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Subject:	Local Schengen cooperation between Member States' consulates (Article 48(7) of the Visa Code) - Compilation of 2024 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 – 2024**

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LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ALBANIA
2024 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 a General Consulate in Vlora.

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

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

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Even though there were no significant developments or specific concerns in terms of issuing Schengen visas in Albania, the EU Delegation organised and chaired four hybrid meeting of the Local Schengen Cooperation: on 15 February, 6 June, 25 September, 17 December, which were well attended. All except one were organised back-to-back with the Local Consular Cooperation meeting. The agendas were prepared by the EU Delegation with input from Member States.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

On 3 December 2021, The Commission 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 since December 2021.

3.2 Exchange of information

LSC continues to provide a useful platform for Member States to exchange experience on their consular functions in Albania on statistics, trends, and cases of frauds, and exchange information on the functioning of the Schengen system.

Based on the information received from Member States, out of 1 189 uniform visa applications lodged, 1 075 have been issued (including MEV). Approval rate stood at 90%, similar to the previous year (88%). A number of Member States had a larger number of inquiries than the actual applications. In most of these cases the inquiries were from people who did not have a residence permit in Albania and their application would therefore be inadmissible.

The EU Delegation shared with Member States the updated Visa Code Handbook in all language versions. The Delegation also shared the information of the new rules regarding the digitalisation of visa procedures and the increase of the visa fee as published in the EU Official Journal of 22 May 2024.

3.3 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Since no major changes of trends or other particular issues were signalled in 2024, the exchanges largely focused on less LSC specific, but still related topics of migration flows, asylum applications by the Albanian citizens, 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 the lack of Albania's alignment with the EU's list of visa-free and visa exempt countries, which remains a matter of concern.

The LSC was tasked with contributing information to update of the list of travel documents issued by Albania for border authorities responsible for determining whether or not someone may cross the external borders. The exercise was led by the EU delegation and the updated list was submitted to the Commission (DG HOME) on 11 October 2024.

4. Challenges

Challenges set out in the European Commission's annual visa suspension mechanism report will continue to be addressed by the LSC, in particular the lack of visa policy alignment which raises potential risks in terms of irregular migration and security.

Detailed sharing of information and awareness raising will need to accompany the entry into force of EES and ETIAS.

The issue of the seemingly abusive requests by the Albanian nationals to access their personal data stored in the Schengen Information System (SIS), which was raised in previous years, was not brought to the attention of the LSC in 2024, even though the practice continues in some Member States.



**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) en ALGERIE**
RAPPORT 2024

1. Introduction

Vingt-deux (22) États Membres¹ sont présents en Algérie (AT, BE, BG, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI). En dehors de la capitale Alger, FR et ES disposent de consulats à Oran, et FR à Annaba. Pour la délivrance des visas, AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, HU, NO et PL représentent, respectivement SI, LU, SK, LT, EE, LV, IS et SE. BG et RO, déjà présents en Algérie, ont rejoint la zone Schengen en 2024 ; SI a ouvert une ambassade dans le courant de l'année. Les deux États Membres de l'UE qui ne font pas partie de la zone Schengen, IE et CY, ne sont pas présents en Algérie.

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

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

En 2024, dix réunions LSC ont eu lieu. La participation des États Membres est généralement élevée : la majorité des États Membres prennent part aux réunions de façon régulière. La Délégation de l'UE préside les réunions et rédige les rapports, qui sont ensuite partagés avec les États Membres. Les équipes des consulats en dehors d'Alger reçoivent par courriel les informations relatives aux activités du groupe LSC.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

En 2024, les États 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. 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 : la fraude documentaire ; le rôle des

¹ États Membres = pays Schengen

intermédiaires sur le système de prise de rendez-vous et les stratégies mises en place par les États Membres pour minimiser leur impact ; le phénomène du « visa shopping ».

Les consulats des États Membres sont très souvent confrontés à des demandeurs qui soumettent leur dossier auprès de services consulaires d'un État 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 État Membre.

Des intermédiaires (agences de voyage, cybercafés, 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 ensuite aux demandeurs les rendez-vous, et proposent souvent d'autres « services » qui incluent la constitution de dossiers de visa et parfois la fabrication de documents falsifiés. Tout cela impacte négativement les opérations, en rendant indisponibles les rendez-vous en ligne et contribuant à la mauvaise qualité des dossiers. Les États Membres et leurs prestataires travaillent pour s'attaquer à ce phénomène ; certains d'entre eux ont modifié leurs systèmes de prise de rendez-vous pour empêcher l'intervention d'intermédiaires, par exemple en minimisant la possibilité de choisir un créneau de rendez-vous, ou en introduisant des outils de reconnaissance faciale qui permettent de vérifier l'identité du demandeur au moment de l'enregistrement en ligne et du rendez-vous même.

Les États 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 2024, les États Membres ont continué à assurer l'application de la 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 États 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 États 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 Échange d'informations

En ce qui concerne les statistiques trimestrielles, à la fin de chaque trimestre, la Délégation de l'UE demande aux États Membres de fournir leurs statistiques. La Délégation consolide les statistiques sur la base du format partagé par le siège. Les statistiques et les tendances sont discutées lors des réunions du groupe.

En 2024, les services consulaires des États Membres ont traité ca. 546 200 demandes de visa Schengen, et délivré ca. 341 000 visas Schengen. Le volume des demandes traitées et des visas délivrés a augmenté par rapport à 2023 (+15% de demandes traitées et +14 % de visas délivrés) et 2022 (+40% de demandes traitées et + 78% de visas délivrés).

Lors des réunions, les principaux sujets abordés incluent : les échanges sur les statistiques, les modalités de prise de rendez-vous, le phénomène du « visa shopping », les taux de refus, et la lutte contre la fraude documentaire. Ce dernier sujet fait depuis plusieurs années l'objet d'un effort particulier dans le groupe.

L'échange d'informations permet aux États Membres de répondre de façon plus efficace aux problèmes récurrents et communs. Grâce aux échanges au sein de réunions LSC, les participants peuvent se renseigner sur les mesures prises par d'autres services consulaires pour 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 comment coopérer avec des entités locales susceptibles d'aider à détecter les faux documents (banques, sécurité sociale, etc.).

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

En avril 2024, la Délégation de l'UE a organisé avec et experts Frontex une séance de formation sur la fraude documentaire, à laquelle ont participé 42 fonctionnaires et agents locaux des consulats des États Membres. La formation était ouverte aux pays affinitaires : 4 représentants des autorités britanniques et canadiennes ont également participé.

La Délégation de l'UE a également préparé une campagne de communication sur les opérations de visas et la fraude qui sera lancée en 2025.

4. Défis

Plusieurs États Membres ont continué, en 2024, 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 2025.

La coopération et l'échange d'informations, au sein du groupe LSC et de façon bilatérale entre les États Membres concernés, restera un outil essentiel pour faire face à ces défis et pour mitiger, dans la mesure du possible, leurs conséquences.

5. Divers

Rien à signaler.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO ARMENIA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Armenia
2024 REPORT²

1. Introduction

15 MS have resident embassies/ official (non-honorary) representations in Armenia; 8 out of them – Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia - issue Schengen visas on the spot.

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

France represents Iceland, Norway, and Portugal;

Germany represents Belgium, Luxembourg, and Sweden;

Italy represents Finland and Malta;

Lithuania represents Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Netherlands and Spain;

Poland represents Slovenia, 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, EL, AT) and TLS Contact (IT, FR – starting March 2025).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Three LSC meetings took place in the reporting period, i.e. on 23 April, 30 September and 2 December. All three meetings were organized and chaired by the EU Delegation. The attendance rate was high. Resident embassies with active consul sections were represented at all three meetings, occasionally also joined by non-resident in Armenia (AT, HU). Reports were drafted by EUD and shared with participants. Signal list was set up as an additional channel of communication.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and EUD were generally prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code.

² The report was approved by MS locally present

The main challenges concerned a long waiting time for appointments in some consulates, due to a high demand for visas, shortages in consular staff and usage of bots by the agencies to block slots for appointment. Both the EUD and some MS raised issues with the conduct of agencies offering support to AM citizens seeking EU visas (e.g. immediately booking online and selling the appointment slots), a practice, which may occasionally be linked with fraud or false promises. This alleged misuse was subsequently raised with Armenian MFA.

Statistics provided by MS to HQ revealed discrepancies between MS consulates in the share of multiple entry visas issued by consulates, which possibly encouraged visa shopping.

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

MS has not signalled a need to 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')

MS has not signalled a need to adapt the rules on the issuing of the multiple-entry visas set out in Article 24(2) of the Visa Code to take account of local circumstances, and of migratory and security risks, in view of the adoption of more favourable or more restrictive rules.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

EUD and some MS took initiative to consider the need for harmonisation of practices with regard to Armenian 070 code series passports which have been issued by Armenia as travel documents for former residents of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). It was found in local Schengen coordination that there is no consistent practice among MS on recognition of such documents for the purpose of issuing visas. While some MS continued to recognize such documents, others started to refuse to do so, or do recognize them but do not apply rules under visa facilitation regime. Some MS flagged an interest in harmonisation of the practices. As a follow-up, the matter was discussed in the HoMs meetings, and subsequently by the Travel Document Committee (TDC) in Brussels on 2 October 2024 which has not come to an agreement on harmonising practices on 070 passports.

3.5 Exchange of information

MS exchanged information on the number of issues, in particular:

- quality of supporting documentation (eg fake work letters)
- cases of fraudulent declarations of travel destination in the Schengen area (indicating the MS of landing, rather than the actual final destination)
- operation of travel agencies offering services in visa application processes
- instances of supporting certificates which require extra checks, as some ministries tend to issue their high number without verifying whether the applicant actually plans to visit the EU on official grounds.

The participants have also exchanged mutual advice on good practices of multiple applications for visas, and agreed that a previous refusal record may not be, by itself, a sufficient ground to refuse visa upon subsequent applications, especially where it was based on unintentional technical shortcomings in applications.

MS also discussed an issue flagged by AM citizens, regarding changes or cancellations of hotel bookings which resulted in revoking their visas, arguably without sufficient grounds, as the visa

holder was not contacted. In this context, EUD recalled that the EU Visa Code provides for limited grounds of visa revocations. In line with the [Visa Code Handbook](#), circumstantial evidence such as cancelled hotel or airline reservations, on its own, is not sufficiently reliable evidence to revoke the visa. In such cases, consulates should consider contacting the visa holder for an explanation of the change in travel plans before deciding whether a revocation is warranted. MS confirmed that this is done on a regular basis.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

Considering the increased number of visa applicants and limited capacities of visa sections at the respective embassies, a long waiting time for visa appointments remains the most challenging issue.

In response to these challenges, several MS have re-organised the work of their consulates to streamline access of certain categories of applicants (business, Erasmus students, official invitations), for example by dedicating a flexible number of timeslots, or separate email addresses for such categories, and/or putting up a lottery system to avoid abuse in selling appointment slots by local travel agencies. Some MS are also preparing to increase their visa section staff capacity.

5. Other issues

EUD and MS discussed the launch of visa liberalisation dialogue by the Commission Vice-President on 9 September 2024, and next operational steps planned.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Australia
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 24 Schengen countries represented in Australia (AT, BE, CZ, HR, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, LI, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SK, SI, ES, SE, NO 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, 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 2024

The LSC Group met twice during 2024, once during each Presidency. The attendance of the LSC meetings for the period under consideration was high. Participation of LSC in locations outside of the capitals was ensured by the organisation of hybrid meetings. 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. Colleagues from BE and HU have been collecting Schengen Visa Statistics.

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 regarding the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants of short stay visas in Australia (as per Commission Decision C (2017) 5853).

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

No other initiatives taken to ensure harmonisation of practices.

3.5 Exchange of information

Since 2018, the rotating Consular Presidency has been collecting the visa statistics using the updated template provided by HQ. BE collected the statistics during the first six months of 2024 and HU 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. EUDEL shares information with Schengen countries on a regular basis.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other initiatives taken.

4. Challenges

No particular challenges presented themselves during 2024.

5. Other issues

During the LSC meeting in 2024, a recurrent concern for MS involved the timeline and communication of the future ETIAS system.

No other issues at present.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO AZERBAIJAN

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in AZERBAIJAN
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are **20 EU Member States' diplomatic missions**, accredited to Azerbaijan³. Among non-EU Schengen countries, **Switzerland** has a diplomatic mission in Baku.

Fifteen Schengen countries issue visas in Azerbaijan: **Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia** as well as **Switzerland**.

Twelve Schengen countries are represented in visa matters by other Schengen countries: **Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden** are represented by **France**; **Estonia and Slovenia** are represented by **Latvia**; **Finland** is represented by **Lithuania**; **Malta** is represented by **Italy**. The Norwegian Embassy in Ankara represents **Denmark** and **Iceland**.

The majority of LSC members use **external service providers**. In 2024, Hungary and Slovakia joined other Member States in availing of Visametric, whereas Austria did the same with VFS. By the same token, Bulgaria signed a contract with VFS Global, which entered into force at the end of 2024. Member States have proposed drawing up a list of these service providers, for ease of reference.

The reporting period covers the tenth year of the implementation of the **EU-Azerbaijan Visa Facilitation Agreement** (signed on 29 November 2013 and entered into force on 1 September 2014). Azerbaijan is **one of the thirteen** countries in the world that has an effective Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA) with the EU.

Statistical data shows that **Azerbaijani citizens** have largely benefitted from the provisions of the Agreement.

Cross-border mobility of EU citizens across Azerbaijan's land (and maritime) borders continued to be limited in 2024 due to their persistent closure since March 2020, under a special regime that is extended every four months without any indication as to its end.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

LSC meetings were held **four times** at **EU Delegation's premises** (January, June, September, December) and were chaired by the Delegation's political officer / consular correspondent. The

³ Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Slovenia have their diplomatic representations accredited outside of Azerbaijan.

meetings were well attended. Non-LSC EU Member States were invited to, and sometimes participated in, these meetings as **observers**, upon common agreement of the LSC members.

Local LSC group regularly exchanged non-sensitive information via a dedicated **whatsapp group**.

Visa-related statistics were compiled by the French and German Embassies until September 2024. A new system based on a protected shared document, in which each diplomatic mission can insert relevant data autonomously, is in the process of being streamlined.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code has been applied by the relevant Embassies in Azerbaijan.

It has proven difficult, for certain diplomatic missions, to provide applicants with appointments within the requisite two week-deadline throughout the year, as provided by the Visa Code.

Certain LSC countries less affected by this issue have related that, as a consequence, they have faced an increase number of applications ('visa shopping'). Since many such applications tend not to be in conformity with the Visa Code, this has led to a higher refusal rate than in the past, for these countries.

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

All LSC countries represented in Azerbaijan have included on their websites information regarding the list of supporting documents to be submitted by prospective visa applicants.

A few LSC countries floated the idea of a possible update and revision of the harmonised list of documents in the near future.

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 topic was regularly discussed at the LSC meetings, with all Schengen countries reporting that they have duly implemented the „MEV cascade rule“ in accordance with Article 24(2) of the Visa Code. Several Embassies pointed out that misuse of visas by the visa holders have been recorded in a number of cases, which led to shorter visa validity, or the denial of a multiple-entry visa, in subsequent applications.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The LSC discussed and implemented harmonised practices regarding among other things:

- 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)
- a coordinated response to visa-shopping issues
- the increased number of 'high-quality' fraudulent applications and forged documents
- the introduction of electronic certificates within the harmonised list of documents
- the appointment system, the problem of "no-shows" and counter-measures (including the introduction of pre-payment).

3.5 Exchange of information

LSC countries shared information on visa statistics, visa trends and visa processing at all meetings.

Visa handling capacity has increased but certain critical issues remain, notably the difficulty in complying with the deadlines as regards the granting of a visa appointment.

LSC countries regularly exchanged information regarding cases of fraud in visa applications.

LSC countries reported that VISMail and Visa Information System were not user friendly. As regards cooperation with external service providers, LSC countries regularly exchanged relevant information on their experience.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

IOM Baku held a presentation at the LSC meeting of January 2024.

4. Challenges

LSC member states will continue to exchange information and adjust their respective visa handling capacities, in line with their commitments under the EU-Azerbaijan Visa Facilitation Agreement.

LSC members will continue to exchange information regarding any issues with visa appointments, in particular “no-shows”, parallel/multiple visa applications, and high visa refusal rates.

5. Other issues

After the 7th joint EU-Azerbaijan Joint Visa Facilitation Committee was successfully held on 23 November 2023 in Baku, no further meetings were held in 2024.

The latest EU-Azerbaijan Joint Readmission Committee took place in Baku in July 2024.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO BANGLADESH

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BANGLADESH
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

10 Member States (CH, DE, DK, FR, ES, HU, IT, NL, NO, SE) are present and 18 are represented in Dhaka (AT, BE, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, ISL, LI, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SK, SL).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The EU Delegation (Head of Administration and Political Officer) chairs the LSC meetings and draws up the reports.

Meetings are scheduled on a bi-monthly basis, with the possibility of additional ad hoc meetings if an urgent need arises. Due to the civil unrest in Bangladesh in the summer of 2024, only four LSC meetings were held in 2024 (January, March, September, December).

Meetings are generally well attended. The meetings were held physically at the EU Delegation and a number of Member States representations, with the hybrid option of attending via WebEx if requested. In particular, EU member States represented in New Delhi but not in Dhaka were invited several times to attend LSC meetings virtually. DG Home also joined several meetings virtually.

MS confirmed their wish to continue holding meetings 4-5 times a year. As there are additional exchanges via WhatsApp /Signal groups, and email in between meetings a more frequent LSC meeting schedule is not necessary. Furthermore, many participants also meet in other formats (Admin, Consular, DHoM, Security).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and EUD are well prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code and no specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code focusing on the revised rules applicable since February 2020 have been reported.

Some MS have reported challenges to respect the deadlines set by the Visa Code for the different steps of the lodging and examination procedure due to an increasing case load and the frequent use of false documents in visa applications. Several MS have reported a high rate of no-shows for visa appointments, possibly due to the unscrupulous behaviour of certain brokers.

Some MS not present or represented in Dhaka reported challenges linked to the fact that the Indian High Commission in Dhaka temporarily suspended the issuance of visas to Bangladeshi citizens following the change of government in July/August 2024. This resulted in some Bangladeshi citizens

not being able to travel to India to submit visa applications to MS embassies in New Delhi. In addition, some MS reported challenges linked to the closure of VFS services during the political unrest in July/August 2024.

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.

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')

Represented Schengen countries are mostly applying the cascade system as a general rule and recognize that exceptions can be made in specific cases.

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 Article 16(7) of the Visa code. However, the different national systems do not allow for full implementation of Article 16(7). Currently the BDT price for a Schengen visa vary slightly (+/- 5 EUR difference) depending on the MS where the application is lodged.

All representations except CH and FR are using the services of VFS (ES uses BLS) and generally experience a good cooperation with the service providers.

3.5 Exchange of information

MS exchanged the following information during the reporting period:

- quarterly statistics shared by MS via email;
- cases of possible fraud or practical cases or difficulties encountered;
- difficulties encountered as a result of the civil unrest in July/August 2024;
- information provided to applicants about the minimum requirements for the obligatory travel insure, as well as how to deal with medical insurance providers which are not on the list of recommended insurance providers;
- respective positions on Bangladesh's accession to the Apostille Convention.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

MS discussed options to launch a possible joint communication campaign on the use of fraudulent documents in visa applications.

4. Challenges

- Due to a high number of fraudulent or false documents (for Schengen and national visa), verification is considered time consuming and increasingly challenging in light of high-quality counterfeits.

- Visa and Embassy staff in Dhaka experienced occasionally security and safety issues when interacting with applicants.
- Due to the civil unrest in July/August 2024, VFS services were partly closed.

5. Other issues

N/A



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Belarus
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

16 EU Schengen Member States are present in Belarus: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden. From non-EU Schengen MS Switzerland is present as well. Eleven Schengen Member States (MS) deliver visas (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). Two relatively new Schengen MS (BG and RO) present in Belarus started to issue visas of 31 March 2024.

Due to expulsion of the 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 in Minsk with one expat capacity. Estonia, while still keeping the embassy open, operates with no expat staff in Minsk since the summer 2024. The Poland's Consulates in Minsk, Hrodna and Brest operate with significantly limited staff.

As representation is concerned, please note the following:

- EE represented Finland⁴ and Sweden until August 2024⁵;
- 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;
- Latvia temporarily suspended all visa representation since March 2022;
- Slovakia represents Portugal.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

During the reporting period, three LSC meetings were held (13 February, 3 May and 20 September). The meetings were generally well attended by 13-16 MS.

As previously, the 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. No online meetings were held in the reporting period, however, some MS covering from other capitals (Moscow and Warsaw) occasionally showed interest in this format.

⁴ After the date, BY citizens planning to travel to FI could only apply for Schengen visas at the FI Embassy in Moscow, and only in exceptional cases.

⁵ In August 2024, the EE consul departed and a new one has not yet received a visa from the Belarusian authorities (only EE technical staff remains at the embassy). During the second part of 2024, SE managed to have a short-term representation agreement with FR.

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

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States reported no problems in implementation. The Visa Code is being implemented in a well-coordinated manner by the LSC states' consular offices located in Belarus, although the smooth implementation was somehow impacted by the Russian war on Ukraine and staffing limitations imposed by the authorities. Some EUMS were subject to expulsions of their diplomatic and consular staff and can consequently count on limited resources and capacities for issuing visas. Some other MS experience extreme challenges related to a high numbers of applicants, therefore, long waiting times (1.5 – 9 months) are in place.

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

The Commission Implementing Decision as regards the list of supporting documents to be submitted by visa applicants for short stay in Belarus (C(2020) 6149 final) started to be implemented on 21 September 2020. No problems were reported by EUMS in 2024, and there is no need at the moment to amend the existing list.

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

The Group agreed that currently there was no need to adapt general rules locally in Belarus. Article 24 of the Visa Code and Article 5 of the Visa Facilitation Agreement cover most of categories.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Entry into force of the EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement helped to 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.

3.5 Exchange of information

The LSC and EUDEL regularly shared relevant information in accordance with art 48.3 of the Visa Code. EUMS sent statistics to EUDEL on a quarterly basis. The regular exchange of information within the LSC covered implementation of the Visa Information System, use of VIS Mail, cases of fraud and other relevant issues. EUDEL coordinates a dedicated Signal group for urgent exchange of information while MS remain active by sharing information in the chat.

After the war on Ukraine started, a number of MS (EE, LV, LT, PL and CZ) 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. PL later resume the issuance of all types of visas. C type visas can be issued for humanitarian reasons by LT, as well as by the CZ, upon a special permission by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Some EUMS focused on issuing D visas. To satisfy a growing demand of visas and to recall the importance of people-to-people contacts by supporting

mobility, some EUMS like IT and DE considerably augmented the visas issued, for humanitarian, as well as tourism and business purposes.

Other EUMS reported a constantly increased of the number of applicants. There were some cases of visa shopping, however, with EUMS changing an appointment system, these challenges were almost overcome. Several MS discovered cases of time slots being sold. The medium refusal rate has generally increased, reaching approx. 3.7% of the total number of applications (3.4% in 2024).

4. Challenges

The EU-Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA) entered into force on 1 July 2020. However, its implementation remains 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. EUMS did not report on attempts to circumvent this Council decision.

The understaffing of most 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 for LV, LT and PL citizens and extended by Minsk to all EUMS citizens as of 17 July 2024 continued to be in place. Despite warnings by the authorities, people used quite actively this opportunity and some were detained and politically prosecuted. Due to worsening political relationships, EUMS consular staff was unable to provide effective consular support. The consular access remains unpredictable and in several cases it was limited or non-existing

The report was approved by the Member States on 19 February 2025.



EUROPEAN UNION

**OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE IN BOSNIA AND
HERZEGOVINA**

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 2024 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).

Implementation of visa-free regime between EU and BiH further remained normal with no issues registered. After introduction of visa regime with Oman, BiH did not make any further progress in harmonizing its visa policy with the EU/Visa Acquis. Seasonal visa-free regime with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia further remained applied. EU actively advocated adoption processes of legal and strategic frameworks of integrated border management policy but BiH authorities failed to adopt either of them in the reporting period⁶. Efforts invested in negotiations with EU/EC on the Model Status Agreement revealed tangible results passing the BiH CoM for further adoption process with the Presidency and the Parliament. Efforts on the Working Arrangement revealed limited results as the document is with the EU for personal data protection assessment.

On returns and readmission, in 2024 number of both forced and assisted/voluntary return operations increased, whilst readmission operations to Pakistan further remained limited. EU further financed most of the forced returns, whilst the assisted voluntary returns were further supported by IOM. Negotiations with other countries of origin on readmission agreements or other arrangements, notably with Bangladesh, Egypt and Morocco did not reveal tangible results.

On readmission with neighbouring countries, 'shortened' readmission procedures from HR continued in 2024, whilst results of the 'shortened' procedures with SER and MNE remained limited.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

In 2024 the EU House (EU Special Representative's Office and EU Delegation) hosted one well attended LSC meeting, namely on 30 May 2024. Reasons for this were political stalemate/crisis and lack of any significant/concrete results in integrated border management, migration or asylum policies

⁶ Law on Border Control fully passed the adoption process and entered into force in February 2025. New IBM Strategy and Action Plan have not been adopted yet.

to be reported or discussed. 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 distributed to EUMS/SAC and appropriate institutions in MHQ/Brussels. No ad-hoc meetings were organized in 2024.

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.

In the reporting period we can recognize some tangible but limited results that local authorities made with an intensive facilitation of the EU House in visa, integrated border management and migration management policies. Details are provided in the text below.

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.

Effects of the Republic of Croatia's joining the Schengen Zone as of 1 January 2023 further remained stable with no 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

EUMS/SAC did not report any issues related to harmonized list of supporting documents.

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.

Local authorities did not suspend limited (30-days) visa-free regime with Russia in framework of the EU sanctions.

Temporary humanitarian residence for Ukrainian citizens is still in force. Number of asylum applications filed remains rather low compared to the total number of incoming and outgoing Ukrainian citizens.

3.5 Exchange of information

As visa statistics were not received in a consistent manner despite of multiple reiterations appropriate trends analysis for 2024 will be provided afterwards.

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, the EUMS/SAC were informed on EU support to BiH authorities in deployment of 50 biometric sets to BiH diplomatic and consular offices for the future biometric visa application process. With this regard the EUMS/SAC were informed on the Project of Swedish Migration Agency worth EUR 1,2 M that started on 1 May 2024. Participants were also informed on issues related to abuse of visa-free regimes and potential solutions on how to minimize negative effects of illegal migration coming through airports.

In order to fully harmonize visa-free policy with the EU/Visa Acquis, BiH still has to revoke visa-free regimes with Azerbaijan, China, Kuwait, Russia, Saudi Arabia [seasonal], Turkey and Qatar.

DG HOME/DDG Onidi mission

EUMS/SAC were informed on the mission's objectives based on The EU Action Plan on Migration in WB. Most emphasized concern was abuse of visa-free regime that inflicts growing migratory and security consequences in the EUMS/SAC. Primary objective was to encourage full alignment with the EU Acquis, notably to re-introduce visa regimes to the seven remaining countries, notably TR, RU and PRC.

EUMS/SAC were explained a Plan of Actions to be created by HOME/NEAR containing eight steps to minimize negative consequences of abuse of visa-free regime. Most critical countries of origin were declared Turkey and China.

An additional issue was influx of RU citizens with not high statistics, recognized by the EC as a long-standing issue.

EUMS/SAC explained all the steps necessary to decrease recorded numbers, such as Diplomatic outreach to TR, RU and PRC embassies, employment leverage of all three countries being against emigration, a common message for fully the visa-regimes alignment, fight against human trafficking and human smuggling (significantly higher rates). Visa facilitation was also explained as one of preferred alternatives. Security risk analysis and related statistics revealed no problems with most of the Near/Middle East countries.

Integrated Border Management (IBM) policy

The EUMS/SAC were informed on the most recent amendments to the Schengen Borders Code focusing on internal border checks, border surveillance and healthcare emergency situations. This included border surveillance hubs on sea, ground and airport, as well as compensatory measures and random checks.

The healthcare provisions included alignment with healthcare measures taken in EUMS/SAC after COVID-19. This would set uninterrupted transport of food as the priority in economic supply chain mechanisms.

The EUMS/SAC were informed on stagnation in FRONTEX/Status Agreement negotiations at the local level and practical benefits of the agreement once signed. Deployment of FRONTEX Standing Corps with executive powers and Operation Plan were most discussed subjects. FRONTEX under the status of agreement will have a full force status as local police. However, it will have local guidance, and peer-to-peer mode of working.

Participants were also informed on three FRONTEX officers deployed from IT, BG, RO, to Sarajevo International Airport based on the Working Arrangement and their support to the Border Police in risk analysis, joint trainings and joint operations.

No changes in the legal framework so far, and the Integrated Border Management Strategy is with the BiH Council of Ministers.

On Passenger Data Exchange (API/PNR) systems, the single-window issue has not been resolved as the Entities require full and automatic access to Border Police databases.

Migration policy

EUMS/SAC were informed on the Book of Rules on Temporary Reception Centres and the Decision on opening the Lipa detention unit that were sent to CoM for adoption. EUMS/SAC were explained new EU Pact on Migration containing multiple legislation pieces defining new migratory and asylum policy mechanisms for future transfer into BiH legislation. EUMS/SAC were update on activities of the Task Force for Fighting Human Trafficking and Illegal Migrations and general security situation in BiH. EUMS/SAC were regularly updated on migratory trends, statistics, human smuggling, human trafficking and other related crimes related to migratory movements through the BiH territory. Local authorities continued talks with multiple countries of origin of migrants on readmission agreements, e.g. Bangladesh, Morocco and Egypt but without significant tangible results.

In 2024, BiH registered decrease of migrants compared to 2023 for changes in movements on the WB Route, including continued border measures and operations on the SER/HU borders.

On EU level, there were no significant changes after full adoption of the EU Pact on Migration as transposition period is two years.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No special initiatives were taken in 2024.

4. Challenges

In 2024 as of the last Annual Report, the EU Office focused its facilitation and advisory expertise on achieving the following [Key] Priorities:

- Technical talks on the Model Status Agreement between EU and BiH,
- Technical talks on the new Working Arrangement between BiH Border Police and FRONTEX [FTX] and deployment of FTX Standing Corps officers to BiH,
- Supporting introduction of biometric visas in BiH Diplomatic and Consular Offices,
- Further alignment of the BiH visa policy with the ‘White Schengen List’ that resulted in termination of visa-free regimes with Bahrain and Oman [01/2023], but also in backsliding through introduction of (seasonal) visa-free regime with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

- Drafting and adoption of the new Law on Border Crossing Control and its harmonization with the EU/Schengen Acquis,
- Full implementation of the Risk Analysis Training Cycle process and finalization of the drafting the Instruction on Risk Analysis fully harmonized with CIRAM 2.0 methodology,
- Endorsing the Roadmap for cooperation with EU Asylum Agency,
- Improving capacities of the Witness Protection Unit for different protection methods, and
- Remained actively engaged in all aspects of migratory and asylum movements and trends in BiH, including fight against illegal migration.

In 2025, besides the opening chapter negotiations as the ultimate objective, the EU Office will focus on the following objectives:

- Finalization of negotiations and signing the Status Agreement between BiH and EU,
- Signing of the Working Arrangement between BiH Border Police and FRONTEX,
- Implementation of the Law on Border Control with its newly introduced mechanisms,
- Drafting and adoption of bylaws to the Law on Border Control,
- Establishing the Advanced Passenger Information [API] system in BiH,
- Implementation of the Instruction for Risk Analysis in the BiH Border Police,
- Amending the BiH Criminal Code with provisions on human trafficking/smuggling crimes,
- Further supporting improvement of the Joint Risk Analysis Centre's business process,
- Further supporting implementation of migration and asylum management policies in BiH,
- Further supporting Witness Protection Unit in improving operational capacities, and
- Further supporting introduction of biometric visas in BiH Diplomatic and Consular Offices.

5. Other issues

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



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO BURKINA FASO

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) BURKINA FASO**
RAPPORT 2024

1. Introduction

Au Burkina Faso, quatre Etats membres de l'espace Schengen délivrent normalement des visas (BE, DE, DK, FR), avec pour la première fois la Belgique gérant le plus grand nombre et représentant également quatre autres Etats membres à travers des accords de représentation en matière de visas Schengen (FI, HU, LU, NL). DE représente SK, DK représente SE.

La coopération locale Schengen (LSC) s'est tenue depuis quelques années d'une façon informelle entre les quatre consulats présents, basé sur des efforts précédents au niveau de l'harmonisation de gestion des demandes et des pièces justificatives, avec la participation de la DUE avant 2018. Suite à la demande des Etats membres, ainsi qu'au risque de *visa shopping* à la hausse, des réunions LSC sont organisés depuis janvier 2025.

Suite aux attaques violentes contre l'ambassade et le consulat de France en novembre 2022, la France avait annoncé une suspension des accords de représentation. Alors que la délivrance des visa a été repris un moment donné partiellement, les services consulaires français restent fermés et reçoivent les demandes uniquement par dérogation et exceptionnellement, même si en grand nombre (seconde place après la Belgique).

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

Il n'y a pas eu de réunions formelles LSC en 2024. Le nouveau correspondant consulaire UE a organisé la première réunion LSC le 30 janvier 2025.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Une évaluation de l'état de préparation des EM et de la DUE en vue d'assurer les tâches à accomplir dans le cadre de la coopération consulaire au titre de Schengen prévues par le Code des Visas sera entreprise durant le second semestre de 2025.

BE travaille avec un prestataire de service externe, alors que DE ne le fait pas.

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

Les EM estiment que la liste des documents justificatifs est harmonisée.

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 »)

Une évaluation sera entreprise durant le second semestre de 2025.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Il n'y a pas de problèmes particuliers au niveau de l'harmonisation des procédures et des documents.

3.5 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

4. Défis

Suite à la fermeture des services consulaires de la France, les consulats des trois Etats membres qui continuent à délivrer des visa (BE, DE, DK) ont constaté durant l'année 2024 une augmentation significative des demandes de visa touristiques et pour visite en famille. Il y a également une augmentation de la documentation frauduleuse.

Suite au risque accru de 'visa shopping' et à une croissance des demandes auprès des autres consulats, les réunions de coordination LSC seront organisées chaque trimestre en 2025.

5. Divers



**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) CAMEROUN**
RAPPORT 2024

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 Slovénie ; l'Espagne avec le Portugal et la Slovénie; l'Allemagne avec l'Estonie et la Hongrie).

La Belgique et la France ont recours à un prestataire de services externe, en l'occurrence la société TLS Contact pour la Belgique depuis 2021 et pour la France depuis 2023, pour le traitement des visas Schengen. En ce qui concerne la France, TLS est présente à Yaoundé, Douala et reçoit les dossiers de demande de visas à Garoua (ils sont ensuite acheminés à Yaoundé). L'Italie a également externalisé la réception des demandes de visa, qu'elle confie à BLS International, remplaçant ainsi VFS Global. L'Espagne a fait appel à l'opérateur BLS jusqu'au COVID. Depuis les visas sont directement traités par le consulat.

