) 2022 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) and Iceland (ISL).
- 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 conduct the processing of visas at their larger missions - for example the US - while the physical aspects of this process (sticker print, shipping, etc.) remain at either the local missions, or outsourced to companies in Santo Domingo.

In 2022, the number of visa applications and issued visas continued to increase, nearing pre-pandemic figures. Italy restarted its visa operations, outsourcing the physical aspects to a local company, while processing the visas at the Italian Consulate in Santo Domingo.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Visa request numbers continued to increase steadily. By the end of 2022, EUMS/SAC lifted all COVID vaccination restrictions and saw requests nearing pre-pandemic figures.

Meeting coordination continued to be excellent. In 2022, the EUDEL organised 4 LCC/LSC meetings on:

- February 8th
- April 19th
- September 8th
- November 15th

All member states present in the country participated in the meetings. Like previous years, EUMS not represented in the DR and non-EUMS with representation in the country participated either virtually or in-person. LSC discussions focused on forged documentation and visa shopping cases, visa processing and waiting-time, and other internal procedures. Last year, the EU Delegation chaired all the above-mentioned 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

EUMS reported increasing visa requests, as restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic were lifted. By the end of the year, all EUMS reported figures close to pre-pandemic levels. At the beginning of the year, the DR wanted to join the EUDCC platform. However, efforts were later discontinued.

With the increase in visa requests, EUMS reported long waiting times for visa appointments, ranging from 1 to 3 months.

EUMS continued to report cases of visa shopping and forged documentation. The civil registry is aware of the problems with forged documentation and continues to work on the improvement of documentation authenticity. Problems related to forged documentation were presented to local authorities at different LSC meetings, including Director General for Migration and Consular and Migration Affairs at MFA.

Rejection rates in the DR are high, reaching 22% due to migratory risk, lack of sufficient documentation or financial means.

The Dominican Republic launched a press campaign during the summer to be on the visa-exempt list of countries. President Luis Abinader appointed a special Ambassador (José Singer) to pursue such objective. The EU DEL informed Dominican authorities on both technical and political aspects of such requests. Primarily, a biometric passport.

In the case of passports, the DR has chosen a European provider to work towards the implementation 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:

- Multiple entry visa for businessmen
- Possible visa-facilitation for non-migratory risk profiles
- Implementation of the new biometric passport.

5. Other issues

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



UNIÓN EUROPEA

DELEGACIÓN EN ECUADOR

8 de marzo de 2023

COOPERACIÓN LOCAL SCHENGEN (CLS) EN ECUADOR INFORME 2022

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), República Checa y Eslovaquia (representado por Hungría), Finlandia, Grecia, Lituania, Luxemburgo, Malta, Países Bajos, Portugal (representados por España). Hay Consulados Generales de España en Quito y en Guayaquil. El Consulado General de España en Quito procesa visados de corta estancia para viajar a Grecia, Luxemburgo, Malta y Portugal, para los residentes en todo el Ecuador, y para viajar a Países Bajos, Finlandia y Lituania, únicamente para los residentes en las provincias de su demarcación consular. La Embajada de Francia en Quito procesa visados de corta estancia para viajar a Bélgica, para los residentes en todo el Ecuador. La Embajada de la República Federal de Alemania en Quito procesa visados de corta estancia para viajar a Alemania y Austria. La Embajada de Alemania tiene la demarcación consular para todo el territorio nacional de Ecuador y las Islas Galápagos. La Sección Consular de la Embajada de Hungría en Quito procesa visados Schengen para viajar, además de Hungría, a la República Checa y Eslovaquia.

2. Reuniones de la CLS celebradas en 2022

La actividad de solicitudes de visados durante 2022 se recuperó o se acercó a los niveles pre pandemia de 2019 con la relajación o suspensión de las restricciones sanitarias relacionadas con Covid.

El grupo CLS tuvo una reunión el 30 de mayo de 2022. En el último trimestre, un nuevo proceso en cooperación con la Cancillería se inició con el objetivo de compartir información en vistas a una reducción de las altas cifras de rechazos.

En este marco, se celebró una primera reunión el 27 de octubre de 2022.

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.

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

No existe la necesidad de una mayor armonización de la lista de documentos justificantes.

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”)

Una propuesta de revisión de las normas generales sobre la expedición de visados de entrada múltiple para ciertas categorías de viajes (negocios, culturales, académicos) fue enviada a Bruselas al Comité de visas. Este último hizo unos comentarios que fueron presentados a los consulados locales. La revisión de éstos en el marco del CLS está pendiente. El tema ha quedado recientemente relegado a un segundo plano por la campaña del Ecuador para conseguir la exención de visa Schengen.

3.4 Armonización de las prácticas

En las reuniones de CLS se comparan prácticas sobre distintos asuntos; mencionar la especial coordinación que existe en cuanto a la lucha contra la falsificación de documentos, y el problema de la saturación de citas debido a la alta demanda de visados Schengen después de la pandemia y la presencia de agencias tramitadoras. También el problema de visa shopping entre Estados miembros.

3.5 Intercambio de información

3.6 Cualquier otra iniciativa tomada en la CLS

Se hizo un proyecto de distribución de países a efectos de asistencia consular. (ADJUNTO DOCUMENTO).

4. Dificultades

La emisión de visados Schengen durante 2022 se acercó a los niveles pre-pandemia. Eso produjo aumentos de las solicitudes que alcanzaron para algunos consulados los niveles pre-pandemia. Con este aumento, aumentaron también los problemas, como por ejemplo:

- Presentación de documentos falsificados;
- Presencia de tramitadores
- Escasez de citas disponibles
- “Visa shopping”

Frente a estos problemas y en cooperación con la Cancillería un proceso de reuniones entre la CLS y las autoridades se lanzó con la coordinación de la DUE. Estas reuniones pretenden identificar problemas y alimentar el debate sobre las medidas paliatorias necesarias, como por ejemplo campañas de sensibilización, evaluación de las agencias tramitadoras entre otras.

5. Varios

El tema de la exención de visados Schengen para los ciudadanos ecuatorianos es 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 EEMM. En el curso del año, las expectativas de una exención aumentaron con una posible revisión por parte de la UE de la lista de los países exentos de visas.

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



February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in GHANA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Nine (9) EU Member States are present in Ghana (CZ, DE, DK, ES, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL) and 13 are represented by residing MS in Accra (AT, BE, EE, FI, GR, LV, LT, LU, MC, PL, PT, RO, SK). Several EUMS are represented by Honorary Consuls and/or do not have specific agreements with residing MS. Other Schengen partners present in Ghana are Norway and Switzerland.

There are no LSC members outside of Accra, apart from IT and HU honorary consulates in Kumasi. Members also issue visas in Accra for residents of neighbouring countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo among others).

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Four LSC meetings were held in 2022, all in physical presence and well-attended by all LSC partners. Meetings were chaired by the EUDEL and hosted respectively by Malta, Switzerland, Denmark and Czech Republic. Minutes of the meetings were drawn up and circulated by EUDEL.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Members are well-equipped and rapid information exchange is possible through an up-to-date LSC contact list. This was first done during COVID-times. Some members still do not use an external service provider, but deadlines can be met. There are no significant challenges relating to the implementation of the Visa Code. Some MS operate with longer visa handling times, although they are actively working towards compliance with the 15-days timeframe.

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

Harmonised list of supporting documents is in place since 2019. There is currently no need to update or 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')

See section 3.4.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

LSC members all agreed to adopt a **grace period** for visa validity [NB: while the visa validity is extended, the period of stay remains the same]. To be noted that the Visa Code stipulates that insurance certificates do not need to cover the grace period, only length of stay of the applicant.

LSC members also agreed to comply with the **multiple cascade** procedure of the Visa Code, while applying appropriate measures accounting for the local context (one year at a time). Members also reserve the right to adapt this procedure in exceptional cases that do not fit the general rule [NB: All MS exercise leniency in light of the Covid-19 context, where 2020 and 2021 are not perceived as years with the possibility of easy international travel].

Submission to the Visa Committee in Brussels is still pending, planned for first quarter of 2023.

3.5 Exchange of information

- *Quarterly statistics*: Good exchange, statistics are compiled by the German Embassy and shared quarterly with other LSC members.
- *Cases of fraud*: Fraudulent documents received include student transcripts, birth certificates and bank statements. 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 has been compiled by NO. List will be updated by NO and HU in first quarter of 2023.
- *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 Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) (especially the Document Fraud Expertise Centre (DFEC)) and Births and Deaths Registry, though in the latter case it often takes time to receive feedback. Bank statements can be checked via email at almost every bank, although some banks are not always reactive. LSC members usually cross-check with the Ghana Central Bank's official list available publicly on its website. Communication and collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Passport Office has been particularly challenging in 2022, despite efforts by EURLO and EUDEL to engage the office.
- In 2022, the EU launched a Migration Dialogue with the Ghanaian authorities, notably to improve cooperation with certain departments and agencies (see below section 3.6).
- *Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises)*: Most LSC members use VFS as external service provider, with the exception of ES, DE and HU. Some MS cooperate with law firms to verify documents (DE). Verification fee has to be paid by applicants. NL operates with a waiting list for applicants, but this is not a common practice.
- *Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System*: Not used by all MS, some technical problems. CH, CZ, DE, DK, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL and NO are using VISMail.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC members finalised and approved a **Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework (JFW)** for Ghana. The document establishes 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. Following review by RSO and all EUD Consular Correspondents, the JFW was shared with HQ (EEAS Consular Affairs) and the document has been circulated to LSC Heads of Mission.

Following instructions from EEAS and DG HOME, EUDEL intensified its **dialogue with the Ghanaian government on migration**. To this end, EUDEL organized a bilateral meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Directors of Consular Affairs, Passports) to stress persisting issues in cooperation on Art. 25a, including challenges relating to identification, issuance of travel documents and authorisation of return flights. EUDEL also organized a large stakeholders meeting with EUMS, EURLO and high level of attendance on the Ghanaian side: MFA Chief Director, Chief Director of Ministry of Interior, Ministry of National Security, Ghana Immigration Service, and MFA Directors for Europe, Passports, Consular and Research respectively.

Ghanaian partners took note of the issues raised in both meetings and promised to assess the matter internally and revert promptly. EUDEL will follow-up with EUMS and the MFA respectively in the first quarter of 2023.

4. Challenges

Challenges faced in 2022 revolved around:

- **Forged documents:** A high number of visa applications include submission of forged documents (seemingly over 25%). This trend has increased in recent months and it is challenging for Member States to verify these documents (time consuming, but also requiring technical resources and expertise and smooth communication with relevant Ghanaian authorities).
- **No-shows at visa appointments:** Several MS (CH, CZ, DE, DK, ES, MT, NL) have experienced an increase in no-shows at visa appointments. This trend is likely a sign that middle-men organisations are booking a large amount of appointments, rather than individual applicants not showing up. ES will start implementing three-month 'ban' for no-show applicants.
- **Increase in number of visa applications and fully booked appointment slots:** MS (CH, DE, FR, IT, NO) are experiencing an all-time high number of visa applications, with some cases of appointments fully booked for the next several months. This is perhaps related to the post-Covid-19 situation. It is particularly problematic given the context of no-shows mentioned above and is also leading to increasing requests for special appointments.

Other persisting issues already raised in the 2021 report included: large groups applying for short-term visas and last minutes NVs/requests from MFA.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO HONG KONG AND MACAO

February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in HONG KONG AND MACAO 2022 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 2022

Meetings were held on xxx (online until April, then in presence). All MS and CH attend. Due to pandemic restrictions imposed by the host country, PT could only attend online meetings.

The meetings are chaired by the EU Deputy Head of Office. The two MS holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2022 (FR, CZ) are present in Hong Kong and co-chaired 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.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

2021 continued to be plagued by traveling restrictions due to the pandemic. The number of visas issued remained very low.

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;
- One MS noted an increase in false documents in Autumn, but 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

In the beginning of the year, the LSC was held on a monthly basis and served to exchange consular information, tips, and good practices.

On 27 October, FR Schengen police officer in HK provided an update on ETIAS

4. Challenges

The first half of 2022 was the most difficult year regarding Covid-19 related travel restrictions in Hong Kong, as the authorities implemented 'zero-Covid policy' that failed to prevent the rapid dissemination of the Delta variant in early 2022. Flight suspensions mechanisms and three-week long centralised quarantines were imposed to all inbound travellers, isolating Hong Kong and Macao from the rest of the world. The situation gradually returned to normalcy during the second half of the year.

Due to the lockdowns in mainland China, several MS observed an increase in requests for visa from mainland Chinese citizens that were not residents of Hong Kong. Although the normal practise was not to grant them visa, some flexibility was showed in light of the severe travel restrictions and mobility disruptions in mainland China.

In previous reporting period (2020-21), 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 2022 hence this challenge remains true for 2023.

5. Other issues

The EUO updated its website with the aim to improve access to info of the MS CGs in HK

HK authorities (Philip TANG, Senior Immigration Officer, International Co-operation Section, Immigration Department, HKSAR Government) have been in touch regarding the development of EES and ETIAS.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO INDIA

5 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in INDIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

25 Member States (MSs) are present and one (LI) is represented in India. The four prospective MSs (BG, CY, HR, RO) are also present in New Delhi. In addition, several MSs have additional consulates processing Schengen visas: seven in Mumbai (BE, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, PL), two in Kolkata (FR, IT), one each in Bengaluru (FR), Puducherry (FR) and Goa (PT). DE gathered most of its Schengen visa processing at its section in Mumbai in 2021, while keeping a residual capacity in Delhi. Therefore, the total number of offices processing Schengen visas in India went from 40 to 37 in 2022.

All MSs 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 18 visa application centres (VACs). Each MS selects the VACs where they wish to be represented: 17 MSs are represented in 10 or more of these VACs. Three prospective MSs also avail of the service of the same ESP (RO is not using any). ES is represented in the 7 VACs of its ESP, and EL is represented in 12 VACs of its ESP.

Several MSs' representations in India have also 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 2022

The travel conditions in relation to Covid-19 evolved considerably in 2022: at the beginning of the year, only 8 MSs allowed non-essential travels to vaccinated persons from India, and half of them did not recognise one of the two vaccines used in the country; moreover, India was keeping an "air bubble", restricting the number of international flights. This air bubble was removed by the end of March, and at that time most MSs lifted all restrictions to non-essential travellers. This generated a huge influx of requests, choking the visa processing capacities of most MS (see below); this was compounded by a noticeable increase of first-time visa requests substantiated with fake or forged documents, therefore increasing the average processing time.

Nine regular LSC meetings were held in 2022, with an average representation of more than 19 MS and prospective MS. The first meeting was held virtually due to the local Covid-19 situation, the second one was in-person hosted by the embassy of CH, and the penultimate was at the embassy of CZ. The other ones were hosted at the EU Delegation in-person, with an option to follow on-line, in particular for consulates outside Delhi processing Schengen visas. Reports were drafted by EUD.

Airport Liaisons Officers (ALOs- four posted in Delhi, three in Mumbai, and two abroad) are systematically invited and represented at the LSC meetings. IE was invited on one occasion early 2022, to the discussion on recognition of vaccines and certificates of COVID-19 vaccinations for non-essential travels. On one occasion, representatives of the main ESP were invited, as well as representatives of the Indian government, presenting an initiative of virtual wallet of verified documents for Indian citizens.

In addition, EUD and MSs participated to a workshop on document and visas frauds organised at and by the US Embassy.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EUD and MSs actively engaged and cooperated on the tasks defined by Article 48 of the Visa Code, either during the regular meetings, or through the platform AGORA. A lot of energy was necessary to accompany the migration of the old version to the new version of AGORA, both from EUD and MSs. Cooperation was also ensured through two series of training workshops organised in Delhi at EUD by ALOs on verification of visas, travel documents and accompanying documents. In total, ten sessions of four hours each were organised, reaching more than 200 local and expat visas officers. In addition, ALOs in Mumbai organised similar training session for the local consulates.

The discussion on migratory risk does not only take place in the LSC, but also in a Local Migration Group, which met three times last year, in particular to gather information and prepare a EU-India High Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility.

The main problem relating to the implementation of the Visa Code discussed in LSC meetings pertained to the observation of the visa processing time, and MSs competent for processing visas. The huge and sudden influx of visa requests from March/April 2022 generated significant backlogs for most consulates, and many introduced limits (caps) in the applications. As a consequence, Indian wishing to travel either could not apply for visa to some MSs, or faced waiting time of several weeks or months.

The persisting caps and extended delays for applications for travel to some of the main destination MSs had spill-over effects to other MSs, with Indian travellers trying to find alternate ways to enter Schengen MSs. The application of the rule of MS competent for visa processing represented the main challenge in terms of application of the Visa Code in 2022. Several MSs admitted issuing uniform visas to travellers of good profile (or with previous history of Schengen travel), even if “visa shopping” could be suspected; one MS explained feeling uneasy in rejecting obvious cases of “visa shopping”, while other applicants more cunning would get through.

MSs exchanged regularly on the evolution of their situation, and adopted mitigation measures. Several consulates received additional human resources to deal with the backlogs and removing of caps.

The common information sheet was reviewed at the end of 2022 in order to update it following the integration of HR to the Schengen area, and have it ready for publication on MSs’ websites on the first days of 2023.

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

The revision of the harmonised list of supporting documents in India was adopted in May 2020. There is no active monitoring of its implementation (and guidelines on such monitoring would be necessary to implement such monitoring (who and how?)).

The harmonised list contains specific instructions regarding film crews (a specific feature in India considering the strength of the film industry). Discussions were held in a couple of LSC meetings on the issues linked to this category of travellers; upon completion of discussions, a need of revision of the harmonised list of supporting documents may arise in 2023.

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 the adaptation of the MEV cascade were held in seven of the nine LSC meetings. A first adaptation was agreed in April, for seafarers (limited number of MS involved).

In a way, the challenge created by the capacity of processing the huge influx of visa requests in 2022 helped developing a consensus on the value of reducing the administrative burden of processing visas for trusted travellers.

The discussions were held on who could benefit from the cascade, how to apply a segmentation between bona fide travellers and other groups, but also sharing individual MSs' current practices for certain groups of travellers.

