

Questionnaire by Commission services on the implementation of the guidelines on general visa issuance in relation to Russian applicants addressed to the Member States and the Schengen Associated Countries

Introduction

Following the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, on 9 September 2022 the Council adopted a Decision on the suspension in whole of the EU-Russian Federation Visa Facilitation Agreement ("VFA").¹ Consequently, the general rules of the Visa Code² apply by default to Russian citizens applying for short-stay visas. The Commission Implementing Decision as regards the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in the Russian Federation for short-stay visas was revised to reflect the suspension of the VFA and adopted on 11 September 2024.³

On 30 September 2022, the Commission presented the updated guidelines⁴ to Member States on visa procedures as well as on border controls for Russian citizens at the EU's external borders.⁵ These guidelines were updated in the light of heightened geopolitical and security risks linked to Russian visa applicants, in particular following the general military mobilisation in the summer of 2022 and the sham 'referenda' in illegally occupied territories of Ukraine that led to an increase in the number of people holding Russian passports, including conscripts and their families, applying for Schengen visas to travel to the EU.

¹ Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on the facilitation of the issuance of visas to the citizens of the European Union and the Russian Federation (OJ L 129, 17.5.2007).

² Regulation (EC) 810/2009 of the European Parliament and the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas, (OJ L 243, 15.9.2009, p.1).

³ COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 11.9.2024 amending Implementing Decision C(2016) 3347 as regards the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in the Russian Federation for short-stay visas, (C(2024) 6136 final, 11.9.2024).

⁴ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION 1. Updating guidelines on general visa issuance in relation to Russian applicants following Council Decision (EU) 2022/1500 of 9 September 2022 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 to the citizens of the European Union and the Russian Federation; and 2. Providing guidelines on controls of Russian citizens at the external borders (C(2022) 7111 final, 30.9.2022).

⁵ On 5 May 2022, the Commission adopted the guidelines on the partial suspension of the VFA and on general visa issuance (C(2022) 3084 final, 5.5.2022). On 9 September 2022, the Commission presented the (second) guidelines to support Member States' consulates in handling short-stay visa applications lodged by Russian citizens following the partial suspension of the VFA (C(2022) 6596 final, 9.9.2022). The guidelines follow the political agreement reached by Foreign Affairs Ministers at their informal meeting of 31 August 2022 on a common and coordinated way forward when it comes to visa issuance for Russian citizens and ensure a consistent approach across consulates.

The guidelines call for **reinforced security scrutiny when issuing visas to Russians** and heightened scrutiny during border controls, while fully respecting EU asylum law. Consulates are encouraged to introduce priority categories in the treatment of visa applications, giving lower priority to those applicants that have no urgent or compelling reason to travel to the EU (e.g. tourists), as well as to refuse visas to those applicants that could be considered as posing threats to security, public policy, public order and international relations. On the contrary, priority should be granted to visa applicants travelling for essential purposes, including family members of EU citizens, independent journalists, dissidents, civil society representatives and for other humanitarian reasons. According to the general rules, Member States' consulates should continue to examine each visa application on an individual basis and on its own merits. The guidelines also call on Member States' consulates and border authorities to apply a higher degree of security checks and a coordinated approach when carrying out individual assessments of Russian citizens' visa applications and controls at the Union's external borders.

Looking at the publicly available statistics on short-stay visas issued by the Schengen countries, Russia remains among the top-5 locations for Schengen consulates, with more than half a million visa applications processed in 2023, representing around 5% of the global number of Schengen visas processed and issued in 2023 (10.3 million visa applications processed, with approximately 8.5 million visas issued). In 2019 (the last 'regular' year before the COVID-19 travel restrictions), Russia represented 27% of the total of Schengen visas issued worldwide (4 million out of 15 million short-stay visas issued). Similarly, in 2019, the visa refusal rate stood at 1,5%, whereas the visa refusal rate is now 10.6%. Overall, on 1 August 2024, there were 527 326 valid Schengen visas held by Russian citizens (against 857 627 on 1 January 2023).