En 2024 :

- L'Allemagne a délivré 3.500 visas Schengen, contre 3300 en 2023.
- La Belgique a reçu 6243 demandes de visas Schengen, en augmentation de 15% par rapport à 2023 (et 3177 visa D, en diminution par rapport à 2023). Le taux de refus est très important pour les visas C
- L'Espagne a délivré 1020 visas Schengen en 2024 (1600 demandes reçues, 35% de refus)
- La France a délivré 20 784 visas Schengen en 2024 et 7 606 visas nationaux.
- Les chiffres pour l'Italie ne sont pas disponibles pour 2024. Il est de 800 pour l'année 2023
- La Suisse a délivré environ 1600 visas Schengen (environ 2500 demandes de visas Schengen et 35% de refus environ)
- La question de la migration et notamment de la réadmission a été abordée lors du premier dialogue de partenariat dans le cadre de l'Accord de Samoa, en décembre 2024.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

Deux réunions de coordination Schengen ont été organisées à la Délégation de l'Union européenne au Cameroun en 2024, au niveau des Chefs de section consulaire, consuls, ou agents en charge des visas. La Belgique, sous sa présidence a organisé une réunion spécifique sur la fraude.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les délais d'attente sont très variables selon les Etats membres, selon qu'ils disposent d'un opérateur de réception des demandes de visas ou non.

Ils varient de plusieurs mois (Allemagne), entre 10 jours en début d'année à 6-8 semaines lorsque le nombre de demandes est plus fort (Suisse) à 24h (Belgique). Les demandes prioritaires peuvent être traitées en 1 à deux semaines pour l'Espagne.

Les Etats membres constatent en effet du « visa shopping » : des demandeurs font une demande de visa à un Etat membre pour se rendre en réalité dans un autre pays. Cela peut s'expliquer par la longueur des délais d'attente ou la perception que le taux de refus serait moins élevé chez certains Etats membres, ou bien le nombre de pièces à produire.

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

Il n'y a pas d'harmonisation pour le moment, même si les documents demandés sont assez similaires d'un consulat à l'autre. Certains Etats Schengen sont favorables à l'harmonisation, notamment la Belgique.

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 »)

Les Etats Schengen appliquent la cascade MEV, avec davantage de flexibilité pour la plupart d'entre eux. Ainsi le visa à entrées multiples est souvent donné à partir de deux visas.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Les Etats encouragent à l'harmonisation et le partage d'informations telles que les listes de notaires, d'avocats, de banques.

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.

- *statistiques trimestrielles* : La précision et la fréquence du partage des statistiques varie d'un Etat Schengen à un autre.

- *cas de fraude* : Il s'agit d'une problématique constante et le sujet principal des échanges. La plupart des types de fraudes sont bien connus : faux documents d'état civil ou ajout à posteriori sur les registres d'état civil, jugements supplétifs douteux, faux extraits bancaires, faux diplômes, faux certificats médicaux, documents issus d'administrations ou d'établissements privés ou hospitaliers à l'insu de la personne investie du pouvoir de signature, fausse assurance voyage, fausse lettre d'invitation, etc... Une nouvelle fraude a été découverte : l'usurpation d'identité de hautes

personnalités qui souhaitent faciliter la délivrance d'un visa pour un tiers. Certains demandeurs sont également victimes d'arnaqueurs, qui leur proposent leur aide contre rémunération pour constituer leur dossier.

- *assurance médicale de voyage* : Plusieurs compagnies proposent des prises en charges adéquates à des prix raisonnables. Des fraudes et des arnaques sont constatées.
- *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, ou demandent à se faire payer. Elle est également délicate avec les organismes publics. Il semble que la vérification des diplômes soit à présent payante, ce qui pose des problèmes, notamment pour les universités en Europe. Les autorités tardent à répondre aux sollicitations. 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. Certains Etats Schengen, comme la Belgique ont un agent qui procède à la vérification des documents.
- *coopération avec les prestataires de service et contrôle* : Partage d'informations (carnets d'adresses, e-mail, ...) à développer.
- *utilisation du VISMail et du Visa Information System* : Les Etats Schengen utilisent en effet VISMail, ainsi que les échanges par emails.

3.5 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Un groupe SIGNAL a été créé.

4. Défis

La fraude documentaire est le défi principal.

5. Divers



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in CANADA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

The 27 EU Member States (MS) are now represented in Ottawa. Luxembourg and Malta opened an embassy in Ottawa in 2024. Switzerland, Iceland and Norway also have diplomatic missions in Canada.

Many MS have an established network of Consulates in other large Canadian cities, with a bulk of their consular and Schengen visa work conducted in the large metropolitan areas of Toronto and Montreal, as well as in Vancouver. Some MS are present as well in Quebec, Calgary, Moncton and/or Edmonton. Honorary Consuls are present throughout many Canadian cities.

Several MS have engaged with private companies to handle the receipt of visa applications, including recording biometric. Several Schengen visa hubs have been established in major cities across Canada at this point. Note that for the year 2025, BE will continue to issue passports to LU citizen (transition year following the opening of the LU embassy end of 2024).

In an effort to centralise visa processing regionally, some MS have also reorganised internally and now conduct the processing of visas at their missions in the US, while the physical aspects of this process (sticker print, shipping, etc.) remains at the diplomatic missions in Canada.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

LCC and LSC meetings are organized jointly, one after another, in a hybrid format. In 2024, 4 LCC and LSC meetings took place in Ottawa in February, June, October and December. One decentralized LCC meeting took place in Montreal in October. All meetings LCC/LSC have been very well attended (more than 80 % of EU and Schengen countries), with participation beyond the Ottawa embassy and with regular participation of colleagues from General Consulates in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The meetings have been chaired jointly by the EU Delegation and the MS ensuring the rotating EU Presidency of the Council. Reporting of these meetings have been agreed locally and then shared with EEAS and DG HOME via Ares. The Group regularly exchanges information by email. Except for the EU and Schengen states, no other countries participated to the meetings of the Group.

Exchanges with Canadian authorities took place on a regular basis. Immigration Refugees Citizen Canada (IRCC) provided a comprehensive briefing on the new migration system and was instrumental in providing statistics for the EU citizen presents in the country. A side visit was organized at the Government Operation Center to understand how crisis response works in Canada and how the Group should prepare to provide consular assistance in cases of crisis.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The *unification* of work under the Visa Code is deemed advanced. The update of the Handbook for the processing of visa applications and the modification of issued visas (Visa Code Handbook I)⁷ was very much welcomed by EU MS. The LCC proposed its support to Romanian and Bulgarian colleagues, following the full integration of their MS to the Schengen area.

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

An update of the Commission's implementing decision and its annex establishing the new harmonised list of supporting documents for Canada was adopted on 11 September 2024. This is a major achievement based on the presales formulated by the LCC, as all the proposals made locally had been agreed and taken into account in the new Implementing Decision.

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 2023, there were some on-going discussions amongst the Group as regards a possible simplification of the current MEV cascade. The first meetings of 2024 showed that there was no consensus on the process. No further discussion will take place in 2025, except if a majority of MS want to put it again on the agenda.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The LCC discussed the continuous concern as regards the increase of visa request/shopping, notably from India, Afghanistan and some MENA countries. This situation is explained by the liberal migration policy of the Canadian Government that see an important number of people requiring Schengen visa. Some MS informed that they are performing some ex-post controls and revoke the visa if they have the confirmation that the applicant did cancel his flight ticket or hotel reservation.

3.5 Exchange of information

The Group agreed not to compile statistics for 2024. Yet, no cases of fraud were reported to the EU DEL or brought to a meeting. Exchanges took place during the LSC meetings.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Discussions took place on the EES/ETIAS system as this is a topic with a high impact for Canada given the number of travellers between Canada and the Schengen space, but also the number of binational. EUDEL made several briefings on the topic and stand ready to organize some ad-hoc meetings when the system would enter in force.

⁷ [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1d79f44d-49ba-4847-951e-129f924b1051_en?filename=Commission%20Implementing%20Decision%20C\(2024\)%204319-annex_en.PDF](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1d79f44d-49ba-4847-951e-129f924b1051_en?filename=Commission%20Implementing%20Decision%20C(2024)%204319-annex_en.PDF)

The Group has been involved in the revision of the list of travel documents which entitle the holder to cross the external borders and which may be endorsed with a visa, following a request from EEAS and DG HOME made in June 2024. The list was prepared by EU DEL and shared with the Group in October 2024.

On Apostille, there was some positive feedback, after summer 2024, on the overall process, in particular on the significant reduction in the time taken to process an application for an apostille. Some MS shared some remaining technical concerns for which EUDEL will facilitate an online meeting with Global Affairs Canada to try to fix the problems.

On crisis preparedness. The work on the Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework was initiated at the end of the summer 2024. A final first draft was communicated to the group at the end of 2024, with an objective of formal adoption by HoMs in early 2025. In the midst of the Lebanon crisis, EUDEL outreached Global Affairs Canada to become active on the COOL platform. As a result, GAC shared Canada's plans for government-sponsored departures from Beirut, which resulted in the support of around 100 EU citizens.

On European elections held in June 2024, the Group was active on exchanging information, communication materials and sharing best practices. Some discussions also occurred on sharing polling stations' premises (FR and BE shared the same premises on different days in Montreal).

4. Challenges

Many MS informed that they continue to face a high number of demands, while their staff remains at the same level as in the last years. There was a consensus to say that this trend of such high volume visa demands will continue in the future. MS agreed that at least a seasonal manpower support would be expected from their HQs.

The implementation of EES/ETIAS is an important source of concerns for all the EU/MS, notably given with the uncertainty of the starting date. All the EU MS welcomed the EUDEL's briefings on the subject to answer some practical questions. An important number of MS reports that they have not received any information from their line ministries as regards EES.

During the last meeting of 2024, the LCC discussed the new trend of an increase of Canadian inquiring about the possibility of long-term visa in Europe. Not all the MS did have the same request. The LCC tend to think that this situation is linked to the current political situation in North America. This situation will be followed-up in 2025.

5. Other issues

The Group collected information as regards the issue faced by diplomats newly posted to Canada as regards the accreditation process. The Group further agreed that the topic is a protocol issue and not a consular and has recommended to engage the HoMs to further discuss the topic. The Group facilitated contacts with IRCC which resulted in inviting Migration Minister Miller to an EU HoM's in May 2024 and an update of the questionnaire in Summer 2024.

This report has been approved by the Local Schengen Cooperation Group on 30 January 2025.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in CHILE
2024 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. (There are additionally nine Member States concurrent Ambassadors).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

There have been well-attended meetings of the Consular Working Group each semester in 2024. EUDEL sent reports of the meetings to HoMs and HQ.

No separate LSC meetings were requested by the rotating Presidencies and topics were discussed in the Consular Working Group when relevant.

A dedicated LSC meeting is scheduled for May 2025 with the Presidency.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EU Member States did not report issues regarding the application of the EU Visa Code. 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 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

Consular Working Group meetings organised in EUDEL provide a space to share information on visa practice and/or implementation of new regulations by the government of Chile.

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. Venezuela, Bolivia, 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

Different configurations of the working groups organised by EUDEL (HoMs, DHoMs, consular, etc) 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

The immigration act in force since 12 February 2022 along with a new electronic visa and residence permits online application system continue to create backlog and long waiting time, which are specifically difficult for incoming students and expats working for European companies with branches in Chile.

Diplomats are granted special identity cards (RUTs) which are limited and do not have a serial number/'clave unica' making digital procedures required for basic services in the country very difficult. In this respect, the EU Delegation, the 18 Member States present in Chile and several like-minded partners, sent a joint letter in December 2024 to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to highlight problems related to the implementation of provisions related to diplomatic privileges and immunities pursuant to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

5. Other issues

The Joint Consular Framework for Chile agreed by the Heads of Mission in Chile and transmitted to the COCON Working Group in 2022 is being updated.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO CHINA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BEIJING (PRC)
2024ORT

1. Introduction

26 EU Member States (all but Lithuania) + Switzerland, Iceland and Norway are present in China and all of them are represented in Beijing. There are EU MS Consulates General in the following cities: Shanghai (24), Guangzhou (13), Hong Kong (12), Chengdu (6), Chongqing (3), Shenyang (2), Macao (1) and Wuhan (1).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

In 2024 there were 6 meetings (25 January, 21 March, 28 May, 17 July, 19 September, and 5 December). All of them were well attended by at least 20 MS, and co-chaired by the Presidency and the EU Delegation.

Reports were drawn up by the Delegation and consulted with the Presidency.

Coordination with the LSC in locations outside the capital is done by MS. Most cities with EU presence hold local LSC meetings.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

After an eventful 2023 which saw the sudden reopening of the borders of post-Covid China, 2024 appears to have been a most stable year where the Member States have been gradually able to bring the necessary manpower to face the demand of Chinese visas.

The MS have agreed in 2024 on a harmonized list of documents and prepared a proposal for the cascade in order to apply the Visa Code uniformly.

Most MS make use of external service providers (VFS serving most of the MS, TLS serving only 2 MS and BLS and GVCW serving 1 MS each) – there do not appear to be any significant issues to report regarding the ESPs. The inspections of the VACs conducted in 2024 were positive.

The collaboration with the ADS groups and travel agencies has resumed and the MS manage to communicate clearly when sanctions have to be implemented in accordance with the regulations in place.

The European Commission experts (including experts from other MS) carried out an on-site inspection at the Embassies of Hungary and the Czech Republic as part of the annual Schengen Evaluation in the field of the common visa policy.

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

In Beijing, the harmonisation of lists has been completed by local LSC meeting and formally accepted by the Commission.

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')

A specific cascade for Chinese nationals has been adopted by local LSC cooperation, but is still pending formal decision by the Commission.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

As mentioned in point 3.1, the MS have initiated steps to harmonize the list of documents that have to be delivered for a visa application as well as the cascade system. The latter still has to be approved by the MS in Brussels.

3.5 Exchange of information

The practice of collecting and sharing statistics has continued throughout 2024. Most MS share their statistics on a punctual basis with the PRES.

During the LSC meetings, MS regularly share information regarding cases of fraud / visa shopping and other trends that are being detected.

Some MS have also shared the reports of their inspections conducted at the VACs.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Schengen information campaign

A majority of MS expressed concern over the ongoing practice of some visa applicants of using service intermediaries other than the designated VACs. To tackle the issue of Chinese applicants relying on private companies to prepare their applications – which appear to use sometimes fake documents – a visa information campaign has been put in place with the collaboration of the International Organization for Migration, in order to provide information about a visa procedure in an accessible way. It has been decided to make four short video clips to allow foreign applicants:

- to understand how easy it is to apply for a Schengen visa;
- to counter visa shopping;
- to counter the number of fake documents used;
- to inform about the consequences of submitting wrong information or using fake documents in a visa application.
- to discourage the use of intermediaries other than the approved VACs.

Goals set to judge the potential impact of this campaign were:

- decrease in refusal rate (at least for visa shopping and fake documents);
- less people using agents to assist with applications.
- PAP passports referred to VAC
- A few MS have been able to secure an agreement with the Chinese MFA to allow the Public Affairs passport holders to submit their applications at the VACs.

VAYD

Some MS have also started using the *Visa at Your Doorstep*, allowing the ESPs to move to the applicants' desired place to take the biometry and collect the documents for the visa applications.

4. Challenges

One of the main challenges for 2024 was to continue increasing the number of staff at the Visa Sections of the Embassies and at the external service providers, along with keep harmonizing amongst the Schengen states the use of harmonized list of supporting documents and overall, the decision process, with the aim of avoiding visa shopping. Along with the increasing number of applications, continuous and various documents (bank account, statement, flight tickets, accommodation, etc.) forgery increased. As most MS work together with an external service provider, it is also essential to regularly check the providers' performance in line with the Visa Code.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Colombia
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

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

The following MS are represented for Schengen visa applications, i.e.

- Slovenia and Latvia (via Germany)
- Malta (via Italy)
- Estonia (via Poland)
- Denmark, Finland, Island and Norway (via Sweden).
- Greece, Lithuania and Slovakia (via Spain)

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Three meetings were held under the chair of the EU Delegation, which also drew up the reports. The meetings were well attended.

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 LSC coordination meetings allowed the exchange of information, including on best practices on how to handle visa applications despite the rare cases. Exchanges also included experiences with different types of travel documents and their acceptance in Member States.

Another topic of discussion was the increasing number of Colombians who entered the Schengen area as tourists. Some Member States observed an increased trend of asylum applications from Colombians in their countries. The Group also discussed the reintroduction of a visa requirement for Colombian nationals in December 2024 by UK, based on the argument of a sharp increase of asylum applications and visa abuse in general, as well as Colombian media information about possible plans by the EU to also reintroduce visa requirements.

There was a general interest in information exchange on the introduction of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS).

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A.

4. Challenges

One of the challenges identified in the 2023 report was the promotion of the ETIAS system in Colombia and to describe well what its entry into force implies. To this end, the EU Delegation continued to provide relevant information, including in social media etc.

Another challenge identified was the management of the increased interest in work visas to certain countries in the Schengen area. One MS has experienced a continuous increase in working visas applications (although generally not Schengen visa applications) since 2022, in some cases through agencies that do not seem to communicate well with their clients. In this regard, the MS informed having provided more appointments to deal with the increased demands.

The increase in asylum applications and visa abuses might continue in 2025, also because of the reintroduction of visa requirements in the UK (see point 3.5).

5. Other issues

N/A.

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



**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN REPUBLIQUE DU CONGO**
RAPPORT 2024

1. Introduction

Quatre États membres de l'espace Schengen ont des ambassades à Brazzaville, à savoir l'Allemagne, la Belgique, la France et l'Italie. Toutefois, l'Allemagne et la Belgique ne délivrent pas de visas Schengen en République du Congo.

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

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

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

Les États membres de l'espace Schengen suivants ne sont ni présents ni représentés en République du Congo : la Bulgarie, le Danemark, l'Estonie, la Finlande, la Hongrie, la Lettonie, le Liechtenstein, la Pologne et la Roumanie.

La Suisse est le seul État membre de l'espace Schengen à délivrer des visas Schengen aux ressortissants de la République du Congo depuis son ambassade basée à Kinshasa.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

Des échanges de coordination consulaire entre les États membres représentés à Brazzaville ont eu lieu régulièrement. Ainsi, l'Allemagne et la Belgique ont parfois participé à des échanges sur les visas, même si l'Allemagne et la Belgique ne délivrent pas des visas Schengen en République du Congo. Toutefois, la problématique des faux documents (voir point 4) les concerne aussi pour la légalisation de documents congolais.

Spécifiquement sur les visas Schengen, suite aux échanges entre États membres, une rencontre a eu lieu d'abord de manière bilatérale entre la DUE et la nouvelle secrétaire générale adjointe et cheffe du protocole du ministère des Affaires étrangères en mai 2024 et ensuite en Équipe Europe en juin 2024 pour adresser les défis mentionnés sous point 4.

Sur demande de DG HOME, la DUE a également travaillé étroitement avec la France et l'Italie pour actualiser la liste des documents de voyages sur lesquels un visa Schengen peut être délivré. Cette liste actualisée a été soumise à DG HOME par la DUE le 29 août 2024.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les deux États membres qui délivrent des visas Schengen aux ressortissants et résidents de la République du Congo sur le territoire national ont une bonne connaissance de leurs obligations en matière de coopération au titre du Code. Ils échangent leurs informations de manière fluide.

La France gère le plus grand nombre de demandes de visas Schengen en République du Congo avec environ 14.000 visas Schengen délivrés en 2024, dont seulement 500 visas pour les autres États membres de l'espace Schengen représentés par la France. À ceci s'ajoute environ 3000 visas de long séjour, notamment des visas étudiants. Les délais d'attente pour les rendez-vous ont été considérablement réduits et presque éliminés dernièrement par la coopération des consulats de la France à Brazzaville et à Pointe-Noire avec un prestataire de service externe. Le taux de refus est autour de 40% à cause des faux documents (voir point 4).

L'Italie a géré environs 1400 demandes de visa Schengen en 2024, mais avec un taux de refus importants autour de 60% à cause du phénomène des demandes par des personnes qui ont déjà été refusés le visa par la France, ou qui ont en réalité la France comme destination principale du séjour, mais qui font demande auprès de la section consulaire de l'ambassade d'Italie pour éviter les frais du prestataire de service externe engagé par la France. Le nombre de visas géré par l'Italie pour les autres États membres de l'espace Schengen qu'elle représente en République du Congo est insignifiant. L'Italie a également géré 1600 demandes de visas de longs séjours.

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

Les ambassades et consulats des États membres qui délivrent des visas Schengen en République du Congo affichent des informations sur les documents justificatifs à soumettre en fonction du type de visas demandé sur leurs sites. Les exigences documentaires sont déjà bien harmonisées.

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 »)

Les États membres qui délivrent des visas Schengen en République du Congo n'ont pas soulevé un 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.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Les États membres qui délivrent des visas Schengen en République du Congo considèrent que l'harmonisation des pratiques est déjà acquise.

3.5 Échange d'informations

L'utilisation du Visa Information System centralisé facilite l'échange d'informations et empêche la délivrance de visas Schengen à des personnes qui ont déjà été refusés le visa Schengen récemment ou par un autre consulat, sauf si leurs conditions ont changé.

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

La coordination européenne et le dialogue avec les autorités congolaises sur le problème des faux documents continuent, en Équipe Europe et bilatéralement par les deux États membres qui délivrent des visas Schengen en République du Congo.

4. Défis

Jusqu'en 2023, les délais d'attente pour les rendez-vous pour demander un visa Schengen pouvaient atteindre plusieurs mois et la gestion des rendez-vous faisait l'objet de critique par les autorités congolaises. Comme indiqué sous point 3.1, ce problème a été résolu à la grande satisfaction des demandeurs de visa Schengen, ce qui est important pour l'image de l'Europe.

Malheureusement, des pratiques de soumission de faux documents persistent, ce qui explique un taux de refus relativement élevé, parfois même à des personnes qui auraient pu obtenir le visa en soumettant un dossier honnête, mais qui ont fait recours à des « services » par des escrocs qui prétendent pouvoir « faciliter » la délivrance du visa Schengen, mais qui en réalité agissent par la production de faux documents (relevés de comptes bancaires inexistants, ordres de mission avec des fausses signatures, documents d'étude falsifiés, etc.).

Les autorités congolaises sont peu actives pour lutter contre ce phénomène. Elles ont toutefois pris des mesures ponctuelles, à la demande des États membres, pour arrêter le trafic de documents par certains cadres de l'administration publique et pour chercher de démanteler les réseaux des escrocs qui prétendent pouvoir « faciliter » la délivrance de visas.

5. Divers

Rien à observer.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO COTE D'IVOIRE

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN CÔTE D'IVOIRE**
RAPPORT 2024

1. Introduction

Six États membres de l'espace Schengen (BE, CH, DE, ES, FR, IT) délivrent des visas et 15 (AT, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HU, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SK) sont représentés par ces derniers en ce qui concerne les visas. BE représente AT, NL, SE et LU. CH représente CZ et LH. DE représente ES, FI, SK. ES représenté PL ; FR représente HU, LT, LV, MT, IS et EL ; IT représente SI.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

L'année 2024 a vu une hausse des demandes de visas impactant ainsi les délais de rendez-vous et de délivrance, eu égard au manque de personnel dans certains consulats, poussant les demandeurs vers les visas shopping. Une nouvelle sorte de fraude s'intensifie au travers de la réutilisation de dossiers « bons » de mineurs.

Trois réunions de la LSC ont eu lieu en 2023, en mars, en juin et en novembre, sous la présidence du chef de section politique de la DUE, qui produit les projets de compte-rendu.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Visas en 2024

BE 4319 dont les visas des EM suivants, représentés par BE : NL(376), AT (136), SE (122), LU + BE (2052)

ES 4216

IT 6100

FR 73801

DE 1625

CH 1960

3.2 Application du Code des Visas

- Les consulats ont constaté que les demandes continuent à s'effectuer toujours à la dernière minute, malgré l'allongement du délai de dépôt.
- La fraude documentaire et le visa shopping demeurent un problème accru et ont augmenté par rapport aux précédents années
- Augmentation de la fraude au visa shopping via des agences de voyage qui proposent un service complet.
- Les délais d'attente d'un mois sauf pour FR qui a réduit les délais d'attente à une journée pour obtenir un rendez-vous et le délai de délivrance à de moins d'une semaine
- Coopération avec des prestataires de services externes : VFS (IT, FR, BE – satisfaits) et BLS (ES – pas contents), baisse qualitative depuis le changement de direction.
- 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

3.3 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.

3.4 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.

3.5 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.

3.6 Échange 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

4. Défis

L'identification de la fraude documentaire reste un défi d'envergure, nécessitant une mise à jour et un partage constant des informations, notamment pour la levée d'acte d'état civil.

Le manque de réactivité et de réponses de la part des autorités, notamment la MAE pose beaucoup de difficultés.

5. Divers

Citoyens européens en prison : Les autorités ne notifient toujours pas les EM de la présence de leurs citoyens en prisons. Les demandes de visites sont à envoyer au MAE, le délai d'attente tourne autour de 2 semaines. Les passeports des prisonniers sont saisis par la DST sans retour vers l'ambassade. Les autorisations des visites sont de plus en plus difficiles à obtenir.

Cas de décès : un hollandais en RCI.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF CUBA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in CUBA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 16 Schengen EU Member States present in Cuba (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden) with all of their embassies in Havana. Cyprus is also invited to the LSC meetings. From non-EU Schengen members, Norway and Switzerland are present.

Number of unrepresented Member States have agreements with the embassies in Cuba. Denmark, Finland, Estonia and Iceland are represented by Sweden; Luxembourg is represented by Belgium; Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia by Hungary; Malta by Spain and Liechtenstein by Switzerland. Croatia is not represented.

Even though Norway is present, Sweden represents them in issuing Schengen-visa.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

During 2024, four regular meetings of the Local Schengen Coordination group took place (in February, May, September and November), chaired by the EUDEL Consular Correspondent and back up in collaboration with the PRES BE and PRES HU. Three regular meetings were held in person at the EU Delegation, and one at the BE residence.

One ad-hoc meeting on the revised list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in Cuba was held in April, upon invitation by the PRES BE.

The meetings of the LSC group are open to participation of non-EU Schengen Member States (Norway and Switzerland) and were very well-attended.

After each meeting, draft minutes were circulated by the EUDEL. After being approved by the group, they were shared with the Headquarters in Brussels.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

LSC exchanges were well-attended and allowed sharing of important information and appropriate action when needed.

The group made regular updates on the migratory situation in the country. Various other issues were discussed, including Schengen statistics; the refusal rates; percentage of no shows for tourist visas;

trend of false marriages with EU citizens; unclaimed passports; local MEV cascades according to art. 24 of the Visa code; accepted travel insurances; and other practical matters as for example the accepted mode of payments in the consulates. The group discussed the possible update of the harmonised list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in Cuba and the input with comments was sent to HQ.

As regards the visa application handling, there is no possibility for outsourcing to the private companies, given the local legislation. Each embassy organises its own logistics in relation to the whole procedure, including processing the paper and digital files, as well further interaction with the visa applicant in person: interview, submitting of original documents and passport, up to the final return of the passport with the issued Schengen visa. Some MS Consulates face additional challenges because of insufficient number of Consular staff amid significant visa applications pressure.

Visa appointments services continued be a challenge during 2024. Some Consulates seek a solution on prevention of malicious practices with multiple registrations followed by no-shows, as well as resale of appointments. The online or telephone appointment services were often overloaded. A shorter registration period limited to 1 month prior to the travel has been installed by most of the MS. Some Consulates prefer e-mail appointments.

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

A proposal for an update of the harmonised list, prepared by a working group, has been submitted to the Visa Committee. In October 2024, feedback from HQ following the Visa Committee meeting was received. The draft-revised list of supporting documents for Cuba was well accepted by Member States' central visa authorities. There were only two questions raised by Member State delegates. On 27 November 2024, EUDEL sent the LSC group feedback to the HQ and is awaiting the opinion of the next Visa Committee.

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 assessment to be carried out under Article 24(2b) of the Visa Code has been put on the agenda of LSC a couple of times. The group concluded for the moment that local circumstances do not pose problems in applying art 24.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The necessary unification of Member States Consulates practices in relation with the accepted mode and currency for the fees was among the issues discussed by the LSC.

3.5 Exchange of information

Quarterly statistics trends

Consolidated statistics were regularly submitted by the MS. However, some MS need to receive the necessary data from their capitals, which makes the process of submission slower. The shared statistics served for useful exchanges during the LSC meetings.

Fraud

The documents issued locally need to be checked carefully because of the risk of falsification. The verification is often complicated due to the lack of cooperation by Cuban institutions (banks). Due to a difficult local context and bureaucratic delays, some visa applicants resort to forgery, especially with bank accounts statements and registry documents. False flight reservations have also been seen and therefore they have to be verified.

The MS registered increased attempts at fraudulent practices. As there are more cases of EU citizens requesting visa for their Cuban spouses, the issue of fake marriages for obtaining a visa was regularly discussed by the LSC. Often applicants do not even know the name of their EU spouse, or the presented travel plans are based on fake reservations. These fraudulent activities tend to be well organised and supported by European citizens. There are cases of verbal abuse or even of threatening consular officials.

Visa shopping exists and there is also a potential threat of trafficking women to Europe.

Schengen visas are also often used for other purposes than travelling to Europe, as it allows visa free entry to Mexico and other countries in Central America. The final destination of those using it in this way was usually the U.S.

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

Not applicable given the nature of the largely state-run economy and the domestic legislation.

Cooperation with external service providers and monitoring

It is impossible for private companies to develop business in this area.

Travel medical insurance (TMI)

All MS, except two, accept TMI from the Cuban state insurance company ASSISTUR/ESEN.

VIS-Mail

VIS-MAIL can be used when secure transmission is needed which seldom occurs in practice. Usually, the local exchange of information on ad hoc files is often done orally or through the regular contact between the member states.

Other issues

The issue with cancelled ESTA for EU nationals by the U.S. authorities after a visit to Cuba remains a matter of concern.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

The major challenges to be addressed will be linked to the enormous migration flows out of Cuba, especially considering the last U.S. administration movements.

5. Other issues

Statistics on the family reunion visa issued under Directive 2004-38 for family members of EU citizens would be useful data.

Some MS register high percentage of no-shows, probably because of the practice that a person reserves many appointments with the intention to sell them. As regards the accepted mode of payments in the consulates, except of one MS Consulate, all accredited in Cuba collect visa fees in cash in Euros.

The Schengen member's states present at the LSC meeting held in Havana on 20 February 2025 have accepted this final version.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (DR)
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are six EUMS/SAC diplomatic missions present in the DR: Germany (DE), Spain (ES), France (FR), Italy (IT), the Netherlands (NL), and Switzerland (CH).

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.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

In 2024, the EUDEL organised 4 LCC/LSC meetings on:

February 20th

May 2nd

June 18th

October 17th

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) 2021/1134 of 07 July 2021].

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

EUMS did not report any problems regarding the harmonization of documents. There is no consensus under EUMS/SAC on the need for harmonization.

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

Beginning 2024, the Delegation received inquiries from visa applicants on the duration of Schengen visa. Some applicants indicated that they received short-term visas, after having received 5-year visas before. Member States explained that the duration of visas takes into account previous visa applications, while also pointing out that a shorter visa duration is often granted due to incomplete visa requests or expiring passports.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

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

Exchange of information

Exchanges principally focussed on the following topics :

Rejection rates in the DR are rather high, oscillating around 20-25% due to lack of sufficient documentation and lack of verifiable financial means.

Forged documentation continued to be a key issue in 2024. Amongst forged documents, EUMS reported civil registry documentations, bank statements, hotel reservations and travel insurances. An important milestone was the implementation of a new regulation by the Bank Supervising Authority, obliging banks to add digital verification means to financial statements. More details are presented in section 3.6.

EUMS continued to report cases of **visa shopping**, often facilitated by travel agencies. Following the increase in **visa costs**, EUMS/SAC agreed that the conversion from Euro to Dominican pesos, and its periodic revision, takes place at an individual level, as most Consulates receive conversion instructions from their HQ.

As was the case in previous years, EUMS reported **long waiting times for visa appointments**, ranging from 2 weeks to 3 months. In line with 2023, EUMS identified false appointments from travel agents and visa facilitators as the main cause.

EUMS reported a number of cases where **passports are not picked up by applicants**, even after multiple reminders. Once a year, Member States send these passports back to the Dominican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Member States discussed the possibility to implement a **joint communication campaign** on Schengen visas in 2025. The campaign aims to inform the public of the general rules on Schengen applications and the correct procedures of application.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Following concerns raised by EUD on the falsification of bank statements as one of the main reasons for visa rejection, the Bank Supervisory Authority (BSA) agreed end-2023 to start a pilot exercise introducing digital verification methods for bank statements. Several Member States have participated in the pilot. Subsequently in May 2024, the BSA issued a new regulation obliging all banks to add a digital verification method. Smaller banks will have the possibility to use a website hosted by the Dominican Telecommunications Authority (INDOTEL). Almost all banks effectively implemented the digital verification method by end of January 2025.

This has been an example of successful cooperation with the Dominican authorities.

4. Challenges

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

A joint communication campaign on Schengen Visa.

Introduction of biometric passports. The contract has been awarded to the Franco-American consortium EMT. The first passports are expected in the second half of 2025.

Visa shopping and forged documentation.

5. Other issues

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



COOPERACIÓN LOCAL SCHENGEN (CLS) en ECUADOR

INFORME 2024

1. Introducción

Seis Estados miembros del tratado Schengen están presentes (Alemania, España, Francia, Hungría, Italia y Suiza) y doce son representados en Ecuador por alguno de los países antes citados: Austria (representado por Alemania), Bélgica (representado por Francia), 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 los Consulados Generales de España en Quito y en Guayaquil, para viajar a Países Bajos, Finlandia y Lituania, para los residentes en sus respectivas demarcaciones. 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. La Embajada de Suiza representa expedir visados de corta duración para Polonia, Eslovenia y Letonia.

2. Reuniones del grupo CLS celebradas en 2024

La actividad de solicitudes de visados marcó un incremento muy substancial durante 2024.

El cambio de gobierno, supuso un cambio en las prioridades en la política exterior. Para el gobierno de Noboa, conseguir un acuerdo con la UE para la eliminación de visas ya no es una prioridad, teniendo en cuenta la realidad en Ecuador y la UE: Por falta de interés de la Cancillería, se suspendieron las reuniones especiales entre las autoridades ecuatorianas y los cónsules de CLS. Estas reuniones se iniciaron en 2023 con la finalidad de identificar problemas vinculados con las altas cifras de rechazo de las solicitudes de visas Schengen.

El grupo de Coordinación Local Schengen se reunió tres veces en 2024: 23.1.2024, 7.6.2024 y 23.12.2024.

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.

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. No hay cambios con respecto a 2023.