At the end of 2022, a large consensus arose on the decision to propose a couple of adaptations: one applying to all Indian travellers, and another one on specific category (-ies), including seafarers and trusted business persons. The ambition is to complete the proposal early 2023.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

At the beginning of the year, the LSC group continued to share extensively practices in relation to restriction to non-essential travels, or resumption of visa processing operations, in a bid to promote harmonisation of MSs' approaches.

The extensive discussions on adaptation of cascade helped also exchanging on the current implementation, with more opportunity for harmonising practices across the consulates.

3.5 Exchange of information

Quarterly statistics

A uniform template is in place, also including optional features for reporting processing of national visas (having for some a huge impact on the overall visa processing capacity). This section is largely filled also by the MSs when they share their data.

Despite discussion at LSC meetings and regular reminder of the obligation to report, 20 of the 40 visa sections in India reported no quarterly statistics, and a further 9 reported only for one or two quarters. This prevents from performing any meaningful analysis of trends.

Cases of fraud

As explained above, a steep increase of fraudulent practices linked to visa applications - both Schengen and national visas (students in particular) - were reported by MSs. This was discussed during LSC meetings, at the training sessions, during a workshop at the US embassy. One main unresolved challenge is to define how to address this increasing trend, and in particular the follow-up to be given to individual cases of forged or fake official documents.

Travel medical insurance (TMI)

The system in place in India for verification of TMI (through a website managed by the General Insurance Council (GIC)), allowing verification of authenticity of individual contracts works well. One MS (DK) has volunteered to be the contact point of the GIC for solving issues.

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

Exchange of information and experience on those largely took place during the extensive trainings given by ALOs, who also share their expertise and knowledge on ad-hoc basis, upon request from individual visa sections.

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

With all MS but two using the same ESP, there is a lot of opportunity for cooperation, and this has been discussed extensively within the LSC. The common check-list developed by LSC a couple of year ago is still available in AGORA, and EUD introduced in 2022 a systematic point of exchange of information on monitoring of visa applications centres, giving the opportunity for MSs to exchange their experience of recent visits, or announcing future visits for possible common exercises.

MSs still have a lot of complaints of the delivery of the main ESP, and in particular in the Delhi visa application centre. The monitoring of all active visa application centres by each MS is also representing a challenge for most, and these two topics will be followed in 2023.

Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System

This topic has not been subject to exchange of information within the LSC in 2022.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The coordination with LSCs in neighbouring countries developed in 2021 did not live through in 2022 (sharing reports of neighbouring countries of LSCs with consulates in India processing visas from such countries). Ad-hoc information was shared when received, but an alternative and more durable solution needs to be developed.

4. Challenges

Response to the challenges identified in the 2021 report

The improved and expanded use of verification tools of accompanying documents was ensured through the massive training exercises organised in 2022, the invitation of the Government of India to present their digital wallet and means of verification, followed by bilateral session organised at the consulates on a voluntary basis.

The 2021 report had rightly identified the post-COVID smooth resumption of operations as challenge, but the chaotic resumption of activities of external service providers was compounded by the processing capacity of consulates. The cooperation on controls of visa application centres should be continued, and supported by a coordinated approach regarding deficiencies in the quality of service of the main external service provider.

Subject to be addressed in the next reporting period:

The challenge of adopting an adaptation of the cascade under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code, identified last year, is still on for 2023.

In addition, the following subjects will need to be addressed:

- Confirmation of the need to review the list of supporting documents (general, film crews);
- Improved sharing of information regarding monitoring of Visa application centres of external service providers and coordination for addressing deficiencies in quality of services of the main external service provider;
- Exchange on ways to deal with forged and fake documents, spurious agents and traffickers, sharing information and possible legal actions.

5. Other issues

The issue of Schengen visa processing capacity cannot be treated independently from the capacity of national visa requests. Most MS also face a very significant increase of visa requests both for studies, and for work. In most cases, these are processed by the same teams in the consulates. Although these topics are outside the visa code remit, there is also an interest from MS of sharing experience in such fields.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO INDONESIA AND BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

7 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in JAKARTA, INDONESIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

20 out of 27 Schengen countries are present in Jakarta⁵. There are some honorary consuls in other areas of the country, notably in Bali-Denpasar, but also in other cities such as Bandung, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Medan.

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. Some MS regionalized the processing of Schengen visas: for Sweden all applications from Jakarta and Bali are handled in Bangkok, including visa issuing; all visa decisions for the Netherlands are taken centrally in The Hague.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

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).

The 2021-2022 period was characterized by the transition from limited number of visa request due to the Covid-19 related travel restrictions to a return to normality in terms of travel regulations and an important increase in visa demands, especially in 2022, creating a significant visa applications backlog with important delays in providing visa appointments for several EU MS.

⁵ Schengen countries that are not represented in Jakarta: Iceland Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Slovenia.

There were *six well attended LSC meetings in 2022*, chaired by the EU Delegation, back to back with the Consular meeting co-chaired by MS holding the EU Council presidency, by France during the 1st semester of 2022 and by Czech Republic, during the 2nd semester. The Secretariat, including agenda setting and reporting was ensured by the Delegation. Each meeting was followed by a report by EUDEL, sent to local participants, to be shared with capitals, and to EU Headquarters (Commission and EEAS). In addition the Delegation organized a coordination meeting and kept active contacts with like-minded countries.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Good cooperation was ensured via the LSC meetings and 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.

The high increase of visa applications due to the relaxation of Covid-19 travel restrictions, as well as the initially uneven provision of appointments to apply for touristic visas, created a backlog in the availability of appointments for visa requests and encouraged “visa shopping” practices. Although for certain countries the delay in ensuring a meeting for visas remain important (up to 3 months), the situation seems to be currently stable and delays were reduced for most countries. On the other hand, visa processing time was not an issue of concern.

During LSC meetings, participants also discussed about the issue of IDN passports without the signature field that caused a refusal of issuing visa with a differentiated approach by member states, until the proposal for solution by the IDN government was validated through Schengen coordination.

Member states were also contacted by an external contractor tasked by DG HOME to prepare a study to support an evaluation of the application of the Visa Code (the topic was only discussed at an LSC meeting in early 2023, when the EU delegation was officially notified about it). Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents.

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

Overall, member states 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 member states discussed about the cascade system and its implementation in Indonesia. Most MS mentioned that they followed to the letter the provisions of Article 24 of the Visa Code. Some MS mentioned exceptions, e.g.: facilitation for business entities, military cooperation actors, grace period taking into account the Covid pandemic for the provisions of Article 24(2) of the Visa Code. There was no formal request or initiative to prepare possible proposals for the identification of common MEV to be discussed at LSC meetings.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Coordination on *travel insurances requirements has continued*, with the EU Delegation updating a list of insurance companies compliant with Article 15 of the Visa Code. The list was shared for comments/approval to the MS present in Indonesia. A final list was shared with MS and the concerned insurance companies, to be 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 administrations. Nonetheless, 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.

One of the key topics discussed at the LSC meetings in 2022 was the **cooperation with external service providers**. Most Schengen missions based in Indonesia cooperate with the outsourcing company of VFS Global. In general, the cooperation with the visa application centres operated by VFS Global is smooth. No major issues regarding visa outsourcing were reported by the Schengen missions in 2022.

As of 2022, there was no harmonized list of **accredited travel agencies** adopted in terms of the LSC. Considering the continuous growth of short-term Schengen visa applications and the majority of them being with tourism purpose, a harmonized list of travel agencies might be one of the topics to focus on in the next year.

3.5 Exchange of information

Available statistics for 2022 showed **a steep increase of Schengen visas requests and Schengen visas issued as compared to 2021**, this clear difference is **due to the relaxation of Covid -19 travel restrictions**. The **proportion of refused visa applications remained stable and relatively low as compared to global refusal rates**. According to the LSC group, **cases of fraud** are not a serious problem in the country.

On *multiple entry visas (MEVs)*, the practice remains as reported for the 2021 period: some countries 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. During LSC meetings, Schengen Member States and the EU Delegation also engaged in technical discussions on: possibility of liberalisation of visas between Indonesia and the EU; coherent approach concerning Indonesia's series of passport books that do not contain the passport holder's signature field produced in the period of 2019-2020. EUDEL also organized joint meetings with Indonesian (IDN) authorities. During these meetings, a number of points were raised including: visa on arrival processing by IDN side; visa for EU citizens coming with purposes other than tourism; visa for unmarried couples arriving in IDN.

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. Communication from/with HQ and close local cooperation with the Schengen Consuls helps mitigating this challenge.

Often quarterly statistics are not reported timely. It was agreed that EUDEL will also share consolidated statistics with MS more often, in the hope this would push them to act timely in providing the necessary data.

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.

Possible visa-free access to the Schengen area for Indonesian citizens remain a topic of interest, in reciprocity to the 30-days visa (extendable) on arrival access granted to all EU MS citizens, and all together citizens of 169 countries, mainly for touristic purpose. Such system makes it simple for EU citizens to travel to IDN for different proposes

This report was approved by Member States via silent procedure on 27 February 2023.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN

February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in JORDAN 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

14 Schengen Member States are present in Amman and issue visas (AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IT, NL, NO, PL, SE). Five Non-resident Schengen countries have their nearest consulates in Cairo (MT, LV, LT, PT, SI), 2 in Ankara (EE, FI), 2 in Beirut (SK, DK) and 1 in London (IS).

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Four regular meetings were held in 2022 (25/01, 04/04, 22/06 and 05/10), all of them well attended. EUD was the usual chair with the CZ Presidency co-chairing the last meeting. It was then agreed that CZ would take over the chair of the group with EUD assistance.

Anti-fraud meetings resumed in October, hosted by the Canadian Embassy, and it was agreed that they would continue on a quarterly basis among a larger group of like-minded countries. CZ also organised a dedicated workshop in December.

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 shared info on implementing QR code on the visa sticker.

Some MS communicated problems with the VIS-mail communication. It would need further work on the improvement of the system itself at HQ level.

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

The group considers that harmonisation of practices is already acquired, waiting for final approval of the list from the Visa Committee in Brussels.

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.

MS need to take into consideration the fact that Jordanian passports are usually issued only for 5 years.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Sharing information on visa applications, regular checking of what VFS in Amman requires.

3.5 Exchange of information

The workload of consulates has returned or even exceeded pre-COVID-19 levels.

MS received applications by businesspeople for tourist visas, seen as more favourable, and the intended use of study visas or national visas to emigrate to Europe. Falsified health insurances and bank statements were also frequently found.

The CZ Presidency hosted in December a practical training session on fake documents with German Federal Police experts.

MS discovered practices of mandatory courier services by the external providers to reduce contact with clients and earn extra money. Some expressed reticence to the practice due to bad experiences and liability in case of lost documents. One MS indicated apparent loss of neutrality by an external service provider who seemed to be pushing for visa approvals.

The group discussed experiences with VFS Global as external provider. Some MS received complaints about backlogs, delays and handling. Some MS made regular unannounced visits of VFS and CZ organised a workshop on Schengen visa for VFS employees.

Some MS complained being bound by GDPR to use VIS-Mail for exchanges of information regarding cases but the messages often did not arrive to MS counterparts.

MS reported applicants asking for transit visa towards Ukraine (sometimes with fake Ukrainian marriage certificates), which were mostly refused except in proven cases of serious reason.

Visa requests by Russian citizens were handled differently by MS, mostly on a case by case basis and only if they were resident in Jordan.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

- Worsening profile of the applicants, usually young people (16-40 years), single, from poor areas of North Jordan.
- More fraud documents appearing, especially bank statements.
- Some travel agencies offer help for a fee to prepare the paperwork for visa applicants.
- Falsifying US and CAN visas as proof of travel history.

The group aims to enhance cooperation with the banks in Jordan and to continue anti-fraud meetings with like-minded countries.

5. Other issues

Some MS were facing problems with visa applications from Yemeni citizens accompanied by support letters or Note verbales from the Embassy of Yemen in Amman or directly from the Yemeni MFA, often with (sometimes diplomatic) passports close to expiry. Most of the applications were refused.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

24 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KAZAKHSTAN 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

22 MS (20 Schengen States and two observers - BG and RO) have embassies, most with consular sections, in Astana (the capital). There are also five consulates (DE, LT, HU, PL and FR) in Almaty, the former capital. The consulates in Almaty and many of the consulates in Astana often also cover neighbouring countries, primarily Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - which increases the scope of the issues debated in this LSC meetings.

Many embassies and consulates work with visa service providers. Some service providers⁷ have offices outside of Astana 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 2022

During the reporting period, the LSC group in Astana held FIVE regular meetings on the following dates: 23 February 2022, 26 April 2022, 29 June 2022, 28 September 2022 and 23 November 2022. The LSC group meetings were very well attended.

Depending on the COVID-19 situation, LSC meetings were organised both online and offline. The first LSC meeting in February was organised and chaired by the EU Delegation in Astana in an online format via the WebEx platform. As the COVID-19 restrictions eased and infection rates decreased in the country, it was decided to return to offline meetings. (A hybrid format is not possible for the time being due to technical issues). Once again though, the LSC meeting in June was held online due to increased number COVID-19 cases, as well as in order to allow consulate representatives from Almaty (former capital and biggest city) to participate in the meeting.

Reports (summaries) were drawn up by EUD. The EUD has also been in charge of reporting and coordinating the follow-up steps when needed.

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

Ad hoc meetings were not organised on specific subjects, however - EUD invited representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as guest speakers to the meeting on 23 November 2022 to discuss the influx of Russian refugees into Kazakhstan.

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

EUD asked MS whether the harmonized list of required documents could be reconsidered. Although the aforementioned list has not been updated in a period of 10 years, MS expressed their satisfaction with it, and no particular proposals to amend the existing list were raised.

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')

After the resumption of the normal influx of visas requests following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission implementing decision on the specific rules on issuing multiple-entry visas is being widely and satisfactory implemented.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Nothing to report in 2022.

3.5 Exchange of information

LSC MS regularly exchanged views on flights, visa policies and travel regulations in the aftermath of COVID-19. They also regularly discussed changes introduced by the Kazakh Government (several regulations were adopted concerning travel) and influence of the war in Ukraine and influx of Russian citizens in Kazakhstan.

LSC MS regularly shared their visa statistics and discussed issues related to visa centres, vaccination passports and recognition of vaccines. EU MS noted that the number of visa applications increased exponentially once the travel restrictions related to COVID-19 disappeared, reaching and even surpassing pre-COVID-19 levels.

It is also important to note that there were no interruptions, restrictions or any other changes in visa policy related to the tragic January events (mass protests and crackdown of January 2022 that lead to over 200 deaths).

Other issues discussed in the group were:

- Wave of applications including in many cases falsified documents coming from Kyrgyzstan, whose real final destination were Latin American countries (e.g. Mexico).
- Fake vaccination certificates coming from Uzbekistan.
- Forgery in travel insurance forms.
- Frauds involving EU citizens who meet Kazakh women on-line and are asked for money so that the person in question can obtain a visa and visit them in Europe.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Some MS highlighted that they are in favour of raising the issue of visa facilitation for Kazakhstan, since they consider that KAZ citizens meet the requirements, and this will be beneficiary for neighbouring countries. MS also had this discussion at HoMs level, where at least one MS was not in favour this initiative. Another MS concluded that it was a bit too early to raise this issue locally, and that it is better to raise this in Brussels and to have it on the agenda of the visa-working group. MS concluded that it depends on the position of the capitals, even if locally some MS can be in favour. However, towards the end of the year, HoMs concluded that the issue should be moved forward, also in view of the increasingly strategic importance of Kazakhstan to the EU. Note that today the same status applies to Russian citizens and Kazakh citizens: a standard visa regime without facilitation.

4. Challenges

All representation agreements, which were suspended due to COVID-19, were resumed, and all COVID-19 restrictions were eased in the course of 2022.

Several MS experience lack of human resources, with great amounts of applications on the waiting list. Also, Italy has no visa centre in place as it had to cease cooperation with a service provider which was a Russian company, due to the sanctions regime now in place with the country.

Regarding 2023, it will be important to:

- Follow up on the evolution of the number of EU Schengen visa requests after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Follow up on the possibility of a visa regime facilitation repeatedly asked by the Kazakh authorities.
- Follow up on the visa requests from Russian citizens who found themselves in Kazakhstan.

5. Other issues

Starting from mid-September 2022, (mobilisation in Russia), a huge migration flow from Russia to Kazakhstan was recorded. Altogether **more than 100,000 RU citizens** have arrived to Kazakhstan within two weeks. EU MS began to receive many requests from Russian citizens, including human rights activists/defenders (based in Russia) on how/whether they can obtain a Schengen visa and/or asylum to/in EU MS.

MS have already quite long waiting lists for Kazakh applications, and do not have the capacity to cope with the quantity of visa requests this would entail. However, the issue on whether - and how - Russian human rights defenders may get a Schengen visa in Kazakhstan remains.

Although with some differences, according to the rules of most MS embassies in Kazakhstan can only accept applications for Schengen visas of citizens of countries from outside their consular circumscription if they are registered in Kazakhstan with IIN (personal ID) number, which is normally not the case with Russian activists. In the latter, legislations from MS vary and national “D” visas seem to be a more adapted instrument.

One of the MS received instructions from their capital not to issue visas for RU citizens, even for those who live in Kazakhstan (except family members, those who have roots, but these are few exceptions). One of the MS have some special arrangements on how to deal with activists that have connection to the MS, and they would not issue Schengen visa, but a national visa. These persons concerned would have difficulties to return, so the Schengen visa is not the right visa for them.

Issue of the granting of humanitarian visas was also discussed, with most MS agreeing that trying to avoid mobilisation is not a ground for granting a humanitarian visa. Such visas remain a rare exception in the activity of MS embassies and consulates in Kazakhstan.

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



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA (RoK) 2022 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 Tokyo.

The agreements of representation in Schengen visa matters⁸ 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 2022

From January to December 2022, four EU/LSC Consular cooperation group meetings were held on 26 January, 30 March, 29 June and 13 October.

During this period, at the request of the French Embassy in its capacity of EU Council Presidency in 1H 2022, EUDEL acted as the chair of the group's meetings. All MS agreed to that. For the second half of the period in agreement with all Member States in the group, the EU Delegation assumed the duty of local chair. The EU Delegation supported with logistics, providing a meeting room at the EU Delegation, drafting minutes, etc.

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).

