

GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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European Union – Council and Parliament Agree to Digitalise Visa Procedure

On 13 June 2023, the Council of the European Union (EU) and the European Parliament agreed on rules to digitalise visa procedures.¹ The agreement must be approved by the EU member states before the adoption process can start.

A digital Schengen visa procedure will introduce an online platform for applications for visas. In-person appearances at a consulate will in principle be necessary for first-time applicants, persons whose biometric data are no longer valid, and persons with a new travel document. (See [GMS Flash Alert 2023-080](#), 7 April 2023.)

WHY THIS MATTERS

A creation of a single website for applications for Schengen visas will improve the efficiency of the application process significantly. All relevant data, uploading of relevant documents, and 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 in specific situations.

Background and Next Steps

Recent migration and security challenges have changed the context of the EU's visa policy. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down visa operations considerably calling for more efficient and digitalised procedures for visa applications.

Applications for visas are often an administratively burdensome procedure – it is paper-based and applicants are required to travel to submit their applications at consulates and collect their visas afterwards.

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The European Commission submitted a legislative proposal for digitalising visa procedures in April 2022.² (See [GMS Flash Alert 2023-080](#), 7 April 2023.) 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 administrations and applicants.

It is now up to the EU member states to approve the proposed digitalisation of visa applications before technological and other developments can take place.

KPMG INSIGHTS

A timeline is expected for when each EU member state is to decide whether they support the legislation for digitalisation of visa procedures. However, as the agreement between the Council and the European Parliament was reached relatively quickly, it could be foreseen that the approval of the member states will be done with similar speed.

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 2023-019](#), 24 January 2023.)

The EU has also introduced e-gates that will automatically record border crossings into and out of the EU – this is called the “EES system.” EES is expected to be operational later in 2023. (For prior coverage, see [GMS Flash Alert 2023-019](#), 24 January 2023.)

It seems therefore 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 reduce administrative burdens, but also it could inevitably increase requirements concerning 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.

FOOTNOTE:

1 Council of the EU press release, "[Council and European Parliament agree on rules to digitalise the visa procedure](#)" (13 June 2023).

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The information contained in this newsletter was submitted by the KPMG International member firm in The Netherlands.

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