4. Dificultades

La emisión de visados Schengen durante 2024 superó 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”

A raíz de estos problemas, las tasas de rechazos se incrementaron y llegaron al orden de 30-35% del número total de las solicitudes de visas. Se notan números crecientes de solicitudes de ciudadanos ecuatorianos residentes en la Costa, lo que reflejaría un deterioro de las condiciones de seguridad en esta parte del país.

5. Varios

El tema de la exención de visados Schengen para los ciudadanos ecuatorianos ya no figura como de alta prioridad para Ecuador en las relaciones con la UE. El gobierno de Noboa ha mostrado su interés, en cambio, a la movilidad regular hacia la UE, incluso los esquemas de trabajo y estudios ya en vigor con Francia y Hungría.

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



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in EGYPT

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Twenty-six EU Member States are present and represented in Egypt and one (Luxembourg) is represented by another Member State (Belgium). Ten have Consulates in Alexandria (AT, BE, DK, DE, FR, EL, IE, IT, MT, PT, SK), three in Hurgada (AT, BE, IT), two in Sharm El Sheikh (BE, IT), two in Luxor (IT, ES), one in Port Said (DK), and one in Suez (MT). Among non-EU Schengen countries, Norway and Switzerland have diplomatic representations and issue visas.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Four LSC meetings were held in 2024: on 26 February, 22 May, 30 October and 4 December. All of these were regular meetings which were well-attended. EUDEL chaired the LSC meetings, accompanied by the rotating EU Council Presidency (BE and HU). Usually some non-Schengen States also attended the LSC meetings (CY, IE). All reports and minutes from the LSC meetings are drafted by EUDEL with greenlight of the rotating presidency. Coordination with the LSC mainly take place in Cairo as most visas are issued there. There were some initiatives by Schengen States outside the regular LSC meetings, like conducting audits of the external service providers (including locations outside Cairo) and workshops on forged documents conducted by the HU Embassy as part of their presidency of the Council of the European Union.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC meeting in Egypt in 2024 addressed several issues regarding the implementation of the Visa Code. In general, the demand for visas is high and the workload for Embassies and Consulates is substantive. The number of slots/appointments/day for visas requests in Cairo varies. There are issues with no-shows, a black market for visa appointments, as well as groups or companies blocking slots at once as soon as they come available. Waiting times after a visa application is filled is usually around 2-3 weeks for issuing a visa, for some countries this can take up to two months. Some of the Schengen States divide their applicants into groups, like business, tourism, special events, so that they can prioritise certain applicants when needed. Some of the Schengen States work with external service providers, like VFS and TLS. Some states are content with their external service provider, whereas others feel they have more control over appointments because they do not use any. SE was this year instructed to release their caps in order to get insight into the real demand.

Visa shopping is a common practice in Egypt, the topic was discussed in the LSC meeting of 30 October. Many of the smaller Schengen states in Egypt deal with visa shoppers, who are trying to bypass longer waiting times for popular travel destinations. Under these visa shoppers is a small amount of people who are actually good candidates for the other states, in some cases even in need of an urgent Schengen visa. As they however do not have an actual intention of traveling to the Schengen state they applied to, they get rejected. One state (MT) mentioned a case of an applicant actually being a local business contact and being concerned that having rejected their visa could leave a strain on the working relationship. There was some discussion on the possibility of an information campaign to guide applicants to the right country, no concrete follow up has been undertaken.

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

The Decision on the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in Egypt for short stay visas was adopted and published in spring 2023⁸. In general, there are some challenges in Egypt assessing the supporting documents when processing a visa application. Egypt is a cash-based society, which makes it difficult to determine the real wealth of a person. Moreover, EgyptAir – the main airline of Egypt – has a policy of pay-later and then automatically cancelling unpaid tickets after 48 hours. Forgery of accommodation and flight tickets by travel agents is a common phenomenon. Also, people with enough means to travel and intention to come back make use of (travel companies providing) forged documents. This has led to some discussions on whether the documents required for a Schengen are difficult to provide for many people in the Egyptian context. However, there has not been any serious consideration for amending the existing list in 2024.

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')

Egypt knows a harmonised cascade system where the issuing of multiple entry visas with a long validity to regular travellers with a positive visa history increases gradually from 1 to 5 years. Embassies and Consulates implement the general rules by visa code, taking account of local circumstances and “offer more (or less) generous “cascades” for all or certain categories of the applicants”. Sometimes applicant’s their circumstances can change (for example when they used to be a spouse of a citizen and now no longer are), and then some might move away from the cascade. 2024 saw a specific issue with short term visas (some days only) with multiple entries being issued by the one Schengen state that did not make sense by the next Schengen state receiving the applicant. This is done by means of practicality, when the application is received as such and all other information checks out, for example to avoid the applicant being able to appeal to any changes that have been made to the application.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The LSC group in Egypt is quite active. Regularly, individual states initiate topics for the agenda of the meetings with the goal of harmonisation of practices, in 2024 for example on exemptions. Besides the meetings, they regularly consult each other through a Signal group when they face a specific issue and wonder how other states deal with this. There is a common understanding that harmonisation of

⁸ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/C-2023-2743_en.PDF
https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/C-2023-2743-annex_en.PDF

practices and a shared approach to common challenges is to be sought. However, it can be a challenge to agree on the exact approach to take. Sometimes because of difference in national positions, but also because of difference in available staff to carry out tasks.

3.5 Exchange of information

The majority of applications for Schengen visas are processed in Q3, showing the highest number of applicants for most Embassies. Some Embassies have their highest number of applicants in Q2 (LV, PT) and some in Q4 (DE, FR). Annual refusal rates range between 10-15% (SI, RO, CZ), 15-20% (FI, LV, FR), 20-25% (AT, DE, HU, IT, PL, PT), 25-30% (CH), 30-35% (BE, EL, LT, ES), 35-40% (BG, DK, SK), 45-50% (EE, SE), 50-55% (NO) to 55-60% (MT).

With a total amount of 44 applicants and a refusal rate of 40.9% for 2024, ES had the most Airport transit visas (ATVs). Other countries that issues ATVs were PL, DE and FR.

Fraud in the sense of using forged documents in Schengen visa applications is a common phenomenon in Egypt. The Embassy of Hungary during their Presidency of the Council of the Europe Union shared their findings regarding fraudulent visa applications in Egypt. For 2024, they find that in 11% of their applications at least one forged document is used. Reasoning that the same number might be applicable for the other Embassies, that would indicate that of the about 350,000 applications received annually about 35,000 applicants could be using forged documents. The falsification of bank statements and documents issued by the Egyptian authorities have links to criminal organisations and human trafficking. According to the Egyptian authorities, to acquire a full package from these organisations for a visa application can cost around EGP 150,000 (around EUR 2,875), an amount what most of the applicant never possessed. In case these people reach Europe, their faith is difficult to track. In cases of asylum/Dublin cases, this usually considers middle-class, Coptic families from Cairo and Upper Egypt (Minya, Assuit). Typically, 60-70% of Egyptians seeking asylum in Germany are Coptic Christians. However, most Egyptians that overstay actually do not apply for asylum, but most likely end up in illegal employment.

Travel medical insurance (TMI) was not discussed too extensively in 2024. There are a number of well-known websites that make it easy for Schengen states to verify the proof of insurance.

In general, cooperation with local authorities can be challenging in Egypt. The 2024 LSC discussed cooperation with Egyptian prosecution in cases of detected fraud, where the Egyptian prosecution office did not react to such cases if reported. Some states cooperate with the Administrative Control Authority (ACA) that does not need instruction from the prosecution office. In Egypt, a problem across the board is also that banks do not give feedback to verify bank statements. Only colleagues with personal contacts in banks are able to verify bank statements. There is currently no official or systemic reporting of fake bank statements to the national Egyptian police or judicial authorities, but rather an informal communication of cases of fake bank statements (SI and IT) often based on the identity of the applicant and his crime records (member of a criminal networks are more reported by IT).

External service providers: 14 Schengen states (CH NO SE PT NL MT HR AT DK FI LV EL HU LT) use VFS, 3 Schengen States use TLS (DE FR BE) 2 Schengen States use BLS (SK ES) 6 Schengen States (PL RO SI EE CZ BG) don't use service providers, 1 IT uses Almoviva. In order to ensure good practice at the external service provider, Schengen states conduct audits (see below).

The Visa Information System secure system of mail (VISMail) is considered too cumbersome and not user-friendly.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

During the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the HU Embassy in Cairo organised three workshops on the use of forged documents in Egypt. As part of a EU-funded project, they have support in their Embassy visa section from a document specialist. The initiative was well received by the other Schengen states and non-Schengen participants.

4. Challenges

The 2023 report mentioned issues with statistics, waiting time for appointments, refusal rates, fake/false/forged documents, relations with service providers.

In order to ensure good practice at the external service provider, Schengen states have conducted audits. For example, PT and EE on 16 May audited the new VFS office in Alexandria that seems to organise the processing of applicants well. However, they noted problems regarding finding the location of the office, security failures, the absence of easy access for disabled persons, and the support office One Vasco right next to VFS that could potentially be used to make forged documents.

During the above mentioned HU Embassy workshops was some discussion on how to cooperate and how to push back the phenomena of document fraud. The participants agreed that a common approach would be the best, which common approach will need to be elaborated. Placing applicants under SIS alert was suggested. This comes with some complexities like not having the same national instructions for placing a SIS alert or not having the ability to see previous concerns of other Schengen Embassies in the system. DE suggested that Schengen States issue a joint harmonised communication on its social media and websites flagging the cases and warning about the consequences (inscription on the SIS). Given the EU General Data Protection Regulation, no blacklists with suspicious names/IDs can be set. But DE suggested to check with each respective HQ regarding the field of data protection and encouraged a greater exchange of information, documents and data amongst Schengen States.

Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2025)

- Tackling visa shopping;
- Migration risks, in cases where applications check-out and cases where they do not;
- Suspicious applications with references to EU-funded projects;
- Cooperation with Egyptian authorities regarding forged documents and suspicion of criminal activity.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ADDIS ABEBA, ETHIOPIA 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Twenty-one (21) Member States as well as NO and CH are present and represented in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia. No Member States are present/represented outside the capital.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Regular monthly meetings were held. These are well attended. EU Delegation and Presidency chaired/co-chaired. Prior to and following temporary Art. 25a measures coming into force on 01 June, several ad hoc meetings were organised. Reports of meetings were prepared by EU Delegation.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and EUD are fully prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code. Issues discussed at LSC meetings include waiting times for appointments, cooperation with external service providers, and visa shopping.

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

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already acquired, ref. C (2017) 5853 final Brussels, 30.8.2017. The issue was discussed at two LSC meetings during the year.

MS' implementation of the Commission Implementing Decision on the list of documents to be presented in Ethiopia is not specifically monitored. MS (and NO and CH) do not see a 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')

No specific cascade has been adopted for Ethiopia. However, the issue with entry into force of temporary Art. 25a measures, this is not relevant for Ethiopia.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Discussions on detailed aspects of harmonisation (e.g. retention of passports during application period) are on-going.

3.5 Exchange of information

Describe the exchange of information within the LSC:

quarterly statistics; MS (+CH and NO) consider that this exchange takes place via HQ systems. Local exchange is being considered.

MS (+CH and NO) regularly exchange on cases of fraud;

travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI); limited exchange.

Considering preparation of TMI and bank list

any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules;

no cooperation with local authorities and companies (e.g. banks, employers, transport companies) is regularly discussed

cooperation with external service providers and monitoring (including initiatives on common monitoring exercises); discussed occasionally

use of VISMail and the Visa Information System; discussed occasionally

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

N/A

5. Other issues

N/A



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Tbilisi
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

18 MS (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden) are present in Georgia and 9 MS (Belgium, Cyprus, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia) are represented from abroad.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Two LSC meetings took place in 2024, they were well attended and chaired by the EU Del. Reports were drafted by the EU Del.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Given that, Georgian nationals are not subjected to the Visa Code, its application is mainly focused on third-country nationals residing in Georgia. Several MS reported a high volume of visa applications from Armenia, Belarus and Russia, followed by a diverse range of nationalities, including applicants from Iran, Azerbaijan, India, and Kazakhstan. Overall, the number of visa requests from Russian citizens has increased exponentially in 2024 compared to the previous year.

The implementation of the Articles 6 and 7 of the Visa Code still requires special attention. Some MS accept applications from third country nationals who are legally residing in Georgia solely on issued permanent or temporary residence permit by the Georgian authorities. Other MS do not request the residence permit but accept applications from third country nationals based on entry and exit stamp in their passports, assessing that the applicant has been in the country for more than 6 months.

MS vary in their approach to Russian visa applications. Some refuse all applications (except for humanitarian cases), others apply the previous mentioned requirement of a residence card or 6 months stay.

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

MS regularly exchange best practices regarding the document requirements outlined in Articles 14 and 15 of the Visa Code. A recurring issue is travel medical insurance, with most MS refusing insurance from Russian companies (noting some are sanctioned) and instead requiring coverage from

Georgian or European providers. To address this, CZ recently proposed creating a common list of approved travel insurance companies.

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 24 (b) is implemented, however the issuance rate of MEV varies significantly between MS.

3.4 Exchange of information

The EU Del compiles quarterly statistics.

As in 2023, some MS continue to see an increase in commercial surrogacy cases, with one or both of the intended parents being EU citizens. Georgia permits surrogacy arrangements for individuals of any age or nationality, including non-Georgian couples and surrogate mothers. The framework allows for commercial surrogacy, leading to a growing commercialisation. MS exchange regularly on the handling of such cases.

MS frequently receive visa applications from third-country nationals seeking (tourist) visas to a MS other than the MS of their EU partner. This practice raises concerns, as Georgia's comparatively lax documentation requirements for marriage registration, relative to EU standards, have made it a hub for fraudulent marriages. Consequently, these particular visa applications are viewed with suspicion and undergo rigorous scrutiny.

4. Challenges

Looking forward, the implementation by MS of the Council Decision of 27 January 2025 to partially suspend the Visa Facilitation Agreement between EU and Georgia might be an upcoming challenge. By the end of 2024, some MS imposed individual sanctions (travel bans) on Georgian officials.

This report is approved by all Member States present in Georgia.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in GHANA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Ten (10) EU Member States are present in Ghana (AT, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL) and 12 are represented by residing MS in Accra (BE, EE, EL, FI, 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. Some members also issue visas in Accra for residents of neighbouring countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo, among others).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Five LSC meetings were held in 2024, all in physical presence and consistently well-attended by all the LSC partners. Meetings were co-chaired by the EUDEL and the host LSC member. In 2024, LSC meetings were hosted by Switzerland, Norway, EU, Denmark, and Germany.

The new (bi-monthly) meeting frequency, agreed upon in 2023, was welcomed and has been sustained. LSC members also agreed to serve as co-chair, including determining agenda, suggesting/inviting guest speaker(s) and drafting minutes.

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. Most MS use an external service provider (VFS), but those who do not still manage to meet deadlines. Most members do not face significant challenges relating to the implementation of the Visa Code. Some MS operate with longer visa handling times, especially during the summer period (up to three months), 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 has been in place since 2019.

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')

January 2023, LSC members proposed a **modification of the visa cascade system** (as stipulated under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code), envisioning a 5-step system with smaller jumps: 1-2-3-4-5. The proposal implied stricter measures due to the local context (with high levels of document forgery), compared to the 3-step cascade prescribed by the existing Visa Code.

The Commission presented the LSC proposal to the **Visa Committee** late 2023. In turn, the Committee **suggested to eliminate the final two steps from the proposed five-step cascade**, leading us to a 1-2-3 model instead. LSC members discussed the counterproposal on 8 February 2024, and the group unanimously agreed with the 3-step proposition regarding the new decision as a general guideline.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The list of verified insurance providers was updated in 2024, through a coordinated effort led by CH.

3.5 Exchange of information

Bi-monthly Statistics: As a standing agenda item, LSC members exchange data on refusal rates, waiting times, etc.

Cases of fraud: Fraudulent documents that members frequently receive include student transcripts, birth certificates, marriage certificates and bank statements. Some MS lack ability to detect fraudulent passports and birth/marriage certificates. MFA urges MS to report cases of fraud.

Travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI): The list of credible travel medical insurance companies for Schengen was updated by CH, and validated in April 2024.

LSC members do not experience problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules.

Cooperation with local authorities is mainly limited to Birth and Death Registry (BDR) and Marriage Registry. The cooperation with local companies and institutions (e.g. banks, employers, transport companies and universities) varies from each Embassy. Banks are staffed for verifying bank statement, but delays or responses vary a lot. The LSC group welcomed a representative from the **Document Fraud Expertise Center (DFEC) at the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS)**, as well as the **MOFARI Director for Consular Affairs**. 2024 saw the arrival of new passports with enhanced security features, produced in HU.

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 DE and HU. Some MS cooperate with law firms to verify documents (DE and CH). Verification fee has to be paid by applicants.

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

Regular **training opportunities** have been organised for the LSC group.

At the invitation of DE, a training took place at the EU Delegation on the identification of forged documents, provided by experts from the German Police based in Lagos.

The EU Delegation also organized a consular crisis response exercise offered to members of the LSC/LCC group.

DK welcomed a Schengen visa evaluation mission on 9-10 December, inviting all Schengen members to meet them informally.

4. Challenges

Challenges faced in 2024 revolved around:

Human smuggling: a case was identified, involving the National Paralympic Committee-Ghana. The case appeared in national media and fostered closer information exchange between members.

Fraudulent documents are routinely used in visa applications (bank statements, birth certificates, employers' letters of introduction, salary slips, etc.). Spotting forged legalizations is deemed particularly challenging. The widespread use of middlemen and lack of reliability of national certifying institutions exacerbate this issue. HU and DE (which do not use external service providers) have slightly lower refusal rates (30-40%). The refusal of visa applications often results from "purpose not documented", "purpose not reliable" and/or "doubts about the intention to return to the home country".

Big groups of travellers going for cultural or sport events, at times endorsed by Government authorities, frequently make use of fake applications. Past experience (showbiz, football) has shown that such events are used for illegal migration.

Increase in number of visa applications and fully booked appointment slots: for many Members, the number of visa applications continues to rise (190% for HU). Several members struggle with appointment bookings made by travel agents.

Returnees: The EURLO ended her mission in the summer of 2024. A replacement is expected to arrive mid-March.

Dialogue on migration: The envisioned thematic dialogue on migration did not take shape in 2024. In fact, migration was the most contentious item during the 2024 EU-Ghana partnership dialogue. The Consular Bureau within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recalled a need to negotiate bilateral agreements or EU-wide Agreement on Pensions Portability for Ghanaian migrant workers returning to Ghana upon retirement. Ghana called for Labour agreements – stimulating regular migration, while avoiding brain drain, and reduced cost of remittances. The CDA of Ghana in Brussels raised concern about the new Asylum and Migration Pact, raising possible human rights implications.

Several members face **pressure from local authorities** to facilitate visa processing.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in GUATEMALA

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five EU Member States (ES, DE, FR, IT, SE) are represented through an Embassy in Guatemala City. 15 MS have a non-resident Ambassador who is accredited to Guatemala (a large majority is based in Mexico-City). 18 non-represented MS have an honorary consul in Guatemala.

Outside the capital, ES and IT have honorary consuls in Quetzaltenango.

ES issues Schengen visas for BE, EE, EL, FR, LU, HU, MT, NL, PT and FI; SE for DK, LT, IS and NO; IT for SI; CH for LI.

Guatemalan citizens benefit from a visa waiver.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

One meeting was held (November 2024), chaired by the EU Delegation, which also drafted the report. Good attendance (CH also joined). There is no LSC outside the capital.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No specific problems discussed during the LSC meeting.

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

Harmonisation practices are already acquired. The number of Schengen visas issued in Guatemala is very small. In general, applicants comply with the requirements and present the documents correctly.

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 cascade has not been adopted in Guatemala. There are no security or migration risks that would justify the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

none

3.5 Exchange of information

none

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

none

4. Challenges

Once confirmed when ETIAS will enter into force, it will be important to communicate locally to particular stakeholders (government authorities, travel agencies, airlines) as well as to the general public.

5. Other issues

none



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in INDIA 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

27 Member States (MSs) are present and one (LI) is represented in India. Three non-EU Schengen States (NO, CH, IS) are present too. One perspective member (CY) is also represented in Delhi. In addition, several MSs have additional consulates processing Schengen visas: eight in Mumbai (BE, DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, NL PL), two in Kolkata (FR, IT), two in Bengaluru (FR, NL, IT), one in Chennai (FR - under the Bureau of France but depending on the Consulate General in Pondicherry -) and one in Goa (PT).

Two prospective MSs (BG, RO) became full members of the Schengen area in 2024.

All MSs outsource non-judgemental tasks to an external service provider (ESP). With the exception of ES, EL and SK (as of late 2023), they all use the same 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 2024

Seven regular LSC meetings were held in 2024, with an average representation of **more than 20 MS**. All were held in person (or as hybrid meetings) in the premises of the EU Delegation. Meeting reports as well as the annual report were drafted by EUDEL.

Airport Liaisons Officers (ALOs - seven posted in Delhi, three in Mumbai, and two abroad – FI and NL) are systematically invited and represented at the LSC meetings. IE didn't attend any LSC meeting in 2024 but attended the migration-related EU MS coordination meeting.

The annual ALOs training was organised between 26 February and 1 March 2024 in the premises of the EUDEL. More than 100 visa officers undertook the training during the five training days.

In addition, EUDEL and MSs participated to a workshop on student visa frauds organised by the US Embassy in May 2024.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EUDEL and MSs actively engaged and cooperated on the tasks defined by Article 48 of the Visa Code, mainly during regular meetings. The LSC Signal group proved to be a useful tool for ad hoc

exchanges. Several MS continued to face issues with accessing the AGORA platform which impeded the cooperation via the platform. EEAS IT Helpdesk provided partial support to the queries.

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

The main problem related to the implementation of the Visa Code discussed in LSC meetings pertained to on one hand the observation of the visa processing time, and MSs competent for processing visas. The high amount of visa requests continued to put pressure on most consulates, and some still kept limits (caps) in the applications. Consequently, Indians wishing to travel either could not apply for visa to some MSs, or faced waiting time of several weeks. Visa shopping also remained a phenomenon in 2024, though to a lesser extent than in 2023. The persisting caps and extended delays for applications for travel to some of the main destination MSs continued to have 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 -main destination- continued to represent one of the challenges in terms of application of the Visa Code in 2024. 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.

A persistent challenge for the human resources of the MS remains the high volume of fake and fraudulent documents submitted as part of visa applications. According to several MS local tour operators, travel agencies and other third parties are mainly responsible for submitting fake documents.

The common information sheet was reviewed in 2024 following accession of BG and RO to the Schengen area as well as in view of the increase of visa fees and was ready for publication on MSs' websites.

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. In 2024, the LSC agreed on the need to revise the harmonised list especially in view of introducing a cover letter and business bank statements. The proposal was brought to DG HOME in view of a discussion in the Visa Committee in 2025.

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')

Following launch of discussions on the adaptation of the MEV cascades in 2022 and subsequent exchanged in 2023, despite some reservations of the Visa Committee the proposal for the general Cascade was adopted and the procedure was finalised in April 2024.

Regarding the proposal for the Cascade for Seafarers, as it concerns only several EU MS, the Visa Committee did not accept the proposal in order not to create a precedence of creating a cascade for a specific category of travellers but gave the option for the LSC to make a local agreement of those MS concerned on the implementation of the cascade in a form it was proposed. There was no particular follow up on the issue, but general understanding is that Schengen States concerned are applying this cascade in practice even without formalisation.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Following a request from two Schengen States, EUDEL supported by LU undertook a questionnaire among the 27 on possible harmonisation of visa fees in the local currency. Based on the survey, the approaches are largely different and there are no two MS that would have the same approach; hence very difficult to find a common ground. Based on the information received all are using the ECB rate. Those MS that have digitalised their procedures are not using the exchange rate. Further, there is a large variety of approaches to the time when the fee is adjusted according to the exchange rate, some are doing this on the 1st/10th/20th of the month, some during the first week of the month, some on a quarterly basis and some on a rather ad hoc basis. Further, some MS are bound by the national legislation to follow a concrete *modus operandi*. The outcomes of the analysis hence reconfirm the conclusion of the last exchange on the subject done in 2022 that harmonisation of visa fees in local currency is not feasible in short/mid-term.

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, majority of the 40 visa sections in India reported no quarterly statistics or reported only for one or two quarters. Partially this was also linked with the issues of accessing AGORA. The absence of statistics however prevents from performing any meaningful analysis of trends.

Cases of fraud

As explained above, fraudulent practices linked to visa applications - both Schengen and national visas (students in particular) - continued to be reported by MSs. This was discussed during several LSC meetings as well as during a workshop at the US embassy. The main challenge remains how to address this continuous 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 took place in the LSC meetings but also thanks to the 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 three (SK, ES, EL) using the same ESP, there is a lot of opportunity for cooperation, and this has been discussed extensively within the LSC. Upon initiative of CH, CH, AT and LU have started common inspections of the ESP centres that they have in common. There was no follow up on the working group on cooperation with VFS (MT, PT, IE, NL, PL) set up in 2023.

Use of VISMail and the Visa Information System;

This topic was briefly touched upon at one of the meetings (in relation to the need to revise the harmonised list of supporting documents and eventually add old Schengen visa that are not available in VIS) but was not discussed in detail in 2024.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The EU DEL organised as part of the EU-funded project on migration and mobility a dedicated workshop on student mobility, touching also upon issues related to document fraud. Several Schengen States participated and shared their experience.

4. Challenges

Response to the challenges identified in the 2023 report

A decision to revise the harmonised list of supporting documents was taken and an LSC proposal was submitted to the Visa Committee for discussions in early 2025.

EU DEL with support of LU undertook a survey regarding harmonisation of visa fees. This proved not feasible given the different regimes Schengen States apply.

The Common Information Sheet was updated in early 2024 and later in summer in view of the accession of BG and RO to Schengen and the increase of visa fees respectively.

Subject to be addressed in the next reporting period:

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

- Finalisation of the revision of the harmonised list of supporting documents;
- Continue exchange on ways to deal with forged and fake documents, spurious agents and traffickers, sharing information and encouraging legal actions.
- Exchange on the implementation of the MEV cascade for *bonafide* travellers and overall on the processing capacity of the Schengen States
- Engaging with MHA/Indian Police regarding appointment of a single point of contact at federal level regarding fraudulent documents (for transmission of information, denunciation of fraud, trafficking in human beings or migrant smuggling)

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.

The report has been approved by all the Member States present.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Indonesia
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

22 EU Member States (MS) have an embassy in Jakarta. This includes countries that are not part of Schengen (CY, IE). Schengen countries Norway and Switzerland are represented in Jakarta. Some regionalized the processing of Schengen visas: for Sweden and Norway all applications from Indonesia are handled in Bangkok, including visa issuing; all visa decisions for the Netherlands are taken centrally in The Hague.

Several embassies issue Schengen visas on behalf of other Schengen countries 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 Luxembourg.

Several Schengen countries use external service providers for collecting applications. Some MS collect visa applications in Bali and/or Surabaya for processing in Jakarta.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

There were 6 well attended meetings held in 2024, chaired by the EU delegation (EUDEL). The secretariat was held by the EUDEL. The EUDEL collects input for the agenda with participating countries and sends out the agenda, and drafts the meeting minutes after each meeting, which are sent out to member states and to EU Headquarters (EEAS and DG HOME). EUDEL maintained contact with like-minded countries. Some MS also organised networking activities for EU and like-minded countries' colleagues.

Colleagues from the foreign ministry and immigration ministry joined one of the meetings.

MS not present in Jakarta are usually invited to join LSC meetings via webex link.

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 and by a signal group.

Schengen Member States and the EUDEL worked well together on fulfilling the Visa Code requirements. Besides LSC meetings, Schengen Consuls used the LSC mailing list and WA and signal group to exchange information, questions, answers and experiences on Schengen/Visa related issues.

In peak seasons, some Schengen Member States encounter difficulties regarding availability of appointments for visa requests and regarding the Visa-processing time/

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

Overall, Schengen countries 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')

LSC consider the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas to be important and urgent. This would also solve the occasional backlogs in visa processing

The topic has been discussed on several occasions in LSC and at EUHoMs level. A proposal has been sent to Brussels for discussion at the Visa Committee.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No local coordination on the regular adjustment of **exchange rates** for Schengen visas fees.

No harmonized list of **accredited travel agencies** adopted in terms of the LSC and is not envisaged in 2025 either.

3.5 Exchange of information

- *quarterly statistics;*

Member States are requested to share visa statistics, which are compiled by the EUDEL. (Timeliness of submitting visa statistics has room for improvement.

- *cases of fraud;*

Member states exchange on fraud cases and forged documents during the LSC meetings. MS also shared names of fraudulent companies via the LSC mailing list.

- *travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI);*

Coordination on **travel insurances requirements has continued**, with the EUDEL updating a list of insurance companies compliant with Article 15 of the Visa Code. The list is shared for comments/approval to the Schengen countries present in Indonesia. A final list is then shared with the members and the concerned insurance companies, to be made available for information to visa applicants in the Schengen Consulates. Proposal for 2025 is to have Member States' involvement in verifying the visa policies.

- - *cooperation with external service providers and monitoring*

Information is exchanged during LSC meetings

- *use of VISMail and the Visa Information System;*

VISMail can be used to exchange information but it is not widely used yet. Some countries still encounter problems using the VIS.

4. Challenges

As mentioned in previous years' reports, there is limited staff capacity in the EU Delegation to carry out LSC effectively (one EEAS Official in charge as part of many other duties). Communication from/with HQ and close local cooperation with the Schengen Consuls helps mitigating this challenge.

5. Other issues

Bilateral agreements on visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports are already in place with a majority of EU Member States. In several cases, the implementation of bilateral agreements is on hold pending the inclusion of biometrical data in Indonesian Diplomatic Passports and the refusal of Indonesia to differentiate between diplomatic and service passports, the latter category being granted generously. The EU Laisser-passer is not recognized for visa on arrival.

Possible **visa-free access to the Schengen area** for Indonesian citizens remains a topic of interest. In the meanwhile, there is an expectation to have an improved cascade system for Indonesia.

This report was approved by Member States via silent procedure on 20 February 2025.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF IRAN

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in IRAN
2024 REPORT

Prepared by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU

1. Introduction

There are 22 Member States of the Schengen area present in Iran in Tehran: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

7 other Member States countries have representation agreements :

- Estonia is represented by Finland,
- Iceland by Denmark,
- Luxembourg by Belgium,
- Latvia by Hungary,
- Lithuania by Spain,
- Malta by Poland and
- Lichtenstein by Switzerland.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The Presidency had been held successively by Belgium in the first half of 2024 and Hungary in the second half of 2024. Third countries that are not Schengen members are regularly invited: Ireland and Cyprus.

The international situation in the Middle East had a major impact on visa operations. Some consulates suspended their operations, some consulates reduced the issuing of visas, some missions reduced diplomatic staff due to the security reasons (Iran – Israel tensions).

Member States are coordinated by the member that is currently holding the Presidency. The Belgian Presidency organised 6 meetings. The Hungarian Presidency organised 4 meetings.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Member States cooperate actively in accordance with the provisions of the Visa Code. These exchanges mainly concern the exchange of information:

- Cases of fraud and the use of forged documents

Forgery of documents attached to visa applications is common in Iran. Receiving documents confirming employment or wages can be successfully obtained for a fee - the procedure is handled by specialized (operating legally in Iran) visa broker agencies. Falsification or preparation of documents applies to both Iranian and Afghan citizens who apply at MS'consulates in Iran. All MS concern this problem as a serious one.

- The issuing and use of multiple-entry visas known as circulation visas

In 2024 the total amount of uniform visas applied for was 134,592. Uniform visas issued - 101,371, including 38,800 MEVs, which constituted approx. 38.8% of all visas issued. The refusal rate was 24.6%.

- Immigration risk analysis

Iran is a country with a high migration risk, mostly due to the difficult economic situation. There is no uniform pattern for a migrant person. Migration concerns both entire families and people without family obligations. All age and professional groups attempt to leave the country or migrate using legal avenues.

- Relations with external service providers for the reception of visa applications

In general, good experiences with external visa service providers are reported by MS, if services used. External service providers in Iran are: VFS Global, Visametric, TLS and VAC Global.

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

The MS present consider that practices have already been harmonised; last time in 2016.

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')

Cascade has been adapted locally, with validity of issued visas limited to a maximum of two years, in accordance with the relevant Commission Decision.

3.4 Harmonisation of the procedures

Information is exchanged between members at coordination meetings and/or via email. Member States regularly exchange information via email on suspected fraud or reasons for issuing/refusing permits.

3.4.1 Harmonisation of visa policy

A few MS are accepting visa applications from tourist agencies, most MS do not.

3.5 Exchange of information

Exchange of information within the LSC:

- quarterly statistics (number of visa operations, percentage of the refusal rate, waiting time for visa appointment, dynamics of changes in visa trends);
- cases of fraud;
- cases of visa shopping;
- cases of refugee claims in MS with visa issued in Tehran by other MS;
- cooperation with external service providers and monitoring – covered by each MS individually;
- growing number of official invitation from Iranian embassies in MS – ordinary, service and diplomatic passports;
- use of VIS-Mail and the Visa Information System – common;
- cooperation with local authorities and companies – limited;
- growing number of Afghan citizens applications – majority of MS.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Germany shares the statistic regarding the refugee claims in Germany with visas issued in Tehran by other MS – an initiative by the German side showing the scale of abuse and failure to use the visa for its intended purpose.

4. Challenges

- Strengthening cooperation at local level to minimize the risk of “visa shopping”.
- Limiting the participation of unauthorised visa agent companies in the visa process.
- Influx of Afghan refugees to Iran since August 2021.
- Growing risk of the illegal migration of Iranian citizens.
- Security problems related to the unstable international situation (Iran – Israel tensions) and worsening of the economic situation.
- Technical problems related to internet access.
- The challenges associated with the mass presence of Afghans applying for visas are numerous:
- Lack of travel and identity documents, widespread fraud, very high migration risk.
- High refusal rates and systematic, time-consuming appeals.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF ISRAEL

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Israel
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) covered by the EU Delegation in Tel Aviv (EUDELTA) applies to the internationally recognised territory of Israel and is performed by the EU Local Consular Correspondent (Political Officer) together with the Schengen MS consuls accredited to Israel. LSC in Tel Aviv does not cover the occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, where most of the MS have their own consulates located in East Jerusalem or Ramallah. Some MS (AT, CZ, EE, FI, LT, SK) cover the abovementioned areas from their embassies in Tel Aviv. Visas are issued in the Consular Sections of the Schengen MS in their embassies located in Tel Aviv. IS and LU don't have their own embassies/consular sections in Tel Aviv. IS is thus represented by DK and LU is represented by BE. From 1 May 2023 DK represents Norway in Israel (Tel Aviv) in issuing C-visas, as well as residence cases.