⁸ 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 2022 remained the COVID-19 crisis, in particular travel and visa restrictions. Despite the lifting of the RoK visa measures, de facto travel remains depressed as other travel restrictions discourage travel as the mandatory quarantine and strict double PCR testing requirements were only lifted during the course of 2022.

Currently the following rules apply for incoming passengers:

Since 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). K-ETA Korea electronic travel authorization www.k-eta.go.kr is mandatory for all foreigners entering the Republic of Korea (RoK) including those from the EU (effective 1 September 2021) with the exception of diplomatic & official passport holders (from 9 January 2023 onwards). Furthermore travelers are encouraged (not obliged) to register their travel and health information through the Q-Code system ([Quarantine COVID19 Defence \(Q-Code\)](#)) before traveling to the RoK. COVID test (antigen or PCR) is not required either before or upon arrival in the RoK (effective from 1 October 2022, different rules for travellers from China apply) Vaccination is not a requirement for entry into the RoK

As no visas are required for RoK citizens travelling to the EU/Schengen area, LSC discussions on the application of the EU Visa Code⁹ 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 2018¹⁰, 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.

⁹ See https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/regulation-ec-no-8102009-european-parliament-and-council-13-july-2009_en

¹⁰ See https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/document/download/a7a18412-bf69-480c-81ad-c197cac18c5b_en and https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/document/download/d8965f84-a157-4817-8ee6-a73e8064fa7a_en

3.4 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 the 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. Consular and LSC Group on the Signal platform proved to be a useful tool for a quick exchange of information. It contributed to effective sharing of information especially in the situation when the Korean authorities informed about changes of its policies only unofficially, late and/or with unclear wording.

There was an exchange of information on the policy and best practice by a number of countries related to non-issuing Schengen visa (with exception) to the citizens of Russia and Belarus as a consequence of the Russian aggression to Ukraine. It has been mentioned that Russian nationals were very persistent when applying for a Visa and some observed a significant increase in their applications.

Despite the COVID situation, visa issuance in Member State embassies is generally operating effectively. As RoK citizens do not need a visa to travel to the Schengen area, the overall trends are somewhat hard to assess. Based on statistics provided by MS embassies, the following trends can be observed for people travelling with a visa from the RoK to Europe.

In the year of 2022 there was a significant raise of visa applications lodged compared to pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 sometimes up to 3-5 times, but numbers are still significantly lower (e.g. 50%) compared with pre-pandemic application numbers. Individual Embassies process between less than a dozen to a few hundred-visa applications per year. Refusal rate is reported between 0-30%. Refusals especially concern nationals from e.g. Pakistan and Bangladesh because of a suspicion of misuse of the visa. Despite that, only few cases of suspected visa shopping or fraud involved could be identified inter alia some visa applicants with refugee status in the RoK, sometimes accompanied by suspected “brokers”.

An increase in visa applications inquiries towards the end of 2022/beginning of 2023 has been recognised by some Embassies -probably due to the removal of travel restrictions- from third country nationals mainly from South and Southeast Asia. . Sometimes it seems that they are addressing several embassies. In most cases after the initial inquiry, they usually do not follow through with the actual application.

As a noticeable trend, it has been reported that many third-country nationals (including from China, Taiwan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, etc.) apply for a visa with a very short departure date (in some cases the applicants apply even 3 days before their departure date), urging us to proceed quickly so that their Visa can be issued before their flight date.

Since November 2022 the Embassies of Schengen countries in Seoul began to issue visa stickers with a QR code. There was an exchange of information within the LSC initiated by the Czech Local EU Presidency on the roll-out of the implementation of the QR code printing. A vast majority of Schengen Embassies were issuing visa stickers with a QR code by the end of 2022.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

N/A

5. Other issues

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



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN UNION OFFICE / EUROPEAN UNION SPECIAL
REPRESENTATIVE IN KOSOVO

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KOSOVO 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Kosovo hosts Diplomatic Missions of 17 EU Member States.

Member States present	Location	Type of mission(s)
Austria	Pristina	Embassy
Belgium	Pristina	Diplomatic Office
Bulgaria	Pristina	Embassy
Croatia	Pristina	Embassy
Czechia	Pristina	Embassy
Finland	Pristina	Embassy
France	Pristina	Embassy
Germany	Pristina	Embassy
Greece	Pristina	Liaison Office
Hungary	Pristina	Embassy
Italy	Pristina	Embassy
Luxembourg	Pristina	Embassy
Netherlands	Pristina	Embassy
Romania	Pristina	Liaison Office
Slovakia	Pristina	Liaison Office
Slovenia	Pristina	Embassy
Sweden	Pristina	Embassy

Another 8 EU Member States are accredited in Kosovo, without local representation.

MS accredited from abroad	Location	Type of mission
Denmark	Vienna	Embassy
Estonia	Vienna	Embassy
Ireland	Budapest	Embassy
Latvia	Praha	Embassy
Lithuania	Zagreb	Embassy
Malta	Valletta	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Poland	Skopje	Embassy (consular relations)

Portugal	Budapest	Embassy
-----------------	----------	---------

Additionally, 2 Schengen Area countries are represented in Pristina

Schengen Area country	Location	Type of mission(s)
Switzerland	Pristina	Embassy
Norway	Pristina	Diplomatic Office

Schengen visas in Kosovo are issued by:

Italy (representing also Estonia), Hungary (issuing visas for Malta), 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. The Norwegian Embassy in Ankara, Turkey handles all visa applications from Kosovo and Albania. 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, a situation that will dramatically change with the adoption of the decision on Kosovo's visa liberalization.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Throughout 2022, as normal travel conditions resumed, all visa operations of EU Member States went back to normal. Easing travel restrictions to fully vaccinated individuals, highlighting that there was no common policy for lifting travel restrictions to Kosovo.

From January to December 2022, the European Union Office in Kosovo convened three LSC meetings on 24th March, 1st June and 1st December. The first two meetings took place in person, while the last one was online. In addition, the EU Office assured regular exchange on LSC related matters and updates from Brussels via a WhatsApp group and by email. The meetings were organised and chaired by the LSC political officer. 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 resumption of travel after the COVID pandemic has provided an opportunity to apply the Visa Code in normal visa operations.

In the absence of the delayed Visa Liberalisation decision for Kosovo, the visa policy was 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.

Throughout 2022 there was a high demand for visas, with DE informing that Kosovo became number 3 in the world in visa issuance after Istanbul and Ankara. Schengen rules are complex for the public, which leads to visa shopping and to high refusal rate. The limited human resources available to the Visa Sections is also a common problem, especially for the Embassies with higher demand.

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, and other Schengen participants decided to keep the fee at €35.

Schengen Tourist visas	Short Stay	Children 6 to 12	Children under 6	Other fees	Comments
Switzerland, Austria, Liechtenstein, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg	80	40	Free	29	TLS
Croatia	35	Free	Free		VFS
Finland	80	40	Free	27	VFS
Norway	80	40	Free	49	VFS
Slovenia	80	40	Free	20	VFS
Sweden	80	40	Free	42	VFS
Czechia	80	40	Free		Consulate Skopje
Germany	35	35	Free	30	VisaMetric
Greece	80	40	Free		Embassy Pristina
Hungary	35	35	Free		Embassy Pristina
Italy	80				Embassy Pristina
Slovakia	80	40	Free		Liaison Of. Pristina
Denmark	80	40	Free	49	VFS
Estonia	80	40	Free		
Latvia	80				

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 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')

As regards the adaptation of 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 several LSC meetings, with MS calling for harmonizing the practices for close family members to address the high number of visa appointments, while for smaller Missions there was an issue of trust, high abuse of the previous visas and therefore high refusal rates. MEV are usually not issued to the first time travellers. For the visa history it was suggested to avoid the COVID years.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

All travel restrictions have been lifted, and the LSC continues working on the harmonisation of procedures, Visa fees, issuance of MEVs and other issues.

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.

Information is regularly shared via email and Whatsapp group.

The LCC group agreed to continue LCC meetings online, to avoid unnecessary displacements, and allow the participation of non-resident colleagues both in the Local Consular and Schengen groups. The group will meet in person in informal social occasions.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EU Office in Kosovo (EUOK) raised the possibility to organize an anti-fraud group that could help LCC share information on known fraud practices, document forgery, coordinate with the authorities and with other likeminded Embassies, as well as including Airline Liaison Officers and Police attachés.

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 identified as 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). 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.

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.

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.

An additional issue that disrupted normal travel was the problems caused by the difficulties experienced by the Kosovo Government to issue passports, diplomatic IDs and other documents. This is causing problems for Kosovo travellers in Europe and foreigners applying for resident permits in Kosovo, and the problems are likely to last until February-March 2023, due to lack of secure materials. The EUOK raised the issue in the framework of its regular dialogue with the Deputy Prime Ministers Office.

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, are 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 TO THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

27 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

- 3 EU Member States are present in capital - Bishkek with resident Embassy (DE, FR, HU). Embassy of Switzerland is also present.
- Schengen Member States are represented by Germany (BE, LU, PT, NO). SE was represented till 1 May 2022.
- 8 Schengen Member States are represented by Switzerland (FR, PL, CZ, SL, SK, EE, LV, LIE), FI was represented till 1 December 2022.
- Schengen Member States (ML, IT, LT, ES, NL, GR) are represented by Hungary.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The impact of COVID-19 has gradually diminished and by late 2022 all restrictions in the EU Member States and in Kyrgyzstan have been lifted. MS started receiving an increased number of applications and quickly reached the pre-pandemic statistics.

3 LSC meetings took place in the course of 2022 (May, June and October). These meetings were well attended by the MS present in Bishkek and Switzerland. To one of the meeting we invited representatives of the Consular Section of the USA Embassy and exchanged with them on topics of mutual interest. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation, who also prepared the first draft of the minutes accordingly.

Most of the Consuls (also those based abroad and accredited in Kyrgyzstan) are included in a Signal group. This group has been initially created for Deputy Heads of Mission. Later some of the MS Ambassadors and Consuls also joined. If MS consider it necessary, as separate Signal group for Consuls can be established.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Embassies and EU DEL are prepared to ensure tasks, as required by the Visa Code.

A specific problem is securing legal use of issued visas by Kyrgyz citizens. On numerous occasions visas are used not in destinations initially indicated in the application form. Currently MS are in discussion how to tackle this problem and are considering different options including introducing a more restrictive cascade.

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

On-going. Partially completed. Due to new circumstances and attempts of presenting false application information some Embassies are forced to request additional documents, for example bank statements for the last 6 months (previously last 3 months). Another challenge is improper behaviour of travel companies, some of which frequently attempt to receive financial gains by “selling” timeslots to applicants, as well as by using other illegal practices.

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 of restricting the cascade is touched upon in p. 3.1. Further communication with the Visa Team in Brussels will be needed in order to establish what is possible in that respect.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In order to ensure exchange and harmonisation, meetings on a regular basis are planned and conducted.

3.5 Exchange of information

Information regarding i.e. visa fraud, information about external service providers is shared by the MS, cooperation regarding individual cases. Other information shared is related to medical insurance companies, banks, travel agencies.

Statistics are usually shared on an ad hoc basis.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

4. Challenges

Challenges related to COVID-19 lockdown have gradually been overcome in 2022.

In 2023 challenges linked to illegal use of visa are to be addressed.

5. Other issues

Kyrgyzstan illegal Immigration to the US by visa fraud, Schengen Visa application in order to travel to MEX or Costa Rica or to apply for visa to the US in MS.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO LEBANON

24 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in LEBANON 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

In Lebanon seventeen Member States (MS) are present and issuing Schengen visas: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Finland and Sweden.

Eight MS represent other MS on issuing visas: Belgium (Luxembourg), Spain (Portugal), France (Estonia), Norway (Iceland), Italy (Malta), Hungary (Latvia, Slovenia), Austria (Lithuania) and Switzerland (Liechtenstein).

There are no LSC consular sections in Lebanon outside Beirut.

Some MS take in Beirut Schengen visa applications by Syrian nationals residing in Syria.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Five LSC meetings were held in total during 2022. The first meeting was held virtually via WebEx, the other meetings were physical meetings at the EU Delegation (EU DEL). On the initiative of Belgium, the EU DEL organized two additional working group meetings to focus on a new draft harmonized list for supporting documents for short stay visa.

The meetings were generally well attended. The EU DEL chaired the LSC meetings, while MS submitted input for the agenda. Recognised travel documents, draft harmonized list of supporting documents, visa shopping, document falsification and fraud, proof of financial means for visa requests as well as the increase in visa refusal rates of some MS have been recurrent topics discussed during the LSC meetings.

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 report an increase in the submission of falsified or fraud support documents, especially bank statements, invitation letters, and health insurance documents.

MS exchange information with each other on a regular basis, either during the LSC meetings or via email. The EU DEL organises and chairs the LSC meetings according to Article 48 of the Visa Code.

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

As the socio-economic situation in Lebanon has been deteriorating very quickly since 2019, MS agreed that the draft harmonised list of supporting documents dating from pre-Covid and pre-crisis Lebanon is no longer reflecting the current situation of applicants in Lebanon and the challenges faced by MS' visa sections. It was therefore decided to work on a new draft, which made good progress and should be ready for submission to the Visa Committee in early 2023.

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 report that while being willing to apply the MEV cascades, they need to keep in mind the unstable economic situation in Lebanon. One MS reported to use the exceptions to the cascade model. MS asked for the application of the MEV cascades to be discussed in more detail in the LSC meetings in 2023.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Nothing to report.

3.5 Exchange of information

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

- Visa statistics, especially refusal rates. A template to collect numbers from MS' visa sections was circulated and MS agreed to split numbers based on the nationality of the applicant (LB, SY, PS), at least for those whose system allows to extract numbers based on nationality. The numbers will be collected quarterly with an annual overview at the beginning of the following year.
- Cases of fraud. MS reported the submission of fake bank statements, falsified health insurance documents, and fake invitation letters.
- Cooperation with local authorities, especially regarding the verification of the applicant's financial situation.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

Adapting to the rapidly changing situation in Lebanon will continue to be a challenge for visa sections in Beirut as well as detecting and countering fraud schemes. While MS are determined to keep the door to the Schengen area open for applicants from Lebanon, the current situation requires a thorough check of the situation of the applicant and the documents submitted.

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA AND THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

**** The content of this report has been approved by the MS ****

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in SRI LANKA and THE MALDIVES 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five Schengen Member States are present in Colombo, out of which, one delocalised its visa operations to New Delhi in July 2019. This delocalisation however has neither affected the quality of exchanges and synergies within the group nor the regular participation in meetings. MS representation (up to 20 MS initially) was on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic but by the end of December 2022, 5 Schengen MS had resumed representation (2 fully, 3 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 since there is a large Tamil diaspora in most Schengen MS.

As regard the Maldives, two MS are present with a dedicated visa application centre in Male, three MS are aiming at opening one in 2023.

2. LSC meetings in 2022

Four meetings (January, February, July and December) were held in Colombo 2022. Meetings were convened by the EUDEL, which chairs the meetings and drafts the minutes, which are finalised in consultation with Schengen MS. The group is well connected, members contribute actively to exchanges, and atmospherics are overall very positive and constructive.

EUD and members of the group were pleased to see the efforts of one MS, which had so far rarely participated due to a heavy workload and staff shortage in its consular section, to be far more regularly in attendance in 2022, which sets a positive trend. Indeed, in view of the commonalities of challenges increasingly faced, EUD continues to insist on the need for all MS to be present at the meetings to make them more meaningful in a true spirit of cooperation.

While there has been a significant improvement in the exchange of statistics amongst members, bilateral information exchanges between MS, as has been reported in the past, could still be improved.

3. State of Play

There is still no fully uniformed approach locally on the implementation of the cascade provision for Multiple Entry Visas (MEV) under art. 24. 2 of the Visa Code. Most MS concur that it has eased visa processing and allows for more predictability on workload.

EUD and two MS who apply the cascade systematically would like to see more harmonisation in its implementation. While two MS endeavour to implement the cascade mainly for business rather than tourism, one MS mainly applies it for tourism for specific categories of frequent travellers.

As of now, the group continues to use the harmonised list of documents approved a decade ago (2011). Although this has worked so far, a review could be useful in view of the noted increase in frauds. The aim is to have an updated harmonised list in 2023.

Two MS had taken the initiative to draft a more “practical” questionnaire. In the MS’s understanding, provided there is a consensus locally, the use of an additional questionnaire can be accepted and it has been seen as a useful additional tool.

One MS mentioned the use of VISMail, particularly in the context of appeals, for a more secure documentation upload. However, most MS are still not using VISmail.

VFS services

MS are overall satisfied with the performance of VFS services in Sri Lanka that nevertheless need some supervision with frequent staff changes. LSC members were concerned by the high rate of “no shows” for appointments but this appeared to have been settled by the end of the year. 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 2022, some MS faced new challenges with travel agents in VFS Jaffna tampering with the online system. For MS which have a large number of applicants from the Northern Province, this has been an issue.

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 that helped improve services. 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

MS reported an increase in visa shopping in 2022 due to the sharp increase in applications, which is likely to continue in view of the current economic crisis. The exchange of quarterly statistics by most MS has contributed to improved transparency on the issue.

MS flagged that there had been a sharp increase in seafarers’ applications with blatantly fake contracts in 2022.

MS continue to insist on the need to ensure the detection of forged visas and fake documents at the Colombo airport. As understaffed consulates do not have the required capacity to address these issues, MS continue to insist in 2022 on the need to appoint an Airport Liaison Officer in Colombo (the last ALO's assignment ended in July 2021).

The visa rejection rate has sharply increased reaching between 40 to 50% for most MS.

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.

4. Challenges

Sri Lanka is a key country from a Schengen perspective as Sri Lanka is among the countries whose citizens need transit visas for all MS, there is a heavy workload. Although there is no longer any MS liaison officer at the airport, MS conveyed that the border security unit had been well trained and that checks are conducted more systematically and efficiently but that despite this improvement, MS still stress the need for a full-fledged posting in Colombo BIA.

The sharp increase in visa requests from April to December can be attributed to the acute economic and political crisis, which led many Sri Lankans to try to leave the country temporarily or permanently. The risk of no return of bona fide travellers has overall been assessed as increasing and prospects are rather worrying as this trend is likely to continue in 2023.