While these statistics may show a lower volume of issued visas to Russian citizens, several elements also show a noticeable divergence among Member States in the processing of visa applications for Russian applicants. The visa refusal rates vary significantly across Member States and Schengen Associated Countries (SAC), from as low as 5% to as high as 40%. Publicly available data show that in 2023, a limited number of Member States (5) processed over 80% of all visa applications in Russia. Regarding the purpose of the journey, 75% of Russian applicants who obtained a Schengen visa between January 2023 and July 2024 had stated that the purpose of their journey was tourism.

Regarding multiple entry visas (MEVs), the Commission recommends Member States to refrain from issuing them due to the likelihood that applicants will no longer fulfil entry conditions over time (restrictive measures, political developments, etc.). Out of 827,812 visas issued in Russia since 1 January 2023, 26% were single entry visas, **63% 1-year MEVs**, 4% 2-year MEVs, 1% three-year MEVs and 1% five-year MEVs.

Equally, 115 700 **first residence permits** were issued to Russian citizens in 2023, according to the data from Eurostat. Family reasons (39.4%) and employment (25,7%) accounted for the largest share of permits for citizens of Russia.⁶

⁶ [More than 3.7 million first residence permits in 2023 - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

As indicated in the guidelines, the Commission will keep their implementation under constant review, to support rapid and coordinated actions at EU level in addressing all emerging challenges. Since their adoption in 2022, it is the right moment to conduct an inquiry about the guidelines' implementation by means of the questionnaire attached herewith.

*The Commission services would appreciate if you could send your replies to the questionnaire by email directly to **DG HOME.B4 - Visa Policy Unit** (**HOME-NOTIFICATIONS-B4@ec.europa.eu**), at the latest by **4 November 2024**.*

PLEASE INDICATE THOSE PARTS OF YOUR REPLIES THAT SHOULD BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL.

I. Competent Member State and consular territorial competence for examining visa

1. Please provide a list of your **top-5 consular locations outside Russia** in terms of the total number of visas issued to Russian citizens in the years 2022-2023-2024 (to date). Please indicate the number of 1-year MEVs issued by these consulates and of visas refused.
2. Since September 2022, which rules have your consulates located in a third country outside of the Russian Federation used to establish competence for Russian citizens applying in the third country concerned (Article 6(1) of the Visa Code)?

II. Procedural aspects for lodging a visa application in Russia in the current situation

3. Since September 2022, has your consular staff regularly requested additional documents or carried out extra security checks during the examination of visa applications in respect of certain categories of Russian citizens in order to ensure a high level of security (apart from those listed in the harmonised list of supporting documents of 11.9.2024)?

YES

always

only in respect of certain categories of Russian citizens. Please specify which categories:

NO

4. According to the guidelines, Member States should, when attributing appointments, give lower priority to Russian applicants who do not have an essential reason to travel to the EU or whose travel is not urgent (e.g., **tourists**). Statistics from the VIS show that 75% of Russian applicants who were issued a visa between January 2023 and July 2024 stated that the purpose of their journey was tourism. Please elaborate which security screening has been conducted by your consulates since September 2022 and which security concerns have been considered when issuing visas to Russian tourists.
5. Please report how many visa refusals for Russian citizens have occurred on the basis of a SIS entry ban in 2022, 2023 and 2024 (to date).

6. How many appeals to your national courts have been submitted by Russian citizens whose visa applications were refused by your consulates? How many of those appeals were submitted regarding applications refused by your consulates on the basis of the SIS entry bans?