Israeli citizens, holders of ordinary passports, are not required to be in possession of a visa when entering the Schengen area for less than 90 days. LSC Tel Aviv therefore essentially covers the cases of non-Israeli citizens who are residents in Israel. Nationals from the occupied Palestinian territory are subjected to visa requirements, but usually apply for visa in the consulates located in East Jerusalem or Ramallah.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

In 2023 EUDELTA organised 4 LSC meetings in its premises (they were held back-to-back with the LCC meetings), including one special LSC meeting organised together with the Israeli MFA and Israel's Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA), regarding the introduction of the ETA-IL system for travellers from visa exempted countries. All LSC meetings were met with a high interest by the Schengen/MS with almost all of them being present in each of the meetings. LSC topics were also occasionally discussed on DHoMs level.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

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

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

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

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

MS have adapted to the general rules of multiple-entry visas under Article 24 (2). Some MS limited visa operations in first weeks after Hamas attack in October 2023 and after the military operation in Gaza started. However, all MS consulates resumed their regular visa operations.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The MS have initiated steps to harmonize the list of documents that have to be delivered for a visa application as well as the cascade system.

3.5 Exchange of information

EUDEL and MS keep regular exchange of information. EUDEL remains in contact with Israeli authorities on a regular basis, especially with the IL MFA Consular Department, Diplomatic Protocol, Israel's Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA). EUDEL remains in regular contact with the MS consuls also via e-mail list and consular WhatsApp group, which is a daily forum to discuss issues concerning visa and other Schengen topics. All MS present in Tel Aviv recognize Travel Medical Insurances (TMIs) issued by local Israeli companies for the purpose of visa applications. The VIS-Mail system is fully used by MS present.

Current visa statistics were exchanged by the MS on a regular basis and were included into the updated version of the Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In 2024, due to ongoing wars in Gaza and Southern Lebanon, as well as consideration of a constant threat from Yemen (several missile attacks) and Iran (two heavy missile attacks in 2024), EUDEL and MS continued sharing their views on the procedures, restrictions and regulations regarding non-essential travels to IL. All MS have been keeping the highest, or second highest alert for travels to Israel, which at the end of 2024 (after the reaching of a cease-fire with Hezbollah in Lebanon and with Hamas in Gaza) started to be reviewed and adjusted to the improved security situation on the ground.

4. Challenges

The issues of "visa shopping", as well as restrictions regarding issuing visa for Russian and Belorussian citizens, were discussed on several occasions.

5. Other issues

No other issues to be reported.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in JORDAN

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

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

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Three regular meetings were held in 2024, all of them well attended. EUD was co-chairing the meetings with BE in the first semester and chaired alone in the second semester. Reports are prepared by the EUD.

The Anti-fraud group (EU MS and like-minded, about visa-related fraud cases) met twice in 2024; organised by the US Embassy in March and the Belgian Embassy in June.

The EUD hosted a very successful FRONTEX workshop on the detection of false documents on 25-28 November with the participation of 64 consular officers, mostly from EU/Schengen country embassies but also from Canada and the USA. The CZ Embassy also organised on 1 December a training on trends and potential risk indicators in short term visa applications.

In addition to regular in person meetings, there are two relevant WhatsApp groups for fast communication: one for EU/Schengen consuls only and one comprising most consuls in Amman, with regular exchanges of information on both.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS are well equipped to properly apply the Visa Code provisions and share information on different kinds of visa matters (e.g. on external providers, special cases, etc.). Exceptions from the Visa Code are only applied for royal visits.

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

The harmonised list of the supporting documents was adopted by the Visa Committee in June 2023. No problems or difficulties with the implementation of the harmonised list were raised during the 2024 LSC meetings. No suggestions for amending the list have been put forward to date.

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')

Several discussions took place in the LSC on drawing up a new cascade for low-risk Jordanian travellers, i.e. persons with solid financial background and no past issues. Some MS are interested while one MS is not in favour; the LSC plans to take a final decision in 2025.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The LSC held a discussion on harmonising the exchange rate for the visa fee in JOD but several MS indicated strict instructions to use the rates provided by their capital. The differences are not big but still the local price of Schengen visas varies with each MS.

3.5 Exchange of information

The EUD compiles quarterly visa statistics but received less contributions from MS than in previous years. Overall, the number of visa applications received by MS remained constant with small variations.

BG and RO were welcomed to the Schengen area. The number of Schengen visa requests they received was not significantly different from previous figures. RO is considering outsourcing visa services in the future.

There were discussions in the LSC on Syrian applicants, in particular the issuance of second-generation Syrian passports that already contain the holder's signature enabling recognition by MS.

Some MS have been approached by insurance companies requesting formal approval of their policies by Schengen Embassies in Amman for visa requests. After discussion, the group agreed not to draw up a list of pre-approved insurance policies.

The group regularly discussed experiences with VFS Global, TLS and BLS International as external providers.

Regular information exchanges took place on waiting times for appointments to avoid visa shopping.

One MS indicated problems with VISMail, unable to receive any messages, only to send.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

False document detection trainings by FRONTEX (organised by the EUD) on 25-28 November 2024 were well attended and much appreciated. Part of the "FRONTEX Roadshow" to train consular officers of EU consulates around the world, the seminar provided hands-on practical training for 16 participants on each of the four days (64 in total), who were awarded a certificate of attendance.

A seminar on trends and potential risk indicators in short term visa applications, organised by CZ on 1 December 2024, was attended by 24 consular staff from MS. It focused on what to expect from visa applicants, how and what to see in the applications and what is important while conducting an interview.

4. Challenges

Different approaches by MS to VIP applications from the Royal Court / Royal Family, with regard to the documents required, timeframe, physical presence, etc.

5. Other issues

MS were consulted on this report and gave their approval at the LSC meeting of 04/02/2025.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KENYA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 18 Schengen EU member states represented in Kenya (AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE and SK) and 2 Schengen non-EU countries (CH, NO). All of the countries have embassies in Nairobi; some offer also consular services outside of Nairobi (e.g. IT has a visa centre in Mombasa) and several have visa hubs and handle visa applications from other countries in the wider region (e.g. CH, DK, ES, FR, HU, SE, NO, RO). One of the LSC members was not issuing Schengen visas in 2024 (PT) and is represented by EL.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The LSC Group met on monthly basis in 2024. The meetings are conducted in a hybrid format. Most of the countries participated regularly in LSC meetings, which are run back-to-back with the meetings of the Local Consular Cooperation (LCC) group. The LSC meetings were chaired by EU Delegation – either by Deputy Head of Delegation or the Head of Administration. Minutes were prepared by EU DEL and shared for approval with LSC members for approval under silent procedure.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States reported no significant problems in implementation, particularly with respect to Kenyan visa applications. Main issues identified during the year included submission of fake bank statements, submission of NVs not signed by MFA individuals authorized to sign travel NVs and use of the other fake documents (e.g. employment letters). In case of fake documents originating from the government, Embassies normally approach MFA for clarification. In case of suspicious bank statements, Embassies ask for verification directly by banks.

LSC members also reported a number of suspicious study visa requests and discussed policies that individual Members States have in place to discourage fraudulent visa applications. All in all most problems relate to applications coming from other countries in the region covered by LSC members in Nairobi. Somalia is a particular case – both in terms of visa applications and visa fraud - as almost all MSs do not recognize Somali passports.

Most LSC members work through external service providers - VFS (AT, CH, HU, DK, FI, IT, NL, NO, SE); TLS (BE, DE, FR); BLS (ES), while few engage directly with visa applicants (CZ, EL, PL, RO, SK). Some cases of problems with external provider were reported (e.g. appointments outside of the booking system) as well as cases of incomplete application files, or biometric data of insufficient quality. Staff of external service providers receive training both by the service companies and Embassies who work with them.

Waiting times ranged from up to 2 months to no waiting time at all. Some cases of visa shopping were reported – these cases tend to increase at the time of major events in a particular MS, resulting then in long waiting period for submission of applications to get visa for entry into that MS. LSC members are in regular contact and share information to ensure smooth implementation of the Visa Code.

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

The harmonized list of supporting documents for visa applications in Kenya was adopted on 26 June 2023 (C(2023) 4053) with implementation starting immediately thereafter. There were no difficulties in implementation in 2024. LSC group revised and approved an updated list of TMI companies in 2024. None of the MS has raised any difficulty with the implementation of the harmonized list of documents in 2024. There was no request for amendments to 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')

There has been no indication of the need to adapt general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2) of the Visa Code in 2023. LSC members reported compliance – i.e. multiple entry visas according to the cascade rules found in the Visa Code Handbook (8.4.3.1) to those, who fulfil the requirements of Article 24 (2).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Some practices could be more harmonized – e.g. practice for acceptance of the proof of marriage between EU citizen and non-EU citizen, when applying for free Schengen visas. Operating procedures for working with external service providers as well as training for their staff could be also more harmonized.

3.5 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC group worked well. The hybrid nature of LSC meetings facilitated the participation of those who were not able to take part in person. Information also continued to be shared via email and a dedicated WhatsApp group. Visa statistics were shared orally during the LSC meetings, indicating that the number of applications continued to increase as has the refusal rate. The statistical figures in case of some LSC members include also applications from other countries in the region and thus do not fully capture the situation in Kenya. Cooperation with local authorities was generally good. LSC members discussed and worked together in 2024 to update the list of travel documents issued by Kenya.

4. Challenges

No specific challenges identified. In 2025, LSC will continue to focus on regular exchange of information and assessment of visa code implementation.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in REPUBLIC OF KOREA (RoK)

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

25 EU Member States (EU MS) out of 27 are present in the Republic of Korea (RoK). Cyprus covers the RoK from their embassy located in Beijing and Malta from their MFA in Malta, whereas the Embassy of Iceland responsible for RoK is located in Tokyo.

The agreements of representation in Schengen visa matters⁹ were as follows:

- Embassy of Austria represents Malta;
- Embassy of Belgium represents Luxembourg;
- Embassy of Switzerland represents Liechtenstein.
- Embassy of Poland represents Estonia.
- Embassy of Slovakia represents Latvia.
- Embassy of Sweden: for visa application to Sweden, Denmark and Iceland applicants have to contact VFS Seoul. The Swedish Embassy in Bangkok processes them.
- Embassy of Norway: VFS Seoul deals with visa requests to Norway. Norwegian Embassy in Beijing processes and decides on them.
- Spain temporarily represented Portugal for the issuance of short-stay Schengen visas, under article 8 of the Visa Code, from 2024 May 20 to June 20.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

From January to December 2024, four EU/LSC cooperation group meetings were held on 31. January 29 May, 30 October and 27 November 2024 (with two additional meetings for consular issues only).

During this period, at the request of the Belgium Embassy in its capacity of EU Council Presidency in 1H 2024 and of the Hungarian Embassy in its capacity of EU Council Presidency in 2H 2024, EUDEL acted as the chair of the group's meetings. All MS agreed to that. The EU Delegation supported as well 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).

⁹ This does not necessarily imply the same arrangements for consular matters more widely.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

As no visas are required for RoK citizens travelling to the EU/Schengen area, LSC discussions on the application of the EU Visa Code¹⁰ have been relatively limited and discussed only when problematical cases were brought up by EU MS/Schengen countries.

While most countries have efficient systems in place, common challenges include longer waiting times during peak periods, the prevalence of visa shopping due to appointment delays, and the ongoing issue of no-shows, which has been noted by several countries.

The **Czech Republic** Embassy reported, while the consulate does not face significant issues with C visa applications, peak periods, such as November and May, result in longer waiting times due to limited staffing, particularly when processing a high volume of student long-term visa applications. As South Korean citizens do not require visas for travel to the EU/Schengen area, Czech consulates issue visas to Korean nationals (or other individuals from countries on the positive list under EU Regulation 2018/1806) only when the purpose of travel involves profitable activities. In such cases, we also process short-term C visas for South Koreans.

Generally, we do not encounter significant issues with handling C visa applications. The consulate has encountered isolated cases of visa shopping, notably involving Russian nationals, but they were unable to process such applications under current legislation.

Belgium reported that the applications are mostly solid, adhering to documentation requirements, so waiting times have not been an issue.

Hungary, which does not rely on external service providers, operates an efficient booking system that prevents significant problems with waiting times. However, no-shows have been a persistent issue and have been communicated to headquarters for further action.

Switzerland noted that visa shopping is a significant problem, likely due to applicants turning to the Swiss Embassy after facing longer appointment waiting times at other consulates.

The Netherlands also observed visa shopping, with applicants scheduling appointments with multiple LSC member states in the Republic of Korea based on the availability of quicker appointment slots. This behaviour is linked to the occurrence of no-shows.

The Greek Embassy reported that, with a small number of applicants, there are no issues with waiting times or visa shopping.

France, after implementing a specific timetable for Schengen visa appointments in 2023, has better managed waiting times. However, during peak periods for student visa applications, appointment times for Schengen visas are longer.

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 2018¹¹, following discussion and agreement by the LSC. MS embassies in 2024 did not

¹⁰ See https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/regulation-ec-no-8102009-european-parliament-and-council-13-july-2009_en

¹¹ 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

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.

Due to the visa free entry of Koreans, multiple entry visas are rather rare, although some MS (AT, CZ) mentioned they are actively using the C Visas cascade.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

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

3.5 Exchange of information

Meetings of the group are appreciated as a useful platform to exchange information related to consular and visa issues. The chair and other Member States regularly debriefed on meetings with RoK authorities on pertinent topics. 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.

- quarterly statistics

The exchange of information within the LSC is effective and valuable, with active participation and timely communication facilitated through platforms such as Signal. Several countries report strong cooperation and share relevant data efficiently, contributing to enhanced understanding and response to trends in visa applications.

Switzerland values the LSC collaboration highly, and the exchange with other Schengen countries is considered crucial. The Signal platform has proven especially useful for quick information sharing.

The Netherlands saw no significant changes or trends in visa applications in 2024, except for a notable rise in C visa applications, primarily from Chinese nationals, followed by those from Uzbekistan.

The Czech Republic Embassy reported that, the number of C visa applications remains consistently low, with around 60 applications annually, predominantly from third-country nationals. In 2024, these applicants represented 21 different nationalities.

Hungary saw a notable increase in C visa applications in 2024, reaching levels not seen since 2015. The applicants are primarily from China and Russia, with the main purposes being tourism and business.

Austria experienced a modest 5% increase in visa applications compared to 2023, with 60% of applicants being Korean nationals and a high approval rate of 90%.

Belgium reported an 8% increase in short-stay C visas compared to 2023, with a low rejection rate of 3%. The applications are mostly solid, adhering to documentation requirements.

As for **France**, there was a slight decrease in Schengen visa applications in 2024, dropping by 3%, although overall visa applications increased by 6%. The quality of submitted files improved, resulting in a reduction in the refusal rate from 17% in 2023 to 12% in 2024. Additionally, there was a significant increase in circulation visas (+66%). Refusals were mainly due to applicants from Bangladesh and Pakistan, typically men with G1 or E9 status in Korea, applying to visit France.

- ***cases of fraud;***

For **Hungary**, fraud cases are often detected through patterns in itineraries or recurring reasons for visits, particularly from certain nationalities. Applicants frequently claim they are traveling to Hungary with the intention of visiting Western countries like Austria and Germany, possibly believing that obtaining a visa from Hungary is easier. Additionally, Hungary experiences issues with no-show applicants, which have been reported to headquarters for further attention.

France reports that, the situation is complicated by the fact that the majority of visa applications are submitted by agencies, making it difficult to easily detect fraudulent cases. The reliance on agencies creates an added layer of complexity in identifying and addressing potential fraud.

- ***travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI);***

Sufficient options, e.g.

- ACE American Fire and Marine Insurance Korea (Korean), www.chubb.com/kr
- AXA General Insurance Co. (Korean),
<https://www.axa.co.kr/AsianPlatformInternet/html/axacms/shti/travel/info/index.html>,
<https://www.axa.co.kr/en/> (English), Tel. 1566-1566
- Dongbu Insurance Co. Ltd. (Korean),
<https://ir.idbins.com/mall/travel/overseas/MallTraOverSpecial.jsp>
- KB Insurance Co. Ltd. (Korean), <http://www.kbinsure.co.kr/main.ec>
- Samsung Fire & Marine Insurance Co. Ltd. (Korean)

- ***any problems linked to the implementation of the TMI rules;***

The Embassy of the Czech Republic reported that some applicants submit policies valid only for Czechia. In such cases, they request them to replace it with coverage valid for the entire Schengen area and to provide updated documentation.

- ***cooperation with local authorities and companies (e.g. banks, employers, transport companies)***

No problems have been reported. Only the Hungarian Embassy pointed out that they rarely cooperate with local authorities. In case of any submitted application we mainly have to contact some authorities in Hungary to validate certain things.

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

Most Embassies here do not collaborate with External Service Providers (ESPs) due to the low volume of visa applications. In contrast for example, Austria and Sweden make use of VFS for handling their visa applications.

- ***use of VISMail and the Visa Information System;***

The use of VISmail is generally limited, with only a few instances of exchange occurring in 2024. Despite having access to VISmail, it is rarely utilized due to the low number of applicants. For example France, reports a limited exchange, with only one or two files exchanged with other embassies per year. Overall, while VISmail is available, its use is minimal.

- ***other issues.***

Hungary has experienced persistent problems with no-shows in its booking system. This issue has proven challenging to manage, and the country has reported its experiences to headquarters. It was also highlighted as a key topic during Hungary's EU Council Presidency.

Switzerland, has encountered several requests from third-country nationals seeking humanitarian visas, including some applicants who have been refused asylum in Korea or have applied at multiple embassies. Switzerland emphasized the importance of improved coordination on these cases.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

From the Korean side, it is notable that the RoK authorities extended the K-ETA exemption for EU passport holders for 2025.

Since 1 September 2021 a new online authorisation system, called K-ETA came into force (resembling the US ESTA system and future ETIAS). 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) after originally from 29 March 2023 only passport holders from very few EU countries (and not 17 others) have been exempted till the end of 2024.

4. Challenges

No challenges to be addressed have been listed in the 2023 report, therefore no response was necessary.

No subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2025) were raised by Member States.

5. Other issues

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



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Kosovo
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Kosovo hosts Diplomatic Missions of 17 Member States of the EU and Schengen Area.

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

Another 11 EU and Schengen Area Member States are accredited in Kosovo, from abroad.

MS accredited abroad	from	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
Slovakia		Belgrade	Embassy
Norway		Ankara	Embassy
Iceland		Reykjavik	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

After the entering into force of the Visa Liberalization (VL) decision for Kosovo (January 1st 2024), the LSC was adapted to respond to the new circumstances, focusing on a reinforced dialogue with the authorities to follow up the trends emerging from the use of the VL by Kosovo travellers to the Schengen area. The group was expanded to include other relevant actors, such as Police Attachés, Migration Officers and Airline Liaison Officers, as well as DG HOME and NEAR representatives.

In 2024, three LSC meetings were held, in June, September and December, chaired by the European Union Office in Kosovo (EUOK). All of the meetings were well attended by most of the LSC members, including non-resident via videoconference. Reports of the meetings were drafted by the EUOK and shared with the LSC. Coordination with non-resident MS was ensured via email, and by facilitating their online presence in meetings.

Representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo were invited to two of the meetings, to discuss possible avenues of cooperation and information sharing regarding the numbers of Kosovo travellers entering the Schengen area. Monitoring of these figures is a key obligation for Kosovo under the Visa Suspension Mechanism, and some worrying trends related to the increased numbers of asylum requests by Kosovo passport holders in some Member States (DE, FR) have emerged over the year. Strategies to address the issue of rising numbers of asylum seekers through prevention and communication campaigns were discussed during the LSC meetings.

The EUOK has collected and shared regularly with the LSC and the Kosovo authorities the statistics available in EUROSTAT, to closely monitor the evolving trends.

The meetings were also used to discuss 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 Kosovo's lack of alignment with the EU's list of visa-free and visa exempt countries, which remains a matter of concern.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC has worked for several years to provide support and harmonize the application of the visa code, procedures and conditions for issuing visas in Kosovo.

The rules concerning applications, admissibility, use of the Visa Information System (VIS), examination of the application, background checks, collection of biometric identifiers and other procedures were strictly followed by the States issuing Schengen visas.

The States issuing Schengen visas applied the criteria established by the Visa Code on decision on visa applications. No challenges arising from the application of the Visa Code were reported.

The Member States consular authorities staff ensured full respect for the human dignity and the fundamental rights of the visa applicants, ensuring that no discrimination affected persons on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

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

The harmonisation of the list of supporting documents in Kosovo was completed in 2012. The harmonised list of documents is being applied, although in some cases, additional documentation may be requested by the consular authorities in order to support a decision on a particular visa application.

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 consular authorities have made an effort to harmonize the practices for close family members to address the high number of visa appointments. MEV are usually not issued to the first time travellers.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Given the advantage that Kosovo's official currency is the Euro, the harmonization of visa fees has been adopted by almost all embassies, with few exceptions.

3.5 Exchange of information

After the entering into force of the VL decision for Kosovo, the collection of visa statistics was deemed no longer necessary.

The LSC group agreed to continue its meetings in a mixed in person – online format, to avoid unnecessary displacements, and allow the participation of non-resident colleagues both in the Local Consular and Schengen groups.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other initiatives to report.

4. Challenges

After the entering into force of the VL decision for Kosovo, most of the challenges identified in the 2023 report are no longer a cause for concern (high visa demand workload, long waiting periods, admissibility of visa requests, validity of the visas issued, prevalence of visa shopping, frequent use of false supporting documents for the visa application, abuses of the visa appointment booking systems and misinformation about visa procedures).

As expected, the impact of the VL decision has created a new set of challenges, the most concerning, the increased numbers of asylum requests by Kosovo passport holders in France and Germany. Despite the relative growth, the total numbers are small, and not alarming. The LSC and the Kosovo authorities took quick action to address this issue. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) has already taken measures to strengthen the screening of travellers enforcing a more strict control, within the legal mandate of the Border Police, based on the information contained in police databases. Other elements, such as destination are also included in the list of indicators being monitored for departures to Europe. Screening is more effective in the international airport. Land border crossings are more problematic, with no direct border with any Schengen countries but NMK and AL are collaborating more closely to prevent departures. Greece, Hungary and Croatia are the most used entry points by land into the EU.

The GoK has already established very close coordination with the FR and DE Embassies, to understand better the personal motivations behind the recent spike in asylum applications in these two EU countries.

Another pending issue is the finalization of readmission agreements with EU Member States. Kosovo has subscribed agreements with 20 of them, with a final agreement with Lithuania awaiting approval and drafts agreed with Iceland and Latvia.

Visa policy alignment has also been highlighted as a challenge, despite some progress with three more countries aligned in 2024: Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

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. Connected to the adoption of the visa free regime for Kosovo, on 16 November 2023, the Commission adopted a proposal to ensure that all citizens of the Western Balkans will be covered by a visa free regime when travelling to the EU. The proposal was adopted by the EP and the Council, and effective 13th October, 2024, Serbian nationals who reside in Kosovo and hold passports issued by Serbia's Coordination Directorate (Koordinaciona uprava) no longer need a visa to EU for stays up to 90 cumulative days within a 180-day rolling period.

This decision caused controversy. The Kosovo authorities and Kosovo Albanian CSOs reacted strongly against it, while Kosovo Serb minority supported it. Additionally, Kosovo authorities do not recognize the validity of KU passports, so these documents cannot be used to travel directly to Europe from the Pristina international airport.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the STATE OF KUWAIT
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

16 EU Member States (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, RO) are represented locally. The remaining 11 EU Member States are represented by their Embassies in other Gulf States, mostly in the UAE (EE, IE, LT, LU, LV, PT, SE, SI), while FI is represented by its Embassy in Qatar, DK and SK by their Embassies in Saudi Arabia. From non-EU Schengen Member States CH has an Embassy in Kuwait, and NO is accredited from UAE. Both are regularly included in the Local Schengen Cooperation.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

EUDEL organised eight formal LSC meetings (back-to-back with EU LCC meetings), one of which was hosted by the BE Presidency. HU Presidency organised an informal working lunch at the end of the year.

All LSC meetings were very well attended, with only 1-2 resident MS absent on occasion. The meetings were chaired by the EUDEL. Due to a long-term vacancy in the CH embassy, their participation in 2024 remained rather limited, although they were invited to both the LSC as well as the LCC meetings. The minutes of the meetings were drafted by the EUDEL and circulated to resident and non-resident EU MS together with other EU coordination meeting minutes.

The year 2024 was marked by two major discussions for the LSC/LCC group: the drafting of the Harmonised Lists of Supporting Documents for Schengen Visa Applicants, and the Joint Framework for Consular Crises Cooperation. After several attempts of discussion, both draft documents were agreed on local level. Towards the end of 2024 the draft harmonised lists were sent to Headquarters for discussion and endorsement in the Visa Committee.

Ad-hoc and more informally various issues are frequently discussed in the Consular WhatsApp group, where all Member States are represented.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC regularly discussed the local implementation of the Visa Code and the Visa Cascade Implementing Decision for Kuwaiti citizens, which is in force since 8 September 2023. Main points of discussion have been differences in the practices between MS and service providers. In particular,

the discrepancies in the usage of the reservation systems for applications has been discussed regularly, as well as changes in the application trends after the Visa Cascade Decision for Kuwaiti applicants.

Some cases of fraud and visa shopping have also been discussed during the meetings. Towards end of the year one major additional point of discussion – partially overlapping with Consular cooperation – has been the revocation of Kuwaiti citizenship for over 30 000 persons, which has led to uncertainties regarding their citizenship, their future travel documents as well as handling of their possible Schengen visa applications.

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

In October 2024, the draft harmonised lists of supporting documents for both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti visa applicants have been agreed upon locally, and were forwarded to the Visa Committee. The completion of this exercise is expected to take place in 2025.

The proof of financial means for Kuwaiti applicants was the only major point of discussion for the harmonisation of the 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')

There is a visa cascade in place for Kuwaiti nationals, which is in force since 8 September 2023 (Commission Implementing Decision C(2023) 6004 establishing adapted rules on the issuing of multiple-entry visas to Kuwaiti nationals residing in Kuwait and applying in Kuwait for short stay visas).

Currently no visa cascade decision is applicable to any other nationals residing in Kuwait, nor has there been any major discussions towards adaptation of such decision for other groups of applicants. The only exception has been a brief discussion of possibility to apply the existing visa cascade decision to other GCC nationals resident in Kuwait. DG HOME clarified that this is not possible without revision of the existing visa cascade decision, for which at the moment there is no appetite for in the LSC.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Besides the local level agreement on the harmonised list of supporting documents, in 2024 the LSC frequently discussed the cooperation with service providers, especially as regards the reservation systems, dealing with pressure from last minute applicants, and application capacities.

Furthermore, before the summer peak travel period with EUDEL's support on social media an information campaign on Schengen visa applications was launched. Most MS found this campaign such a success, that upon their request the campaign was re-launched before the second peak travel period at the end of the year.

3.5 Exchange of information

Exchange of data on application trends (overall figures, refusal rates) has been discussed in the LSC meetings on ad-hoc basis. There are also regular exchanges regarding (attempted) cases of fraud and other reoccurring issues with applicants from some nationalities.

Besides the cooperation with service providers (VFS / Capago), the LSC has discussed the cooperation with local authorities, banks and travel/transport companies, where the experiences are

rather mixed. Good cooperation with local authorities as well as with private companies is often dependent on knowing the right counterparts personally, and/or on local (Arabic) language skills.

EUDEL has also kept the MS informed of the (delayed) launch of the new Entry/Exit System (EES) as well as of the ETIAS. Communication campaign on the EES was expected to take place in autumn 2024, and in the meanwhile has been postponed until further notice.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A.

4. Challenges

There was no report prepared for 2023.

Main goal to be achieved by the LSC in 2025 will be the adoption of the harmonised lists of supporting documents for Schengen visa applicants applying in Kuwait, which goal is also dependent on approval by the Visa Committee.

5. Other issues

All represented Schengen Member States' Embassies have been consulted during the drafting process of this report and have approved it.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

EU Member States present in the capital Bishkek with resident Embassies (DE, FR, HU). Embassy of Switzerland is also present.

- Schengen Member States represented by Germany (BE, LUX, PT, NO).
- Schengen Member States represented by Switzerland (FR, PL, CZ, SVN, SK, EE, LV, LIE)
- Schengen Member States represented by Hungary (ML, IT, LIT, ES, NL, GR, SWE). LIT is represented only as far as visas for officials are concerned.
- FR Embassy in Bishkek does not issue visas. The Consul of FR in Astana covers Kyrgyzstan on LSC issues.

Member States who have agreements with private companies where citizens of Kyrgyzstan can submit applications:

- HU VFS Global Bishkek
- DE Visametric Bishkek
- FIN VFS Global Bishkek
- FR VFS Bishkek and in Almaty (Kazakhstan)
- GRE VFS Global Bishkek
- CRO VFS Global Bishkek
- CZ VFS Global Bishkek
- IT VFS Global Bishkek
- AT VFS Global Bishkek
- NO for residence permits Kyrgyzstan citizens/residents can apply at VFS in Almaty, Astana, as well as at any VFS that falls under the NO immigration hub in Ankara
- RO visa applications to the Embassy in Astana through the portal www.evisa.mae.ro
- DK VFS Global in Almaty

Member States Embassies based abroad and accredited to Kyrgyzstan are as follows:

In Astana, Kazakhstan: BE, NED, LIT, LV, CRO, CZ, SVK, GRE, ES, PL, EE, FIN, IT, RO, BG, AT

In Moscow, RF: SVN, CYP, PT, IRL (currently no Consul at the Embassy, communication on LSC issues is held with the Ambassador), DK (Consul currently based at MFA in Copenhagen)

In Ankara, Turkiye: SWE

LUX and MT do not have Embassies accredited to Kyrgyzstan, thus for LSC issues they communicate from their capitals.

NO and ISL have accredited Ambassadors based in their capitals. LIE has no accredited Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan and on LSC issues is represented by Switzerland.

Citizens of MS, non-represented in the Kyrgyz Republic can have ETDs or other support from locally present Embassies.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Four LSC meetings took place in the course of 2024 (January, April, July and September). These meetings were well attended by the MS present in Bishkek and Switzerland, as well as online by a number of MS Embassies accredited to Kyrgyzstan from Astana and from Moscow. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation, who also prepared the first draft of the minutes accordingly.

Several of the Consuls (also those based abroad and accredited in Kyrgyzstan) are included in a dedicated Signal group for Consuls accredited/covering Kyrgyzstan. This Signal group was created in 2024.

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.

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’)

In 2024 the LSC group decided that there is no need, nor necessary conditions to adapt the general rules.

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. There is regular 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

In 2024 the main challenges were related to applicants submitting fake, misleading supporting documents in order to obtain Schengen visa. Also the law enforcement agencies in Kyrgyzstan have for the first time cracked down on an organised crime group who were producing faking Schengen visas.

Local travel companies use fraud simulating they booked timeslot and obtained visas for applicants, with the latter discovering all this only after having paid a significant fee. There are many suspicious advertisements about guaranteed receiving of visas and resident permits/citizenships in MS.

Love fraud is also often used, where MS citizens based abroad are tricked to pay money for non-existing people and expenses.

5. Other issues

Kyrgyzstan illegal immigration to the US by visa fraud, Schengen Visa application in order to travel to Panama, Mexico, Costa Rica or to apply for visa to the US in EU Member States.

According to the information received, some of travel companies help applicants to submit suspicious documents to help illegal immigration, also to USA.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Lebanon
2024 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 deal in Beirut with Schengen visa applications by Syrian nationals residing in Syria, at least one also with visa applications by Iraqi and Jordanian nationals residing in Iraq and Jordan respectively.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Five LSC meetings were held in total during 2024. Four were physical meetings at the EU Delegation (EU DEL), but a WebEx link was provided to allow consuls residing outside Lebanon to join. One meeting was held as a hybrid meeting at the EU DEL and via WebEx because the chair was teleworking from Europe due to the security situation in Lebanon.

The meetings were generally very well attended. The EU DEL chaired the LSC meetings, while MS submitted input for the agenda. Recognition of travel documents, the draft harmonised list of supporting documents and its implementation, trends (related to visa shopping, statistics, refusal rates and fraud), the level of the profile of visa applicants, and the revision of the list of travel documents issued by the Lebanese authorities have been recurrent items on the LSC agenda. EU DEL drafted minutes after each meeting, which were adopted by MS.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The MS are generally well equipped to apply the Visa Code and share information on different kinds of visa matters.

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

The escalation of violence in the South of Lebanon had an impact on the functioning of some MS visa sections, notably in the last months of the year. Some MS reported a drop in applications, while other MS reported an increase, probably due to the fact that some visa sections closed for several weeks following the airstrikes on Beirut and its suburbs and the evacuation by some embassies of some of its expat consular staff.

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

The harmonised list of supporting documents for short stay visa for Lebanese applicants was adopted in March 2024. Some flexibility was given for its implementation but at the LSC meeting on 20 June 2024, MS confirmed that they have reviewed their websites and forms, which are now fully in line with the language and requirements of the harmonized list.

A remaining issue is the list of required documents used by external service providers (ESP). A unique list would make the harmonisation of requirements visible for applicants and hopefully reduce visa shopping. One MS proposed to meet with other MS using the same ESP to discuss the issue and find a solution. Due to the challenges of the security situation, this has not happened yet.

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 confirmed at several meetings that they continued to apply the 'cascade' despite the security situation. Nevertheless, each application is assessed individually taking into account the previous visa obtained, the full documentation of the application as well as the economic means and professional situation of the applicants and its connection with the economic situation in Lebanon. Falsified and fake supporting documents continue to be an issue leading generally to the refusal of the application and some MS reported a decrease in the quality of the profile of the applicants in the last months of 2024.

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
types of passports issued by Lebanese and Syrian authorities,
visa trends and statistics, especially refusal rates,
cases of fraud (imposters pretending to work for MS' consulates, fake and falsified documents, incl. identity documents, travel documents, bank statements, insurance certificates, fake invitation letters, etc.),
application of the cascade for MEV,
cooperation with local authorities, especially regarding the verification of 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.

The formation of a new government and the stabilization of the ceasefire give hope that the economic and security situation in the country will normalize again. A return to a functioning financial system and a positive economic outlook might make a revision of the harmonized list of supporting documents for short stay visa for Lebanese applicants necessary in the coming years.

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.

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



UNION EUROPEENNE
DELEGATION AUPRES DE LA REPUBLIQUE DE MADAGASCAR
ET DE L'UNION DES COMORES

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) A MADAGASCAR**
RAPPORT 2024

1. Introduction

Trois Etats membres Schengen sont présents (CH, DE, FR).

Sont représentés

- par la France : Allemagne (uniquement pour les ressortissants malgaches), Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, Estonie, Finlande, Grèce, Italie, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovénie, République tchèque (FR représente en outre Islande) ;
- par la Suisse : Hongrie, Norvège, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Suède + Liechtenstein
- L'Allemagne délivre les visas de longue durée et certains visas Schengen.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

Trois réunions (mars, juin, septembre), dont une (juin) focalisée sur la problématique des visas « au pair » vers l'Allemagne. Elles sont présidées par la DUE, qui drafte les compte-rendu.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les délais de rendez-vous pour le dépôt des dossiers auprès du prestataire du consulat général de France sont importants (actuellement un mois). C'est principalement lié à un déficit de ressources humaines parmi les agents instructeurs du service des visas. Une période très difficile avait déjà été enregistrée entre septembre et novembre 2024 (plus de 2000 dossiers en « stock »). Cela entraîne du « visa shopping », non-massif mais notable, auprès de la Suisse.