The spike in visa applications in 2022 has led to an increased workload for missions, which remain for most severely understaffed. A recent issue is that some travel agencies tend to book all available slots within a few hours after their release online. This malpractice has led to an increase in complaints to MS about delay/impossibility of getting an appointment. Moreover, three MS have an additional workload locally in managing the increase in appeals. As of end 2022, barring one MS, all were in want of additional staff to address the above-mentioned challenges.



16 février 2023

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AU MALI RAPPORT 2022**

1. Introduction

9 Etats Membres sont présents au Mali. On peut également ajouter la présence des consuls honoraires d'Italie, Roumanie, Malte, Hongrie, Autriche et Lituanie. L'Estonie, la Pologne, la Slovaquie et la Roumanie sont accrédités au Mali sans y être présents. Les Pays Bas délivrent les visas pour la Belgique et le Luxembourg et la Slovaquie.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2022

En ce qui concerne l'impact de la pandémie, la majorité des Etats membres considère que 2022 marque un retour à la normale. Certains EM ont vécu un accroissement très important des demandes de visas. Depuis peu, un retour à la normalité dans la gestion des visas est constaté.

En ce qui concerne la présentation d'un test COVID négatif pour les non vaccinés, le cadre réglementaire malien ne détermine pas d'âge minimum. Cela peut poser des difficultés à l'embarquement dans le pays d'origine, dans lequel la compagnie aérienne desservant Bamako peut avoir une interprétation variable de l'âge minimum requis à Bamako.

4 réunions ont été organisées, avec une forte participation. Les réunions sont animées par la DUE et l'Etat membre qui a la Présidence de l'UE. 3 réunions habituelles/ordinaires se sont tenues. Une réunion ad hoc a été organisée à la demande d'un Etat membre qui souhaitait inviter les participants à un déjeuner de travail (avec la Norvège et la Suisse). Les rapports sont établis par la Délégation de l'UE. La coordination LSC n'est pas assurée en dehors de la capitale en raison des conditions de sécurité en vigueur au Mali.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les EM n'ont pas soulevé de difficulté.

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

Les travaux d'harmonisation n'ont pas encore été finalisés

Les éléments ont été envoyés à Bruxelles, mais nous n'avons pas d'information sur sa validation.

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 »)

Au Mali, les EM n'ont pas de cascade MEV harmonisée, ni systématique.

- DK : Lors de la demande d'un 4^{ème} visa court séjour dans les deux dernières années, le demandeur peut se voir remettre un visa de circulation à multi entrées : 1 an la première fois, puis 2 ans, pour une durée totale de 90 jours/semestre. En 2022 17% des visas délivrés étaient des visas de circulation.
- DE : Avec la situation COVID, le consulat vérifie la délivrance de visas court séjour avant 2020 pour décider de la délivrance d'un visa de circulation multi entrées.
- FR : Pas d'automatisme, après 2-3 visas de courte durée, le visa de circulation est envisagé. Il arrive que des bénéficiaires de visa de circulation, soient moins rigoureux dans la constitution de leur dossier de demande de renouvellement de visa de circulation multi entrées.
 - Sur environ 4000 visas de circulation délivrés :
 - Environ 1200 pour une durée de 6 mois
 - Environ 1200 pour une durée d'un an
 - 630 pour une durée de 2 ans
 - 300 pour une durée de 3 ans
 - 500 pour une durée de 4 ans
- ES : est flexible. Tout dépend du demandeur : la durée du visa de circulation peut aller jusqu'à 3 ou 4 ans, mais cela concerne peu de requérants. En général ES donne un visa de circulation si 2-3 visas de court séjour ont été délivrés dans les 3-4 ans. La priorité est donnée aux demandeurs dont le tampon d'entrée dans l'Espace Schengen est celui de l'ES.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Pas d'harmonisation des procédures en cours, mais certains EM ont exprimé leur volonté d'échanger les bonnes pratiques concernant les documents d'identités maliens ou bien les demande de visa pour les sportifs.

3.5 Echange d'informations

Décrivez comment se déroule l'échange des informations LSC:

- **Statistiques en 2022**

DK : 22 demandes de visa en janvier 2023, contre 12 en janvier 2022. 23% de refus, ce qui est très peu, comparé à 62% de refus en 2021 et 43% de refus en 2022.

FR : 21 789 visas demandés en 2022, soit une hausse de 8% par rapport à la 2019 qui fut considérée comme une année record. 12 160 visas ont été accordés. 42% de refus, ce qui est exceptionnellement élevé par rapport aux dernières années. 355 visas ont été délivrés en représentation, jusqu'au 15 septembre (FR a suspendu la délivrance de visa en représentation au-delà du 15 septembre).

ES : les chiffres sont comparables à 2019 : 39% de refus de demande de visas, pour 2 214 visas délivrés en 2022. En 2023, 280 visas ont déjà été délivrés. Il y a donc une forte progression. 35% des rendez-vous pour des entretiens ne sont pas honorés. Cela peut s'expliquer par une tendance au visa shopping (plusieurs demandes sont amorcées auprès de plusieurs consulats).

- **Cas de fraude**

Les Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont rappelé que les fraudes sont protéiformes. Ils utilisent des méthodes variées pour les déceler ou les dissuader.

FR favorise les levées d'actes en demandant communication du volet I à la mairie de naissance du demandeur. Cela peut néanmoins poser des difficultés en cas de destruction des registres (ex : à Kidal). Outre l'état civil, la fraude concerne généralement la fraude documentaire (diplômes, relevés bancaires, assurances, double identité).

Les conditions d'obtention d'un jugement supplétif, permettant l'obtention d'un acte de naissance peuvent également jeter un doute sur l'identité des demandeurs. L'Italie a choisi de ne plus les accepter dans certains cas s'ils sont trop récents. Un test ADN peut être exigé par certains Etats¹¹. ES refuse les jugements supplétifs. Depuis, elle a constaté des actes de naissances sans jugements supplétifs mais apparemment faux.

NL confirme aussi constater des fraudes documentaires. ES a également identifié de fausses vignettes (ancienne version).

Sans constituer des cas de fraudes, le recours des demandeurs illettrés à des intermédiaires peut poser des difficultés, les dossiers manquant de cohérence.

¹¹ Allemagne : pour l'accèsion à la nationalité ; Italie : pour le regroupement familial et les visas sans relevé d'empreinte (visa D). L'Espagne recourt également au test ADN.

Les entretiens révèlent parfois que le requérant n'est pas en mesure d'expliquer de manière convaincante les raisons de sa demande dans le pays pour lequel il demande un visa. Il est également constaté des dépôts sur le compte bancaire juste avant le dépôt de la demande, ou bien l'annulation de la chambre d'hôtel peu après avoir obtenu un document attestant de sa réservation.

La situation des sportifs, souvent mineurs, qui sont invités à faire un test dans un club situé dans l'espace Schengen est jugée délicate par plusieurs Etats membres.

- **Assurance médicale de voyage**

Hormis les assurances médicales de voyage internationales (Allianz, Axa, Europe Assistance), les EM, ont énoncé les sociétés Sanlaam, Sunu et Lafia. Cette dernière société n'a pas encore la confiance des services des visas.

Il est possible de vérifier l'authenticité de la preuve d'assurance grâce à un code fourni par les sociétés Sanlaam et Sunu.

- **Quels sont les problèmes liés à la mise en œuvre des règles relatives à l'assurance médicale de voyage**

Certains EM souhaiteraient que la police d'assurance spécifie la prise en charge du COVID 19.

- **Coopération avec les autorités locales et les compagnies locales**

Certaines banques répondent aux demandes des consulats.

La coopération avec les autorités locales est soit inexistante pour certains EM, soit à géométrie variable. Il y a un risque de politisation du regroupement familial, les autorités regrettant des conditions plus strictes d'octroi. Cela s'explique par la découverte de vastes schémas de fraude en ES. Les autorités ne souhaitent plus délivrer des visas à l'arrivée.

- **Utilisation du VISMail et du Visa Information System**

Certains EM considèrent que le système est compliqué, car il y a trop d'informations à trier. Il est très peu utilisé par les EM au Mali. L'outil est plutôt utilisé en dehors du territoire, par exemple une demande de l'Ambassade de la Norvège à Dakar pour l'ambassade de Danemark à Bamako. Plusieurs EM préfèrent utiliser la messagerie électronique, considérée comme plus rapide (FR, ES).

- **Autres**

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

4. Défis

Les EM ont évoqué :

- le nombre de visas important à traiter
- la formation du personnel de droit local

En 2023, les EM traiteront des documents d'identité maliens (mise en circulation de nouvelles cartes d'identité), ainsi que du traitement des demandes de visas des sportifs.

5. Divers

3rd March 2023



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MEXICO

February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MEXICO 2022 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. 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.

- **Austria** (for Schengen visas also representing Malta)
- **Belgium** (also representing Luxembourg and Slovenia for Schengen visas)
- **Bulgaria** (not applying the common visa policy in full, always invited to LSC meetings)
- **Czech Republic**
- **Denmark** (also issuing Schengen visas for Sweden, Norway and Iceland)
- **Finland**
- **France**
- **Germany**
- **Greece**
- **Hungary**
- **Italy**
- **Netherlands**
- **Poland**
- **Portugal**
- **Romania** (not applying the common visa policy in full, always invited to LSC meetings)
- **Slovakia** (for Schengen visas representing Latvia)
- **Spain** (for Schengen visas representing Estonia)
- **Sweden** (Schengen visas for Sweden are issued by Denmark)
- **Norway** (Schengen visas for Norway are issued by Denmark)
- **Switzerland** (also issuing Schengen visas for Liechtenstein)
- **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 2022

Since Covid-19 in Mexico subsided in early 2022, all meetings were held in person while MS resumed their visa operations. Following the lifting of the European Union's temporary restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU, travel by Mexican citizens into the EU resumed and achieved normal levels by mid-2022. Mexican citizens do not need a visa to enter the Schengen area, and therefore the issuing of Schengen visas by MS consulates returned to its normal limited numbers similar to the pre-pandemic level.

In the reporting period, four LSC meetings were held, in March, June, September and November of 2021 (all in person). For the November meeting, the Honorary Consuls of "non-represented" EU MS (8 MS do not have an Embassy in Mexico) based in Mexico City were invited and 4 of them attended (CY, HR, LT, SI).

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. The issuing of Schengen visas by Member States returned to pre-pandemic levels following the lifting of EU travel restrictions half way through 2022 when the pandemic started to subside. The Member States issued a bit more than 1500 Schengen visas for 2022 (refusal rate ca. 4.6%), with ES issuing 456 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 long pause or slowdown in the issuing of Schengen visas during the two years of 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

Continuing on the practice established in 2021, the whatsapp group consisting of the MS consuls and the main airlines operating flights between Europe and Mexico remained active. This allowed the exchange of information to facilitate the airlines' work in case of discrepancies among Member States in the way they interpret requirements for entering the Schengen area. The chat group served as an important platform to solve issues related to entry into the EU.

In the September meeting DE (through Miriam Veith, Document and Visa Advisor and Airline Liaison Officer, based in Panama with regional responsibility, including Mexico) reported about several recent cases of citizens of Asian countries traveling to Mexico with fake Schengen visas. It was agreed that the situation would continue being monitored.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None

4. Challenges

Misinformation with regard to the implications of the ETIAS roll-out is problematic and could affect negatively EU-Mexico relations. In June, EUDEL informed MS about the recent spread of misinformation about an alleged visa requirement for Mexicans, which most likely stemmed from a website (www.etiasvisa.com) that appears to communicate the official EU position when in fact it did not. The Mexican MFA has also referred to it. EUDEL countered actively the misinformation through a dedicated campaign, i.e. through numerous interviews by the HoD. EUDEL drafted a press release which was shared with MS] that served as LTT on this subject. Changes in the roll-out date of ETIAS in 2023 risk creating further uncertainty but the EUDEL has been active in communicating already on the matter on its social media accounts in order to prevent the spread of disinformation. In the November meeting, the issue was discussed again as the spread of erroneous information in Mexican media about ETIAS continued. EU HoD frequently communicated about this issue too.

5. Other issues

In June 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, some MS (DK, ES) reported about a considerable increase in Schengen visa applications by Russian citizens. In most cases, however, the Russian citizens are not eligible to obtain visas as they lack legal residence in Mexico. CZ underlined that they do not issue any visas to Russian citizens.

CZ mentioned problems with regard to the consular letters required by Mexican authorities in order for visa applicants to be able to obtain criminal records. It appears that some applicants are selling these documents.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MONGOLIA

16 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONGOLIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

7 Member States are present in Mongolia and 20 are represented in Beijing.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Travel from Mongolia to the Schengen area has increased since borders re-opened in 2022. There were no LSC meetings organised in 2022. Some topics related to LSC were discussed during the DHoMs meetings throughout the year.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

This topic has not been discussed in 2022. In 2021 all EUMS carried 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

This topic has not been discussed in 2022. In 2021 MS present considered that harmonisation of practices was already acquired.

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 topic has not been discussed in 2022. It was also not discussed in 2021.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

This topic has not been discussed in 2022. In 2021 MS present considered that harmonisation of practices was already acquired.

3.5 Exchange of information

A specific functional mailbox is created to receive statistics from EUMS. (Delegation-Mongolia-LSC@eeas.europa.eu). Some EUMS send statistics monthly, some send statistics quarterly and some EUMS do not send their statistics to the EUDEL.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

In 2021 EUDEL reported that the main challenge remained the opening or not of Mongolia's borders and the evolution of the pandemic both in Mongolia and in EU. In 2022 the borders have re-opened and visa activities have resumed normally.

In 2022 lack of human resources within the EUDEL and some EUMSs missions proved a challenge when it comes to organising LSC meetings.

5. Other issues

No LSC meetings were organised in 2022 and EUDEL will ensure that meetings will resume in 2023.

EUMS present in the jurisdiction have been invited to provide input to this report.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MONTENEGRO

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONTENEGRO 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Currently, 14 EU MS Embassies (AT, CZ, ES, GR, FR, SI, IT, BG, HU, SK, PL, DE, RO, HR), one Consul - Gerant (HR in Kotor's consulate) and seven Honorary Consuls representing 10 EU MS (DK/SE/EE, AT, ES, MT, BG, RO, SL, 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 14 EU MS (AT, BE, DK, EE, ES, FR, LV, LT, LU, HU, NL, PL, PT, SK).

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

In 2022, two Local Schengen Group meetings took place in June and October 2022. 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 EUD and distributed to all resident and non-resident EU MS.

3. State of play

The Italian Embassy in Montenegro ensures Schengen representation for Malta, only for issuing Visa C.

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The issue of Visa Code was discussed in both LSC meeting in 2022. No specific problems were noted with regard to its implementation.

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

For the locations where work on this has not been completed

Based on previous and recent experiences with applications for Schengen visa of third country nationals, the need remains for harmonising the lists of supporting documents.

EU MS agreed to find a common approach and publish the identical lists at their embassies' and the EUD's website.

For the locations where work on this has been completed:

No specific issues were reported by the EU MS 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')

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

Observer countries:

Bulgaria

The Republic of Bulgaria applies the Common Visa Policy of the European Union under the terms of the Treaty of Accession of 1 January 2007. Currently, Bulgaria issues only national visas, which do not give the right for their holders to enter the Schengen area.

The short-stay visa can be issued for multiple entries and with a validity period of up to 5 years, when the foreigner:

- 1. holds a valid travel document entitling him to enter the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, issued within the last 10 years and is valid for at least three months after the planned date of departure from the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, except in urgent circumstances or humanitarian reasons;*
- 2. has substantiated the purpose and conditions of the planned stay and the fact that he has sufficient means of subsistence both for the duration of the planned stay on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria and for his return to the country of origin or transit to a third country, his/hers acceptance is guaranteed, or that he/she is able to legally acquire these funds.*

and

Short-term multiple-entry visas may be issued for the following periods of validity, unless the validity of the visa does not exceed the validity of the travel document:

- 1. up to one year, provided that the foreigner has obtained and legally used three visas within the last two years;*
- 2. up to two years, provided that during the last two years the foreigner has received and lawfully used a previous multiple-entry visa with a validity period of up to one year;*
- 3. up to 5 years, provided that during the last three years the foreigner has received and lawfully used a previous multiple-entry visa with a validity period of up to two years.*

Airport transit visas are not taken into account when issuing multiple-entry visas.

- visa tax - in accordance with Art. 16 of the Visa Code, the tax for BG short-stay visas was set at 80 EUR starting from 01.10.2021;*
- suspension of the Visa Facilitation Agreement with the Russian Federation and increasing the visa tax from 35 EUR to 80 EUR per application; as well as implementing the need for a BG visa for the holders of Russian service and diplomatic passports.*

Romania

Romania had opened in November 2022 a Honorary Consulate in Danilovgrad, covering all Montenegro, except for Podgorica . Contacts: <http://podgorica.mae.ro/en/node/402>

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

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

3.5 Exchange of information

There is room for improvement in the exchange of information within the LSC and with the local public and private institutions (e.g. insurance companies, banks, employers, transport companies).

SI (CAC) continued to provide monthly statistics on the issuance of visas to the EU Delegation and 14 represented EU MS. Visa Application Statistics of the CAC for 2022 are as following:

- Uniform visas applied for – 946
- Total uniform visas issued (including MEV) – 903
- Multiple entry uniform visas (MEVs) issued – 746

An increase of visa applications has been noticed, including those concerning Russian citizens.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EUD obtained from the Ministry of Interior statistics on the number of Ukrainians and Russians who requested temporary protection, along with a specimen of the application confirmation.

EU MS contacts for visa issuance have been published at the EUD's website under "Practical Information" - "Travel & Study":

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/montenegro/travel-study_en?s=225

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 agreed to meet in the upcoming period to exchange on visa related issues and inviting a representative from Montenegro to provide updates regarding temporary Russian residence issuance and other visa issues.

5. Other issues

The EU Delegation and the EU MS communicate on consular cooperation issues through a Viber group, which also exchanges information on visa and general consular issues.



UNION EUROPÉENNE

DELEGATION AU ROYAUME DU MAROC

le 6 février 2023

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AUPRES DU ROYAUME DU MAROC RAPPORT 2022

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), MT (Rabat, Casablanca), NL (Rabat), NO (Rabat), PL (Rabat), PT (Rabat), SE (Rabat).

BG (Rabat), HR (Rabat) and RO (Rabat), ainsi que IE (Rabat) participent aussi aux réunions de GLS comme observateurs.