III. Assessment of visa applications lodged by citizens of the Russian Federation or in Russia

7. In case of a reasonable doubt on the fulfilment of entry conditions (Article 24(2a) of the Visa Code), which security considerations have been taken into account for issuing visas with shorter validity and/or single-entry visas instead of multiple-entry visas (MEVs) to Russian citizens?
8. Regarding **multiple-entry visas (MEVs)**, the percentage of 1-year MEVs (63%) is unusually high, given the circumstances and the guidelines' recommendations.
 - a. Which were the three main travel purposes linked to the 1-year MEVs issued by your consulates?
 - b. What are the guiding principles followed by your consulates in relation to issuing MEVs to Russian applicants?
9. **Visas with limited territorial validity (LTVs)** can be issued in very specific circumstances according to Article 25 of the Visa Code. According to the statistical data, one can observe a high number of LTVs issued to Russian applicants in 2023 and 2024. Namely, since 1st January 2023, almost 67 000 LTVs were issued to Russian applicants.
 - (i) Please elaborate on the reasons your consulates may have issued LTVs to Russian applicants instead of uniform visas (for ex., entry conditions were not fulfilled, there were objections linked to prior consultation, other).
Please provide % out of the total of LTVs issued for each of the above-mentioned reason.
 - (ii) Please elaborate on which ground the LTVs have been issued to Russian applicants:
 - Humanitarian grounds (please explain in which situations:)
 - Reasons of national interest (please explain in which situations: ...)
 - International obligations (please explain in which situations: ...)Please provide % out of the total of LTVs issued for each of the above-mentioned reason.

10. Have you identified individuals being potential threats to public policy, internal security or to the international relations of any of the Member States among the Russian visa applicants? If yes, which criteria/considerations have been taken into account during the examination of these applications? Please specify:

IV. Revocation and annulment of valid visas held by Russian citizens

11. Have you revoked any valid visas held by Russian citizens since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression in March 2022? If yes, how many and on which grounds?

12. How many appeals to your national courts have been submitted by Russian citizens whose valid visas have been revoked due to a SIS alert on Russian citizens subject to EU restrictive measures?

V. Controls of Russian citizens at the external borders pursuant to the Schengen Borders Code

13. Which instructions have you issued to your border guards about heightened scrutiny checks of Russian citizens according to the guidelines?

14. Please report on the numbers of refused entries of Russian citizens and the reasons for refusing entries:

In 2022: for the following reasons (top 3 categories in descending order):
.....

In 2023: for the following reasons (top 3 categories in descending order):
.....

In 2024: for the following reasons (top 3 categories in descending order):
.....

15. Please report on the numbers of authorized entry on humanitarian grounds under Article 6(5)(c) of the Schengen Border Code where Russian citizens did not fulfill all entry requirements under Article 6(1) of the Schengen Border Code. Please specify also the reasons for using that derogation:

In 2022: for the following reasons (top 3 categories in descending order):
.....

In 2023: for the following reasons (top 3 categories in descending order):
.....

In 2024: for the following reasons (top 3 categories in descending order):
.....

VI. Long-stay visas and residence permits for Russian citizens

16. How many new applications or applications for renewals for a long-stay visa or residence permit were refused for Russian citizens, in the period of 2022-2024, and on what grounds?

In 2022, there were new applications or applications for renewals for a long-stay visa or residence permit refused for Russian citizens. Please indicate on what grounds they were refused:

In 2023, there were new applications or applications for renewals for a long-stay visa or residence permit refused for Russian citizens. Please indicate on what grounds they were refused:

In 2024, there were new applications or applications for renewals for a long-stay visa or residence permit refused for Russian citizens. Please indicate on what grounds they were refused:

17. Do your consular staff or other relevant national authorities apply the same checks and safeguards to ensure a high level of security during the examination of applications for long-stay visas and residence permits from Russian citizens than the one described above for short-stay visas?

YES

NO - Please indicate:

i) which checks and safeguards are applied during the examination of applications for long-stay visas and residence permits from Russian citizens in addition to those short-stay visas (e.g. requesting additional documents or performing additional checks etc.):

ii) are those additional checks and safeguards applied uniformly to long-stay visas and residence permits issued on the basis of EU law and those issued on the basis of national law?