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

La liste des documents justificatifs est harmonisée.

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 »)

Les consulats appliquent au mieux de leurs possibilités les règles relatives aux visas à entrées multiples. Cet élan est freiné par le fait que les passeports malgaches n'ont une validité que de cinq ans. L'attention du ministère de la sécurité publique, en charge de la délivrance des passeports, a été attirée sur ce point par la DUE. A défaut de pouvoir délivrer des visas dépassant la durée de validité du passeport, la délivrance de visas de circulation adaptés à la péremption du passeport (par exemple deux ans et dix mois au lieu de deux ans) constituerait un progrès.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

S.O.

3.5. Echange d'informations

Décrivez comment se déroule l'échange des informations LSC:

- *statistiques trimestrielles; (brève description qualitative des échanges/tendances observées; n'ajoutez pas de tableaux ou d'annexes de statistiques)*

Les échanges d'information ont lieu de manière fluide.

- *cas de fraude*

Surtout des relevés bancaires et documents professionnels falsifiés. Quelques cas de fraude « look-alike » décelés à l'aéroport (pas de contrôle biométrique)

- *assurance médicale de voyage (càd quelles sont les compagnies d'assurances qui offrent une assurance conforme);*
- *quels sont les problèmes liés à la mise en œuvre des règles relatives à l'assurance médicale de voyage;*

Pas de problème signalé concernant les assurances. Les requérants présentent une assurance conclue soit par l'hôte dans le pays de destination, soit par les compagnies d'assurance locales ARO, AXA ou HAVANA.

- *coopération avec les autorités locales et les compagnies locales (par exemple : banques, employeurs, compagnies de transport);*

Coopération satisfaisante. Le CG de France accorde des facilités à certaines entreprises et travaille à la mise à jour d'une liste d'attention positive.

- *coopération avec les prestataires de service et contrôle (citez des initiatives de contrôles exécutés en commun ou pour le compte d'autres Etats Membres);*
- *utilisation du VISMail et du Visa Information System;*

Faible utilisation de VISMail, sauf par l'ambassade de Suisse pour ses échanges avec l'ambassade de Norvège (qu'elle représente).

- *autres.*

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

S.O.

4. Défis

Le poids prépondérant du Consulat général de France dans la délivrance des visas depuis Madagascar fait que ses difficultés à traiter les demandes ont un impact pour l'ensemble des Etats Schengen. C'est particulièrement le cas pour les visas court-séjour, qui sont traités de façon moins prioritaires que les visas étudiants ou les renouvellements de visas de circulation.

5. Divers



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF MALAYSIA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Malaysia
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Fifteen EU Member States in the Schengen Area have diplomatic representations in Malaysia (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden). Many Member States have Honorary Consular representations all across Malaysia. Some Member States are only represented by an Honorary Consul.

From the non-EU Schengen countries, Switzerland and Norway have diplomatic representations in Kuala Lumpur.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The EU Delegation hosted and chaired five LSC meetings in 2024, of which all were organised back-to-back with the Local Consular Cooperation meetings. The meetings were generally well attended.

The EU Delegation with inputs from Member States prepares the agendas and reports. The LSC Meeting reports are approved by a silent procedure by the EU MS.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The cooperation between the Member States and the EU Delegation is close and information is shared according to the Visa Code.

Different MS's have different waiting and processing times.

Malaysia has visa free regime with Schengen zone. Therefore, the number of Schengen visa applications is relatively low as they mainly come from the citizens of other countries who legally stay long-term in Malaysia. The refusal rates for Schengen Visas in 2024 showed some divergence (in some cases 0, in other: 37%).

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

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already acquired.

3.3 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 general, majority of MS are back on track for the implementation of the MEV cascade, with a flexibility based on the situation (bona fide, applications prior to 2020, etc.).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Member States share information during the LSC meetings to harmonise practices. Such harmonisation entails, for instance, whether to accept e-pass (electronic pass which replaced the physical sticker Employment Pass) as proof of residence in Malaysia and how to work with different local websites that are used to authenticate e-pass. This topic will be further discussed during LSC meetings in 2025.

Coordination is also used to share experiences from the contacts with the Immigration Department (e.g. on the acceptance of temporary/emergency passports or on the need for POC's).

3.5 Exchange of information

Schengen Member States share visa statistics on a yearly basis, which is considered as an adequate frequency. Numbers for visa applications are limited in Malaysia, mainly because Malaysians are exempt from short-stay visa requirements.

Member States share their observations on new documentations issued by Malaysian authorities and discuss any problems they might have faced in the cooperation with local authorities.

During 2024 Member States reported having observed an increase amount of fraudulent cases, especially passport and e-pass forging.

CZ has noted a sharp increase of interest in Estonian Schengen visas (they represent EE in the Schengen visa agenda). The majority of prospective applicants, however, are filtered out before being granted the appointment.

VISMail is not used regularly.

4. Challenges

Member States sometimes face challenges in receiving consistent and timely information from the Malaysian authorities. The Ministry of Home Affairs and its subordinate Immigration Department have not replied to requests for information.

Access to the regulations in force is difficult, and their application depends largely on the immigration officer in post at the time the check or application is made.

Member States observe some challenges in certifying the place of birth of Malaysian citizens, because Malaysian passports in some cases state the territory or the name of the hospital as a place of birth.

The LSC in Malaysia reissued its invitation to the Immigration Department as a follow up after the meeting in January 2023 to discuss ways to increase cooperation and to obtain first-hand information from the authorities. Despite many attempts, the invitation remained unanswered.

Approved by all Member States present in Malaysia.



**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN MAURITANIE
RAPPORT 2024**

1. Introduction

4 Etats Membres sont présents en Mauritanie, dont 3 avec des sections consulaires qui délivrent des visas (Espagne, Allemagne et France). L'Espagne dispose également d'un Consulat à Nouadhibou.

Plusieurs Etats-Membres n'ont pas de représentation diplomatique permanente en Mauritanie mais disposent d'accords de représentation avec les Etats-membres présents pour la délivrance de visas. La France représente ainsi 11 EMUE et 2 Etats membres de l'espace Schengen (Belgique, République Tchèque, Grèce, Estonie, Lettonie, Lituanie, Luxembourg, Hongrie, Malte, Pays-Bas, Suède, Islande, Suisse), et l'Espagne 3 EM (Italie, Autriche, Portugal).

Les demandes de visa Schengen pour la Bulgarie, le Danemark, le Lichtenstein, la Pologne, la Roumanie, la Slovénie, la Slovaquie, la Finlande et la Norvège doivent être déposées auprès des Consulats compétents hors de Mauritanie.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

Trois réunions de coordination Schengen ont été organisées en 2024 à l'initiative de la DUE, dont une en présence du représentant de la DG Home en charge du code visa. Elles se sont tenues en personne, à la DUE. Les réunions LSC sont pilotées par la DUE, au niveau de la Cheffe de la Section Politique, presse et information (PPI).

Les réunions régulières qui se sont tenues en 2024 se sont concentrées sur le partage d'informations (statistiques visa, cas de fraude consulaire, filières d'immigration irrégulière etc.), sur la préparation d'une fiche d'information harmonisée et d'une liste harmonisée de documents, sur la perspective d'une campagne d'information conjointe sur les visas Schengen ainsi que sur des points d'actualité.

La DUE établit l'ordre du jour des réunions, incluant les contributions des EM. Un système de rotation pour la rédaction des comptes rendu de réunion pourrait utilement être mis en place. Les EM participent activement aux réunions LSC.

Le renforcement de la coopération locale Schengen a également été discutée lors de réunions de dialogue politique sur les questions migratoires entre l'UE et ses Etats membres et le ministère de l'Intérieur mauritanien, alors que la question de la migration légale est l'un des piliers de l'accord de partenariat migratoire signé en mars 2024 entre l'UE et la Mauritanie.

3. État des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les EMS appliquent le Code des visas. L'Espagne a externalisé la réception des demandes de visas (société BLS).

Le nombre de demandes de **visas Schengen** traitées, en augmentation pendant plusieurs années depuis 2018 (en dépit d'une baisse lors de la période COVID) est désormais relativement stable. (autour de 22 700 demandes en 2024 et autour de 23 000 en 2023) mais la répartition entre les 3 consulats a beaucoup évolué au profit de l'Espagne qui traite désormais la grande majorité des demandes :

- Espagne : 16876 demandes, soit 74% des demandes
- France : 4230 demandes, soit 19 % des demandes
- Allemagne : 1594 demandes, soit 7% des demandes
- Le taux de refus moyen pour la Mauritanie est de 31% en 2024.

En conséquence de l'augmentation des demandes de visas (en particulier en haute saison, l'été), mais aussi du rôle joué par les officines qui fonctionnent comme intermédiaires en bloquant les créneaux de rendez-vous, plusieurs consulats font parfois face à une pénurie de disponibilité de rendez-vous pour la présentation de demande de visas (difficulté qui existe aussi dans d'autres pays de la région). Les délais de traitement de demandes de visa varient également d'un consulat à l'autre (entre une et trois semaines en moyenne).

L'augmentation du prix de visa n'a pas suscité de difficultés particulières, bien que certains acteurs locaux véhiculent l'idée que cette tarification est excessive, en particulier en cas de refus.

A noter qu'en 2024, l'Espagne puis les Pays-Bas se sont ajoutés à la liste des EM qui demandant l'obtention d'un visa de transit aéroportuaire pour les ressortissants mauritaniens (en complément de FR et CZ).

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

L'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs a fait l'objet d'un travail commun au printemps 2024 et a été par la Commission européenne le 11 septembre 2024.

Son application par les consulats ne pose pas de difficultés.

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 conviennent de l'utilité du système en cascade, d'ailleurs largement appliqué mais n'ont pas exprimé le souhait d'une harmonisation de cette pratique via l'adoption d'un système en cascade uniforme et fixe, qui limiterait la marge de décision locale de chaque consulat. Le sujet pourra être abordé de nouveau en 2025.

3.4 Harmonisation des procédures

Une fiche d'information commune a également été finalisée en 2024 et servira de base de travail pour la campagne d'information sur les visas Schengen qui doit être mise en œuvre en 2025 par le

Consortium ICMPD/GOPA sur des fonds de la DG Home. Cette fiche n'existe pour l'instant qu'en anglais mais sera traduite et disponible en ligne sur les sites des 3 consulats et de la DEL UE, ainsi qu'en version papier dans les locaux consulaires.

3.5. Echange d'informations

Conformément aux dispositions du code des visas, les réunions de coordination, des rencontres et échanges directs entre les Consuls, ainsi que des réunions entre la Délégation de l'UE et les Attachés de sécurité intérieure des 3 Ambassades concernées et la liste de diffusion servent à échanger les informations notamment sur les aspects suivants:

Les cas de fraude documentaire

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 de certains actes d'état civil, mais également des relevés bancaires.

La viabilité des sociétés d'assurance de voyage.

4. Défis

Comme l'année précédente, la fraude documentaire et la falsification des documents continuent à constituer un défi important en Mauritanie, bien que celle-ci soit souvent peu sophistiquée. Des cas de fraude et fraude documentaire sont rapportés par rapport aux demandes de visas de toute sorte, court et longue durée (tourisme et affaires, accompagnants, conférences et groupes culturelles, visites familiales, réunification, etc). La nécessité de fiabiliser l'état civil mauritanien, qui ne dispose pas d'un parquet spécialisé sur l'état civil, est également un sujet de préoccupation.

Il est donc important que les États Schengen poursuivent leur approche commune et coordonnée dans la lutte contre la fraude documentaire et la falsification de documents.

La préparation et le suivi de la campagne de communication conjointe UE-Mauritanie sur les visas Schengen prévue au 1^{er} semestre 2025 constituera un enjeu important pour la coordination Schengen 2025.

5. Divers

RAS.

Le rapport a été approuvé par les EM représentés localement.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO MEXICO

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MEXICO
2024 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, including Bulgaria and Romania (all represented in Mexico-City through an Embassy), as well as Norway and Switzerland. It is worth noting that MS maintain three Consulates General outside the capital Mexico City: ES has a Consulate General in Guadalajara (State of Jalisco) and both ES and FR in Monterrey (State of Nuevo León).

Austria (for Schengen visas also representing Malta)

Belgium (also representing Luxembourg and Slovenia for Schengen visas)

Bulgaria (even before becoming full member of Schengen, it was invited to the LSC meetings)

Czech Republic

Denmark (also issuing Schengen visas for Sweden, Norway and Iceland)

Finland

France

Germany

Greece

Hungary (Schengen visas for Hungary are temporarily issued by Spain, due to works in HU Embassy)

Italy

Netherlands

Poland

Portugal

Romania (even before becoming full member of Schengen, it was invited to the LSC meetings)

Slovakia (for Schengen visas representing Latvia)

Spain (for Schengen visas representing Estonia and – temporarily due to works at HU Embassy – Hungary)

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 have to 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 2024

In the reporting period, three regular LSC meetings were held, in March, May, and September 2024.

LSC meetings are usually held back-to-back with LCC meetings.

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 Member States issued a bit more than 2,100 Schengen visas for 2024 (refusal rate ca. 6%).

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.

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 2024 on ensuring a harmonised application of Multiple Entry Visas at the local level to prevent forum shopping.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Not applicable

3.5 Exchange of information

Continuing on the practice established in 2022, 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.

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 the perception of the EU in Mexico. EUDEL regularly informed MS about the 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 does not. The Mexican media also referred to it. EUDEL countered actively the misinformation through a dedicated campaign, i.e. through numerous interviews by the HoD during the last few years. Changes in the roll-out date of ETIAS 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. Non-Schengen EUMS, like Ireland, regularly communicated about the difficulties they face due to Mexicans' consideration of ETIAS as an EU harmonised tool.

A challenge often is presented by some EUMS on the compatibility of long-term visas with short-term stays. The more frequent case is a Mexican student with a national long-term visa that decides to travel to Europe before his visa is in force, which he can do as Mexicans are exempted of visa for short-term stays. Some border agents fail to see the compatibility of having a short-term visa-free stay with a long-term stay back-to-back.

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF MONGOLIA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONGOLIA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

7 Member States are present in Mongolia (Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary), 19 are based in Beijing and 1 in Seoul but accredited in Mongolia. Bulgaria does not issue visas in Mongolia and no MS present in Mongolia issues visa for Bulgaria. The Consul of Hungary has left and not been replaced.

Representation for visa purposes:

- **Czechia** represents Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Switzerland
- **France** represents the Netherlands
- **Germany** represents Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain
- **Poland** has started in 2024 to issue Schengen visa. They do it for Poland only.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

A LSC meeting was held in April 2024, with the participation of the consul of Austria in Beijing, in addition to the EUMS present in Mongolia. The issue of visa was raised occasionally during the monthly meeting of the Heads of Mission. It was agreed in principle that LSC meeting would be organised every six months, and that ad-hoc meetings on fraud could be organised. However, this schedule has been challenged due to the departure of the staff member in charge of the file at the end of 2024.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In 2024, all EUMS carried out their tasks under LSC's Visa Code normally. Applications have continued to increase. Refusal rates vary importantly, but can reach 20%. There is a consensus that Mongolia is a migratory risk country. The claimed purpose of the visit is not always the actual one. Fake tourism is one of the frequent scenarios. People tend to borrow money from brokers to show greater savings on their accounts. There were also registered cases of fake electronic statements and fake certificates of employment. Sometimes there is fake information on genuine documents. Hotel reservations are frequently missing.

While most MS rely on in-person appointments, one is using phone calls, which it considers more efficient and allowing shorter delay. MS share the concern about the activity of some travel agencies that propose for a fee next-day appointment, while the waiting time is usually of several weeks. Maybe in connection, MS see the case of people booking appointments but no showing up.

The medical insurance coverage requirement continues to vary, as do the payment method and currency of application fees.

The regime applicable to diplomatic passports varies from a MS to the other.

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

MS do not see a further need to harmonize formally the list of supporting documents since they consider that harmonization in practice already exists, although they acknowledge that some there are variations concerning information requested from the applicants.

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')

Multiple entry visas are quite rare. MS agree that harmonization in the cascade standards is not feasible.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

There were no other initiatives taken in 2024 to ensure harmonisation of practices.

3.5 Exchange of information

A specific functional mailbox was created to receive statistics from EUMS. All present EUMS have shared their statistics of 2024. EUDEL created a Signal group for both Local Consular Cooperation and Local Schengen Cooperation. The cooperation with local authorities remains minimal.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

4. Challenges

In 2024, lack of human resources within the EUDEL was the main challenge for organising LSC meetings. The colleague in charge of the file (among many others) left the Delegation at the end of 2024 and was not replaced. The Head of the Political section keeps in touch on visa issues with MS present in the country and will organise a LSC meeting in the first half of 2025.

5. Other issues



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF MONTENEGRO

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONTENEGRO

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

14 EU MS have resident Embassies (AT, BG, CZ, DE, ES, FR, GR, HR, HU, IT, PL, RO, SI, SK), one Consul-General (HR in Kotor's consulate) and seven Honorary Consuls representing 10 EU MS (AT, BG, DK/SE, ES, FI, HU, NL, RO, SI) 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, HU, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SI, SK).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

In 2024, LSC meetings took place in February and in December. The meetings were organised by the EU Delegation in a hybrid way and chaired by the EUD Consular Correspondent. The LSC meetings were well attended, with non-resident EU MS attending the meeting via WebEx or in person. Minutes were prepared by the EUD and distributed to the participants.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Most EU MS guarantee an appointment for Schengen Visa within 7-15 days. Two countries take on average from two to three weeks.

Many MS highlight the problem of visa shopping, where applicants book an appointment in one EU Embassy and then do not show up because received an earlier appointment in another EU MS Consular Service, or apply in one MS but with the aim to visit another neighbouring MS. Then, when it comes to third country residents in MNE (Russian are the largest group), another issue observed by some MS is the verification of the embassy's territorial competence, as MNE may be seen a convenient short-term hub for the sole purpose of launching short- and particularly long-term visa applications.

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

At the last LSC meeting, EU MS agreed on adopting a common list of documents to harmonize 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')

Most MS foreseen the possibility to grant visa under the cascade system. One MS is planning to implement it based on positive records of previous applicants.

When it comes to Russian nationals residing in MNE, the majority of LSC countries do not grant or have not granted multi-annual visa in 2024. Few countries, however, foreseen it as possible (yet rare) on a case-to-case basis, or because of family ties or private property owner in the EU MS.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Information-sharing is ongoing in the context of the regular meetings organised by the EU Delegation and in bilateral contacts with the other Embassies that issue visas in Montenegro.

Exchange of information

EU MS reported information on visa statistics, visa trends and visa processing. Most MS report an increase in number of Russian citizens' request for visa type C, followed by Turkish and Byelorussian citizens for some MS. One MS underline the issue of the visa-run practice.

Two MS have a refusal rate under 1%, while other MS's rate ranges from approximately 6 to 13%. One country, which has the less absolute number of request (32 ABC type visa), has the highest refusal rate, 43%.

No EU MS encountered any issues in the implementation of the Travel Medical Insurance (TMI) rules in 2024.

LSC countries usage of the VISMail and the Visa Information System is not uniform. Two MS reports that they use it regularly; others use them when necessary or use them but also direct communications via email with the other Embassies that issue visas in MNE.

As regards cooperation with external services providers, some MS reported that do not cooperate with external service providers, but cooperates with Police Directorate, insurances, banks and employers. However, cooperation with banks rarely provided valuable insights, allegedly for their data protection policies.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EU MS suggested inviting representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide information on the status of Montenegro's visa liberalisation, and alignment with EU visa policy. The meeting took place in December 2024.

In relation to the practice of "visa shopping" and visa statistics, MS agreed to collect and exchange template/information and statistics on practical implementation in the context of the prevention of visa shopping with a view to discussing at an upcoming meeting.

4. Challenges

One EU MS reported that lack of language skills and limited experience of employees in the Montenegrin Border Police poses a challenge for proper assessment of the migrations' risks coming from third countries (as it was the case for nationals from Syria, India, Pakistan). The MS in question

organizes every year a training course, for both MoI and Border Police staff, but attendance is very low due to “limited resources available” or “lack of knowledge of English/French languages”.

Furthermore, there are cases of postponing the deadlines for issuing residence permits /”boravak” or of not accepting in a timely way the submitted documents for renewed residence permits.

Selective process of issuing Montenegrin citizenship to foreigners (of some specific countries) is another challenge.

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.

** The report is based on contribution by EU Member States delivering Schengen visas and has been agreed as such by EU MS.*



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION AUPRES DU ROYAUME DU MAROC

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AUPRES DU ROYAUME DU MAROC RAPPORT 2024

1. Introduction

19 Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique/consulaire au Maroc: AT (Rabat), BE (Rabat), BG (Rabat), CH (Rabat), CZ (Rabat), DE (Rabat), DK (Rabat), EL (Rabat), ES (Agadir, Casablanca, Nador, Rabat, Tanger et Tétouan), FI (Rabat), FR (Agadir, Casablanca, Fès, Marrakech, Rabat et Tanger mais les demandes de visa sont uniquement traitées à Rabat et Casablanca), HR (Rabat), HU (Rabat), IT (Rabat, Casablanca), MT (Rabat, Casablanca), NL (Rabat), NO (Rabat), PL (Rabat), PT (Rabat), RO (Rabat), SE (Rabat).

IE (Rabat) participe 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 représente NO.
- FR représente EE.
- HU assure l'octroi de visa court séjour de SI.
- SE représente IS.

Recours aux prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visa :

AT, CH, FI, HR, DK/NO, IT, NL, NL et SE utilisent les services de VFS Global; DE, BE, FR utilisent les services de TLS Contact ; ES et PT recourent aux services du prestataire BLS.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

4 réunions ordinaires ont été organisées pendant la période de référence (en février, mai, septembre et décembre 2024), toutes en présentiel. La participation aux réunions des Etats membres représentés au Maroc 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. Ils sont ensuite partagés avec les missions diplomatiques des Etats membres, qui les communiquent à leur capitale.

Les consulats des Etats membres en dehors de Rabat reçoivent les rapports et les conclusions des réunions LSC à travers leurs missions diplomatiques à Rabat et/ou directement de la Délégation de l'UE.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des visas

En 2024 les déplacements internationaux vers l'espace Schengen ont continué à croître.

Les demandes de visas ont, pour certains consulats, atteint des niveaux qui dépassent la période pré-COVID. Face à cet afflux de demandes, les problèmes de capacité ont entraîné de longs retards pour l'obtention des entretiens. Le taux de refus semble similaire par rapport à la situation en 2023 (néanmoins, les chiffres officiels ne sont pas pour le moment disponibles).

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 ;
- 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 ;
- des questions spécifiques sur des documents demandés ou des façons de procéder pour des cas particuliers, par exemple les visites officielles.

Spécificités locales :

- Le manque de ressources humaines entraîne de longues attentes pour les RDV. Néanmoins, les problèmes de « visa shopping » se sont stabilisés à un niveau habituel.
- Le rôle des intermédiaires utilisés par les demandeurs de visa qui, en plus de problèmes liés à la monopolisation des RDV par remplissage automatique, présente un problème de réputation sérieux. Différents modèles innovants de prévention de remplissage automatique ont été discutés (paiement en deux heures, présence physique du demandeur devant la caméra au moment de la réservation obligatoire, etc.). En plus, la France a lancé à Rabat un essai de vérification par téléphone des identités des demandeurs primo, ce qui représente un investissement important surtout en temps et personnel. Néanmoins, les résultats intermédiaires de l'opération sont positifs. La Hongrie, sous sa Présidence du Conseil, a préparé un document d'information pour les demandeurs pour les avertir des problèmes des intermédiaires, qui a été partagé avec tous les États Schengen pour l'utilisation sur leur sites web.
- Les Etats membres ont constaté une recrudescence des tentatives de fraudes de la part d'associations - ou pseudo associations - sportives et culturelles, les 'années préparatoires linguistiques', les voyages touristiques présentés avec des traductions automatiques aux fautes identiques, les mineurs (souvent en échecs scolaire) délaissés sur le territoire Schengen ou les femmes qui voyagent exprès pour accoucher en Europe.

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

L'ensemble des consulats des Etats membres au Maroc a 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. Le groupe a travaillé sur une mise à jour de la liste pour ajouter des documents prouvant un lien parental. Le Comité de Visa du Conseil a donné un avis formel positif par consensus en janvier 2025.

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 été discuté à plusieurs reprises, sur base d'une demande d'un Etat Membre. Le groupe a travaillé sur une proposition de cascade accélérée pour certains types de voyageurs fréquents. La proposition a été discutée au Groupe Visa du Conseil en janvier 2025 mais n'a pas été finalisée ; elle fera l'objet de futures discussions/modifications localement.

En général, la disposition de l'Article 24(2) existante 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 suspicions de fraude et d'utilisation de faux documents et le fonctionnement du système VIS.

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.

Pendant une période de l'année, plusieurs Etats Schengen soulevaient la question de la consultation Schengen (Art. 22) qui peut prendre plus de temps que prévu et rallonge le temps de traitement des dossiers pour certains consulats.

4. Défis

Réponses apportées aux défis mentionnés dans le rapport 2023

Le groupe a continué à échanger/améliorer les outils pour réduire les aspects négatifs liés aux actions des intermédiaires, initiatives spécifiques des Etats Schengen (FR).

Pour des voyages familiaux, l'ajout des documents prouvant le lien de parenté à la liste harmonisée a été présenté au Sièg.

Points à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2025)

Continuer les discussions sur des possibilités d'une cascade accélérée.

Continuation de l'échange 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.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN MOZAMBIQUE 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

24 EU Member States (MS) are accredited to Mozambique and 11 have a diplomatic mission in Maputo [AT, BE, DE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, NL, PT, SE] alongside two other non-EU Schengen States [CH and NO]. PT counts two General Consulates: one in the capital Maputo, the other one in the central city of Beira.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Four regular meetings of the Local Schengen Coordination group took place in 2024 (March, June, September and December). The sessions were chaired by the EU Delegation (EUDEL) and overall well-attended. The EUDEL drafts minutes of the meetings which are subsequently shared with the LSC group.

In September, a Consular Crisis exercise was held ahead of the October elections with the participation of all resident EU MS and a number of non-resident EU MS, as well as non-EU Schengen States represented in Mozambique. The session was held in a hybrid format to facilitate the attendance of non-resident EU MS.

Throughout the year, coordination and exchange of information was mainly ensured by messaging apps – a dedicated *WhatsApp* group exists and was recently migrated to *Signal*.

Due to the limited number of resident EU MS, Local Consular Cooperation (LCC) and LSC meetings have systematically been held together with a view to create synergies and ensure consistency in the work of the two largely overlapping groups.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EU MS are generally well prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out under the Visa Code, even though in some embassies, the staff in charge of consular affairs is also covering other tasks (e.g. Head of administration, cultural affairs, etc.)

Out of the 11 EU MS resident in Mozambique, seven issue Schengen visas [DE, ES, FI, FR, IT, NL, PT], including on behalf of other EU MS [e.g. short-term Schengen visas for BE are issued by the NL, whereas long-term visas are issued by the BE Embassy in Pretoria]. The LSC has fostered coordination and cooperation in carrying-out the tasks foreseen in the Visa Code, including

harmonised application of the Visa Code provisions and implementation of the Visa Information System (VIS).

The revised rules applicable since February 2020 have not been source of major concerns among EU MS who generally welcomed the changes as a simplification of the Visa Code implementation.

No particular issues have been reported, except for the significant increase in the number of forged documents submitted to support visa requests. Falsified documentation e.g. *inter alia* bank statements, insurance certificates and employment records have thus continued to be a challenge in 2024.

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

The LSC group in Mozambique harmonised its list of documents supporting visa applications following the adoption of the Commission Implementing Decision of 4 September 2014 (which establishes the list of supporting documents to be presented by visa applicants in a number of countries, including Mozambique). All EU MS agreed to start applying the decision from 15 September 2014.

During the reporting period, no amendments to the list of supporting documents were deemed necessary by the LSC, nor any specific monitoring mechanism of MS' implementation of the Commission Implementing Decision.

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

No issue has been reported.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No specific additional measure of harmonisation of practices is currently being envisaged.

3.5 Exchange of information

Regular exchange of information has continued to be encouraged among the LSC group, namely on: (i) visa-related statistics, based not only on the yearly official statistics but also quarterly whenever possible; (ii) emerging trends regarding possible instances of migratory risk or visa fraud; (iii) overview of the general VIS functioning; (iv) best practices and relevant experiences.

As regards the use of VIS Mail, all consulates have been using it since 20 January 2020 for exchanging personal data of visas applicants, even though in some cases this is managed at capital level.

In relation to visa statistics, taking all types of visas together, EU MS observed a steady increase in visa requests since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic-related travel restrictions. The first three quarters of 2024 followed a similar trend with an expected 10% increase initially forecast. However, post-electoral protests and the ensuing violence which brought the country's activity to a near-standstill had a significant impact on the number of visas requested towards the end of the year – a period that is otherwise rather busy in terms of visa applications.

Isolated instances of fraud were reported, notably the case of a travel agency located in Eswatini who claims to be "specialized" in helping people to obtain Schengen visas in return for a fee. A significant

increase in the submission of forged or falsified documents to support visa applications was also noted.

No particular issues have been reported regarding travel medical insurances or the implementation of related rules. However, cooperation with local banks was flagged as problematic due to the restrictions affecting Mozambique's banking sector since its listing by the FATF as a country under increased monitoring (also known as 'Grey List').

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Following a successful experience in October 2023, DE kindly offered to organise a training on how to identify forged and falsified documents to be delivered to all EU MS and likeminded by an expert of the Federal Police. Participants who attended the past session have found it useful when carrying out their daily tasks, in particular in relation to the processing of visas. A majority of the EU MS issuing visas in Mozambique expressed interest in the training to be held at the beginning of 2025.

4. Challenges

2024 was marked by the post-electoral violence and the ensuing social turmoil which affected the country. It was the opportunity to test the LSC group's preparedness, notably in terms of coordination in a crisis situation and timely exchange of information in relation to EU MS' travel advice updates.

Political uncertainty requires that EU MS increase their level of preparedness, especially in relation to non-resident Embassies and unrepresented EU MS in Mozambique. The available Joint Crisis Preparedness Framework Mozambique will be revised and updated in 2025.

5. Other issues

This annual report was drafted by the LSC Chair (EU Delegation) and commented by LSC MS.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MYANMAR

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

9 Member States (MS) have resident embassies/official (non-honorary) representations in Myanmar (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden). Non-MS Norway and Switzerland also have resident diplomatic missions in Yangon.

4 MS - France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands - issue Schengen visas in Myanmar. For visa purposes, apart from their own countries:

- **FR** represents CH, CZ, ES, LV and PT
- **DE** represents AT, BE, DK, FI, EL, HU, LU and IS
- **IT** represents MT and SI

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

One LSC meeting took place in the reporting period, on 5 June 2024, although visa-related issues were discussed at EU Political Counsellor meetings throughout the year as well as at the consular corps and management meetings held four times a year with like-minded partners in Yangon. The EU Delegation organized and chaired the meeting, and prepared and shared the minutes. The meeting was well-attended, including online participation of several non-resident missions, mostly based in Thailand. No other *ad hoc* meetings took place.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Embassies and the EU Delegation are prepared to ensure tasks required by the Visa Code. MS did not highlight any problems related to its implementation. Waiting times for appointments are considered to be within the guidelines.

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

It was agreed that a short consultation on harmonization of documents among MS issuing Schengen visas in Yangon would be carried out to ensure harmonisation is still working.

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 have adapted to the general rules for issuing MEV.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Practices related to the application of the EU sanctions regime requirements (106 Myanmar individuals currently listed) and exceptional granting of Schengen visas for sanctioned individuals – for example to attend hearings of the International Court of Justice – is a specific topic of interest in the case of Myanmar.

3.5 Exchange of information

Monthly statistics for Schengen applications range between 100 and 350 Schengen visas per emitting resident mission. A high number of applications relate to seafarers.

During the reporting period, refusal rates ranged anywhere between 10% and 40%, a marked increase from the around 5% refusal rate pre-coup and pre-COVID. This is representative of the increase in citizens, especially youth, wanting to leave the country. Non-resident missions who issue visas for Myanmar nationals –mainly Bangkok-based– report very few applications, but high refusal rates.

There is no closed list of insurance providers. The national Myanmar Insurance is *not* accepted as it excludes repatriation, which is a requirement under the Visa Code.

Several MS report a growing issue of fraudulent documents. This includes fraud concerning bank statements, housing documents and reports of illicitly legalized documents – where the applicant was never in possession of the original. This raises questions as to whether authorities in Myanmar correctly notarize documents.

Two MS cooperate with external service providers (both use VFS). They do not report issues.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None.

4. Challenges

The political and security situation remains highly volatile in the country and continues to require monitoring and a sustained exchange of information, though this affects the LCC group more than the LSC.

5. Other issues

No other issues of importance raised.

EU MS validated this report in February 2025



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF NAMIBIA

LOCALSCHENGENCOOPERATION (LSC) in NAMIBIA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five Member States have Embassies in Namibia: Germany, Spain, France, Portugal and Finland. Three of these (DE, ES, FI) are issuing Schengen Visas in Windhoek. These 3 Member States also represent other Schengen countries:

- *Germany* represents Belgium, Switzerland, Hungary, Luxemburg, Malta, and The Netherlands
- *Spain* represents Portugal and Slovenia.
- *Finland* represents Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Notes:

France only issued emergency travel documents in 2024, including to Monaco citizens, while Germany handled visa issuance to France. From Q1 2025, FR will resume issuing its own visas via a private facilitation company under the French Embassy in Pretoria.

Austria started re-issuing its own visa through a private facilitation company on 07 February 2025. The following countries have no Schengen visa representation in Namibia: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

In 2024, two LSC meetings were held on 18 June and 7 November. Both were chaired by the EUD, with all five resident MS in Windhoek attending. The EUD shared minutes with the Local Schengen Coordination group and HQ colleagues in DG Migration and Home Affairs. For 2025, the LSC plans to include non-resident MS by making the meetings hybrid.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Most resident MS assess the “unification” of their work under the VISA Code as rather advanced, even if informally. Formalising this cooperation is planned (see below). 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

The MS present consider that harmonisation of practices has already been informally achieved. The initial impression is that all three (FI, DE, ES) use the same lists of supporting documents. However,

there is room for formalisation to adopt a harmonised list, which the LSC group will seek to establish in 2025. MS agreed to compare their respective lists of supporting documents as a next step. Due to earlier concerns expressed by some LSC members regarding some discrepancies in the application process, the EUD clarified that even with a harmonised list of supporting documents, differences may still exist in certain aspects, such as minimum financial requirements and the method of application submission.