Accords de représentation pour les questions de visa:

AT et BE représentent respectivement SK et LU.

FI et CZ reçoivent et traitent également les demandes de visa des ressortissants mauritaniens.

DK assure l'octroi de visa 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 2022

La pandémie de COVID-19 a continué à avoir un impact sur les opérations de visas des Etats membres en 2022. La réouverture de l'espace aérien marocain a eu lieu le 7 février 2022, mais les consulats ont repris des activités normales à différents moments de l'année – ce qui complique la comparaison des statistiques sur la délivrance des visas.

Le schéma vaccinal complet, avec des vaccins reconnus par l'EMA ou un test PCR (avec quarantaine à l'arrivée ou pas), était nécessaire pour voyager vers l'UE au début de l'année 2022, mais les Etats Schengen n'ont pas appliqué ces règles de façon uniforme. Dans ces circonstances, les déplacements internationaux vers l'espace Schengen ont été limités pendant la première partie de l'année et ont seulement repris d'une façon habituelle pendant les mois d'été.

Pendant la deuxième partie de l'année, les demandes de visas ont augmenté très rapidement et, pour certains consulats, ont atteint des niveaux qui dépassent la période pré-COVID. Face à cet afflux de demandes, il y a eu des problèmes de capacité, qui entraînent de longs retards pour l'obtention des entretiens.

4 réunions ordinaires ont été organisées dans la période de référence (en mars, juin, septembre et novembre 2022), toutes en présentiel, sauf en mars. La participation des Etats membres représentés au Maroc aux réunions est élevée.

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 du groupe LSC et sont 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 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. Pendant la période de référence, l'activité de coopération a été axée principalement sur l'échange d'informations concernant :

- les problèmes de capacité et les délais de rendez-vous/décisions relatives aux demandes;
- la relation avec les prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visa;
- le rôle des intermédiaires utilisés par les demandeurs de visa;
- la délivrance et l'utilisation des visas à entrées multiples;
- 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.

Spécificités locales (après la pandémie) :

- Dans le cas de certains consulats, les délais de rendez-vous peuvent dépasser 3 mois. Le manque de ressources humaines semble être la cause principale de cette situation, dans un contexte de pression sans précédent au niveau de la demande.
- La saturation des capacités des consulats qui reçoivent le plus de demandes, combinée à la décision de la France de limiter le nombre de visas délivrés, a eu pour conséquence l'augmentation du phénomène de "visa-shopping" au niveau des autres représentations Schengen au Maroc qui, à leur tour, ont vu leurs capacités saturées. Le manque de capacité a pour conséquence la nécessité d'avoir recours à la sous-traitance pour la prise des rendez-vous et souvent un impact négatif pour leur image/réputation. Cette situation a été au centre de l'attention des médias locaux et fait l'objet de communications/pétitions/actions à destination de la Délégation d'UE en provenance de plusieurs associations nationales des droits de l'homme.

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

L'ensemble des consulats des Etats membres au Maroc ont mis en œuvre 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 au Maroc par les demandeurs de visa de court séjour. (La décision d'exécution de 2019 a été adoptée par la Commission européenne suivant une proposition du LSC.)

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. La plupart des Etats membres sont satisfaits du modèle de cascade prévu par le Code des visas et déclarent suivre l'esprit de la cascade. A ce stade, une adaptation des règles ne paraît pas nécessaire, car la disposition de l'Article 24(2) est globalement respectée.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures, échanges d'informations

L'échange d'informations entre les membres du LSC se déroule à l'occasion des réunions de coordination et/ou via e-mail/VISmail. Les membres de LSC échangent régulièrement et/ou sur base ad-hoc, en fonction des besoins, sur les statistiques de visas délivrés/refusés, sur les suspicions de fraude et d'utilisation de faux documents, le fonctionnement du système VIS ou les articles de presse concernant la problématique Schengen.

Les membres du 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 visas (et aussi sur les questions consulaires).

L'utilisation du VISmail par les membres du LSC reste sous-optimale. L'importance d'utiliser ce système pour les échanges entre les consulats (plutôt que WhatsApp ou e-mail) a été rappelée à plusieurs reprises lors des réunions de coordination.

4. Défis

Réponses apportées aux défis mentionnés dans le rapport 2021

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

Mise en œuvre du Code des visas révisé : l'harmonisation au niveau local des procédures de délivrance des visas à entrées multiples a été discutée à plusieurs reprises.

Les risques (et réalités) de « visa shopping » et les problèmes liés aux capacités des consulats et à la prise de rendez-vous ont été discutés en détail. Néanmoins, les problèmes persistent et sont aussi liés à la décision française de limiter le nombre de visas octroyés.

Points à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2023)

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.

Systématisation de l'échange des statistique récentes (Art. 48 Code de visas).

Echange d'informations et d'expériences et recherche de solutions, afin d'améliorer les systèmes de prise de rendez-vous et éviter au maximum les abus des intermédiaires.

5. Divers

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



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO NAMIBIA

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in NAMIBIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

For issuing Schengen Visa in Windhoek, 3 Member States are present (DE, ES and FI): 8 are represented by *Germany*, 2 by *Spain*, and 3 by *Finland*.

5 Member States are represented at Embassy level 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. Spain also has an Honorary Consul in Lüderitz.

Norway, Switzerland and Iceland have also appointed Honorary Consuls in Windhoek.

Regarding Schengen visa issues, *Germany* represents Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, and The Netherlands. *Spain* issues Schengen visas also for Portugal and Slovenia. *Finland* issues visas to Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. France only issues emergency travel documents, including to Monaco citizens.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

In 2022, the LSC meeting which was held on 29 November, included all three MS and was called for and chaired by the EUD.

A consular meeting including FR and PT as well as Honorary Consuls of Hungary, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands was organised along with the LSC meeting mentioned above.

Post pandemic recovery:

For *Germany*, the post pandemic recovery increased the volume of tourists in Namibia and the number of Schengen-Visa applications increased in case of the German Embassy by 75%.

For *Finland*, travel is slowly recovering.

Spain is operating normally and has seen an increase in the number of applicants.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Most MS assess the “unification” of their work under the VISA Code as rather advanced, even if informally.

No specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code are identifiable by *Germany*, *Finland* nor *Spain*.

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, MS agreed to compare their respective lists of required supporting documents, but the first impression was that all three (FI, DE, ES) use the same list. MS are not against having one list, but for FI for example, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland provides the list to Embassy’s webpage and it has to correspond with all Finnish Embassies. Divergences were recorded with regards to minimum financial requirements and type of invitation (when applicable).

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’)

For Finland as well as for the other MS, adaptation of the general rules on issuing MEV in Namibia is currently not relevant.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Cfr 3.2

3.5 Exchange of information

Germany exchanged statistics on a monthly basis (since September 2022: quarterly), including denials with individual information.

Finland shared statistics on a monthly basis by email. Before the COVID –pandemic, there were several fraud attempts for example with bank statements.

For *Spain*, monthly statistics are exchanged, including on fraud attempts.

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

Germany organised a training on forged documents on 22 January 2023.

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).

2022 STATISTICS:

Total issued: 4134

Total denied: 313

Withdrawn: 99

Other: 267

Germany

Total issued: 2.553 Schengen-Visa (272 national visa)

Total denied: 167 Schengen-Visa (6 national visa)

Withdrawn: 77

Other: 255

Finland

Total issued: 499

Total denied: 43

Withdrawn: 1

Other: 2

Spain

Total issued: 1082

Total denied: 103

Withdrawn: 21

Other: 10



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO PANAMA

23 January 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in PANAMA 2022 REPORT

During 2022 there was not LSC activity in Panama. Consequently, there is nothing to report. To be noted that during first Consular Cooperation meeting of 2022 the EU Delegation to Panama suggested Member states to start organising LSC meetings, but they did not show much interest.

The reasons for this lack of interest is that Panamanians do not need Schengen visa for visiting Europe. Only 33rd country citizens request Schengen visas in Member states' consulates in Panama but the volume of applications seems limited.

In 2023 we will enquire again Member State about the necessity to organise LSC meetings in Panama.



UNIÓN EUROPEA

DELEGACIÓN EN PERU

14 de abril de 2023

COOPERACIÓN LOCAL SCHENGEN (CLS) en PERU INFORME 2022

1. Introducción

Hay 14 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 2022

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 2022 hubo 3 reuniones consulares bajo las diferentes presidencias de la UE (Francia y Chequia) con el apoyo de la Delegación de la UE en Perú y donde siempre se mantiene la posibilidad de discutir los temas Schengen, si fuese necesario. La participación es excelente, con alrededor de 90% de los 14 Estados Miembros presentes en Perú. La DEL de la UE ha elaborado los informes de las primeras dos reuniones. El día después de la tercera reunión del grupo consular, en diciembre del 2022, hubo un intento de golpe de estado por parte del entonces presidente Castillo que desato una crisis política y social importante en el país. El acta de la reunión de cónsules no resulto siendo una prioridad, además los temas de prioridad en cuanto a los asuntos consulares reflectaron más bien la crisis interna y los efectos de los paros y bloqueos de carreteras. El Grupo intercambia información a través de reuniones VTC, por correo electrónico y sobre todo vía el grupo WhatsApp. Durante el periodo 2022 no se han llevado a cabo reuniones CLS fuera de Lima. A excepción de la UE, ningún otro país participa en las reuniones.

Como consecuencia de la crisis pandémica todavía, el año 2022 no se ha destacado en cuanto a los visados C por personas extranjeras que residen en Perú, sino algunos casos de bolivianos y ecuatorianos. También hubo puntualmente solicitudes de parte de ciudadanos chinos, indios, turcos y rusos.

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 a 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 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 2022, 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 constantemente, adaptadas a la situación. El grupo se concentró más bien en intercambios de prácticas relacionadas a la crisis y nuevas reglas y otras limitaciones laborales. Sobre todo, en los obstáculos que ponen las autoridades peruanas en la cooperación en casos consulares particulares.

Las estadísticas no se compilaron regularmente durante el año y tampoco se dedicó una discusión profunda a este tema. Es probable que en 2023 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.

4. Dificultades

1. *Describanse las respuestas a las dificultades, de haberlas, que figuran en el informe de 2021.*

A lo largo del año, el Grupo mantiene a sus miembros al tanto en cuanto a las regulaciones con respecto a los viajes y tránsitos UE-Perú.

2. *Describanse los temas por tratar durante el próximo período de referencia (2023).*

Con 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 REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

14 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in RWANDA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five Member States (BE, DE, FR, NL, SE) and one Associated Schengen State (CH) are present in Rwanda. Denmark recently opened an office that will assume some consular assistance, but not deliver visa.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

EU Delegation and Member/Associated States in Rwanda held two Local Schengen cooperation meetings, chaired by EUD, in June and September 2022. Meetings were 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 Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Other Schengen or Associated States in handle visa applications through their competent Embassies in the region.

EU and MS in Rwanda are generally well prepared to ensure the execution of tasks as per the Visa Code. However, there were some issues regarding delays in 2022. After a slow start in applications due to continued covid restrictions and some uncertainty regarding international travel, the number of applications increased dramatically. Between May and September, the Belgian consular services were not able to respect the obligations of Art. 9 of the Visa Code to provide an appointment within a period of two weeks from the date when the appointment was requested. As a result, some travellers had to postpone their travels. However, since the backlog is resolved, delays are back to normal periods and obligations are respected.

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 2022, MS processed and issued the following number of C-visas:

- BE: 9707 requested – 7022 delivered
- DE: 180 requested – 162 delivered
- FR: 102 requested – 102 delivered
- NL: 7 requested – 7 delivered

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

N/A

4. Challenges

There continue to be challenges regarding the authenticity and legalisation of documents electronically delivered by the authorities, which the LSC group members are still trying to address with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Protocol services in order to facilitate relevant visa and consular processes.

There have also been issues about false bank statements. The verification of bank statements is time consuming and onerous on consular staff, and some banks do not cooperate in confirming the authenticity of documents presented to the Embassies.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

2 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in SAUDI ARABIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

A total of 19 Schengen Member States¹² (MS) are represented in Riyadh. Four of them¹³ 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, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. All the countries use the services of VFS Global with the exception of ES, which use BLS International and DE now working with TLS contact. 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 or only in Jeddah. Poland is the only country not making use of an external service provider at the present time.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

LSC group met once a month physically at the EU Delegation. The meetings are chaired by the EUD. LSC meetings are open to all EUMS as observers. Meetings were always well attended with usually 15-16 MS present.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC MS have 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', which has been adopted on 24 November 2022 (see 3.3 below).

¹² AT, BE, CZ, DK, FI, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, ES, SE, SK, CH, NO

¹³ FR, DE, DK, 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').

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 rare in the recent years. Equally, the GCC nationals residing in KSA 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 continues to be applied, especially since the "Saudisation" process of the local job market has created instability and unpredictability to job security for non-Saudis.

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 considered that the less generous rules introduced with the new visa code in February 2020 sent unintended and counter-productive messages, creating political frustration to the detriment of bilateral relations.

On the basis of a proposal by LSC, the Commission adopted adapted rules for multi-entry visas for KSA citizens and GCC residents in KSA on 24 November. The rules applicable to KSA (and GCC residents in KSA) are now more favourable than those provided for by the Visa Code. A multiple-entry visa shall be issued under the following conditions and for the following validity periods:

- (a) for a validity period of 1 year, provided that the applicant has obtained and lawfully used a visa within the previous 2 years;
- (b) for a validity period of 3 years, provided that the applicant has obtained and lawfully used a previous multiple-entry visa valid for 1 year within the previous 2 years;
- (c) for a validity period of 5 years, provided that the applicant has obtained and lawfully used a previous multiple-entry visa valid for 3 years within the previous 4 years.

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, some LSC MS have individually carried out inspection visits to the Riyadh, Jeddah and Khobar visa application centers to ensure harmonisation of practices.

3.5 Exchange of information

LSC MS regularly discuss the visa policy and consular developments in the Kingdom. They exchange information and best practices on individual cases. In selected cases, the EU Delegation reaches out to the Saudi authorities on behalf of the Member States requesting information of general applications regarding visa requirements in particular.

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.

The EU Delegation will explore the possibility of holding regular (twice per year) meetings with Saudi authorities and the Member States on consular issues.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

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 as forged documents in certain applications are not rare.

Saudisation policies also pose a risk for EU workers who can be replaced by Saudi citizens anytime and thus might lose their right to reside in KSA. In addition, residence permits for family members are costly.

Moreover, visa application 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 centres throughout KSA. MS regularly raise issues related to recurring number of mistakes.

5. Other issues

N/A



UNION EUROPÉENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DU SENEGAL

Dakar, le 13 Avril 2023

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AU SENEGAL RAPPORT 2022

1. Introduction

Au Sénégal, 15 Etats Membres Schengen (EMS) sont présents : Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, Hongrie, France, Finlande, Grèce, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, la République Tchèque et la Suisse.

12 consulats des EMS (Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Grèce, Italie, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, République Tchèque, Suisse) délivrent des visas aux ressortissants du Sénégal et des pays qui se trouvent sous leur juridiction respective. Les visas pour le Luxembourg sont délivrés par la Belgique. La plupart des Ambassades des Etats membres au Sénégal sont accrédités pour plusieurs pays de la région, pour certaines jusqu'à 9 pays.

Concernant les Etats Membres sans sections de visas à Dakar, 7 Etats Membres disposent d'accords pour la délivrance des visas avec 3 EM représentés (l'Estonie, la Finlande et la Slovaquie avec la France, la Hongrie et Malte avec l'Autriche, la Suède et la Slovaquie avec les Pays-Bas). La Suisse représente la Lettonie. Pour l'Irlande, qui vient d'ouvrir une nouvelle ambassade à Dakar, la délivrance des visas aux ressortissants du Sénégal reste gérée par l'ambassade à Abuja.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2022

La pandémie de Covid19 a posé de problèmes importants au travail des Bureaux Visa car les procédures de délivrance de visas ne peuvent pas être faites à distance. Les bureaux ont donc continué à fonctionner tout en devant s'adapter aux contraintes liées à la pandémie. Après avoir été fermée au tourisme en 2020 et 2021, les autorités sénégalaises ont progressivement levé les restrictions imposées à l'entrée sur le territoire sénégalais à partir de septembre 2021.

Quatre réunions régulières du groupe LSC se sont tenues durant l'année 2022, à savoir le 22 mars, 14 juin, 28 septembre et 12 décembre. Elles se sont tenues en personne, à la Délégation de l'Union européenne (DUE). Les réunions LSC sont présidées par la DUE, au niveau de la Cheffe de la Section Politique, presse et information (PPI).

Par ailleurs, une réunion ad-hoc a eu lieu le 22 novembre, portant sur la proposition adoptée par la Commission européenne le 9 novembre, proposant des mesures sous l'article 25a du Code des Visas pour le Sénégal et la Gambie. Cette réunion s'est faite sous format hybride afin de faciliter la participation des collègues des EMS basés à Banjul.

Les réunions régulières qui se sont tenues en 2022 se sont concentrées sur le partage d'informations (statistiques visa, cas de fraude consulaire, filières d'immigration irrégulière etc.), sur l'application de l'harmonisation de documents justificatifs, ainsi que sur des points d'actualité comme l'évolution des règles d'entrées sur le territoire sénégalais dans le contexte de pandémie COVID-19. Des informations plus ponctuelles ont également été échangées par email, à l'initiative de la DUE ou des EMS.

Par ailleurs, plusieurs EMS ont proposé d'avoir des échanges plus réguliers (mensuels) dans un cadre informel dans des ambassades alternées des EMS afin d'avoir une coordination plus étroite et suivi concernant les enjeux communs tels que l'augmentation significative du nombre de demandes de visas Schengen, la gestion des demandes et les problèmes liés à cette augmentation, la fraude consulaire, y compris les problèmes de fraude documentaire, les actions conjointes possible et l'harmonisation des documents justificatifs.

