

GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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European Union – Digitalisation of Visa Procedures

The Council of the European Union (EU) will start negotiations with the European Parliament to agree on the final wording of the legislative proposal to digitalise visa procedures.¹

A digitalised Schengen visa procedure would involve an online application for a visa, and the current visa sticker will be replaced with visas in digital format, including a 2-D barcode equipped with a cryptographical signature.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A creation of a single website for applications for Schengen visas is aimed at improving the efficiency of the application process. Uploading all relevant data along with relevant documents, as well as the payment of fees, will be possible through the single website.

Online applications will reduce the number of trips to the consulate for travellers, as in-person meetings will be required only of first-time applicants.

It is expected that online applications and digital visas will prevent falsification and theft of the current visa stickers and thereby improve security in the Schengen area.

Background and Next Steps

The EU has been facing migration and security challenges for years. Pressure on the external EU borders and a considerable slowing down of visa operations during the COVID-19 pandemic created the idea of putting in place more digital procedures for the EU's visa system.

Currently, applying for a Schengen visa is an administratively burdensome procedure that is paper-based. Applicants are required to travel to the nearest consulates to submit their applications and collect their visas afterwards.

The European Commission submitted a legislative proposal for digitalising visa procedures already in April 2022.² The proposal contains the following:

- Replacing the visa sticker;
- Introducing an online visa platform for visa applications;
- Improving the visa application process; and
- Reducing costs and burdens on government bodies, administrations, and applicants.

KPMG INSIGHTS

The date(s) for negotiations about finalising new legislation for the digitalisation of the visa process between the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament has not been set. It is therefore not possible to say when approval of the legislation and the implementation of the digital visa process may take place. Some countries are forging ahead: for example, Spain just approved a change to its law providing for the possibility of electronic applications for visas.³

The EU has launched Europe's Digital Decade 2020-2030,⁴ a project aimed at realising the digital transformation of the EU that includes digitalisation of public services.

In the field of immigration, the EU has introduced a digital system for pre-approval of passengers travelling to the EU from visa exempted non-EU countries called "ETIAS." ETIAS will apply from 2024. (For prior coverage, see [GMS Flash Alert 2023-119](#), 24 January 2023.) The EU has also introduced e-gates that will automatically record border crossing into and out of the EU called the "EES system." EES is expected to be operational later in 2023. (For prior coverage, see [GMS Flash Alert 2023-119](#), 24 January 2023.) Therefore, it seems it is a natural progression to digitalise the application process for visas.

Even though it cannot be foreseen when the application system for visas will be digitalised, employers should be aware of and keep an eye on the progress of digital transformation in the EU. Digitalisation of different procedures is expected to diminish administrative burdens, but also it could inevitably increase requirements for accuracy and timeliness of information and documents submitted to the authorities. Digitalisation is expected to allow the relevant authorities to perform checks and assessments more efficiently than is the case today with paper-based processes.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Council of the European Union: [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council as regards the digitalisation of the visa procedure – Mandate for negotiations with the European Parliament](#), 7905/23, Brussels, 29 March 2023.

2 European Commission: [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the digitalisation of the visa procedure](#), COM(2022) 658 final, Brussels, 27 April 2022.

3 See "Ley Orgánica 2/2023, de 22 de marzo, del Sistema Universitario" published in *Boletín Oficial del Estado* núm. 70, de 23/03/2023.

4 European Commission: [Europe's Digital Decade](#), last update 15 February 2023.

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