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')

Multi-Entry VISAs, especially for DE, represent a relatively high number of the applications. They are considered an important way to unburden the visa section by avoiding a multitude of single visa applications. The MS do not see a reason to further adapt these rules, considering their favourable contribution in reducing workload.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In 2024, the LSC discussed a potential joint communication campaign on the Schengen visa application process to address issues such as erroneous or incomplete submissions. Proposals included a joint public information campaign on applying for a Schengen visa, possibly through explanatory videos or collaborations with social media influencers. However, Germany is implementing several changes, including revamping its website and providing a new overview with all relevant information. Once finalised, the LSC will reassess whether a communication campaign is still needed.

3.5 Exchange of information

Statistics: shared at a quarterly basis by DE, and on a monthly basis by FI and ES.

Fraud: FI and DE report some fraud attempts with bank statements.

No issues were reported on:

Travel medical insurance (TMI) offerings and implementation in Namibia;
cooperation with local authorities and companies (no cooperation at present)
cooperation with external service providers;
use of VISMail and the Visa Information System;

Given little irregular migration pressure from Namibians, there is no need so far for greater exchange of info. Nevertheless, it might be helpful to add another category in the visa statistics for non-ordinary visa issuing, which Germany already carries out.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Austria started re-issuing Schengen Visas. Visa applications have been collected through the service provider VFS in Windhoek as of 7 February 2025, which will be processed at the Austrian Embassy in Pretoria.

France will also start re-issuing Schengen Visas. Visa applications will be collected through the service provider Capago International in Windhoek starting in Q1 2025, which will be processed at the French Embassy in Pretoria.

4. Challenges

In 2024, *Germany* highlighted the challenge of handling a growing number of Schengen visa applications on behalf of eight other EU MS without a corresponding staff increase. Many applicants submit incomplete applications, prolonging the process. Germany requested support from the EUD and other EU MS to present a united front against negative press. The LSC initially planned a public information campaign in 2025 to address incomplete applications. However, with *France* and *Austria* resuming Schengen visa issuance and Germany revising its information services, application volumes and the number of incomplete applications are expected to decrease. As a result, a joint campaign is currently not considered necessary. Notably, applications for other MS, even if represented by Germany in Namibia, can still be processed by the nearest consulate, usually in South Africa.

Spain and *Finland* do not face the same issue of incomplete applications but receive significantly fewer applications than Germany.

5. Other issues

n/a



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Abuja
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Nineteen EU MS (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PT, PL, RO, SE, SK) and two Schengen countries (CH, NO) have embassies in Abuja. There are six EU MS Consulates General in Lagos (IT, DE, DK, ES, FR, NL) + Consulate General of Switzerland. The majority of visas are being issued in Lagos.

Schengen visa representation:

Arrangement with represented Member State	Unrepresented Member State
Sweden	Iceland, Latvia, Slovakia
Belgium/Hungary	Lithuania
Belgium	Luxembourg
Italy	Malta
Hungary	Slovenia
Finland	Estonia

In the reporting period, the EU Delegation and Belgian Presidency co-chaired the LSC meetings.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

There were seven LSC meetings organized in 2024: 7 Feb, 24 April (organized by BE Pres), 13 June, 27 Sept, 13 Nov and 29 Nov. The meeting on 13 Nov included consular exercise. On 29 Nov, Schengen consuls met with their G7 counterparts. Reports and relevant documents were shared with the participants after each meeting.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Schengen states managed to ensure tasks under the Visa Code.

After the drop of visa applications at the end of 2023 caused by the worsening of the economic situation in the country, consuls observed the increase of visa applications in 2024. The migratory pressure (Japa syndrome) contributed to that phenomenon.

Depending on the capacity of the embassy/consulate, consuls report different waiting period for the visa appointments, varying from one day to several weeks. Some MS report their online appointment reservation systems being usurped. Reservation of multiple slots by middlemen remains an issue. Some MS (e.g. PT) introduced facial recognition system while booking the visa appointment, which has been successful in preventing the intervention of agents during this process.

Cases of visa shopping were observed e.g. increase in visa applications to Iceland and Luxemburg, increase in visa applications at a MS Embassy when another MS employs a document verification officer (thus visa process there became more difficult).

Fake documents (including Notes Verbales) remain a challenge, as well as fake reasons for travel (e.g. conferences and/or meetings that do not exist, or are irrelevant to the applicant's profile).

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

Annex IV has been harmonized, shared and implemented by Schengen consuls in Nigeria. The consuls agreed that the approval of the document list does not prevent them to ask for additional documents in case of doubts.

Visa application process for **members of official delegations** (art. 13.7.c: heads of State or government, members of a national government (i.e., federal ministers in Nigeria), and members of their official delegation when they are invited by Member States' governments or by international organisations for an official purpose), has been harmonized, shared and implemented by the consuls.

The **visa process for students** has been discussed during the LSC meetings (ahead of the Study in Europe Fair and/or Erasmus).

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')

Some MS adopted the cascade system, however they allow for the exceptions from the general rule. (e. g. there is a constant push from the Nigerian Government to issue a long-term, multiple entry visas for the government officials).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

3.5 Exchange of information

- MS exchange information regularly during the **LSC meetings** and via **WhatsApp consular chat** (Lagos and Abuja).
- Quarterly and yearly statistics have been compiled by the current Presidencies, shared and discussed. *(There are however challenges in getting the statistic from all MS on time).*
- Cases of fraud (NV's, visas, passports) are being discussed during the LSC meetings and via chat. There is also an exchange of information with the G7 consuls.
- Travel medical insurance (TMI): discussed at the LSC meeting.
- Cooperation with local authorities and companies (e.g. banks, employers, transport companies) have been discussed at the LSC meetings (also with MoFA, vide below) and via chat.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

- Two meetings with the Head of Consular Department at MoFA (discussion on: cooperation with the Legal and Consular Department, legal issues: legal assistance and service of documents, legalization and vital records, requirements for Notes Verbales especially those issued in support of visa application, use of official and diplomatic passports by Nigerians, challenges with Nigerian visas being issued for Schengen nationals).
- Two coordination meetings with the National Population Commission (organized by BE Presidency) on vital records.
- Meeting with G7 consuls to compare the statistics, migratory trends, security and common challenges related to visas.
- Consuls discuss the migratory trends/ number of illegal border crossings to Europe (discussion moderated by EMLO).

4. Challenges (issues to be discussed in 2025)

- EU DEL has not prepared the 2023 report.
- Improvement of the cooperation with MFA through a consistent and common EU/Schengen position during the contact with the NIG authorities
- Directive 38 to be discussed during the incoming meetings.
- Cascade system to be discussed.
- Visa statistics to be collected and discussed more regularly.
- Meetings in Lagos shall be organized once in a semester.

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



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in North Macedonia
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

17 Member States have diplomatic representations in North Macedonia, of which only 16 are delivering Schengen visas, for third country-nationals. Among associated Schengen States (AS), only Switzerland has a diplomatic representation in Skopje, but has no consular section in North Macedonia.

In terms of representation, Austria issues C-visas for Switzerland, France for Portugal and Iceland, Germany issues Schengen visas on behalf of Latvia, Hungary is representing Estonia, Lithuania and Malta for consular matters, while the Netherlands represents Belgium and Luxemburg. Sweden has cooperation arrangements with Denmark and Norway.

Outside Skopje, France, Greece and Bulgaria have General Consulates in Bitola. Some EU Member States also have Honorary Consuls in or outside the capital: in

Bitola (Romania, Slovenia-inactive), Kavadarci (Slovenia), Kumanovo (Romania), Ohrid (Hungary, Poland, Slovenia), Skopje (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Latvia, Slovakia) and Strumica (Croatia-inactive).

Some of the MS consular offices in North Macedonia also deal with visa requests emanating from other among their own diplomatic missions in Western Balkan countries.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The EU Delegation organised and chaired three meetings of the Local Schengen Cooperation in 2024, of which one was dedicated to a consular exercise, with virtual presence from EEAS. These three meetings were well attended: 14 resident EU missions and one associated Schengen State mission attended the meeting on 13 March¹², and 15 EU missions and one AS were present for the meeting on 19 November. 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

¹² There were also four Member States not represented in North Macedonia participating online.

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All missions apply the new Visa Code, and they do not face any issues. Most missions, with the exception of BG, GR, IT and DE issue few C-Visas. Member States reported to apply cascading rules strictly and there seem to be no cases of “visa shopping” attempts.

Consular office	C-Visa approved	C-Visa rejected	Total applications
Austria	39	15	54
Bulgaria	889	7	896
Croatia	31	6	37
Czech Republic*	122	3	125
France	24	2	26
Germany	128	48	176
Greece	358	35	393
Hungary	6	1	7
Italy	155	0	155
Netherlands	23	3	26
Poland	10	0	10
Romania	6	0	6
Slovakia	7	0	7
Slovenia	6	0	6
Spain	15	2	17
Sweden	8	0	8
TOTAL	1827	122	1949
	93.75%	6.25%	

* C-visas mainly extended citizens of North Macedonian and Kosovo¹³ who are travelling for short term work assignments.

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 North Macedonia, as regards statistics and trends of applications, or specific issues. The vast majority of applications are from Turkish citizens, but there are few applications from other European (Russian Federation, Belarus), African (Cameroon, DRC, Ghana) and Asian countries (e.g. Afghanistan, PR China, India, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan).

Other issues: the group exchanged on other issues faced by Member States, e.g. difficulty with recognition of electronically signed documents in North Macedonia.

¹³ 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

3.3 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The EU Delegation informed MS on the future entry into force of the Entry-Exit System (EES) and European Travel Information and Authorisation system (ETIAS), and developments in the area of EU visa policy. The installation and management of the system at the land borders with Bulgaria and Greece was discussed and challenges highlighted. MS recommended to the EU to deploy a public information campaign to raise awareness, and prepare travellers.

4. Challenges

p.m.



COOPERACIÓN LOCAL SCHENGEN (CLS) EN PANAMÁ

INFORME 2024

1. Introducción

Diez Estados miembros están presentes en la Ciudad de Panamá: Alemania, Bélgica, Francia, España, Grecia, Hungría, Italia, Los Países Bajos, Polonia, y Portugal. Suiza cuenta con un Consulado General en la Ciudad de Panamá. Suiza cuenta con un Consulado General en la Ciudad de Panamá.

Doce Estados miembros son representados desde: Austria (Bogotá), Croacia (Washington D.C), República Checa (Bogotá), Dinamarca (Bogotá), Finlandia (Bogotá), Islandia (Ottawa), Luxemburgo (Managua), Noruega (Bogotá), Eslovaquia (México), Eslovenia (Washington D.C), Suecia (Guatemala) y Suiza (Costa Rica).

Los pocos cónsules honorarios de los EEMM ubicados fuera de la capital no emiten visados.

2. Reuniones de la CLS celebradas en 2024

Cuatro reuniones periódicas fueron celebradas: 8 de febrero, 11 de abril, 8 de octubre y 3 de diciembre.

La Delegación presidió las reuniones y redactó las minutas. Las reuniones contaron con una amplia asistencia de media, contando con siete Estados Miembros en la reunión con menor asistencia y con nueve en la de mayor asistencia. Ciertos Estados miembros sólo asistieron en una ocasión (FR).

No se organizaron reuniones *ad hoc* sobre temas específicos. La coordinación con la CLS en lugares fuera de la capital no fue necesaria ya que los pocos cónsules honorarios fuera de la capital no emiten visas Schengen.

3. Situación actual

3.1 Aplicación del Código de visados

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

- Discrepancias en los documentos a solicitar (algunos piden más que otros o formatos/requisitos distintos, e.g los montos requeridos de la póliza de seguro puede variar);
- Discrepancias en los requisitos de presencia física al volver a solicitar una visa cuando ya se otorgó una anterior.

Ninguno de los Estados miembros utiliza proveedores de servicios externos en Panamá. La compra de visas no es un problema debido al número limitado de visas emitidas; sin embargo, este número está aumentando.

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

El trabajo de armonización está en curso. Durante la última reunión CLS, del 3 de diciembre de 2024, se comenzó a repasar el borrador realizado por la Delegación con los Estados Miembros. Se espera que, en la próxima reunión del 6 de febrero de 2025, se apruebe el borrador final. Posteriormente, la Delegación se lo remitirá al Comité de Visados.

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 la reunión del 8 de febrero se trató el tema. El grupo de trabajo llegó a la conclusión de que, por el momento, no es necesaria una adaptación. Los Estados Miembros suelen otorgar primero una visa de la duración del viaje, posteriormente una de 90 días, después de 1 año y finalmente de 3 y 5 años.

Algunos Estados otorgan un visado de entrada múltiple de hasta un año sin necesidad de una aprobación adicional (ES y PT).

3.4 Armonización de las prácticas

Todos los Estados Miembros ven el valor agregado de mantenerse mutuamente informados por lo que se realizan reuniones periódicas.

3.5 Intercambio de información

- Pocos casos de fraude y documentos justificativos falsificados.
- Se debatió sobre el seguro médico de viaje (TMI), pero no se han detectado problemas pertinentes relacionados con la aplicación de las normas TMI.
- Sólo un Estado Miembro emplea VISMail (DE).

3.6 Cualquier otra iniciativa tomada en la CLS

La Delegación realizó una lista de los documentos válidos para viajar emitidos por las autoridades panameñas para armonizar e informar a los Estados Miembros sobre los distintos tipos de documentos legales para viajar existentes.

También, la UE financió, a través de la Oficina de Enlace de DE, la Conferencia TOCUMENT INTEGRATED LIAISON TEAM (TILT). El evento tuvo como objetivo conectar a los socios regionales y discutir las tendencias de migración irregular en la región (migración hacia y desde América Latina, el Caribe, Estados Unidos, Canadá y Europa), con un enfoque en las tendencias de fraude aéreo de pasajeros. La Oficina de Enlace de NL también hizo una presentación en dicha conferencia.

4. Dificultades

La escasez de recursos y de personal sigue siendo la misma que la reportada en el año 2023. Sin embargo, la Delegación de la Unión Europea en Panamá ha cumplido con sus obligaciones, organizando reuniones de CLS y ha trabajado en la propuesta de la lista armonizada de documentos justificativos.

A principios de 2025, se espera aprobar el borrador de la lista armonizada y posteriormente remitirlo al Comité de Visados.

5. Varios

A pesar de que los ciudadanos panameños no requieren visas para estadias cortas en el Área Schengen, hay otros nacionales residentes en Panamá (chinos, venezolanos, cubanos, dominicanos, etc.) que necesitan visas de corto plazo para ingresar al Área.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN THE PHILIPPINES 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

17 Schengen Member States are present and another 8 are represented from abroad.

The current representation arrangements on visa matters are as follows:

- BE represents Luxembourg.
- CZ represents Slovakia.
- DK represents Estonia.
- EL represents Portugal.
- NL represents Latvia.
- NO represents Iceland from Bangkok.
- AT represents Lithuania.
- MT accredited via China (visas are issued at the Embassy of Malta in Beijing and the Consulate General of Malta in Shanghai)

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

There were three meetings in 2024: 5 March, 28 May and 3 September.

Meetings are chaired by the EUDEL and are in general well attended. The meetings were held in a hybrid fashion (via Webex and at EU premises). This allowed non-represented or present States to join the meetings. Reports are drafted by the EUDEL and circulated to the LSC.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

As regards the Visa Code, the LSC assessed whether a local amendment of the assessment of the multiple-entry visa ‘cascade’ under Article 24(2b) of the Visa Code would be appropriate (no consensus was reached on this), whether an update was needed on the harmonized list of documents for the Philippines (a small amendment was suggested) and also discussed the practical application of the visa code handbook. Finally, Member States shared their practices on a number of issues (e.g. the granting of month-long business visas, the sharing of information on overstayers, experiences with local travel agencies, experiences with Chinese applications after the ban on the Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations). The LSC also discussed the vetting of Schengen insurance companies.

The Schengen Visa Code is followed by all Schengen Members States in the Philippines.

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

EUDEL consulted the group on the update of the list of travel documents issued by the Philippines, as suggested by the Handbook for Local Schengen Cooperation.

The Local Schengen Coordination group exchanged views on the need to update the harmonised list of documents, in order to ensure that Member States are allowed to request legalisation or other formalities regarding the presentation of documents. The discussion showed that Member States have different practices in requiring legalisation or other formalities in order to check the authenticity of documents such as marriage and birth certificates. EUDEL suggested to include the following sentence in the updated harmonised list of documents: “All documents need to be provided in compliance with the national law of the host country” in order to ensure that there is a legal basis for Member States to require such formalities. Member States could agree on this amendment.

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 Local Schengen Coordination group extensively discussed the merit of a local adaptation of the MEV ‘cascade’ rule in order to make a harmonised, less strict adapted rule for the Philippines.

While some Member States were in favour of such a harmonisation of a more relaxed adapted rule, the discussion showed that other Member States do not consider this favourably and wish to stick with the general cascade rule of the Visa Code. In view of the lack of consensus within the group, it was agreed that a harmonisation of an adapted ‘cascade’ rule specifically for Philippine citizens is not necessary at this stage.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Not applicable in 2024.

3.5 Exchange of information

In 2024, DE on behalf on the LSC (Rotating task among MS) scrutinised the fulfilment of the requirements of the travel medical insurance (TMI) companies who had approached the LSC in 2024. On a regular basis, the LSC agreed to publish the names of those TMI companies which standard policies as presented seemed compliant with the Schengen Codex on the EUDEL homepage.

Several discussions were also held on cases of fraud and forged documents, as well as on specific population groups or locations which had proven to be hotspots of fraud.

Member States discussed the trends in visa numbers during each meeting in 2024. The group also discussed a number of practical topics, including the digitalization of the visa procedure, the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen Area, the roll-out of the entry-exit system, processing of visas for domestic helpers/staff and the modalities of the direct hiring of Philippine workers.

Statistics on the Schengen visas were shared on a quarterly basis.

4. Challenges

The different resources (backlog) but also the practices executed by Schengen Member States for granting Schengen visas, even if done within the flexibility granted by the Visa Code, leads to a

certain extent to visa shopping. Harmonisation of practices (for example on MEV visa) could potentially reduce this problem though embassies within the Philippines are often limited by the requirements prescribed by their headquarters.

Filipino citizens with official or diplomatic passports are still obliged to get visas for Belgium and the Netherlands, which is a cause of diplomatic difficulties.

5. Other issues

N/A

This report has been approved by the Schengen Coordination Group of Member States present in the Philippines.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE STATE OF QATAR

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Doha
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

A total of 19 Schengen Member States¹⁴ (MS) are represented in Qatar. All Schengen member states, with the only exception of RO, are making use of an external service provider (ESP) to collect and process visa applications. Two ESP companies operate on behalf of Schengen states in Doha, namely VSF and BLS.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

LSC group met at least once every semester. The meetings were chaired by the EUDEL. LSC meetings are open to all EUMS as observers.

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

LSC continued to hold its meetings back-to-back with Consular Cooperation meetings, chaired by the rotating European Council presidency.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

On the 2/2/2020 the LSC MS introduced, in practice, the new Visa Code. Nevertheless, the LSC MS had agreed that the new Visa Code is unnecessarily restrictive to Qatari nationals and contrary to its initial purpose, it adds administrative burden on Consulates. Therefore, they had proposed the exclusion of Qatari nations from the new Visa Code cascade (see relevant section below).

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

Even though there is an understanding amongst member states on a rather unified list of documents to be submitted with the visa application, a formal decision is lacking. This is an area where the MS could work on, following also the establishment of the EU Delegation in Qatar and could provide its

¹⁴ AT, BE, BG, CZ, CH, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE

support on the coordination process. Likewise, an updated version of the list of companies approved for the travel medical insurance, necessary for the visa application, could also be agreed upon.

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

Following the implementation of the new Visa Code, LSC MS suggested a more generous local cascade, which should be applied only to Qatari citizens. According to the Commission's Implementing Decision of 12.01.2022, C(2022) 27, Qatari nationals could receive a multi-entry visa as long as the validity of their passport, minus the three last months. The decision was based on the recommendation of the local LSC group which took into consideration the socio-economic situation of the country and its citizens as well as the subsequent migratory risks (or lack thereof).

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Despite the lack of a formalised harmonisation list of documents to be submitted, LSC MS discuss and adopt practices to ensure a harmonised application of the new Visa Code. In the context of the regular challenges met by LSC MS in their relations with the External Service Providers, LSC MS have carried out inspection visits to application centers to ensure harmonisation of practices.

3.5 Exchange of information

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, by means of the LSC mailing list or through a secure phone communication group.

LSC MS regularly discussed the situation of people from countries of high risk, including Yemen and Sudan, in view of the guarantees given by a number of EU governments to refugees arriving on their territories.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EU Delegation and EU MS, in the context of the new Visa Code and the recent Implementing Decision of the Commission of 2022, have decided to design, share online, print and distribute a Common Information Sheet (article 48 (2) Visa Code) in English and Arabic. This is a work undertaken by the EU Delegation.

4. Challenges

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

It has also be noted that oftentimes travel agencies are tasked by Qatari nationals with the preparation of their visa applications which result in fake airline tickets/ hotel reservations. More rarely also fake

bank statements, even if Qatari nationals are believed to be bona fide travellers, with significant financial capacity.

It appears that travel agencies and/or job agencies have been misguiding non-Qatari residents on job opportunities in Europe, oftentimes presenting them fake invitations for job in the Schengen area. MS have already informed MoFA and the relevant local authorities on this matter.

5. Other issues

The Commission had proposed that Qatari nationals are waved of the obligation to have a visa before entering the Schengen area, but due to the European Parliament alleged scandal of December 2022, the process has been frozen. This has led to the disappointment of the Qatari authorities and nationals. During 2024, Qatari authorities brought up the issue during their meetings with EU institutions/ MS officials.

This report was endorsed by LSC MS through a silence procedure.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the Russian Federation 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

All EU Member States are present in Moscow.

2024 saw the closure of additional consulates. In the beginning of 2025, BG, CY, FR, DE, ES, GR, HU, IT, RO, SLO were represented in St Petersburg, BG, CY, FR and HU in Yekaterinburg, PL and LT in Kaliningrad, LT in Sovetsk, PL in Irkutsk, RO in Rostov-on-Don, GR in Novorossiysk, CY in Samara and Krasnodar, and HU in Kazan.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Due to expulsions of diplomatic and consular staff of EU Member states (MS) and difficulties in obtaining entry visas, most MS have limited resources and capacities for issuing visas.

During the reporting period, four LSC meetings were organised and chaired by EUDEL (12 March, 30 May, 12 September and 28 November 2024).

EUDEL draws up the meetings' reports and disseminates them through ZEUS before their final adoption at the subsequent meeting. EUDEL asks MS for input to the meetings' agenda. The meetings were well attended.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Based on a comparison of the replies to the questionnaire submitted for the period September 2023-February 2024 vs March-August 2024, the Group in November noted the following **visa trends**:

- **High increase in the number of issued C-visas.** The number rose from 150.000 during the first period to 300.000 during the second.
- **Decrease in the overall refusal rate** from 11% to 8%;
- **Increase in the number of D-visas.** Replies to the questionnaire mentioned above also show increase in the number of D-visas (15.400 applications were received and 14.000 permits were issued vs 12.000 during the first period.
- **17 MS do not restrict visas to certain categories of applicants.**

At previous meetings during the reporting period, the Group had noted the following:

- **Wide divergence as regards the period of validity and number of entries:** A limited number of MS issue a large number of multiple entry visas with longer validity, including for the purpose of tourism;
- **Main reasons for refusal:** Mainly insufficient explanation for the purpose and circumstances of the planned stay, visa shopping, insufficient means and threat to internal security. Two MS also mentioned false supporting documents;
- Some MS indicated **problems with their VFS/service provider**;
- **Wide variations in the service fee:** 469 roubles to 3850 roubles.
- **Major increase in visa shopping.** This appears to be a negative consequence of the diverging practices among the Schengen states. Several MS noted the difficulty of identifying visa shopping at the application stage. If it is suspected that another MS is the real destination, but the applicant has a positive record, the visa will normally be issued for a short duration without exceeding the direct travel time. Visa shopping is often detected only when there is a pattern of the exit point being in another MS or when the traveller has entered another MS, which reports that it has cancelled the visa.

EUDEL recalled the importance of applying the **updated 2022 guidelines on general visa issuance** in relation to Russian applicants following the Council Decision on the suspension in whole of the application of the Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on the facilitation of the issuance of visas (Communication of the Commission of 30.9.2022, C(2022) 7111 final). The diverging approaches taken by MS to different categories of applicants and the overall number of issued Schengen visas, including a substantial number of MEVs, should be assessed in the context of the security threat posed by Russia to the EU and its Member States, as highlighted by recent reports of increasing intelligence activities. In particular, careful consideration is needed when assessing if an applicant presents a risk to the security of the Member States and when determining whether the entry conditions are fulfilled, in accordance with Article 21 of the Visa Code and the Visa Code Handbook, as set out in further detail in the guidelines.

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

Further to the suspension of the Visa Facilitation Agreement, the Group agreed to make a proposal for a revision of the 2016 Commission Decision setting out the harmonised list of supporting documents. Additional categories were included, in particular seafarers and applicants intending to travel for the purpose of medical treatment. **The Commission Implementing Decision establishing the new harmonised list of supporting documents for Russia entered into force on 13 September 2024.**

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 November, one MS informed that it considered to **suspend the MEV cascade**.

Several MS clarified that they are no longer applying the MEV cascade and are only exceptionally issuing MEVs, as single-entry visas have become the rule.

EUDEL recalled that pursuant to section 24 ii of the Commission guidelines, MS should refrain

from issuing MEVs with long validity as it is not certain whether Russian citizens would continue to meet entry conditions, especially when the stated purpose of the journey is tourism.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

As regards the question of which **certificate from the Social and Pension Fund** should be accepted under the revised harmonised list of supporting documents, one MS noted a margin of discretion to decide on the interpretation of the list. Essential features of the certificate should be that it is possible **to check it chronologically, as well as to verify it electronically**.

3.5 Exchange of information

As regards **national entry restrictions**, an updated table was prepared showing the situation at the border checkpoints (BCPs) at the external land border. This includes the latest information on the closure of BCPs and on the implementation of sanctions, notably the import of motor vehicles.

Potential **cases of fraud** were flagged by several MS. Noting a recent increase in falsified supporting documents as well as visa applications, one MS highlighted cases of refundable airline tickets which either do not reflect the real travel itinerary or which were bought as a precaution in the event of a refusal of the application. Many of these tickets were issued by Turkish Airlines or Emirates.

Some MS accept **travel medical insurance** (TMI) from EU companies only. Others accept also RU TMIs, provided that these RU insurance companies have a counterpart or branch office in the EU confirming that it is able to pay out any insurance claims. EUDEL recalled the COM position that TMIs issued by companies on the EU sanctions list should not be accepted, since the amounts would not be recoverable in the EU.

A few recent cases of **passports issued in the occupied territories**. A few recent cases were reported, including one involving a passport issued in Abkhazia and another one involving a diplomatic passport issued to a person with an internal passport from Crimea. Ukraine has circulated a NV for additional guidance.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In March, a meeting was organised on good local practices of **security screening of visa applicants**. The exchange focused on how the consulates may locally check the profile of Russian applicants against the sanction list or the criterion of proximity to the Russian state. Some MS indicated that apart from the passport check (recognition or not) all additional Russia specific checks are done by the capital whereas others indicated open source checks by local visa staff. Several MS are checking all applicants against the benchmark of “proximity to the state”, while others are checking if the applicant has served in the army or completed the compulsory military service.

4. Challenges

Noting the **wide divergence between Schengen states** notably as regards the period of validity and number of entries, the Group should be made more strongly aware of the Commission guidelines on stricter visa processing for RU citizens. Members of the Group are encouraged to flag any practical difficulty in implementing the guidelines.

Note: This annual report has been approved by all Member States present in Moscow.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in RWANDA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Nine Member States (BE, DE, DK, FR, HU, LU, NL, PL, SE) and one Associated Schengen State (CH – with a cooperation office) are present in Rwanda. LU opened its embassy in August 2024. DK, HU are diplomatic offices, the other seven are embassies.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

EU Delegation and Member/Associated States in Rwanda held two Local Schengen cooperation meetings, chaired by EUD, in April and September 2024. Meetings were very well attended. EUD established reports, consulted these with all participants and submitted them to HQ. This annual report was consulted with MS on 24 February 2025.

3. State of play

For 2023, the number of Schengen visa applications processed by member states Belgium and France was 12.028 (Belgium 11.039, France 989 from 16 September 2023 onwards) and for 2024 the total was 14.788 (Belgium 10.575, France 4.213). This is an increase of 23% and showing the strongly increasing demand from Rwanda for travel to the Schengen zone.

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Belgium represents Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. France took over visa applications at their Embassy from Sep 18, 2023. Other Schengen or Associated States handle visa applications through their competent Embassies in the region. BE in Kigali is also responsible for processing visa applications of Congolese citizens resident in North and South Kivu and representing also Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden and Germany (only Congolese nationals for Germany) for this region, with approximately 1200 applications out of a total of 10.000 applications in 2024.

EU and MS in Rwanda are generally well prepared to ensure the execution of tasks as per the Visa Code. Regarding issues regarding delays flagged in 2023, the situation has improved:

- there were some delays in visa processing in the high season, as is in general the case worldwide and to a lesser extent compared to last year in BE case

- reinforcement of the BE local team with a Document Verification Officer (DVO) since mid-April 2024
- mission of a 'flying consul' end June-mid July to support visa processing during high season, also given the rotation of staff of the local team (3 new members first half of 2024, 1 new DVO) and summer absences.

For 2025:

- possible reinforcement of local team with a 3rd BE/EU visa agent (who can decide on visa applications)
- further digitalisation of applications by TLS facilitating internal processes (applicants still need to submit application and supporting documents in paper at TLS), which will allow BE Embassies or HQ to assist in processing visa applications if needed.

FR operates with one full-time staff.

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.

The request by DG HOME to verify Rwandan procedures for and obtain samples of Rwandan travel documents was sent to the authorities with repeated reminders, but received no response. Consuls advise DG HOME to request this information from the Rwandan embassy in Brussels. Attached to this report are samples of travel documents. One MS raised the issue of Rwandan Immigration department apparently issuing travel document for stateless resident persons. A MS sent a NV requesting that specimen.

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

Rwanda has joined on 5 June 2024 the Hague Convention Abolishing the requirement of legalization for foreign public documents ('1961 Apostille Convention'). This means that Rwandan documents do not need to be legalized anymore by respective Embassies for use in their country, and only the apostille of the document issued by Minaffet is required for use abroad. All present EU members confirmed the application of the Apostille Convention except DE, which still requires Rwandan documents to be legalised at their Embassy.

3.5 Exchange of information

Member States have exchanged on the number of visa applications and the number of visa issued. In 2024, MS processed and issued the following number of C-visas:

BE: 10575 requested – 7300 delivered

FR: 4213 requested – 2630 delivered

DE:

C-Visa (only non-Rwandans)

- 119 applications
- 13 refusals
- 106 visa issued

D-Visa (national visa for students, au-pairs, family reunification etc.)

- 697 applications
- 65 refusals
- 632 visa issued

NL: 9 requested - 9 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.

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.

The political situation in the Eastern DRC will have consequences regarding processing of visa requests from Congolese citizens resident in North and South Kivu, currently under occupation by rebel group M23. Document verification will become difficult and sensitive issues may arise regarding supporting documents not issued by DRC authorities. The group will follow these issues, and experience from HQ (for instance from other cases of non-recognized territories).



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in SAUDI ARABIA

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

A total of 21 Schengen Member States¹⁵ (MS) are represented in Riyadh. Three of them¹⁶ also have consulates in Jeddah. Norway is handling visa matters from their Embassy in Abu Dhabi. All Schengen member states except Poland and Romania are making use of an external service provider to collect and process visa applications. All the countries use the services of VFS Global with the exception of Spain and Slovakia, which use BLS International and Germany working with TLS contact. Italy started to work with a consortium of Almoviva and VFS Global, after a year of suspension of activities with VFS.

The majority of these LSC MS use the company's visa application centres in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam; a few others use the company's visa application centre only in Riyadh or only in Jeddah. There is also a VFS office for Aramco employees in Dhahran.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

LSC group met once a month physically at the EU Delegation. The meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation. 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 and another adopted on 22 April 2024 closely aligning the cascade with other GCC countries (see 3.3 below).

¹⁵ AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE; EL, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, CH, NO

¹⁶ FR, DE, 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. 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 migrant 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.

On the basis of a proposal by LSC, the Commission adopted in April 2024 adapted rules for multi-entry visas for KSA citizens and GCC residents in KSA. Under the new rules, visas for Saudi nationals and GCC residents in KSA should be issued for a period of 5 year, including for first time applicants. Saudi authorities committed to ensure reciprocity, which has not occurred to date.

Four Member States (CY, EL, FR, IT) have visa-free access agreements for diplomatic and service passports.

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



COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AU SENEGAL RAPPORT 2024

1. Introduction

Au Sénégal, 15 Etats Membres Schengen (EMS) sont présents : Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Finlande, Grèce, Italie, Luxembourg, Norvège, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, République Tchèque et Suisse. L'Irlande, Etat membre de l'UE mais pas de la zone Schengen, dispose également d'une Ambassade et d'un poste consulaire qui délivre des visas aux ressortissants du Sénégal et des pays sous sa juridiction.

En 2024, 13 postes consulaires des EMS (Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Grèce, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, République Tchèque, Suisse) ont délivré des visas aux ressortissants du Sénégal et des pays qui se trouvaient sous leur juridiction respective. Au 1er février 2024, le Luxembourg, avec l'ouverture d'une section consulaire (la 13^{ème} au Sénégal), a démarré la délivrance de visas pour les résidents du Sénégal. Les visas pour le Luxembourg pour les résidents du Sénégal étaient jusqu'alors 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.

Une deuxième réunion entre le Groupe de Coordination local Schengen (LSC) et les autorités sénégalaises sur les questions consulaires et visa prévue début décembre pour poursuivre le dialogue entamé en juin 2023 a été finalement reportée par la partie sénégalaise. (cf. 3.5).

Étant donné que **la problématique de la fraude documentaire et de la falsification de documents** reste très présente (comme dénoncée par l'Espagne, suivie par la France et des autres EMS), un **groupe de travail sur ce sujet** a été créé à l'initiative de la Suisse, avec le soutien de l'Allemagne et de la DUE dans le cadre d'un effort commun et soutenu des EMS et de la DUE à Dakar. Ce groupe, s'est réuni régulièrement au cours de l'année 2024 et a offert de multiples occasions d'échanges fructueux sur des sujets tels que les défis liés à l'état civil et les campagnes d'information. (cf. 3.5).