La DUE établit l'ordre du jour des réunions, incluant les contributions des EMS. La DUE n'a toutefois pas pu assurer la rédaction d'un compte rendu systématique des réunions en raison de ses capacités limitées en termes de ressources humaines au niveau de la section PPI et de la surcharge de travail sur les dossiers politiques et notamment migration. Pour pallier à cette situation, une proposition a été formulée à l'égard des Etats membres pour alterner la prise de note et la rédaction des compte-rendu ; proposition accueillie favorablement par les EMS. Les EMS participent activement aux réunions LSC.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les EMS appliquent le code des visas. L'Espagne, la France, l'Italie, les Pays-Bas, la Belgique et le Portugal ont externalisé la réception des demandes de visas (société VFS Global pour la France, l'Italie, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal-depuis septembre 2018, la société BLS pour l'Espagne et TLS Contact pour la Belgique-depuis septembre 2021).

Avec la levée des restrictions Covid, le nombre de demandes de visas a fortement augmenté. Les informations disponibles confirment une augmentation des demandes pour tous les EMS concernés. Exemples: Pour l'Italie la demande de visa a augmenté presque de 50% (5927 demandes reçues en 2021 et 8337 en 2022) pour la Belgique de 37% - 4670 demandes en 2019 (dernière année de référence) à 6407 en 2022. L'Ambassade Suisse est revenue aux chiffres avant COVID, même un peu plus.

En conséquence de la forte augmentation des demandes de visas, mais aussi au rôle joué par les officines qui fonctionnent comme intermédiaires en bloquant les créneaux de rendez-vous, plusieurs consulats, font face à une pénurie permanente de disponibilité de rendez-vous pour la présentation de demande de visas (difficulté qui existe aussi dans d'autres pays de la région). Dans certains cas, il a été observé que les rendez-vous ouverts par un consulat pour un mois entier ont été pris en une heure.

Depuis son entrée en vigueur, les EMS ont commencé à appliquer le Code de Visas révisé comme prévu, sans difficultés majeures.

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

Après discussion au Comité Visa le 22 janvier 2019, qui a donné son avis positif au projet discuté localement par le Groupe LSC, la liste harmonisée de documents a été adoptée le 6 mai 2019. Il n'y avait pas de difficultés majeures dans son application. Les pratiques concernant les documents justificatifs devant être fournis par les demandeurs de visas sont discutées lors des réunions LSC. Une suggestion a été faite par la République Tchèque d'ajouter la catégorie « athlètes/sportifs » dans la liste afin d'harmoniser les pièces justificatives requises pour ce type de demande.

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 »)

En ce qui concerne les MEV, les EMS ont donné leur accord de principe sur la convenance d'harmoniser les pratiques au niveau local et l'utilité du système en cascade, d'ailleurs appliqué couramment. Par contre, il n'y a pas un accord unanime localement pour l'adoption d'un système en cascade uniforme et fixe, qui limiterait la marge de décision local de chaque consulat. Les différences entre les différents profils des demandeurs de visas, notamment entre la France et d'autres EMS, rendraient difficile aussi l'accord sur des critères à appliquer de façon homogène. En ce qui concerne l'octroi des visas de moins de 5 ans, elles sont courantes en raison de la validité des passeports sénégalais (5 ans).

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

La plupart des EMS utilisent le **système de communication VIS Mail**, sauf exceptions. Le Portugal et les Pays-Bas confirment que dans leur cas la transmission d'information se fait au niveau des capitales. La Belgique décrit leur système de partage d'information qui permet des échanges, mais qui ne permet aucun fichage de fichier avec des données privée (en raison du RGPD).

3.5 Echange d'informations

Conformément aux dispositions du code des visas, les réunions de coordination trimestrielles et la liste de diffusion servent à échanger les informations notamment sur les aspects suivants:

- Les cas de fraude documentaire (falsification des documents de voyage, , utilisation de plusieurs identités et des passeports par la même personne, abus d'utilisation des passeports diplomatiques etc.)
- Les cas de fraude dans l'utilisation de visas et d'identification de falsification de visas.
- Les filières d'immigration clandestine (demandes de groupes avec faux buts de voyage: religieux, sportif, culturel, etc). Le manque de fiabilité d'actes d'état civil
- Le partage d'expériences sur la vérification d'authenticité des documents délivrés par les autorités du Sénégal et les pays sous la juridiction des Consulats basés au Sénégal.
- La viabilité des sociétés d'assurance de voyage.

En 2021, la compilation et la mise à jour des statistiques sur les visas a été assurée par la plupart des EMS, à tour de rôle de six mois. En 2022, ni les EMS ni la DUE n'ont été en mesure de mettre à jour les statistiques, face à une surcharge de travail tant du côté des EMS que de la DUE. En effet, la quantité de données à collecter en vertu de l'article 48 (3a) est considérée comme trop vaste. Néanmoins, il y a eu des échanges réguliers sur les tendances et les chiffres pertinents lors des réunions de coordination trimestrielles. Au cours de ces premiers mois de l'année 2023, les EMS sont en train de tenter de compléter les statistiques de 2022. Pour l'année 2023 en cours, les États essaient d'assurer un partage écrit et régulier des statistiques.

3.5 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

/

4. Défis

La fraude documentaire continue à constituer un défi important au Sénégal et dans d'autres pays de la région dans lesquels les EMS basés à Dakar sont accrédités, notamment la Guinée. Des cas de fraude et fraude documentaire sont reportés par rapport aux applications de visas de toute sorte, court et longue durée (tourisme et affaires, accompagnants, conférences et groupes culturelles, visites familiales, réunification, etc). De documents faux ou contenant de fausse information sont reportés: les documents justificatifs, les lettres d'invitation, les documents de voyage, y compris des passeports diplomatiques.

De véritables réseaux, de plus en plus professionnels, spécialisés en production ou légalisation de (faux) documents d'état civil se sont développés dans la région.

Il est donc important que les États Schengen s'efforcent d'adopter une approche uniforme dans la lutte contre la falsification de documents.

La non-fiabilité des documents d'état civil au Sénégal et dans certains autres pays de la région (Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Gambie) continue à être un autre défi. Pour le Sénégal sont en premier lieu concernés la zone frontalière avec la Mauritanie et les communes précaires de Dakar. Il ne faut pas confondre le manque de fiabilité des documents d'état civil avec les falsifications de documents. Le programme européen « NEKKAL » tente de s'attaquer au premier.

Le cas spécifique des documents faux et fraudes liées à l'état civil des documents provenant de la Guinée est souligné.

5. Divers

/



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

15 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in SOUTH AFRICA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

22 Member States are present in South Africa and 5 (Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia) are represented in by other Member States for Schengen visas.

In, South Africa the following Member States have diplomatic representation outside of the Capital:

Consulate General	Honorary Consuls
Belgium in Cape Town	Austria in Cape Town, Gqeberha and Durban
France in Johannesburg and Cape Town	Belgium in Durban
Germany in Cape Town	Bulgaria in Cape Town
Greece in Johannesburg and Cape Town	Cyprus in Cape Town and Durban
Italy in Johannesburg and Cape Town	Denmark in Cape Town and Durban
Netherlands in Cape Town	Estonia in Cape Town
Portugal in Johannesburg and Cape Town	Finland in Cape Town and Durban
Romania in Cape Town	France in Durban
Spain in Cape Town	Germany in Durban, Gqeberha
	Hungary in Cape Town and Durban
	Lithuania in Cape Town
	Malta in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban
	Poland in Durban
	Portugal in Durban, Gqeberha and Welkom
	Slovenia in Cape Town
	Slovakia in Johannesburg and Cape Town
	Spain in Durban
	Sweden in Cape Town

Among non-EU Schengen countries, Norway and Switzerland have diplomatic representation and issue visas in South Africa. Embassy of Sweden in Nairobi is handling Schengen visas for Sweden in South Africa as well as representing Estonia.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The LSC group meeting met 10 times during 2022. The attendance of the LSC meeting for 2022 was very well attended. Most of the meetings were in person with some attending virtually. The Deputy of the EU Delegation chaired the meetings. Draft minutes were prepared by the EU Delegation and shared for approval with the LSC group. There was also 1 meeting arranged with the Consul Generals Group in Cape Town.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

2022 was characterized by the resurgence of visa applications after more than 2 years Covid-induced near standstill. A common problem faced was forum shopping in contravention to Art. 5 (I) Visa Code due to the fact that many MS Missions had to fully exploit the maximum allowed days for visa appointments in accordance with Art. 9 (II) Visa Code and for making a decision in accordance with Art. 23 (I) Visa Code.

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

The existing list (Annex 4 to Implementing Decision C(2017) 5853) is currently being revised and will be submitted to the Commission in Q2 of 2023.

No major discrepancies in the application of the current list by MS has been noted.

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')

For the locations where a specific cascade has not been adopted:

Poland – has not adopted any specific cascade.

For the locations where a specific cascade is in force:

Embassy of Sweden is following article 24 (2b).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In principle, MS representatives discussed practices on certain topics during LSC meetings.

EU Del hosted Schengen-workshop in December 2022 which highlighted challenges in critical articles of the application of the Visa Code as well as current forgery trends.

3.5 Exchange of information

Describe the exchange of information within the LSC:

- Quarterly statistics.
- Cases of fraud:
 - fraud cases are regularly shared; support where required is rendered by the visa advisors (German Federal Police) at the German Embassy.
- Travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI); any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules.
- Cooperation with local authorities and companies (e.g. banks, employers, transport companies).
- Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises):
 - Schengen visa applications for Sweden are received by VFS Global in Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. We have done inspections of VFS in South Africa during the autumn 2022. There was not much to complain about. Some information on notice boards needed to be updated. The cooperation with VFS is overall working well.
- Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System:
 - Embassy of Sweden is using VISmail when asking for information in specific cases.
- Other issues.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Schengen workshop as described under point 3.4 held in Dec 2022

4. Challenges

5. Other issues



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO SUDAN

05 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in SUDAN 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Nine Member States (MS) are present (Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland), all have their consular services centralised in the capital Khartoum. Poland and Norway do not however issue visas in Sudan. Norway just handles national visas.

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 2022

The visa operations resumed accepting again short stay visa applications around March/April 2022, after the ban of non-essential travel to curb spread of Covid-19 was removed. The number of visa applications picked up significantly again at the end of the travel restrictions enforced during the health crisis.

During the reporting period, four LSC-meetings were held, in March, August, October and December. The European Migration Liaison officer of EUDEL hosted and chaired the meetings. Draft minutes were prepared by EUDEL, shared for approval before being submitted to the headquarter.

The following points were discussed during the LSC meetings: (i) update on visa-related trends; (ii) fake documents; (iii) comparison of lists of supporting documents; (iv) policy on issuing multiple-entry visas; (v) visa for medical treatment; (vi) payment of visa-related fees.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and the EUDEL ensure the tasks foreseen for Local Schengen Cooperation under the Visa Code. Most MS present did not identify any particular difficulties in the implementation of the revised rules of the Visa Code applicable. MS exchange information with each other on a regular basis on different kinds of visa matters. MS are already applying the rules of the Revised Visa code and revised rules since February 2020. One MS raised the issue of not using yet the same list of supporting document.

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

The possibility of drafting a harmonised list of supporting document has not yet been discussed and explored. In the framework of the LSC-meeting, the LSC members took a close look at their respective lists of supporting documents. While there is no common information sheet, the information provided is very similar and all Schengen consulates require mostly the same documents. Some LSC members consider that the harmonisation practice is acquired informally; others call to follow a common procedure.

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 problems reported on application of Article 24 during the reporting period. LSC members.

The LSC members shared within the LSC-meeting their respective experiences on the issuance of multiple entry visas and concluded that the cascade system was applied.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

LSC members exchange on regular basis on various visa matters. LSC members apply the same visa fees. Germany started during the reporting period to require for the visa fees to be paid in Euro instead of the local currency. Spain also started the process to charge the visa fees only in Euro. Other LSC members expressed interest in looking into the option of requesting visa fees in Euro as well.

3.5 Exchange of information

The LSC-meetings provide the best platform for exchange of information. They share information about fraudulent cases and best practices to counter such cases to avoid reoccurring fraud schemes. Italy has a good cooperation with the local banks and brief the other LSC members on their meetings with the bank representatives, as most of the visa sections are confronted with high numbers of fake bank statements.

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. Some MS reported difficulties in uploading documents. Therefore, most of MS resort to regular emails for exchanges.

None of the MS present cooperates with external service providers and they neither have accredited commercial intermediaries.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

Following challenges are raised:

- Some Sudanese family names are too long for total inclusion in the visa sticker. The common practice is for each person to have four names: his or her own given name, followed by the father's name, the grandfather's name and the great family's name. There is a need to find a common approach to determine in which order to include the names and which ones to identify as a first and family names to avoid having same applicants with different names.
- Document forgery.
- Applicants applying for visa at Embassies that they consider easier to get the visa issued in order to travel to another Schengen country to apply for asylum.

Following suggestions are made:

- Exchange information on supporting documents to be submitted for visa applications.
- Organise training on fraudulent documents.
- Organise a meeting with the airlines managers for international flights.

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

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TANZANIA 2022 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 2022

COVID-19 imposed general restriction on non-essential travel for part of the year.

Two LSC meetings were held in 2022:

- 29 March (**Attendance:** BE, CH, DE, ES, FI, IT, NL, PL, SE (Nairobi office). **Absent:** DK, FR, NO)
- 29 September (**Attendance:** BE, DE, ES, IT, PL, NO, SE (Nairobi office). **Absent:** DK, FR, CH, FI, NL).

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 Junior Professional in Delegation post and this affected capacity to ensure coordination.

Problems discussed included review of the harmonized list of supporting documents 2016, consolidation and transmission of statistics, use of VISMail, harmonisation of practices, shortage of consular staff, as described below.

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

The latest list of supporting documents dates to 2016. An extensive discussion of the list was held on 29 September 2022 with comparison to the latest Council-adopted harmonised list for Ghana, Albania and Nepal, taken as examples. There was no conclusion on this point but several aspects were considered for further deliberation on possible amendments.

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 adopt rules. The "Cascade" system is used when applicable by some MSs.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

During the LSC meetings, MSs exchanged experiences and practices about travel insurance reliability, verification of the authenticity of bank account statements and other supporting documents.

3.5 Exchange of information

Statistics were not collected in 2022 from MSs in Tanzania. It was observed that some MSs are not allowed to disseminate information, including to EU Delegations because it could lead to 'visa shopping' if leaked. It was however pointed out that key 2021 figures for Tanzania were disseminated by DG HOME on the internet. Members pointed out that the figures were not generally correct.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Not applicable

4. Challenges

- Challenges concerned some members' participation and poor communication flow.
- The reduction of staff at the Political Section of the EUD is also a challenge.
- In addition, visa applications for government officials continue to be problematic but they remain outside the scope of LSC harmonisation efforts because of political sensitivities.
- There is sometimes lack of coherence between information received from DG HOME in relation to LSC group members' capitals.
- In 2023, the LSC group will need to finalize an updated List of supporting documents.
- Inviting external contributors to the meetings is also an option to share knowledge on topical issues and stimulate further harmonisation of practices.

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.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THAILAND

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in THAILAND 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

19 of the 27 Schengen States are present in Bangkok¹⁴. 16 are represented outside of Bangkok, in Chiang Mai and Phuket.

6 Schengen States are represented, (Visa Code, Article 8)¹⁵.

MS	AT	BE	CH	CZ	DE	DK	EL	ES	EU	FI	FR	HU	IT	LU	NL	NO	PL	PT	SE	SK
present	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
represents	MT				LT	IS				EE		LV								
represents	SI																			

The table below provides an overview.

Most Schengen States have outsourced their visa application processing services to external service providers : VFS Global (VFS), TLS Contact, or BLS International.

MS	AT	BE	CH	CZ	DE	DK	EL	ES	FI	FR	HU	IT	LU	NL	NO	PL	PT	SE	SK
BKK	VFS	TLS	VFS	VFS	VFS	VFS		BLS	VFS	TLS		VFS		VFS	VFS		TLS	VFS	
CNX ¹⁶					VFS							VFS							
HKT ¹⁷					VFS							VFS							

The table below provides an overview.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

LSC meetings in 2022:

- February 9th - 17 present, hybrid meeting
- March 24th - 15 present, online meeting
- June 13th - 13 present, hybrid meeting

¹⁴ AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LU, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, SK

¹⁵ Estonia (EE), Iceland (IS), Malta (MT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Slovenia (SI)

¹⁶ CNX : Chiang Mai

¹⁷ HKT : Phuket

- September 29th - 16 present, hybrid meeting
- November 24th - 14 present + 1 observer

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 2022, five meetings took place. LSC meetings are open to all EUMS as observers with Romania occasionally attending.

Meetings were always well attended with around 13-17 present. Two Schengen States did not attend any meeting in 2022.

EUD draws up the Minutes of the meetings and shares those with the Schengen States and with DG HOME in Brussels.

Schengen States received 194,859 C-visa applications in 2022, (31,234 in 2021). The refusal rate for C-visa in 2022 was 7.6 %, (11.1 % in 2021).

The numbers are based on incomplete data:

- 16 Schengen States provided statistics for the entire year 2022;
- 2 Schengen States did not provide any statistics for the year 2022.

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 2022, 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, which was still an issue in the first half of 2022, there was a split between countries that were mostly open and countries which were more restrictive or not issuing visas. This changed repeatedly throughout 2022. 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 un-vaccinated 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. By the end of 2022, this was no longer an issue.

Due to the global ease on travel restrictions, mid-2022 most countries reported significant increases in visa applications and, following shortages of staff, consequently increases in waiting- and processing time, but these times varied significantly by country with some countries having a short waiting time. This led to visa shopping. Towards the end of 2022 the situation eased, mainly following a reduction of the visa applications (winter is low season for Thais traveling to Europe).

3.5 Exchange of information

Quarterly statistics are shared though there is some room for improvement.

Information is regularly shared about fraudulent documents or fraudulent activities that other Schengen States should be aware of either in the meeting or by e-mail. There was an anti-fraud training organised by the Australian Embassy in Bangkok in March 2022. In this framework, Schengen States explored the idea of closer cooperation with local banks in order to verify bank statements. No final decision has been taken on this point.

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. Two companies are in the process of being added to this list.

Some Schengen States consider the benefits of creating a list of bona fide travel agencies in Thailand as this could expedite the processing time. No final decision has been taken on this point.

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, (some Schengen States indicate challenges with sending or receiving/opening attachments), and emails sometimes take several days to arrive.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

The major challenges highlighted in the 2021 LSC report related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The challenge of divergence regarding the vaccination status of travellers continued to be an issue in early 2022.

