

Guidelines on ‘minimum service’ for processing of visa applications from specific categories of visa applicants during the COVID-19 emergency period

As part of the measures to contain the spreading of COVID-19, many Member States have chosen to suspend the processing of visa applications for non-essential travel, in most cases, for an undetermined period of time. Such initiatives also match the constantly evolving travel restrictions.

On 16 March 2020, the Commission adopted a Communication¹ on “COVID-19: Temporary Restrictions on Non-Essential Travel to the EU.” On 17 March 2020, to limit the spread of the virus globally, the Members of the European Council held a video conference on COVID-19 and reaffirmed the need to do everything necessary to tackle the crisis, including by reinforcing the external borders by applying a coordinated temporary restriction of non-essential travel to the EU for a period of 30 days, based on the approach proposed by the Commission.²

The Communication lists a number of categories of travellers who are to be exempted from the temporary travel restrictions. Some of these categories may be nationals of third countries under the short stay visa requirement.

Despite temporary partial closure of visa sections, Member States’ consulates (and possibly external service providers collecting applications) should therefore remain open and accept visa applications from the following categories:

- Family members of EU citizens covered by Directive EC/2004/38;
- Healthcare professionals, health researchers, and elderly care professionals;
- Frontier workers;
- Transport personnel engaged in haulage of goods and other transport staff to the extent necessary;
- Diplomats, staff of international organisations, military personnel and humanitarian aid workers in the exercise of their functions;
- Passengers in transit in the international transit areas of airports between connecting extra-Schengen flights;
- Passengers travelling for imperative family reasons;
- Persons in need of international protection or for other humanitarian reasons.

The **general rules on the examination of applications** for short stay visas and airport transit visa (Visa Code) should be applied.

¹ COM(2020) 115 final

² Conclusions by the President of the European Council following the video conference with members of the European Council on COVID-19 - <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/03/17/conclusions-by-the-president-of-the-european-council-following-the-video-conference-with-members-of-the-european-council-on-covid-19/>

Validity of the issued visa: it is recommended that multiple entry visas and visas allowing for multiple airport transits are issued by default with a validity of minimum six months, and an authorised duration of stay of 90 days (except for airport transit visas).

Information to the public: Member States should immediately inform the public in the concerned locations on the practice that will be followed. Common information by all Member States should be favoured.

Information to the host country: these guidelines are shared with the Local Schengen Cooperation correspondents in EU Delegations, and it is recommended that this information is shared with host countries..