À l'initiative de la France, un autre groupe de travail avec la DUE, l'Allemagne, l'Espagne, l'Italie et la Suisse s'est formé pour développer une note conceptuelle pour un projet visant à soutenir le Sénégal dans la lutte contre la fraude documentaire à travers la création d'une Division Nationale d'Investigation contre la Fraude Documentaire et à l'identité. En octobre, 1 Mio EUR ont été alloués à cette proposition de projet dans le cadre du programme *Prévention de la migration irrégulière* depuis le Sénégal du *Mécanisme flexible pour la Migration et déplacement forcé en Afrique subsaharienne* de la Commission Européenne. Toutefois, des contributions financières additionnelles de la part des Etats membres de l'UE sont attendus pour pouvoir atteindre le montant minimum de 3 Mio EUR évalué pour la création de cette division.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2024

Quatre réunions régulières du groupe LSC se sont tenues durant l'année 2024, à savoir le 27 mars, 06 juin, 02 octobre et 05 décembre. Elles se sont tenues en personne, à la DUE. Les réunions LSC sont présidées par la DUE, au niveau de la Cheffe de la Section Politique, presse et information (PPI).

Les réunions régulières qui se sont tenues en 2024 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. Des informations plus ponctuelles ont également été échangées par email et/ou via les groupes WhatsApp et Signal, à l'initiative de la DUE ou des EMS.

La DUE établit l'ordre du jour des réunions, incluant les contributions des EMS. Un système de rotation a été suggéré pour la rédaction des comptes rendu de réunion mais n'a pas pu être mis en œuvre jusqu'à présent faute d'accord sur la prise en charge de ce rôle. 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, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal, et l'Autriche (depuis décembre 2024), la société BLS pour l'Espagne et l'Italie - depuis juillet 2023, TLS Contact pour la Belgique - depuis septembre 2021).

Après une forte augmentation entre 2021 et 2022 de 26 387 à 56 866 en raison de la levée des restrictions COVID19, le nombre de demandes de visas Schengen traitées ont continué d'augmenter en 2023 à 64 391. Les informations disponibles indiquent une poursuite de ce développement en 2024.

En conséquence de l'augmentation des demandes de visas, mais aussi du 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 emplis en une heure, voire moins. Pour lutter contre ce phénomène, des mesures ont été prises par plusieurs EMS et prestataires, dont notamment l'implémentation de systèmes de reconnaissance faciale pour la prise de rendez-vous, le prépaiement en ligne et le *one-time-password* envoyée par téléphone.

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.

Plusieurs EMS ont suggéré d'inclure de nouvelles catégories (ex : « athlètes/sportifs ») dans la liste harmonisée. Un exercice de révision de la liste pourrait donc être proposé en 2025.

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. Les Pays-Bas confirment que dans leur cas la transmission d'information se fait au niveau des capitales.

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 2024, la compilation et la mise à jour des statistiques sur les visas a été assurée par la DUE. Bien que l'exercice ait pu être mené avec plus de régularité en 2024 par rapport à 2022 et 2023, la quantité de données à collecter en vertu de l'article 48 (3a) est toujours considérée comme trop vaste face à la surcharge de travail tant du côté des EMS que de la DUE. Les statistiques de 2024 ont pu être complétées au cours des premiers mois de l'année 2025. Pour l'année 2025 en cours, les États continuent à essayer d'assurer un partage écrit et régulier des statistiques.

3.6 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

La **première réunion du groupe de travail nouvellement créé sur la problématique de la fraude documentaire et de la falsification de documents** a eu lieu le 23 janvier 2024. L'objectif est d'organiser des réunions régulières , organisées en alternance par les EMS afin de fournir une

plateforme d'échange plus étroit et de transfert de connaissances sur différents sujets liés à la falsification/fraude de documents entre les EMS, ainsi que de la formation ciblée sur des sujets particuliers pour le personnel transférable et local et de l'identification de projets possibles pour soutenir les autorités sénégalaises, mais aussi les EMS à mieux maîtriser le problème de la fraude et de la falsification de documents.

La première réunion a été suivie de réunions le 28 février sur les justificatifs supplémentaires de voyage (réservations d'hôtel, lettre de congé annuel, justificatif d'emploi/d'activité, etc.) à l'ambassade d'Allemagne, le 30 avril sur l'état civil au Sénégal à l'ambassade de Portugal, le 30 mai sur les différents modes opératoires de fraude documentaire détectés dans les aéroports d'Afrique de l'Ouest à l'ambassade de Suisse (contenu livré par l'ambassade de France), le 26 juin sur l'outsourcing à l'ambassade d'Italie et le 25 septembre à l'ambassade d'Allemagne sur la communication des médias sociaux sur les sujets liés aux visas.

Lors de cette dernière réunion, il a été décidé de lancer une campagne d'information commune sur les Visas Schengen et les risques de la fraude documentaire et à l'identité. Par la suite, le groupe de LSC a travaillé pour une telle campagne sur la base d'une campagne similaire lancée de l'ambassade d'Allemagne en collaboration avec le Centre Allemand d'Information en Afrique (CAI). Toutefois, cette campagne n'a pas encore pu être achevée, faute de ressources dédiées et en raison de la surcharge de travail.

Par ailleurs, plusieurs membres du groupe LSC ont participé aux deux réunions d'un autre groupe de travail sur la fraude documentaire, initié par l'Ambassade de Canada et avec la participation des ambassades des États-Unis et du Royaume-Uni, qui ont abordé les sujets des documents bancaires avec la participation des experts des banques sénégalaises et des risques de la migration irrégulière avec la participation du Secrétaire Permanent du Comité Interministériel de Lutte contre la migration irrégulière.

4. Défis

Comme l'année précédente, la fraude documentaire et la falsification des documents continuent 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 et la Gambie. 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 culturels, 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.

Ainsi, la fraude documentaire demeure un problème récurrent au Sénégal, comme c'est également le cas dans d'autres pays de la région. Le problème est aggravé par le fait qu'il s'étend aussi à des documents qui concernent des mineurs d'âge.

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 EMS poursuivent leur approche commune et coordonnée dans la lutte contre la fraude documentaire et 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, la zone frontalière avec la Mauritanie et les communes précaires de Dakar sont en premier lieu concernées. Toutefois, il

est important de bien faire la distinction entre le manque de fiabilité des documents d'état civil avec les falsifications de documents. Des efforts de modernisation et de digitalisation de l'état civil ont été poursuivis à travers le programme « NEKKAL » financé par l'UE et permis certaines avancées bien que limitées. Dans ce contexte, l'engagement renforcé des nouvelles autorités sénégalaises d'accélérer le processus de digitalisation de l'état civil représente un message positif.

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

5. Divers



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in SERBIA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Twenty-one Member States have an embassy in Belgrade, with Ireland covered from their embassy in Athens, but present with a consul in Belgrade. Lithuania is covered by its embassy in Budapest, but officials join the LSC in Belgrade in person occasionally. Schengen countries Norway and Switzerland are present in Belgrade as well. In addition, Romania (in Zajecar and Vrsac, which do not have any competences regarding visa issuance), Croatia and Hungary (both in Subotica) and Bulgaria (in Nis) have consulates outside the capital. Belgium covers Luxembourg, Germany covers Latvia.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The EU Delegation conducted four Local Schengen Meetings in 2024 (March, May, September, December), which were very well attended, including by Norway and Switzerland and non-Schengen members Ireland and Cyprus. For embassies abroad, the LSC ensures online attendance. Two of those meetings were organised back-to-back with the Local Consular Cooperation Meeting. With the support of the EEAS in the EU Delegation, DG HOME's European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO), who is based in Belgrade and has a regional mandate for the Western Balkans, chairs the LSC. EMLO prepares and shares comprehensive minutes after every meeting. Occasionally, a Liaison Officer from the German Bundespolizei takes part in the Meetings to share recently detected cases of visa and document frauds at Belgrade Airport. The US Consul took part in one of the LSC meetings to share his experiences with visa issuance in Serbia, which was very well received by the MS. Efforts to invite consuls from like-minded embassies will be further strengthened in 2025.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS report congruently, that there are no major issues with the application of the Visa Code and its revised Handbook, which was shared with MS on 28 June.

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

One of the key objectives of the LSC in 2024 was the finalization of the harmonised list of supporting documents for non-Serbian visa applicants residing in Serbia. The proposal for establishing the list

had been discussed at the Visa Committee meeting in October. Following further exchanges with the LSC Serbia and final editing remarks by the Commission, the Visa Committee gave a positive opinion by consensus in January. The final adoption is expected for 2025.

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')

Regarding the adaption of the general rules under Article 24 (2) of the Visa Code, most MS follow the suggested pattern, as long as proper documentation is ensured (sufficient validity of residence permit), whilst recognising that exceptions can be made in specific cases. Some embassies use a different *modus operandi* and their administrations have advised them not to issue more than three-month visas for certain applicants.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Nothing to report. Practices are largely harmonised.

3.5 Exchange of information

The LSC in Serbia turns out to be an essential platform to exchange information. MS openly share and discuss experience, trends, most significant issues and cases of frauds. Ad-hoc inquiries and other issues are also discussed via the EU Consular Group on Signal. The level of cooperation and exchange of information in general is excellent and the MS are supportive with each other and towards the EU Delegation. Annual statistics have been collected for 2024 and the MS agreed to provide quarterly figures for 2025.

Most MS report a mild to strong increase in visa applications in 2024 in contrast to 2023. Only a few report a decline in applications. By far the largest group are still Russian applicants, followed by Chinese applicants.

All available data show, that 18,217 visa applications have been applied for in total and the refusal rate is 5.8% on average.

EMLO regularly informs about changes and adaptations of EU visa policy and other, less LSC-related topics, such as regional migration trends, organised crime with regard to migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings (THB) as well as return and readmission. Topics, which are also particularly important for the MS, are the Entry/Exit-System (EES) as well as the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). Taking into account, that Serbia shares borders with four MS and Serbian citizens are visa-free for Schengen, the EU Delegation and MS are in close consultations on the topic and embassies are encouraged to share public information online.

Another relevant issue concerns visa policy alignment, which is one of the key pillars of the Action Plan for the Western Balkans regarding irregular migration and security. Serbia made progress in further harmonizing its visa policy with the EU/Visa Acquis in 2024 through introduction of visa regime to four more countries (Mongolia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar). The decision for Kuwait, Oman and Qatar took effect in December. Due to the provisions in the agreement, alignment with Mongolia will be in March 2025. Within the Reform Agenda under the Growth Plan, Serbia committed to make further progress in visa policy alignment.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The LSC coordinated a visit of MS to the US embassy in Belgrade.

LSC meetings and Consular Cooperation meetings continue to be held together to avoid a multitude of additional meetings.

4. Challenges

Taking into consideration, that most MS report a strong increase in visa applications in 2024 in contrast to 2023, and expect further increase in the forthcoming years, the multitude of applications and the high workload of MS embassies in Serbia will be huge challenges for 2025. Moreover, there are suspicious applications or those of insufficient quality, because documents and important requirements are missing. As safeguards in cases of suspicion, several MS introduced a questionnaire to ask for the purpose of the applicant's stay or which sights they want to visit in the country when they apply for a tourist visa. Despite, fraud applications remain a challenge. One MS reported a hacker attack on their visa appointment system. Another MS reported a similar experience prior. The risk of fraud and external interference remains consequently high and MS and the EU must remain vigilant on these developments.

From the policy angle, the LSC will continue to address the challenges and recommendations reflected in the Commission's annual Visa Suspension Mechanism report, particularly regarding the lack of visa policy alignment. Serbia's list remains diverging towards 12 third countries, which are visa required in the EU, but not in Serbia.

5. Other issues

This report was approved by MS / Schengen countries.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in South Africa
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

22 EU Member States are present in South Africa with their Embassies or High Commissions in Pretoria and four (Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Malta) are represented by other Member States for Schengen visas. The following Member States have Consulates General and Honorary Consuls outside of the Administrative 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 and Gqeberha
Spain in Cape Town	Germany in Durban and Gqeberha
	Greece in Durban
	Hungary in Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban
	Italy in Durban, Gqeberha and East London
	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 and Gqeberha
	Sweden in Cape Town

Among non-EU Schengen countries, Norway and Switzerland have Embassies in Pretoria and issue visas. Switzerland has a Consulate General in Cape Town and an Honorary Consul in Durban. Embassy of Sweden in Nairobi is handling Schengen visas for Sweden in South Africa as well as representing Estonia. The Consulate General of Denmark in Dubai is handling Schengen visas for Denmark in South Africa (including Greenland and Faroe Islands) and Iceland.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Five meetings were held in 2024. The meetings were held together with the LCC meetings in cooperation with the rotating Council Presidency. The meetings have been well attended in person with a few participants attending virtually. A training on documents' verification was held on 13 November by German document experts hosted by the Embassy of the Netherlands. The EUD issued minutes after the meetings. Coordination with the LSC in locations outside the capital has been ensured by using the common mailing list and enabling online participation.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The preparedness of the Member States and the EUD to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code is good. Regular meetings, exchange of information and trainings contributed to the preparedness. The LSC has exchanged information on the cooperation with external service providers, waiting times for appointments, and visa shopping.

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

Work is on-going and a dedicated group of Member States has been formed to work on the joint proposal by the LSC of the harmonised list of supporting documents. There is a general interest among the Member States to agree and adopt a harmonised 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')

A common cascade has not been adopted in South Africa. A discussion on the possible adoption of a cascade will be initiated in the upcoming LSC meetings.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Member States have shared their practices during the LSC meetings. This practice will continue in the upcoming LSC meetings.

3.5 Exchange of information

The exchange of information on quarterly statistics was irregular. Exchange of information on cases of fraud, travel medical insurance, cooperation with local authorities and companies, external service providers, and the use of VISMail has been conducted *ad hoc*.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other specific initiatives have been taken in the LSC.

4. Challenges

No challenges were listed in the 2023 report. In 2025, the LSC plans to move forward with harmonising the lists of supporting documents and to explore the possibility to adopt a common cascade in South Africa. The LSC intends to enhance information sharing and the harmonisation of practices.

5. Other issues

No other issues to be presented.



EUROPEAN UNION

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

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN SRI LANKA AND THE MALDIVES 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Five Member States + Switzerland are present in Sri Lanka. The latter (CH) being the only state now represented with a visa application centre outside Colombo (in Jaffna, Northern Province). One MS closed its Jaffna office in 2024.

For the Maldives, eight MS + CH are now present in Male with a VFS visa application centre opened in 2020, covering for further seven MS¹⁷.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Four meetings were held in 2024. The EU convened, chaired and drafted the minutes submitted to MS for their final approval. Throughout the year, meetings have been well attended with an active and constructive participation of all members of the group. All MS have been regular in attendance and displayed cooperative spirit and synergies. Contacts with MS based in Delhi have been updated. Visits from MS based in New Delhi took place throughout the year. A WhatsApp group was established for the group.

2024 saw some major events: two MS joined Schengen in two stages in 2024 which also reflected in the composition of the LSC group in Colombo.

On 17 July 2024, the 8th EU-SL Joint Readmission Committee was held after a gap of three years. In July 2024, in a joint and coordinated way, EU sent Note Verbale on behalf of the LSC group to Sri Lankan MFA regarding streamlined procedure of submitting Schengen visa applications. FRONTEX held a technical visit to SL to assess the implementation performance of SL partner within the framework of the EU Reintegration Programme and met with EUD in October. EUD briefed LSC group on the discussion held.

A training on anti-fraud and forged documents by LO/ police officers from three Schengen MS was organized for the group in November 2024 in Colombo.

As regards the “revision of the List of travel documents which entitle the holder to cross the external borders and which may be endorsed with a visa” exercise, launched in Brussels, EUD sent Notes Verbales to SL and MV requiring input.

¹⁷ FR for PT ; CH for NL, BE, SI, PT, LU, LI

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All MS issuing visas are using the harmonised application form as it is integrated on their system.

13 missions rely on the services of the external provider “VFS Global” in Colombo, which has now move to a new and bigger centre (in Colombo10) and since December 2024, BLS opened an office in Colombo and covers one MS.

VFS also operates from Male for most MS.

In Colombo, MS complained that VFS staff is not sufficiently paid which results on high fluctuation of staff and there have been complains of corruption cases. As regards VFS Male, a local company is working for VFS and some MS have had problems with that.

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

There is consensus among the group that the priority for 2025 will be to review the harmonised list of supported documents that dates back to 13 October 2011.

Issues regarding the authentication of documents remain and MS continue to look at best practices. The training in November on forged documents was very useful for the whole group.

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’)

Progress has been made on the application of the cascade for Multiple Entry Visas under art. 24(2).

3.4 Exchange of information

Challenges remain on the exchange of statistics.

Frauds remain a problem particularly with forged documents including of bank statements and groups of facilitators. Agents have continued to present themselves as visa facilitators, often through personal connections, WhatsApp groups, and YouTube videos. Some MS flagged that travel bans are systematically applied when frauds are detected. The importance of raising public awareness is an issue. Some MS flagged that they face appeals in capitals by rejected tourist visa applicants who often win the cases.

There has been a rise on refusal for all Schengen MS in Sri Lanka, whereas there has been no issues with Maldives (some MS flagged 40-50% refusal rate in SL and 5% in MV).

Visa Shopping has continued to take place. MS experienced longer consultation period after new MS joined Schengen. MS pointed out the increase in the use of fake passports in national employment visas.

Some MS noted that the new Sri Lankan passports seem to have basic security features.

MS continue to be stricter on the visas for seafarer’ /shipping companies. Among others, on authenticity of seafarers’ letters was raised several times as there has been a concerning trend to falsify the invitation letter of bona fide companies.

Some Sri Lankans have been promised work visas for large sums of money in routine scams by fake work agencies. A MS informed the group that their border security unit offered training on SL passports checks. The group discussed the US practice in case of detection of any fake documents, which is to systematically inform the Central Bureau of Investigation and it was suggested that this practice could be adopted by LSC MS.

A WhatsApp group was established for the group including some MS covering from New Delhi with the objective that they are all included. It is intended to organize more hybrid meetings to associate non-resident MS in New Delhi.

4. Challenges

The need for a full-fledged posting of a Liaison Officer in Colombo airport remains. MS like in 2023 repeated this plea.

Some MS faced applications accompanied by lawyers' letters (a warning of sorts that there will be an appeal) should there be a rejection.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TAIWAN
2024 REPORT

1.Introduction

16 Member States are present (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden) and seven are represented (Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Slovenia) in Taiwan. All offices are located in Taipei.

2.LSC meetings held in 2024

LSC joined with LCC meetings take place quarterly, in 2024 four times. They are chaired by the Member State holding the EU Presidency, co-chaired by the EU Office, and well attended (usually 12-15 of the present Member States). One LSC/LCC meeting was held as a hybrid meeting with virtual participation of non-present Member States, on the initiative of the Belgian EU Presidency. Each meeting report is drawn up by the EU Office and circulated.

3.State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

N/A. Taiwan passport holders are Schengen free if their passport entails an ID number. The LSC group did not report or discuss any operational challenges with visa issuance beyond the occasional exchange on visa applicants and/or suspicious cases (ad-hoc and case-by-case).

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

N/A. The LSC group did express the need for harmonising the 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')

N/A. No need expressed by the LSC group.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The LSC group did not take any steps towards further harmonisation of practices beyond the occasional exchange on best practices (ad-hoc and case-by-case) due to low volumes of visa applications and the fact that some EU Member States do not issue visa for Taiwanese applicants in Taiwan (they do so outside of Taiwan).

3.5 Exchange of information

LSC was mainly a forum for exchange on crisis preparedness in the absence of a separate group with focus on field security. Crisis preparedness was the priority topic while exchange on consular affairs was secondary. The group was a useful platform for Member States to exchange experience on their consular functions, yet, without a felt urgency regards crisis preparedness, the LSC group would likely not have met four but instead rather twice a year.

Especially during the April 2024 earthquake in Taiwan that affected citizens of EU Member States, the LSC group functioned effectively as a platform for information exchange and support among EU Member States offices and helped coordinating consular assistance efforts as well as liaison with local authorities.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

On top of the four annual LSC meetings, three satellite phone tests were organised and conducted for the LSC group by the EU Office, in addition to the annual half-day crisis tabletop exercise that was designed and facilitated by the EU Office for the Member States.

The EU Office organised an LSC visit to Taiwan's Central Emergency Operations Centre. A visit to the Taipei Fire Department Emergency Operations Centre took place on an ad-hoc basis. As an initiative of the Hungarian EU Presidency, Hungary organised a briefing by a visa outsourcing services company for the LSC group.

Upon the initiative of the EU Office and supported by the Member States, the National Fire Agency and the Taipei Fire Department set up instant messaging app groups for direct and real-time communication among emergency management agencies and Member States' offices (and already used them multiple times for cases of natural or other disasters, e.g. major accidents).

The EU Office drafted assessments and action recommendations following the major 2024 April earthquake and the annual half-day crisis tabletop exercise.

4. Challenges

During the 2025 reporting period, the LSC group intends to make further progress on crisis preparedness measures.

5. Other issues

N/A.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Tanzania
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

12 Member States are present and 13 are represented in Tanzania.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Four LSC meetings were held in 2024:

- 14 March (Attendance: CH, FI, DE, PL, BE, NL, FR, ES, DK (online) and SE (online). Absent: NO, IT)
- 20 June (Attendance: BE, ES, FR, DE and SE (online). Absent: CH, FI, PL, NL, DK, NO, IT)
- 13 September (Attendance: BE, ES, FR, CH, DE, PL, FI. Absent: NL, DK, SE, NO, IT)
- 12 December (Attendance: BE, DE (low turn-out due to glitch in calendar-invitation from EUD))

EUD chaired all meetings, produced, and shared minutes.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC group have discussed how to best share relevant information on the operational situation to both inform of challenges and to coordinate the approach between Member States.

There has been discussion around fraudulent documentations, especially with bank statements, on waiting times for appointments, cases of visa shopping and of cooperation with external service providers. The group also discussed the mandatory insurance scheme that was introduced in Zanzibar. Furthermore, the meetings have been an opportunity for the EU Delegation to share information received from Brussels.

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

The harmonised list of supporting documents for Tanzania was adopted on Friday 15 March 2024. Although officially the decision entered into force the following day, due to potential practical obstacles for consulates, the harmonised lists of supporting documents officially entered into force 31 March 2024.

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 utilisation of the cascade system was discussed at a recent meeting. It showed that there is a difference in applying the cascade system as some MS interpret the rules more generously than others. It will be necessary to have an in-depth discussion on the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas to ensure coherence among MS.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

During the LSC meetings, MS 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

As previously described the MS share quarterly statistics on waiting times, refusal rates, trends and quality of application, cases of fraud, medical insurance and insurance in general. A number of MS are using external service provider so the quarterly meetings are an opportunity to exchange on experiences with monitoring and cooperation.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Sharing of good practices that can ease the assessment of applications. E.g. one MS gets applicants to sign a statement to allow for banks to give details about the validity of the information provided directly to the missions.

4. Challenges

For Q3 of 2025 the EUD will be without a JPD, which will limit resources and efforts to coordinate these meetings. If no JPD is granted to the EUD in 2026-2028 this will have an impact on the delegation's ability to carry out the tasks of the LSC.

5. Other issues



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Thailand
2024 REPORT

1 Introduction

20 Member States are present¹⁸ and 6 are represented¹⁹ in Bangkok.

MS	AT	BE	CH	CZ	DE	DK	EL	ES	EU	FI	FR	HU	IT	LU	NL	NO	PL	PT	RO	SE	SK
present	X	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																				

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

LSC meetings in 2024:

- 8 February 2024 : EUDEL + 16 MS present
- 26 May 2024 : EUDEL + 16 MS present
- 19 September 2024 : EUDEL + 16 MS present
- 27 November 2024 : EUDEL + 17 MS present

The LSC group met four times in 2024. Meetings are organised at and chaired by the EU Delegation. Minutes are drafted by the EU Delegation and finalised after MS comments.

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

¹⁸ AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, LU, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK

¹⁹ EE, IS, LT, LV, MT, SI

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. There is no decision 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 'MEV cascades' have taken place in 2024. MS concluded that EUDEL should propose a draft text (in 2025). This would then be discussed locally while some MS may need to consult their capital at this stage.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

In the post-Covid-19 pandemic most countries reported significant increases in visa applications with some almost reaching pre-pandemic numbers.

3.5 Exchange of information

Overall sharing of the Quarterly statistics worked fairly well in 2024.

Information is regularly shared about fraudulent documents or fraudulent activities that other Schengen States should be aware of either during the LSC meeting or by e-mail.

Schengen States in Thailand have a common list of travel and health insurance companies and new applications are assessed during the LSC meetings. The latest update was in November 2024. There are currently 45 companies on the common 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 VISMai and the Visa Information System are used by Schengen States, with some embassies having instructions to only use VISMai for visa related matters. Schengen States reported that while they do use VISMai 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 following challenges were listed in the LSC Annual Report (2023) and were addressed as follows :

Structure the LSC meetings' recurring agenda point on "Visa services and exchanges/harmonisation practices" in a more structured and efficient way in order to free more time for other important topics on the agenda.

Achieved by updating the information prior to the LSC meeting and as such freeing time during the meeting for more relevant exchanges of views and information

Evaluating the adoption of more favourable or stricter rules in the context of local cooperation based on and in line with the amendment to article 24 of the regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019, paragraph 18.c.2b amending Article 24.

This has been discussed

Continue the discussion on changing or updating the harmonised list of supporting documents

Discussions have taken place, but no update will be proposed.

For the next reporting period, (LSC 2025), Schengen States agree to:

Discussions on ‘MEV cascades’ will continue in 2025, (refer to 3.3 above).

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.

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



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Four Member States have diplomatic representations in Trinidad and Tobago (FR, DE, NL, ES), of which three are delivering Schengen visas (DE, NL, ES), for third country-nationals.

Since nationals of Trinidad and Tobago can visit the Schengen Zone for up to 90 days visa-free for tourism, business, or transit purposes, visa application numbers for TT nationals are not high. Those TT nationals who need visa for carrying out employment, any paid activity, study for more than 90 days or permanent residency there would still applying for Schengen visa. However, most of applications are from nationals who live in TT or neighbouring countries but come from countries who need Schengen visa. Nationals of Guyana and Surinam in the region require Schengen visas for tourism.

DE, NL and ES consular offices are responsible not only for TT but also cover neighbouring countries that do not have their diplomatic representations.

Member State	Dealing with applications from following countries
Germany	Trinidad & Tobago Antigua & Barbuda Barbados Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Netherlands	Trinidad & Tobago Antigua & Barbuda Barbados Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Spain	Trinidad and Tobago Barbados Granada St. Lucia

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Guyana Surinam

Though France has an embassy in TT, their consular section is in the embassy in St. Lucia. Therefore foreigners who are currently legally resident in Trinidad and Tobago must apply at the Embassy of Spain in Port-of-Spain for Schengen visas for tourism if their main destination is France. Other visa applications (long stay and travel to the French overseas departments and territories) must be submitted at the French Embassy in St. Lucia.

Currently there are following formal arrangements with MS present in TT:

Arrangement with represented Member State	Unrepresented Member State
Germany	Estonia Italy Portugal
Netherlands	Belgium Denmark Finland Hungary Luxemburg Norway Poland Sweden
Spain	France

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The EU Delegation organised and chaired one meeting on LSC in the spring 2024.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All missions apply the new Visa Code, and they do not face any issues.

Some applicants complain that visa is valid for short period.

Consular office	C-Visa approved	C-Visa rejected	Total applications
France	13	0	13
Germany	167	11	178
Netherlands	150	3	153
Spain	149	0	149
TOTAL	479	14	493

3.2 Exchange of information

The need for a more coordination on the issue of covering unrepresented countries was discussed in the HoMs meeting in March 2025. It will be discussed in the LSC meeting in coming months.

3.3 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other initiatives taken in 2024.

The EU Delegation is planning to organise a coordinated information campaign on the future entry into force of the Entry-Exit System (EES) and European Travel Information and Authorisation system (ETIAS), and developments in the area of EU visa policy in 2025.

4. Challenges

Since EU MS are not present in many countries of the region, getting simple tourist Schengen visa requires, for example, Guyanese nations to travel to TT or Suriname.

5. Other issues

Not directly linked to Schengen visa issue but for your information:

The UK's government decided to introduce a visa requirement for TT nationals as of March 12, this is in response to a "significant increase" in TT visitors claiming asylum. The UK government explained it by increasing asylum claims from T&T nationals, there used to be an annual average of 49 between 2015 and 2019, but in the past year it was 439. However, there are speculations that it might be linked to the government's decision for introducing the State of Emergency to get the crime rate down and the associated risk that gang members might wish to move to the UK.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TUNISIA
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

In Tunisia, 17 EU Member States are 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). Since Bulgaria and Romania partially joined the Schengen area on 31 March 2024, they all deliver Schengen visas except Sweden, which is represented in visa matters by Finland. 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; Finland represents Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, and Norway. Switzerland represents Slovakia. Germany is representing Lithuania (and theoretically Latvia, which has been put on hold since COVID).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

During 2024, five Local Schengen Cooperation meetings took place, all well attended by MS. The meetings were co-chaired by EUDEL and the MS holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (Belgium during the first half of the year, then Hungary). The EU Delegation drafted reports of the meetings. 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

According to the category of visa, the main problems in implementing the Visa Code are (i) the availability of appointments for filing application due to applicants trying to obtain visas by fraud, and (ii) respecting the time allowed for processing the application. Consulates continue to be seriously stretched: both bigger and smaller consulates are understaffed considering the large number of applications received and the amount of fraudulent attempts.

During the year, several consulates report having managed to reduce waiting times. The vast majority of Member States are using the services of an external service provider to receive visa applications. (Some MS continue also to cover Libya from Tunis).

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. Most frequent frauds relate to fake bank statements, fake hotel reservations, forged insurance certificates, forged diplomas or birth/marriage certificates, invitation letters from unreliable organisations, 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 recurring fraud schemes.

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')

Few applicants have been eligible for the MEV Cascade considering the travel restrictions in force during the past years (reference period) due to the covid pandemic. Most consulates apply the cascade in cases that meet the criteria under Article 24 (2). However, 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.

General practice by MS is to be more lenient than the default cascade suggests.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

There is a high awareness among consulates that cooperation is key to avoid visa shopping. No new harmonisation initiatives have been presented during 2024, but discussions took place regarding the utility of requesting travel reservation documents.

3.5 Exchange of information

Exchange of information takes place through email, telephone, whatsapp, 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 to the Visa Information System (VIS). Some member States have successfully integrated it in their national visa platform. Some MS find it complex to use.

4. Challenges

Irregular crossings by sea from Tunisia reaching Europe in an via the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy has decreased with around 80% during 2024 (from around 100.000 successful crossings in 2023, to 20.000 in 2024), most probably due to a more efficient Tunisian border control. Given the remaining high appetite to leave to Europe, a close 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 communicating on Schengen and other consular matters (informing about the possibilities of legal, circular migration; Talent Partnerships and the development of professional skills) considering the focus on this matter by media and the public opinion.

5. Other issues

It is still important to seek an effective communication channel with the Tunisian authorities and general public. Several interviews have been given by consuls on radio, TV and to the online press.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN TÜRKİYE

2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 4 consular constituencies in Türkiye. In 2024, 22 Member States issued visa in Ankara, 18 in Istanbul, 4 in Izmir, and 2 in Edirne. The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC Türkiye) convened, separately, in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

LSC Türkiye meetings in Ankara took place in February, May and October. In Istanbul in February, April, June, September and November. In Izmir in February, May and October. Ad hoc LSC bringing together Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir were organised in November and December. LSC Türkiye was chaired by the EU delegation, which also drew up reports.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Also in 2024, Schengen visas remained high on Türkiye's political agenda. Press articles continued to decry the difficulties for Turkish nationals to obtain Schengen visa appointments to lodge applications, overdue waiting times for visa decisions and high rates of refusals. Heads of Mission discussed Schengen visa issuance in October. During a senior official mission from DG HOME, in December, Schengen visas were discussed with HoMs, and subsequently with MFA.

Preliminary assessment of collected data points to continuous strong increase in visa applications in Ankara and Istanbul, with the benchmark of 1 million visa applications reached also in 2024.

In Ankara, visa applications rose by approximately 27 800 in total, from around 219 000 to at around 246 800 (partial data available). Waiting times for lodging visa applications were affected by delays compared to the standard in the Visa Code in several Member States, with a few Member States reporting very significant delays. A very common problem is that all appointment slots are booked as soon as they are published by bots and travel agencies, making it very hard to book an appointment.

In Istanbul, the LSC noted an increase in visa applications by approximately 55.300 (from around 677.300 in 2023 to around 732.600 in 2024). Waiting times for lodging visa applications at the external service providers exceeded the standard Visa Code requirements for several Member States, while decision-making periods at the consulates were broadly in line with Visa Code.

In Izmir, the partial data available show a slight decrease in visa applications by approximately 5.500 in total, from 121.000 in 2023 to around 115.500 in 2024. The consulates experienced delays

concerning waiting times for lodging visa applications at the external service providers, negatively affected by bot and other techniques to obtain online appointments. Decision-making periods were largely in line with Visa Code.

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

Discussions took place to modify the harmonised list of 2021 but no proposals were made by the LSC in that respect. The discussions will continue in 2025.

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 the last trimester of 2024, the LSC discussed in detail a proposal for a local adaptation of the cascade model for Turkish citizens (excluding truck drivers). The draft proposal was supported by a large majority of Member States and was sent to Member States in December for final comments, for approval at the beginning of 2025.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

LSC Türkiye discussed possible harmonisation of visa fees for children between 6 and 12 according to Article 16 visa code and noted but no decision was taken in this regard, so the practice remains only partially harmonised. The LSC also discussed the possibility of having a common list of trusted companies, but this was deemed unfeasible.

3.5 Exchange of information

The LSC regularly exchanged on visa statistics and operational capacities. The LSC Türkiye exchanged about best practises put in place by the consulates, notably with regard to business travellers and other specific categories and about challenges.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Working groups were formed to discuss in detail specific topics: the local adaptation of the cascade, the list of harmonised documents, visa fee exemption for children, truck drivers and business travellers, as well as a communication campaign on Schengen visas.

The discussions led to progress with regard to the proposal for a local adaptation of the cascade, to be finalised in 2025, and will be continued with regard to the list of harmonised documents and truck drivers.

The relevant working group started discussing a communication campaign which was deemed needed to combat widespread disinformation with regard to Schengen visas.

4. Challenges

The LSC continued to note the concerning economic conditions in Türkiye, heavily affecting the savings and income of visa applicants, and the continued relative high number of asylum applications from TR citizens, even if the numbers have decreased compared to 2024.

Moreover, the LSC noted the following main challenges, which were also communicated to the Turkish authorities: fraudulent applications with fake documents; unscrupulous behaviour from travel agencies, including booking all available appointments, providing unrealistic itineraries and using fake documents; issues related to truck drivers, with regard to the use of fake documents and involvement in human smuggling; problems with travel insurances; direct requests from Turkish authorities for fast-tracking visas, which disrupt the work of consulates; proliferation and lack of transparency with regard to green and other service passports; visa shopping; visa applicants with visa already issued deviating from the indicated destination or itinerary of their travel; and widespread misinformation about Schengen visas.

5. Other issues

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LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TURKMENISTAN 2024

1. Introduction

Four EU Member States: DE, FR, IT, RO, are represented in Ashgabat. MS do not have consular presence outside of the capital.