For the next reporting period, (LSC 2023), Schengen States agree to:

- Further improve the sharing of the quarterly statistics, the exchange of information, trends, and problems encountered ;
- Further explore the creation of a list of bona fide travel agencies in Thailand as well as reporting on travel agencies that may need closer scrutiny ;
- Create SOP in order to facilitate business continuity from outgoing to incoming Embassies' LSC staff.

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.

This report has been approved by the Local Schengen Cooperation Group in Thailand.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO TUNISIA

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TUNISIA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

In Tunisia there are seventeen EU Member States present with fully fledged embassies and consulates (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden). Fifteen of those deliver Schengen visas, the remaining two, Bulgaria, Romania, not yet members of the Schengen space do not. One non-EU Member State also delivers Schengen visas (Switzerland).

Several Member States hold representation agreements in relation to visas: Austria represents Slovenia; Belgium represents Luxembourg; Switzerland represents Slovakia; and Finland represents Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, and Norway.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

During 2022, seven Local Schengen Cooperation meetings took place, all well attended by MS. The meetings were co-chaired by EUDEL for the first half of the year with France and during the second half with the Czech Republic, being the MS holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at that time. Thematic ad-hoc meetings were also organised, with a special focus on the issue of document fraud. Reports of the meetings were regularly drafted by the EU Delegation or by the presidency, despite the absence for most of the year of an EMLO. Frontex in collaboration with the EUDEL organised a Consular Staff Training on detecting false documents, receiving positive feedback from all MS that attended. The training was also open to staff of UK, USA and Canada. The group also updated the Joint EU Crisis Preparedness Framework for Tunisia. In addition, regular informal consular lunches took place, including like-minded partners (CA/UK/US).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In general, no major problems in the implementation of the Visa Code have been reported. Consulates continue to be seriously stretched: both bigger and smaller consulates are understaffed considering the large number of applications received. An increasing number of low quality applications is reported, which causes long waiting times in some consulates and subsequent visa shopping in others. The vast majority of Member States are using the services of an external service provider to handle visa applications.

All Member States collect biometric data, either directly in their consulates or via the contracted external service provider. The number of frauds and forgeries aiming at illegally obtaining a Schengen visa remains high. This trend continues in spite of the fact that the Member States have been improving their knowledge and capacities on these matters and despite the extra efforts put in place to prevent and detect the phenomenon. Most frequent frauds relate to: fake bank statements, fake hotel reservations, forged insurance certificates, forged birth/marriage certificates, invitation letters from unreliable institutes, and false declarations on the social security coverage (CNSS).

During the LSC meetings, Member States share information about fraudulent cases and best practices to counter such cases to avoid reoccurring fraud schemes. On the side of the EUDEL, expertise has suffered from the absence, since spring 2022, of a European Migration Liaison Officer. Training of EUDEL staff on visa issues are not offered.

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

The list was harmonised in 2019. However, the Member States are open for new harmonisation propositions on Schengen visas based on Art. 48.1 of the Visa Code.

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')

Applicants eligible for the 'MEV Cascade have been limited considering the travel restrictions in force during the past years (reference period) due to the pandemic. All consulates apply this principle in cases that meet the criteria under Article 24 (2). Member States only issue multiple entry visas (MEVs) for periods of 1 to 2, 3 or 4 years. 5 year MEVs **are not issued** as the Tunisian passport only has validity for a maximum 5 years. The cascade issue is on the work plan for 2023.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

There is a high awareness among consulates that cooperation is key to avoid visa shopping. While no other harmonisation initiatives have been presented during 2022 some discussions took place regarding the utility of request of travel reservation documents.

3.5 Exchange of information

Exchange of information takes place through email, telephone, bilateral ad hoc meetings or through the regular LSC meetings. Statistics and other visa related questions are also circulated by email or shared during *tours de table* in LSC meetings. This information exchange relates to different challenges the Member States are facing, such as fraud cases and administrative barriers. Visa shopping, interview procedures, waiting times, refusal rates, and statistics.

All Schengen consulates have access and are using the Visa Information System (VIS) but highlight that it is complicated to use, making it irrelevant, as many messages remain unanswered.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

A report on Local Consular and Schengen Coordination activities was prepared and presented to the Heads of Missions. The document served to discuss perspectives and challenges of coordination between MS and identify thematics to be further explored during future meetings. Statistics on legal migration were also exchanged aiming at highlighting the positive impact of migration in view of the sub-committee on migration organised in Tunisia as part of the Association Agreement.

4. Challenges

Tunisia is facing a multifaceted crisis marked by food shortages and an unstable political and socio-economic situation. Tunisians reaching Europe in an irregular way have increased during the last year including no-risk migration profiles such as families. In this context, a tightening of Schengen cooperation is essential.

Visa services are under unprecedented pressure, due to a steep increase in requests, a decrease in the quality of applications, as well as difficulties related to massive fraud.

Particular attention should be paid to communication on Schengen and other consular matters (informing about the possibilities of legal, circular migration; Talent Partnerships and the development of professional skills) considering the attention on the matter given by media and the public opinion.

While the sub-committee on migration and social affairs eventually took place in January 2023, it is still important to seek an effective communication channel with the Tunisian authorities.

5. Other issues

During 2022, the EU delegation was in contact with the Tunisian authorities and civil society in order to organise the Sub-committee on migration which took place in 2023. It addressed among other the Tunisian wish of visa facilitation and mobility partnerships.

Approved by Member States present in Tunisia



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO TÜRKİYE

1 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TÜRKİYE 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 4 consular constituencies in Turkey. In 2022, 19 Member States issued visa in Ankara, 15 in Istanbul, 3 in Izmir, and 1 in Edirne. The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC Türkiye) convened, separately, in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, every other month in principle.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

The work in 2022 was characterised by increasingly speedy recovery from the pandemic, with measures restricting non-essential travel to the EU lifted, the consulates returning to pre-pandemic work patterns, and the number of visa applications returning in many cases to pre-pandemic levels. With travel from Russia and China restricted, Türkiye may possibly top the list of Schengen visa application worldwide in 2022.

LSC Türkiye meetings in Ankara and Istanbul took place in February, June, September, and December; in Izmir in February, June, and December. Full LSC Türkiye got together – partly online - in April 2022.

LSC Türkiye was chaired by the EU delegation, which also drew up reports.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In 2022, Schengen consulates in Türkiye received one of the highest numbers of visa applications in the world. Some MS surpassed their pre-pandemic figures. Faced with the increased workload and public scrutiny, LSC Türkiye drew up an inventory of practices, including a picture of operational capacities at the consulates, and frequently discussed the issue, to check alignment of existing practices with the provisions of the Visa Code.

Notwithstanding, Turkish authorities and media continued their criticism concerning the issuance of Schengen visa, including for Turkish participants of EU-funded programmes (e.g. Erasmus). In dedicated meetings, in January and October 2022, MFA noted the main areas of concern being: late visa appointment dates, quotas, high refusal rates, high fees, and longer processing periods.

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

Acting upon proposals from Member States, the LSC Türkiye discussed and agreed new set of proposals to modify the harmonised list of accompanying documents in 2022. Pending the finalisation of the draft texts, the proposal will be submitted to the Commission soon.

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, with LSC Izmir exchanging views in February 2021. After the pandemic, LSC Türkiye resumed discussions on Art. 24 in February and took final decision in June 2022.

The LSC Türkiye adopted a four-step approach: i) draw up the current state of play concerning the issuing of MEV; ii) assess local circumstances, migratory and security risks; iii) agree to the need of local adaptation of rules (more favourable or stringent) or agree to the need to continue with the implementation of Art. 24 in the current form; iv) if applicable, decide on specific proposals for the modification of rules.

Having noted broad alignment of the existing practices in issuing multiple entry visa with the provisions of the Visa Code, and considering the flexibility already offered by the current “cascade” in Article 24 of the Visa Code against the background of deteriorating political and socio-economic conditions in Türkiye, LSC Türkiye decided to retain the status quo and not to propose a revision of the current system.

3.4 Exchange of information

Visa statistics: exchange of visa statistics improved markedly in 2022, with LSC Türkiye being in a position to draw up unofficial global statistics for all three consular constituencies.

Asylum statistics: regular exchange concerning the consequences of increasing numbers of asylum applications by Turkish nationals in the EU on visa applications.

External service providers (ESP): LSC Türkiye took regular note of new contracts, as well as exchanged on cooperation with ESP.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Members of LSC Türkiye took part on 16 May 2022 in a workshop about fake and counterfeit documentation, organised by Hungary.

Members of LSC Türkiye took part in an anti-fraud meeting organised on 13 September by the Czech Presidency.

4. Challenges

- LSC Türkiye noted continuous deterioration of economic conditions in Turkey, heavily affecting the savings and income of visa applicants – a crucial point of assessment. Worsening situation leads migrants look for illegal ways, including by abusing visa free transit and asylum requests – hence the recent introduction of Airport Transit Visa (ATV) in some Member States.
- LSC Türkiye also noted poor quality of high number of visa applications, instances of visa shopping, and document fraud. Additional scrutiny of visa applications became necessary and may lead to longer waiting times and more refusals.

5. Other issues

In the wake of Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, characterised by a steep rise in numbers of Russian citizens in Türkiye, LSC Türkiye regularly discussed Schengen visa applications by Russians holding residence permit in Türkiye, and drew frequent updates of the situation.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO TURKMENISTAN

2 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TURKMENISTAN 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Four Member States (DE, FR, IT, RO) are represented in Ashgabat.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

LSC was suspended since the beginning of 2020. Ashgabat exercises a tight control of its population and officially denies the existence of any COVID-19 cases within its borders despite contradictory evidence from independent sources. Nevertheless, harsh COVID-19 preventive measures have been introduced, including a total closure of the borders. The issuing of visas was therefore up until recently limited to exceptional cases.

Most of the restrictions linked to the pandemic have been lifted in autumn 2022, apart from PCR testing and quarantine upon arrival for foreigners including diplomats. On 20 October 2022, the EU Delegation to Turkmenistan convened a “zero” meeting on Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC). All four MS present in Ashgabat (DE, FR, IT, RO) took part in the meeting. With the slow reopening of borders and resumption of flights, EUDEL and MS expressed readiness to re-start LSC in 2023.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In TKM out of four MS present, three have a Consular Section: DE, IT and RO. MS agreed to associate RO to the LSC meetings. FR consular section is managed from Baku/AZ. It was agreed that FR would participate in selected meetings, depending on the agenda.

Of the two Schengen representations in Ashgabat, IT additionally represents FR, while DE represents 13 other Schengen countries: BE, EE, FI, GR, LV, LU, NL, NO, AT, PT, SE, CH and ES. There are no general representation agreements with the remaining countries and issuing of their visas takes place upon written request from the unrepresented country.

In 2022 DE issued business visas and transit-type C visas (necessary for connecting flights to US, KR, UK due to the change of terminals in Frankfurt). IT issues all kinds of visas, including tourist visas.

Due to limited capacity of MS Embassies' Consular Sections and still limited travel opportunities in and out of Turkmenistan, MS agreed to hold only two LSC meetings in 2023, the number to be gradually increased up to the requirement of the Schengen Visa Code. The first meeting will take place in the first quarter of 2023 and will be used for stocktaking. LSC will be chaired by EUDEL. It was agreed that collection of statistics will be done quarterly with MS rotating this responsibility.

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

MS present will consider the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents in 2023 when regular LSC meetings in Ashgabat resume.

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')

With the resuming of regular LSC meetings in Ashgabat in 2023 this will be assessed further.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Close cooperation between the MS Embassies' Consular Sections with Schengen representations is taking place on a regular basis. If further need for harmonisation exists, this will take place with the resuming of LSC in 2023.

3.5 Exchange of information

Information exchange, if necessary, happened in 2022 on an informal level. Proper exchange on statistics, cases of fraud, travel medical insurance and everything else will restart with the resuming of LSC in 2023.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No.

4. Challenges

During the "zero" meeting MS discussed restrictive measures taken by the government to limit the access to internet, which affect the procedure for issuing visas. As many Turkmen citizens do not have access to internet, the use of local agencies in support of visa applications is common. MS identified some of those agencies issuing fake invitations. DE started black-listing some of those local travel agencies. DE and IT are in close contact on cases of visa shopping.

Due to a very limited access to information in Turkmenistan, there is a lack of knowledge about the implications of Russian aggression against Ukraine. MS reported that Turkmen still provide health travel insurance issued by RU companies, which due to the sanctions are no longer accepted. This will be further discussed in the next reporting period 2023.

5. Other issues

None.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

20 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2022 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, 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) has been appointed at the DE Embassy in Abu Dhabi in cooperation between the European Commission and the German Federal Police since mid-2021.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

EUDEL organised four LSC (back-to-back with EU LCC) meetings – initial two on-line (via Cisco Webex) due to COVID-19 related restrictions, and two in-person in the second half of the year. The pandemic affected the frequency and substance of the meetings in the UAE until autumn. Travel restrictions remained partially in place in the first half of 2022, while a progressive resumption of visa process by the EUMSs Embassies and CGs' visa sections culminated to its full capacity before the summer season, and again towards the end of the year.

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. As agreed, CH and NO were invited to stay also for the (back-to-back) LCC meetings as well, as observers. Minutes were drafted by the EUDEL and regularly circulated to EUMSs' Embassies, together with other EUDEL's reports. Regular coordination and mutual updates took place also via email, and in the framework the Expo 2020 TJFW / Crisis Preparedness.

In 2022, the LSC/Consular group was the main EUMSs Embassies' forum of coordination for COVID-19 related global and local preventive measures, as well as the UAE's and international travel restrictions. EUDEL i.a. coordinated exchange of updates on vaccination and PCR testing administration and certificates recognition, and facilitated reciprocal implementation of the UAE's connection to the EU Digital COVID Certificate (since 09/12/2021).

In the first semester of 2022 several EUMSs have been facilitating asylum and visa processes of refugees from Afghanistan (since August 2021). According to available data, approximately 11-15 thousands evacuated Afghans had temporarily stayed in the UAE (Emirates Humanitarian City, Abu Dhabi); vast majority of them were eventually relocated to the USA.

Since February 2022, the LSC group regularly discussed situation of locally stranded and/or residing Ukrainian nationals, some of whom also migrated to / took refuge in Europe.

Ad hoc consultations and exchange of expertise, incl. on Schengen visa related issues took place also via email and the EUDEL-established and administered WhatsApp Consular group.

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 EU-UAE Schengen visa liberalization agreement (since 2015). Discussions have notably focused on discrepancies in EUMSs/VFS practices and capacity limits, which lead to the *visa shopping*. Particular attention was dedicated regular exchanges on trends in documents' fraud. 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; in particular relevant to their connection to the EU Digital COVID Certificate system and to occasional clarifications needed on entry to the UAE, facilitation / freedom of movement of the Embassies' personnel, and on travel to/from Europe.

The LSC group discussed the implementation of the revised Visa Code (2020), in particular the application of the *cascade system* for GCC countries' nationals (KSA, KWT, QAT, BHR, OMN). Concrete proposals had been discussed on the basis of a special regime agreed in Doha; this was - however - later suspended due to visa facilitation negotiations with Kuwait and Qatar.

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 last reviewed in August 2022, and there was no discussion, nor identified need to revise it at that stage. The LSC group monitors and regularly discuss the harmonised list - as required / needed.

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 2022, 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

In the first semester of 2022, EUDEL regularly updated the LSC group on travel restrictions - on the basis of the bi-weekly questionnaire drafted 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 drafted by EUDEL in consultation (and in consent) with the local rotating EU Presidency (Embassy of France).

3.5 Exchange of information

In the context of decreased (or temporarily suspended) visa applications due to the pandemic in 2020-2021, statistics were not collected regularly, although encouraged by the rotating local Presidencies. Throughout 2022, given the renewed significant upward trend, MSs discussed – at the LSC meetings - esp. their actual availability of visa appointment slots and refusal rates. Cases of fraud have increased with post-pandemic re-opening of Embassies' visa sections; the issue has become a regular topic discussed by LSC - in cooperation with PLO/ILOs; a dedicated expert training to prevent this problem is planned (again) in the first semester of 2023.

Cooperation with local authorities and companies continues to be challenging, in particular as regards verification of visa applicants' residential status (after relevant stickers and records in passports were replaced by local authorities' digital evidence in 2022), bank statements, employer's testimonials, travel medical insurance. General lack of reactivity from the local authorities has been witnessed - a consequence of lack of capacities and/or digitalised services.

There have been no major problems related to cooperation with external service providers (VFS Global, for instance). However, a number of visa applicants faced problems when booking their visa appointment due to apparently insufficient technical solutions / IT protection of the online platforms; leading to multiple slots bookings by same applicants or their intermediaries / agents, and a consecutive lack of available appointments / slots and relatively high rate of no-shows. The problems have been causing general delay in the Schengen visa application processes, and occasionally led to a negative publicity in the local media, esp. ahead of peak travel season(s).

In 2022, EU DEL conveyed formal notifications to relevant UAE authorities, and updated MSs' Embassies and CGs on the new border Exit/Entry System and the launch of ETIAS (2023); a coordinated communication campaign will take place towards mid-2023, incl. via local airlines.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

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

Besides demanding, but successful post-pandemic resumption of full operability of MSs' visa sections; a facilitation of visa process in form of a local agreement on *cascade system* was considered again, but then put on hold due to visa liberalisation process with Kuwait and Qatar.

2. Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2023).

LSC group shall pay attention to functionality of visa appointments IT systems and streamlining of the visa process in general, avoiding negative publicity; and to documents' fraud prevention.

5. Other issues

N/A

All represented Schengen MSs' Embassies were informed about this report and approved it.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in UNITED KINGDOM 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Throughout 2022, 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 external service providers (ESPs), including VFS Global, TLS, etc., 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 continue to be extended to the Member States career Consulates outside London, via WebEx, allowing for sustained hybrid collaboration and information sharing.

The elimination/ further relaxation of travel constraints in 2022 has seen the demand for visa applications in the UK soar across Schengen MS compared to the previous two years (2020 & 2021). The total figure for 2022 of 258,842 visa applications is 4 times higher than the number of applications received in 2021 (when travel restrictions/ bans were lowered only in the second half of year); it also exceeds pre-pandemic levels by over 19,000 applications. The refusal rate decreased overall from 4.7% in 2021 to 3.9% in 2022, closer in line with pre-pandemic rates. There has also been another slight increase in MEVs issues, at a rate of 83.1%, up by 2% since 2021.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Under EU DEL's coordination, the LSC group met four times in 2022 (once per quarter). EUDEL continued to benefit from support from DG HOME in the form of VTC updates to the group.

