



Global Employer Services Immigration

Enhanced and stricter border checks for Europe

Recent crises in Europe have underlined the need for stricter border checks and better border management. Consequently, the European Commission introduced a smart borders package, which includes several proposals. The most important ones are outlined below.

Entry-Exit system

Foreigners entering the Schengen area undergo a thorough check at the border. Checks are run through several databases and authorised stay is monitored by calculating stamps, since foreign travellers are usually only allowed to stay for 90 calendar days in any 180-day period.

Currently, these checks systematically occur upon entry into Schengen but not when leaving it. The Commission intends to implement an EU-wide Entry-Exit System (EES), whereby passports and fingerprints will be scanned when travellers enter and leave the Schengen area. This results in electronically tracking the days on the territory and an automated check through databases.

Registered travellers program

There are over 700 million border crossings at Schengen border posts every year and the number increases on an annual basis. The Commission proposes the implementation of technology that would enable a complete automation of border

crossings. This would save 25% of border inspectors' time and should decrease waiting time for travellers, since automated border checks would only take 20 to 40 seconds.

Travellers enrolling in the registered travellers program (RTP) would be issued a card with a unique identifier (application number). At the gate, the traveller swipes the card (on arrival and departure), at which point the card, travel documentation (visa sticker number if applicable) and fingerprints are read. The traveller can then proceed through the gate.

European travel information and authorisation system

The Schengen area is the most welcoming territory in the world, with 1.4 billion people from 60 countries benefiting from visa exempt travel. However, year after year almost 300,000 people are refused entry at the border, mainly due to a negative migration assessment or security risk. Such cases will be processed before going through the European travel information and authorisation system (ETIAS).

ETIAS is similar to the ESTA in the US. Foreigners who do not require a visa will need to log onto a website and provide basic information such as name, passport number, occupation and background information (e.g. contagious diseases, criminal records, presence in war zones, etc.). All of this information is then checked across several databases, and in case of no-hit (i.e. if there are no 'red flags'), an approval is emailed. The ETIAS approval will be checked by the carrier before on-boarding and by the border guard.

Where are we now

The European Commission has tabled several border management proposals. The European Parliament and the Council are now clarifying their positions (or have clarified it) with respect to these proposals. Once clarified, these proposals will go through a trilogue procedure whereby the European Commission, Parliament and Council negotiate towards one mutually accepted regulation.

What this means for you

An entry-exit system means that the authorities will be able to adequately monitor days spent in the Schengen area. It is likely that overstays will consequently be sanctioned and that return decisions or entry bans will be more easily enforced.

It will be beneficial for frequent travellers to enrol in the registered travellers program. This system allows them to electronically follow up on their days spent in the Schengen area, and should facilitate as well as speed up the border crossing process.

An extra administrative burden will be placed upon visa exempt travellers, as they will need to be in possession of an ETIAS before travelling.

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