For issuing visas, Italy represents France, and Germany represents Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and - only for holders of service/diplomatic passports – Switzerland. Additionally, Germany issued visas in ad hoc representation for non-represented MS (Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, etc.).

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Two regular LSC meetings took place in 2024, on 16 April and 12 September; the meetings were well attended. The capacity of Consulates involved does not allow for increasing the number of regular meetings. The meetings were chaired by the EUDEL who was also in charge of drawing up reports.

A presentation on migration by Dr. Reda Sirgediene, UNODC Regional Adviser for Central Asia on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants was held for the LSC, UK and US in the premises of the EUDEL on 28 May 2024.

On 15 November 2024, the EUDEL organised a working lunch in the format of LSC, with the participation of Heads of Administrative Sections of EUDEL to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In Turkmenistan, the Visa Code is being implemented in a well-coordinated manner by the MS Embassies' Consular Sections. MS reported no major problems with the implementation of the Code.

Because of the increase of the number of flights to Europe, the number of visa applications increased, too. This led to longer waiting times on some occasions.

Some visa shopping attempts have been detected throughout 2025 and will be addressed by harmonisation of practices in issuing visas and continued exchange of information via the LSC meetings. RO was particularly targeted since becoming full Schengen MS.

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

During 2024, awaiting the change of Consul in one of the Consulates, MS agreed to postpone the submission of the harmonised list of supporting documents to the Visa Committee, to seek agreement of the new Consul, too. The completed draft list will be forwarded to the Visa Committee in 2025.

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 assessment of the need to adapt the general rules on issuing multiple-entry visas for applicants under Article 24(2b) of the Visa Code will be carried out in 2025.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Further harmonisation of practices will be discussed in 2025.

3.5 Exchange of information

MS established the practice of quarterly exchange of statistics. In 2024, the following trends were observed:

number of applications increasing due to more and cheap flights to Europe;
increasing rate of denials as most of the trustworthy travellers already have a visa;
denials because of doubts about willingness to return mostly regarding applicants from the Lebap and Mary regions, with a risk of illegal work in Europe, main countries of destination being in Central and Eastern Europe;
increasing number of victims of visa fraudsters (promising work visas for up to 2000 USD, fraudsters are often Russian citizens and operate with British phone numbers, also using caller ID spoofing to display Embassy numbers, creating trust among victims);
increasing number of applications for national visas for language courses and au pair employment.
the MS are experiencing increasing migration pressure to Europe as the main destinations of Turkmen migrants, Turkey and Russia, are facing economic difficulties

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In 2024, MS used the revised Visa Code Handbook in application since 28 June 2024, including the use of a revised visa application form.

MS remained ready to show flexibility in handling visa applications lodged by human rights defenders (rare in Turkmenistan), as per the revised Handbook.

MS worked on the revision of the List of travel documents and submitted relevant information to Brussels via the EUDEL.

MS are prepared for the roll out of the Entry / Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System and are ready to conduct an information campaign on that in the host country.

MS addressed the negative role of Turkmen travel agencies spreading misleading information to applicants by sending a joint Note Verbale to the MFA.

MS agreed to use Instagram for spreading visa related information.

4. Challenges

MS noted common problems encountered in the process of issuing visas:

- the lack of knowledge and/or disrespect of the deadlines for issuing visas, both by regular citizens and the authorities (there is a seven-day consultation period for Turkmen citizens);
- visa requests submitted on false pretext of attending events abroad, often with fake invitations;
- negative role played in this respect by some local travel agencies;
- insurance policies with non-compliant terms, or issued by sanctioned RU companies;
- emergence of trafficking in human beings and cash trafficking/money laundering, also including AF nationals; Central and East Europe being the target regions;
- cash based economy and mistrust towards the banking system in Turkmenistan makes checking financial means of travellers difficult; visa fees paid by cash with varying exchange rates.

The report was approved by the Member States on 24 February 2025



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

All 27 EU Member States are represented in the UAE; all except for HR via a resident Embassy in Abu Dhabi. BG, DE, DK, FR, HR, IT, MT, NL, and RO have Consulates General in Dubai. Four Schengen MSs (DE, CH, NL, 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, and 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. In 2023-2024, EUDEL in cooperation with FR Embassy and Commission (DG HOME) tried to establish new Common Airport Liaison Officer (CALO) at Dubai International Airport.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

EUDEL organised three formal LSC meetings (back-to-back with EU LCC) in cooperation with local rotating EU Presidencies (BE and HU). Besides, several *ad hoc* coordination meetings aimed to facilitate visa processes and prevent related harmful trends. No travel restrictions observed in 2024, except for flash floods enforced emergency suspension of operations at Dubai International Airport for a few days in April. Since mid-2022, a post-pandemic resumption of visa process by the EUMSs Embassies and CGs' visa sections culminated to its full capacity, esp. ahead of the summer season, and before the end of the year.

All LSC meetings were well attended (on average 24 out of 27 EUMSs plus CH and NO). The meetings are chaired by EUDEL, in coordination with the rotating local EU Presidency. As agreed, CH and NO were invited to stay also for the (back-to-back) LCC meetings as observers. Vice-versa, non-Schengen EUMSs usually attend the LSC meetings. Colleagues from CGs in Dubai usually come to Abu Dhabi (i.e. 1.5 h drive). Minutes were drafted by the EUDEL and circulated to EUMSs' Embassies, together with other EUDEL's reports.

In 2024, the LSC/Consular group was a key EUMSs Embassies' forum consulting joint efforts / response to flash floods in Dubai, and to a lesser extend also in Abu Dhabi. Travel advice / alerts were repeatedly reviewed by the group in the aftermath of several military escalations in the region (esp. in Gaza, Yemen, Sudan, and Iran). Consultations, mutual updates, and exchange of expertise, incl. on Schengen visa related issues, took place via email and extensively also via the EU DEL 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 inconsistencies in MSs' cooperation with external agencies (*VFS Global* and *BLS International*), their practices, and capacity limits; and esp. efforts to prevent risks of *visa shopping*. Particular attention was dedicated to regular exchanges on trends in documents fraud and systematic misuse of visa applicants' reservation system (overbooking vs. *dead slots*).

Technical and systemic solutions to visa application appointments reservation systems allowed - to a large extent - for elimination of fraudulent activities by visa "agents"; at the same time, MSs cannot offer increased capacity of their visa sections to satisfy high demand of applicants.

The LSC group discussed the implementation of the Visa Code (2020); less frequently than in previous years also regarding the application of the *cascade system* for GCC countries' nationals (KSA, KWT, QAT, BHR, OMN). This mainly due to the ongoing visa facilitation process in the Gulf region and progressive establishing of beneficial *cascade systems* in GCC countries; following the previous suspension of negotiations with Kuwait and Qatar in 2022. Local agreements had been suggested esp. by NO, and MSs with regional visa hubs in the UAE; and discussed on the basis of Schengen MSs agreement reached previously in Doha, 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 suggestion to revise it since then. The LSC group monitors and regularly discusses 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 2024, the group did not discuss the application of the *cascade system* (ref. also to 3.1) related to longer validity of multiple entry visas for GCC countries' nationals – residents in the UAE, for reasons indicated above. Given the overflow of (*lower quality*) Schengen visa applications and damaging activities of some local visa "agents" (ref. to illegal or irregular migration risks), local circumstances do not require adjustments of the general rules (in sense of easing them) for other groups of applicants – local expatriates. This issue may require further considerations.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Following up on efforts by the former SE PRES and ES, and in cooperation with their external partners - *VFS Global* and *BLS International*, LSC managed to identify and implement technical and procedural solutions to reduce the ratio of reservation systems' *no-shows*, and to enhance the capacity available for regular *bona fide* visa applicants. This in the context of constantly overbooked reservation systems and MSs / partners' capacities stretched. At the same time - as clarified by majority of the MSs, there does not seem to be any prospect to open up more / fully to the local visa applicants' demand, due to a high risk of illegal migration towards Europe.

Another topic, regularly raised in the context of LSC coordination / harmonisation, is a recurrent migration route via Dubai and Sharjah airports, given gradually easier conditions for transit, immigration, and residency permits in the UAE. For some MSs, their airlines, and ILOs in Dubai, it has become more difficult to assess immigration risk and verify passengers transiting from/via Dubai through airports in EU on their way to Latin America (esp. Mexico) and back to EU. Affected MSs planned to review requirements for transit visas for particular destinations and countries of origin. Cases of fraudulent travel documents, fake Schengen visas, EUMSSs' residence permits etc. have been regularly reported by the like-minded group in Dubai (*ERIL*).

3.5 Exchange of information

Given a constantly high demand and upward trend, MSs have been exchanging data (on a rather *ad hoc* basis) and discussing their actual availability of visa appointment slots and refusal rates. Cases of fraud have become a regular topic for LSC - in cooperation with ILOs; dedicated expert trainings to prevent these trends took place in March and Nov 2023 and in Jan 2024.

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

No major issues were related to cooperation with external service providers (*VFS Global* and *BLS International*). The problems with overbooking / insufficient time slots, and in general lower than desired amount of Schengen visas issued altogether in the UAE, have been causing general delay in the Schengen visa application processes, and occasionally lead to a negative publicity in the local media, esp. ahead of peak travel seasons (summer and Christmas).

EU DEL has been updating local authorities and MSs' Embassies and CGs on the new border Exit/Entry System and the delayed launch of ETIAS. EU's communication campaign should be consulted with local airlines, target primarily their audiences, and use also their PR channels.

4. Challenges

1. Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2023 report

LSC group improved efficiency of the visa appointments (IT) systems, streamlined the visa process in general, sustained negative publicity, and worked on prevention of documents' fraud.

2. Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2025) – N/A

5. Other issues - N/A

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



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in UGANDA
2023 REPORT

1. Introduction

Ten Member States, comprising eight embassies and two other diplomatic representations, are actively present in Uganda. Additionally, thirteen other Member States are formally represented through various diplomatic arrangements.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings were held at least once every trimester in 2024, often in conjunction with the Local Cooperation Council (LCC). These meetings saw active participation from Member States, both present and remotely. The joint configuration with LCC enhanced coordination efforts, ensuring that all Member States, including those not physically represented, were engaged in the discussions and decision-making processes.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States are generally well-equipped and prepared to handle consular affairs. Most of the embassies (70%) are using an external service provider for visa application.

Certain embassies experienced higher demand than others, particularly during peak seasons in 2024, driven by international events such as the International Conference, Olympics, and Paralympics. This surge in applications led to instances of 'visa shopping,' where applicants sought visas from less busy consulates. To mitigate this, Member States actively shared best practices and lessons learned, focusing on detecting and preventing attempts at visa shopping.

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

MS present consider that harmonisation of practices is already acquired; LSC is used as the primary platform for comparing 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 implementation of the Multiple-Entry Visa (MEV) cascade in Uganda adheres closely to Article 24(2) of the Visa Code, with a uniform approach across different Schengen consulates.

Member States generally follow a progressive approach for multiple-entry visas, issuing single-entry visas to first-time/irregular travellers and gradually increasing validity periods (6 months → 1 year → 2 years → 3 years → 5 years) for frequent *bona fide* travellers. Both respondents consider all Schengen visas, not just those they issued themselves. Member States aim to increase longer-validity MEVs to reduce application pressure. Current provisions in Article 24(2) of the Visa Code are considered sufficient for implementation flexibility.

Member States also focus on applicant profiles and travel history in determining visa validity. Longer-validity visas are also issued to VIPs and family members of residents with frequent travel needs. However, challenges persist, including applicants' lack of understanding regarding visa validity decisions and the variable quality of applications, which hinders the issuance of more long-validity MEVs. Improving communication and application quality could enhance the effectiveness of the MEV cascade in Uganda.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

The EU Delegation will update in 2025, at the request of the Member States, the list of insurance companies recognised by Schengen missions in Kampala.

3.5 Exchange of information

During LSC meetings, Member States openly shared information to harmonize procedures and develop common positions on various issues. Considering the increased number of visa applicants and limited capacities of visa sections at the respective embassies, a long waiting time for visa appointments remains the most challenging and discussed topic.

The LSC is also an important platform to identify fraud scheme and develop common approach and advocacy for addressing concerns with local authorities. Additionally, Member States have raised awareness about potential fraud through marriages for family reunification and shared lessons learned from surrogacy-related cases.

The Uganda airport police have proven efficient in identifying and reporting fraud cases, a topic regularly discussed among Member States and likeminded partners.

MS also exchange best practices in dealing with local administration and bank institutions to verify documents.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In 2024, a demarche was presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding fraudulent travel requests involving Ugandan officials or alleged officials. Following up on previous demarches, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is implementing a new digital platform, the Integrated Foreign Affairs System (IFAS). This system will require all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to submit official travel requests through IFAS, where MoFA will verify and approve them. This initiative aims to enhance transparency and reduce fraudulent activities

4. Challenges

The main challenge is the limited capacity of the delegation to manage consular matters.

5. Other issues

While no significant issues have been identified at present, it is essential to remain proactive in anticipating potential future challenges. Regular assessments and open communication channels among Member States will ensure that any emerging issues are promptly addressed. Future considerations may include the impact of new international events or changes in travel patterns on visa demands and processes.

Coordination and exchange of good practice will be notably important in the implementation of the EES/ETIAS systems.



EUROPEAN UNION

**DELEGATION TO THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in UNITED KINGDOM (LONDON) 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

All 27 EU Member States have continued to be represented in the United Kingdom/UK in 2024, together with Schengen Associated Countries (NO, IS, CH – except LI which is represented in Schengen and consular matters by CH). There are 10 EU-MS (DE, IE, ES, FR, HR, IT, HU, PL, PT, RO) represented through Consulates General or Career Consular Offices outside of London (Belfast/ Northern Ireland, Edinburgh/ Scotland, Cardiff/ Wales, Manchester and Birmingham (upcoming) /England). NO, CH, IS are present only in London.

Several Schengen MS collaborate with external service providers (ESPs), including VFS Global, TLS, etc., for the purpose of collection of visa applications. In addition to the aforementioned locations where MS are physically present, other MS are represented through external service providers in the same locations, as well as in Birmingham (centre of England).

Apart from those joining in person, the LSC meetings continue to be attended by Member States' career consulates outside of London as well, via EEAS WebEx platform, allowing for a sustained hybrid collaboration and information sharing throughout the year.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

The EU Delegation continued to ensure chairing and coordination of LSC meetings throughout 2024, meeting three (3) times per year, in a hybrid format that permitted attendance of MS from across the UK, with an emphasis on in-person attendance of MS in London.

The meetings were well attended, with an average attendance of 75% for the year and most MS maintaining high engagement level of 75-100% attendance rates, largely unchanged compared to 2023. The EU Delegation continued to encourage 100% attendance rates and maintained a high level of engagement between LSC meetings via e-mails. The EU Delegation has also noticed an increase in information and good practices sharing in writing between MS in 2024, generating input/ topics for the agenda, additional engagement with DG HOME and, where applicable, with UK authorities.

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 continued to support the LSC network by compiling draft meeting reports that are submitted for comments to the group, proposing discussion topics, organising structured consultations, etc. Data collection of visa statistics is ensured yearly, and is coordinated - as customary (through agreement in the group) -with one of the Schengen MS (with Sweden looking after this for LSC in 2024).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

During 2024 the volume of visa applications returned to pre-pandemic levels for all Schengen states, with figures suggesting a slight uptake in comparison to 2019 and expecting to continue on an upwards trajectory for 2025. There have been no outstanding challenges compared to previous years in the implementation of the Visa Code, with MS engaging in active exchanges and conversations on best ways to utilise resources when confronted with limited capacity for processing visas. As previously, visa appointment ‘scalping’ for profit by third party intermediaries and visa shopping remain phenomena that are closely monitored and that are prompting MS to trial periodically new measures that deter such practices.

One of the main topics of 2024 is the UK’s accelerated process to fully digitise its border management and immigration systems, which require access to DG HOME guidance and clarifications on the use of digital visas and immigration statuses by visa-required applicants and non-EU/EEA family members who reside in the UK.

On the latter, MS have continued in 2024 to engage in a coordination exercise regarding the proof required to establish that a visa applicant is travelling with or to meet an EU national family member, complicated by UK’s fully digital visa proof. EUDEL recalled that ‘visa-required’ nationals, who previously held a UK residence card of a family member of a Union citizen, are no longer able to use the cards following Brexit, and are now starting to travel more regularly with their EU family member, under the new travel conditions. More generally, as previously noted, the UK’s exit from the EU has generated an additional strand of work for visa sections in the UK through the growing demand for Schengen visas for non-UK third-country family members who are resident in the UK, and classify as ‘visa-required’ nationals.

A new point of debate raised by MS in 2024 has concerned the airport transit visa requirement for UK residents. Since June 2024, holders of UK residence permits (but not of UK visas) may now be exempted from airport transit visa requirements when connecting through the international transit areas of airports in the EU. However, the transition of the UK’s Biometric Residence Card (BRP) to a solely digital format has created an added complexity to deciding whether it is necessary to require the issuing of a transit visa in the absence of a physical biometric residence card/ permit (BRC/P) being provided by the traveller (a Schengen visa-required third country national resident in the UK). This is in particular due to the practical difficulty of verifying the online format of the residence permit, which requires access to online platforms such as View and Prove and accepting digital share codes to prove residence rights in the UK - this requires additional infrastructure (internet-linked devices) which some Member States and/or carriers are not currently deploying. Some MS indicated that they have therefore seen the need to reintroduce the transit visa requirement for UK residents from visa required

States, in order to ensure a practical and smooth transit of travellers through the Schengen area. A recurring point in 2024 remained the interpretation and practical implementation of the guidance on **the burden of proof** for determining whether visa-required applicant is travelling to the Schengen Area to join, or accompany, an EU-national family member.

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

While there has already been significant harmonization of practices regarding supporting documents requested for Schengen visa applications made in the UK, further discussions in LSC in 2024 have been beneficial to address specific cases such as the aforementioned use by applicants of UK's digital visa. In this regard, the concern has been carried over from previous years, due to the ambiguity in the Schengen practical guidance or harmonised lists of how to engage with digital proofs only of residence in the UK.

Some MS have taken the view that introducing the particularities of digital residence documents and the ways to prove them will need to be considered in Brussels. Reliance on digital immigration statuses will continue to pose infrastructure practical problem even if the visa code annexes are amended as some border guards are equipped with closed network devices, with no open internet access enabling them to verify a share code as proof of UK residence, as envisioned by the UK's immigration system.

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 continued to reiterate, where necessary, the benefits of issuing MEVs with a progressively longer validity to frequent bona fide travellers, underlining that this is mutually beneficial for applicants and for consular services, reducing over time the volume of applications.

The figures for 2024 compared to 2023 continued to reflect an overall steady demand and output of MEVs. However, at the time of writing this report the data collection for 2024 has not been finalised by MS for Q4 and a direct comparison is not possible. The existent data however indicates that the number of MEVs issued in 2024 has surpassed the number issued in 2023 by at least 10,000 additional MEVs issued. Compared to 2023, the share of MEVs issued out of the total figure for visas issues by MS in the UK has remained at a steady 51.6 - 52%. Overall, the number of visas applied for, even in the absence of full data for Q4 2025 has remained steady at 358, 000.

Overall, it appears that MS are for the most part following closely the Visa Code and the cascade rules regarding MEVs issuance, with EU Delegation continuing to raise awareness and monitor, as noted above, the rates of issuance and refusals of this category.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Due to the sustained record uptake of visa applications for MS in the UK, there has been an increased attentiveness to harmonisation of practices across the board. Exchanges on travelling trends, visa shopping counteractions, ESP performance indicators etc., that can help mitigate common concerns and booking shortages as well as ensuring family member visa access in line with the Visa Code have been regular agenda topics in LSC meetings for 2024.

One of the LSC meetings in 2024 was also used to exchange experiences in the approaches taken by MSs to the handling of visa applications by RF nationals.

3.5 Exchange of information

The 2024 LSC meetings permitted a wide exchange of information on trends and upcoming developments such as the planned EES/ ETIAS systems and expected knock-on effects for UK visa sections and consular assistance that may be required for non-EU travellers. The UK is particularly impacted by the EES due to the large volumes of traffic between the EU and UK, and due to the ‘juxtaposed’ controls carried out by France on UK soil for Eurostar, Channel ferry and Eurotunnel travellers. For most travellers from the UK, their experience of the system will be at EU ports / airports, with a risk of some delays at heavily frequented by UK travellers, esp. in peak periods.

While the focus on capacity issues has diminished due to MS receiving reinforcements from capitals or boosting capacity at the local level in their visa section, this topic has remained a regular item on the agenda.

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, normally through a yearly rotation by a MS so as to ensure a fair burden sharing of tasks (Sweden, who coordinated the data collection in 2022 and 2023, has taken on the task for an additional year).

4. Challenges

As noted in the previous reporting period, MS are seeing a significant increase in applications for family member visas. These are being monitored carefully by MS together with EUDEL, the latter promoting good practices sharing and encouraging local coordination to streamline applications as per the Visa Code rights of these applicants as well as to determine the documentation necessary to prove the applicant is travelling with or to meet an EU family member.

A common challenge reported in 2023 has been the phenomenon of visa appointments ‘scalping’, where a 3rd party organisation would book in advance visa appointments through MS online booking platforms and effectively sell the appointment slot. This practice, whilst not illegal in the UK, has been long considered unethical and an added challenge for MS dealing

with high demand for visas. This discussion continued during 2024, with EUDEL facilitating a discussion where two MS presented their experiences in tackling this practice. MS exchanged on implementing upfront payments and one-time links and passwords for bookings to eliminate unauthorised bookings by third party entities (this practice has also reduced the amount of applicants who would not show up to their appointments). A more resources costly approach was also discussed, such as the implementation of facial recognition systems in order to make an appointment and ensure the person presenting themselves for the visa interview is the same as the one making the appointment.

5. Other issues

The EU Delegation held several ad-hoc meetings with UK's Home Office Visa and Immigration representatives on the roll-out for EU/EEA citizens of the Electronic Travel Authorisation system

The EU Delegation also updated during the April and September 2024 LSC meetings on the state of play of the planned EES and ETIAS systems.

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

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Washington, D.C. 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

All EU Member States are present in Washington, D.C., as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (Schengen Associated Countries). 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, 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 Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia for applicants residing in some U.S. states).

As far as the externalisation of visa procedures are concerned, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, The Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, as well as Norway and Iceland, are working with VFS; the Consulate General of Croatia in New York is also using the services of VFS, while Germany, Slovakia, and Spain are working with BLS.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Three formal LSC meetings were held in 2024 in hybrid format with participation from consulates across the U.S. (New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, as well as from consulates/embassies in Washington DC). Moreover, the LSC met once with a representative of DG HOME where the introduction of the Entry-Exist System and of ETIAS was discussed. In addition, the LSC met once in a task force format to exchange on experiences and best practices on the use of external service providers to facilitate the processing and issuing of visas. These meeting were very well attended both on the side of the EU Member States and from the Schengen Associated Countries. The EU Delegation chaired the meetings and drew up the report.

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 the LSC participants, this practice continued in 2024.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Representatives in the LSC meeting noted a relatively stable situation concerning the number of visa applications. However, certain participants reported about Olympic games-related surges in visa requests. France reported an increase by 17% compared to the figures in 2023. Some Member States reported about increases in visa shopping, with some of them reporting refusal rates of 20%. The waiting times for appointments ranged from a few days to over one month. Forum shopping is facilitated by information on waiting times published by a third party at a publicly available website as well as the use of bots for applying for visa appointments.

The LSC decided to dedicate a specific meeting, in a more limited task force format, to exchange on experiences and best practices on the use of external service providers to facilitate the processing and issuing of visas. During the discussions, different steps of the externalization were addressed, including communication with the applicants, concerns about data privacy and shipping risks, and other internal procedures. Participants decided to meet again in half a year to monitor their progress.

Among other issues raised in the LSC meeting, participants exchanged on the update of the amount of the visa fees, including the suggestion that the EU Delegation sends out information on a monthly basis regarding the applicable exchange rate, the full application by Romania and Bulgaria of the Schengen acquis, the revision of the Visa Code Handbook, the revision of the visa waiver suspension mechanism, the adoption of the regulations providing the eventual digitalisation of the visa procedure, and changes in the U.S. legal framework affecting international students' (F1 visa holders) stays abroad.

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

LSC participants agreed that a revision of the common list of supporting documents was warranted. The list should include travel insurance as one of the supporting documents. Also, the information on standard letters for some Member States was outdated. One other suggestion for addition was a certified copy of the green card, for mail-in applications. The matter will continue to be discussed in the LSC.

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 LSC agreed a new multiple visa cascade scheme. The proposal has been submitted to the Commission services for further processing.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

See point 3.1.

3.5 Exchange of information

The LSC exchanged views and best practices concerning the correct application of the exchange rates to visa fees by external service providers.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

See point 3.

5. Other issues

The LSC followed developments concerning the roll out of the Entry-Exit System and of ETIAS.

It exchanged views with representatives of the host country on the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) and the Enhanced Border Security Partnerships.

The LSC took note of the U.S. outreach for the introduction of airport transit visas.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

Eleven EU Member States are present in Tashkent, 10 of them have consular officials and issue Schengen and national visas. Also there is an Embassy of Switzerland in Tashkent. Eight EU MS are represented from Moscow, five are represented from Astana, and three Member States (Austria, Finland and Sweden) are represented from their respective capitals Vienna, Helsinki and Stockholm. Austria conducts visa services from its Embassy in Baku using an external service provider in Uzbekistan, Finland operates visa matters from its Embassy in Astana. Lithuania operates visa matters by its Consulate General in Almaty. Spain has Chargé 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 Sweden and Austria (for diplomatic passport holders only), Hungary represents Denmark, Italy represents Malta, Norway and Slovenia, Latvia represents Estonia and Switzerland.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

Three LSC meetings were held in 2024 in March, July and October. The meetings in July and October were also attended by the US consular and immigration officials and among other topics illegal migration to the US through EU airports and Mexico / Nicaragua. The meetings were well attended, about 2/3 of MS present in Tashkent usually attended the meetings. Switzerland also attended the LSC meetings. Meetings were chaired by the Head of Political, Press and Information section of the EU Delegation. There are no consular institutions with visa issuance outside Tashkent. The European Return Liaison Officer deployed to Uzbekistan (covering also Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) also regularly attended LSC meetings. The LSC meeting held on 28 March was basically devoted to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen Zone, followed by a visibility event held on this solemn occasion for the diplomatic corps, officials of Uzbekistan and media.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

As it was in the previous two years, there was a high amount of applications supported by the Note Verbale which are often submitted 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. Request of visas through a Note Verbale was on the rise and not all persons included in the requests were related to the public service or travelling on an official visit. More precisely, by Note Verbales, EU MS Embassies are regularly asked to issue visas to “Accompanying persons” of

family members, personal trainers or personal assistants of high-ranking officials without providing any proof of employment at a certain state institution.

LSC also exchanged views on the functioning of the visa centres and the waiting time for an appointment. In spring and summer time the waiting time for some MS was two months, there were even difficulties in getting online registration at some Embassies. The situation was smoother at those Embassies, who handle registration themselves. Discussions took place regarding the abuse by some travel agencies of the electronic registration systems by blocking of registration spots which lead to difficulties by *bona fide* travellers to register for the submission of documents. LSC exchanged information about unreliable travel agencies.

LSC also discussed the abuse of Schengen visas for traveling to the US. Also, it was noted that sometimes charter flights to holiday destinations served as a path to illegal migration, so called tourism, because many passengers obtain Schengen visas, but do not show up for such flights.

LSC was briefed and exchanged views about the adoption of the Visa Handbook, increase of visa fee, digitalization of visa issuance process. LSC was briefed about the plans to introduce EES and ETIAS.

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

The harmonised list of supporting has been agreed by the LSC in 2014 and approved by the Commission on 4 September 2014 by its decision C(2014) 6141. LSC discussed the need to update the lists in 2021 and in 2022, but finally it was decided that the revision was not needed at this stage. LSC expressed overall satisfaction with the functioning of the harmonised list. MS confirmed their adherence to the provisions of the said Commission decision.

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

LSC did not discuss the issuance of MEV cascades in 2024. The previous opinion adopted by the LSC in 2022 remains valid according to which LSC is in favour of the application of the provisions of the Visa Code for the issuance of multiple entry visas.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

Both EU Heads of Mission and LSC discussed the issue of facilitated registration for the submission Schengen visa applications for Erasmus+ nominees with support letters from National Erasmus Office.

3.5 Exchange of information

Exchange of information among within the LSC was regular. MS often consult among themselves on various issues related to visa issuance by e-mail or through Telegram group, to which also the US Embassy is part of. The exchange of information related to individual cases is done on Vismail. During LSC meetings issues of cooperation with external service providers were discussed in detail.

The need to improve the presentation of quarterly visa statistics will be discussed at the LSC meeting in February 2025.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC was of the opinion that outreach efforts needed for Uzbek population to prevent illegal migration.

4. Challenges

Besides general exchange on practice, LSC will further discuss waiting times, cooperation with external service providers, cases of fraud which are specific in the country of residence as well as interaction with tourist agencies. The LSC will continue engagement with the US Embassy, in particular on combating fraud.

During LSC meetings the difficulties in getting appointments for the diplomats at Uzbek state institutions was frequently mentioned.

5. Other issues

As it was in 2023 during high level meetings, Uzbek officials raised the issue of starting the negotiations on the visa facilitation agreement.

LSC was also regularly briefed by the European Return Liaison Officer and the LSC Chair about the state of play with readmission from the EU MS to Uzbekistan.

Introduction of airport transit visas for the citizens of Uzbekistan (already introduced by some countries) was also discussed.

LSC was briefed about the démarche carried out by the EU Delegation in March regarding the politically motivated Russian arrests warrants against EU officials and politicians.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN HANOI, VIETNAM 2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

18 EU Member States, together with Switzerland and Norway, are represented in Hanoi.

DE, FR, HU, IT and NL have Consul Generals in Ho Chi Minh city. 11 MS have Honorary Consuls (HC) in HCMC (AT, CY, CZ, EE, ES, 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 2024

- In 2024, EUDEL held 4 regular, scheduled meetings, chaired by EUDEL. Reporting has also been done by EUDEL.
- 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).
- Consuls residing outside of Hanoi are always invited to join by video link but only a few tend to join.

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

For the locations where work on this has not been completed

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 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 have adapted to the general rules for issuing MEV.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No particular problems were flagged.

3.5 Exchange of information

Throughout the year, MS have been sharing information about illegal migration.

MS informed about an increase in the use of forged supporting documents for Schengen Visa applications and shared best practices on how to identify them. Some MS do not accept savings accounts as supporting documents. MS also informed about an increase of applications for national visa (study permit) in the second half of 2024. MS informed that when a visa application is rejected the Visa Information System (VIS) would register it.

MS reported that some applicants mention the need to obtain a visa to get married abroad. Some MS ask for documents proving evidence of the marriage to be celebrated. Some MS informed that a national visa rather than a Schengen visa is now required when applying for the purpose of marriage.

Many MS also shared requests received from VN embassy staff in Europe sponsoring visa applications of relatives and friends. MS can sometimes detect false declarations (non-existent family links) and refuse them. There is some suspicion that certain people may be making a business out of this. The best advice is that only if the request is sent via NV, i.e. signed by the VN ambassador, then it is properly official and can be trusted.

MS also shared the inconvenience of processing last-minute visa applications for official VN delegations heading to Europe. Most MS face the same challenges and do their best to process the requests in time even though they have informed VN authorities *ad nauseum* that they need to apply for the visas at least a week in advance of travel. One MS finally put its foot down and refused visas to a VN official delegation traveling to Europe leading to the meetings needing to be postponed.

MS also informed about a rising number of suspicious corporate travel tours from VN to Schengen countries. MS often cannot verify if the visa holders have undertaken the travel as indicated and returned to VN afterwards. When there is a tangible suspicion, the visa can be cancelled, including after the applicant has already entered the Schengen area.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Further to a presentation on the topic of illegal migration delivered for HoMs in November 2023, the group has been discussed establishing a permanent taskforce on this matter, but it was decided to use this group to focus such discussions.

4. Challenges

Assessing attempts at illegal migration continues to be the biggest challenge for MS. Only a few embassies have national police officers dealing with this and even then it remains a challenge.

5. Other issues

There were no other specific issues of note beyond those already mentioned above.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY ALL MEMBER STATES PRESENT IN VIETNAM



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Zambia
2024 REPORT

1. Introduction

8 EU MS (FR, DE, IT, CZ, SE, FI, IE, HU) are resident in Lusaka. Only DE, IT and CZ issue Schengen visas locally.

DE represents HU, AT and SI. IT represents FR (for Zambian passport holders), EL, MT and SK.

SE issues visas through its regional hub in Nairobi using an external service provider (VFS).

SE represent 13 other Schengen countries from Nairobi: BE, DK, EE, FI, IS, LV, LU, NL, NO, PL, PT, ES and CH.

Other MS are accredited from Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Pretoria. There are no EU consulates in other Zambian cities.

Since September 2024, BG has signed an agreement with VFS to facilitate visa applications for travellers, including Zambian passport holders.

2. LSC meetings held in 2024

There were two well-attended LSC meetings in 2024. The EU Delegation hosted the LSC meetings in April and October 2024. The meetings were hybrid to ensure coordination with non-resident MS.

The EU also coordinated a meeting between EU MS consuls and the Director of Protocol at the Zambian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was carried out in February 2025.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Several MS reported “visa shopping” issues. Visa shopping seems to have increased due to the fact that only 3 MS issue visas locally and their timelines are different. Applicants reportedly approach MS that do not issue visas locally and, once informed of the need to refer to the local outsourcing office (which entails a significant additional processing cost), proceed to change their planning. Visa shopping is seen in tourism visa applications as well as business and official visas.

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

The harmonised list of documents has been completed and is being implemented by EU MS in Lusaka. MS noted that the harmonised list is a living document that should be regularly updated.

One MS resident in Harare reported mismatches among the requirements established by MS with regard to, for example, marriage certificate requirements.

Lack of specimens provided by the Zambian protocol remains a challenge.

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 reported that the rule on issuing visas according to Art. 24(2) is being implemented in accordance to the guidelines.

Another MS reported that no specific local cascade is in force for issuing visas with long validity period and multiple entries for Zambian citizens, but the issue is under consideration.

3.4 Harmonisation of practices

No other activities to report.

3.5 Exchange of information

Information is shared during LSC meetings on statistics, cases of fraud, cooperation with local authorities and the issue of external providers, among others. Other issues discussed included knowledge-sharing on handling cases of detention of EU citizens and consular protection, cases of over-staying of visa-free period.

3.6 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Consular officers agreed to carry out a joint demarche to the Protocol of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, coordinated by the EU Delegation (carried out in February 2025).

4. Challenges

Challenges have been experienced by some MS receiving last-minute visa applications for high level visits and large accompanying delegations, which did not provide enough time for adequate processing. Pressure on consular sections creates unnecessary tensions.

One MS reported extremely limited knowledge on the rules of the Visa Code by the majority of applicants.

5. Other issues

No other issues to report.