During 2022, only the first quarterly meeting was held entirely in a VTC setting due to longer-lasting COVID-19 restrictions for in-person gatherings. Starting the second quarter of 2022, the LSC group met in a hybrid format (with attendees based in London encouraged to attend in-person) so as to allow remote access from Schengen MS based in territory.

The meetings continued to be chaired by EUDEL and were well attended, with an average of 20+ Schengen MS per meeting – there is no notable changes or patterns in attendance rates 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, by enabling the aforementioned hybrid participation. To support representation and information sharing, regular updates to the correspondence list are ensured at EUDEL level, whilst meeting summaries, consultations and guidance materials are distributed to the group as necessary. EUDEL further supports the LSC network by compiling draft reports that are submitted for comments to the group.

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. As in the previous year, there continued to be questions raised on specific implementation issues, such as travel insurance policies issued outside the UK for non-UK applicants as well as medical insurance documentation practices for UK nationals requesting long-term visas. Other specific issues raised by members in the first half of the year have been in relation to documentation necessary for a child's visa application and whether notarised consent forms from those holding parental authority is necessary.

During the last meeting of the year, Schengen MS have also sought clarifications on the use of digital biometric residence permits (BRPs) given the fact that the UK's new immigration system is moving towards an all-digital system.

The application of the Visa Code and implementation of the harmonised list, as adopted by COM on 6th September 2021 continues to be monitored via the LSC meetings and Schengen MS are encouraged to share their experiences or seek clarifications from the group. EUDEL takes careful note on specific issues and as possible offers clarifications w/ the assistance of DG HOME.

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

The LSC group meetings have unfolded in 2022 completely post-adoption of the harmonised list of documents, EUDEL monitoring beyond the transitional period any specific issues for applications originating in the UK.

The first half of 2022 saw MS exchange w/ DG HOME on the acceptance of European Health Insurance Card/ EHIC or Global Health Insurance Card/ GHIC issued by the UK as valid for Schengen visas, in the context of UK not recognising these documents as travel insurance equivalents.

The LSC group further raised the matter of travel insurance in the context of revisiting the harmonised list, but solely if only the topic of insurance documentation can be discussed, not the entire list.

The group also discussed whether it is necessary for a child's visa application to be accompanied by a notarised consent form from the persons exercising parental authority; DG HOME offered valuable clarifications on this matter, reminding the group that passports of the people exercising parental authority and proof of consent when applying for the visa are acceptable, unless the visa officer has doubts regarding authenticity of form signatures.

As noted above, the issue of accepting UK's digital-only immigration status going forward also generated concerns among MS, especially on whether ESPs can/ should verify the digital documentation as is the case w/ physical documents.

The LSC also exchanged on documentation acceptable under the harmonised list for visa applications from non-UK students at/ approaching the end of their studies in the UK as well as visa applications from refugee passport holders or UA passport holders with travel documents' validity extended manually.

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')

EUDEL has reiterated to the LSC group the benefits of issuing MEVs 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.

The figures for 2022 compared to 2021 continued to reflect an overall increase in MEV issuance rates and a decrease in refusal decisions at the local level. However, there has been some variation at the individual Schengen MS level in the proportion of MEVs issued, as compared to 2021.

The most common limitation regarding issuance of MEVs to applicants from the UK remains the validity of the British resident permit (BRP) which impedes issuance of 1-3 years visas as well as passports validity or the immigration history of an applicant in the UK.

The resumption of regular travel and lifting of remaining travel bans across the Schengen Area has led to seasonally popular destinations to be disproportionately affected by soaring figures, at a time where back office capacity has yet to recover, and has encouraged visa shopping practices. This issue has contributed to the lower MEVs issued at an individual MS level.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In its coordinating position, EUDEL actively encourages updates across LSC members on travelling trends, visa shopping counter-actions, ESP performance indicators etc, that can help mitigate common concerns and booking shortages.

Due to the unprecedented increase in Schengen applications compared even to pre-pandemic levels, EUDEL also seeks to facilitate discussion between Schengen MS aimed at finding practical solutions to capacity-related challenges.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States continued to exchange information on various operational subjects. In 2022, the focus was on resumption of pre-pandemic-level visa operations and the implications of the war in UA for UA refugee applicants and for RU applicants who are permanent residents in the UK. Additionally information was required to understand emerging trends following UK's withdrawal from the EU, such as increasing necessity for EU family member visas and transit visas.

EU DEL continued to ensure, with DG HOME support, that the group was provided with regular updates and relevant information from the Visa Working Party and other EU-level fora.

Within the LSC, there 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. The LSC continued to ensure data collections throughout Q1-4 through a yearly rotation by a MS so as to ensure a fair burden sharing of tasks. Data for 2022 has been speedily collected and readily available ahead of schedule so as to be reviewed in the context of the present report.

In terms of noticeable trends, there is a noted overall resumption of pre-pandemic levels of travel and demand, with applications received being 4x higher than in 2021, despite visa services being impacted by suspension of the visa facilitation agreement with RU, in the context of the illegal war of aggression in UA.

Although there have not been reported cases of visa fraud in the LSC format, the recurring challenge throughout the year has been the increasing numbers of visa shopping applicants. Many Schengen MS reported spotting repeat applications, fake bank statements or even complete applications packages selling fake itineraries and transport/ accommodation bookings.

As noted above, travel medical insurance (TMI) remains a point of discussion, especially as more and more UK nationals start to request long-term visas or non-UK residents present GHIC/ EHIC as equivalents for TMI. 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.

The resumption of pre-pandemic levels of visa demand has put a strain on ESPs who have reduced capacity during the 2020-2022 period, a majority of Schengen MS notifying backlogs and long applications collection times. Given the fact that various MS utilise common ESPs, it was proposed in the LSC context to collaborate and initiate joint discussions with their contractors so as to mitigate capacity issues.

With regards to exchange information containing personal data, EUDEL reminded the group to use the VISMail system when exchanging details about visa applications/ applicants. No issues were however reported in 2022 regarding functionality of the system.

4. Challenges in 2023

Describe the response to challenges, if any.

The war of aggression against UA has triggered implications for RU nationals, with a few MS taking a stricter approach or applying de facto suspensions to issuing visas to RU nationals who are permanent residents in the UK. This challenge was carefully discussed during the LSC meetings, EUDEL offering guidance though DG HOME to LSC members and emphasizing legal obligations, especially in the context of EU family member applications, humanitarian reasons etc.

Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2023).

Based on the continued exchanges w/ Schengen MS, the most common topic of concern remains the shortages of visa processing capacity exacerbated by the ‘visa shopping’ phenomenon (applicants who apply for a visa to consulate A when they in reality wish to spend most of their Schengen stay in State B). In this context, many MS have reported spotting of fake itinerary documents and last-minute cancellations of bookings from applicants who are unable to obtain a speedy visa from their primary country of destination. For many Schengen states, the current waiting times are up to 2 months for booking an appointment slot, ESP and visa offices lacking capacity to accommodate further collections. From discussions with the group, it has become apparent that the largest external service providers such as VFS and TLS lack capacity to cope with the number of appointment applications coming from within the UK.

Beyond the return of pre-pandemic visa application levels and visa shopping practices, the LSC is concerned about the implications of the cessation of freedom of movement for UK nationals requesting long-stay visas and for non-UK family members of EU nationals. Consolidated data on the increased demand for airport transit visas, for visas for family members of EU nationals travel, and on long stay visa figures for UK nationals, etc, would be useful.

Final Note: This content of this report has been consulted with Member States locally before being finalised.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

9 March 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

All EU Member States (MS) are present in Washington, D.C., as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (Schengen Associated Countries - SAC). Since U.S. citizens do not need visas for short stays in the Schengen area, the issuance of Schengen visas is generally limited to third-country nationals legally staying in the US.

For the purpose of LSC in Washington D.C., Denmark, Estonia and Finland are represented by their consular posts in other locations in the US (e.g. New York City, San Francisco). Liechtenstein is represented by Switzerland for LSC purposes. Some consulates (e.g. Luxembourg) issue visas for third-country nationals residing outside the U.S. due to non-representation in certain countries. Some consulates centralise the issuance of visas outside of Washington D.C. (e.g. Lithuania issues all Schengen visas in Chicago). Consulates of some Member States represent other Member States for visa issuance purposes (e.g. Lithuanian General Consulate in Chicago issues Schengen visas for Switzerland, Consulate General of Austria in Los Angeles issues Schengen visas for Slovakia for applicants residing in some U.S. states).

So far, Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (with exception of the German Consulate General in Atlanta), Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden are using external service providers in the U.S.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

While in 2021 the focus was on non-essential travel restrictions, operation of visa services under these specific circumstances and problems related to travel restrictions imposed by the U.S., 2022 was characterised by a speedy recovery from the pandemic with consulates progressively returning back to normal and the number of visa applications mostly returning to pre-pandemic levels.

The frequency of LSC meetings returned back to pre-pandemic level. Two meetings were held in 2022, in July (remotely) and December (hybrid format)¹⁸. These meetings were very well attended. The EU Delegation chaired the meetings and drew up the reports in consultation with the LSC group.

There is no systematic coordination of the Schengen cooperation outside of Washington D.C. but a new practice was put in place during the pandemic with remote participation of Member States' representatives from other U.S. locations (New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles and San Francisco). As this proved very popular among Member States, this practice continued in 2022.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

An increased post-pandemic demand for travel to the EU/Schengen area, especially during the summer season, affected the workload of MS consulates in the U.S. The volume of visa applications increased considerably in 2022, reaching pre-pandemic levels for most MS with some MS reporting a very high workload and difficulties with visa appointments around the summer season. In this respect, the waiting times for visa appointments at MS consulates were as long as two to four weeks during some periods. Subsequently, visa shopping was a major problem and refusal rates doubled. Determining the main destination for the purpose of the visa applications was an issue discussed and coordinated among MS. Problems with supporting documents (e.g. forged reservations, flight tickets, last-minute flight bookings to create an urgency) were also reported by MS around the summer season. The majority of MS that are using an external service provider for visa processing described recurrent operational and technical difficulties with the main service provider. A lack of staff and training and a high turnover were the main reasons cited, as well as time necessary for the provider to increase its capacity to pre-pandemic levels.

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

MS consider that harmonisation of practices is acquired. LSC Washington D.C. observed problems related to supporting documents in relation to the specific situation linked to the summer season (see point 3.1).

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 matter has not been discussed during the reporting period.

¹⁸ Compared to five meetings in 2020 and five in 2021 due to a need for increased coordination during the pandemic.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

See point 3.1.

3.5 Exchange of information

The compilation of visa statistics resumed in 2022.

Instances of visa shopping and related problems in terms of supporting documents were observed during a limited period in 2022 (summer season). LSC allowed for an effective exchange of views on these matters and coordination among MS.

LSC Washington D.C. took regular note of new contracts with external service providers (ESP) and exchanged on cooperation with ESP (see point 3.1).

LSC Washington D.C. facilitated the exchange of information and updates about the national requirements in place in the first half of 2022 with respect to travel to MS/SACs territories (vaccination, testing). Information was also shared about measures taken by the U.S. (vaccination and testing requirements, restrictions related to issuance of certain categories of visas, etc.).

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

See point 3.

5. Other issues

In 2022, LSC Washington D.C. noted problems raised by the MS in relation to the backlogs at U.S. Consulates in Europe and subsequent long waiting times encountered by their citizens for visa appointments (up to 9 months in some locations) and/or visa processing (from several weeks to several months in case of “administrative processing”). These matters were regularly raised by both MS and EU representatives in their contacts with the administration. The U.S. reiterated that it remains a priority for the administration to address this issue via increased consulate staffing, prioritisation of certain categories of travellers, interview waivers for a number of visa applicants and expedited appointments for humanitarian reasons.

Following the resumption of international travel, LSC Washington D.C. exchanged about the lack of information regarding the rules under U.S. law for citizens of Visa Waiver Programme countries who have travelled to countries designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST)¹⁹. If a traveller is found to have visited a country designated as SST, the traveller is no longer eligible to participate in the Visa Waiver Program and must apply for a visa to enter the United States. This applies to Cuba, designated as an SST on 12 January 2021, as well as Iran, North Korea and Syria.

¹⁹ Pursuant to section 1754 (c) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act, and section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

28 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in UZBEKISTAN 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

Eleven Member States are present in Tashkent, 10 of them have consular officials and issue Schengen and national visas. 10 are represented from Moscow, four are represented from Astana, and two Member States are represented from their respective capitals Helsinki and Stockholm. Spain has Charge d’Affaires a.i. in Tashkent, but consular officials are operating from Moscow. In terms of Schengen visa issuance, 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, Poland represents Spain.

2. LSC meetings held in 2022

Three LSC meetings were held in 2022 in January, April and December. The meetings were well attended, about 2/3 of MS present in Tashkent usually attended the meetings, in addition Switzerland also once attended LSC meeting. Meetings were chaired by the Head of Political, Press and Information section of the EU Delegation. No ad hoc meetings held in 2022. 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 2022 EU MS represented in Uzbekistan were already almost back to the regular process of Schengen visa issuance, although real resumption differed on a country basis depending on the pandemics related containment in a EU MS concerned. At the beginning of the year some countries were still facing COVID 19 related travel restrictions. Some representation agreements were put on hold. MS did not coordinate their response to COVID 19 pandemic in terms of Schengen visa issuance operations. At the beginning of the year most visas issued in Tashkent were still national visas for work or study. However, in the aftermath of COVID 19 pandemic numbers in all categories of visas have significantly increased, even in comparison with 2019. In the case of some EU MS Embassies the increase of Schengen visas in 2022 compared to 2019 was 31 %, and the demand is on the rise in 2023.

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 are ready and do 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.

There is a high amount of applicants supported by the authorities who apply at the last moment without due respect to procedures and the timing necessary for the processing of visa applications. This sometimes put heavy burden for consular officials. The other issue is attempts to obtain Schengen visa not for a travel to the Schengen zone, but to use it for getting access to Mexico and finally to the US. During LSC meetings MS exchanges information about instances of fake passports, Schengen and other visas, fake PCR tests and work documents.

LSC also exchanged views on the functioning of the visa centres as well as management of visa fees in the light of the decisions by the Central Bank of Uzbekistan.

3.3 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 as of 4.96.2014 C (2014) 6141 on the list of documents to be presented in Uzbekistan 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 three times 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. However, in January 2022 the LSC proposed to amend the lists so that to require bank statements covering the period of the last six months instead of three months. DG HOME advised that Visa Committee was not in favour of this extension in its recent decision. LSC agreed that it was not the right moment to launch formal procedures for the adoption of a revised list by the Commission Implementing Decision. At the initiative of one MS the issue was again discussed at the December LSC meeting, and it was decided that the revision was not needed at this stage.

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).

LSC discussed the issuance of MEV twice. LSC was in favour of the application of the provisions of the Visa Code for the issuance of multiple entry visas. It was noted that it might be difficult to agree to which direction to go ahead with the “cascade” rules: softening or toughening, therefore it would be wise to keep it as it is. However, there were questions from some MS regarding the counting of the two year pandemic period for the issuance of multiple entry visas. Some MS were in favour of multiple entry visas so that applicants appear less frequently, especially in Covid times. However, it was mentioned that for the issuance of a multiple entry visa a traveller was supposed to be in the possession of not only three single entry visas, but had evidence of having used them lawfully.

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 one MS 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 2022 report*
- 2. Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2023).*

LSC did not face any particular challenges. 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 associates.

Besides general exchange on practice, LSC will further discuss cases of fraud which are specific in the country of residence as well as Schengen visa issuance for cruise line participants, aspects of interaction with some tourism agencies and instances of misuse of Schengen visas. LSC also decided to intensify interaction with the US Embassy on the misuse of Schengen visas.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO VIETNAM

21 February 2023

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in HANOI, VIETNAM 2022 REPORT

1. Introduction

18 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 2022

- In 2022, Local Schengen Group activities resumed. EUDEL held 5 scheduled meetings, while two extra-ordinary meetings were organised in coordination with EUMS over the summer and autumn following the issuing of the new Vietnamese passport.
- The process of updating the crisis preparedness framework was launched (and finished at beginning of 2023).
- DE Embassy appointed two new Border Officers who updated the group regularly about the state of play of human trafficking and illegal migration between VN and EU, the use of fake documents for visa application and how to detect them etc.
- All meetings have been very well attended and the level of coordination is generally excellent (exchange of information, sharing experience about VFS, joint outreach to VN authorities etc).
- The LSC meetings were chaired by EUDEL in 2022. Reporting has been done by EUDEL.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is strictly applied.

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 2022. 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.

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. This issue could be discussed in HQ as it could also be a global issue.

3.5 Exchange of information

Fraudulent or suspicious agencies requesting visa for large groups of applicants were reported by the group. The issue of fake documents (birth certificate, passport etc) was raised by the two DE border officers.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The group made a special effort of coordination during the launching of the new Vietnamese "Blue passport", (VN issued a new passport that was not recognised by several MS due to some information on place of birth missing on the document) with regular exchanges, explanation of the consequences of the non-recognition of the document and coordination for issuing visas with limited territorial validity.

4. Challenges

N/A

5. Other issues

	Visa C submitted	Visa C refused	Visa D submitted	Visa D refused
AT	1090	141	156	N/A
BE	1417	61	312	14
BG	112	1	79	6
CZ	1550	240	1867	21
DE	15 392	1 711	7 350	589
DK ²⁰	N/A	N/A	754	28
FI	822	137	*Residence permits 1993 (D-visas 2)	N/A
FR	41139	3697	3039	524
EL	806	28	9	0
HU	1130	98	N/A	N/A
IT	5654	114	554	11
NL	2590	242	760	0
NO	1342	243	910	N/A
PL	508	15	1989	223
RO	203	10	2093	380
SK	87	2	725	86
ES	2681	50	80	30
SE	1690	196	19	0
CH	4 634	207	337	N/A

This report has been compiled from the information provided by EU Member States in Hanoi

²⁰ Denmark figures includes also [Iceland and Faroe Islands](#)