



Union Code on Visas (Visa Code) European Youth Forum Reaction & Demands for Improvement

Introduction

The Youth Forum is convinced that mobility of young people is a vital contribution to employability, development of skills, improving educational curricula and intercultural understanding both in Europe and internationally and strongly supports and advocates for mobility without barriers of all young people. Unfortunately, the current Schengen Visa framework creates bureaucratic problems, which jeopardise youth mobility. Some of these can include lengthy and not transparent procedures, which do not correspond with the reality of young applicants (such as volunteers, students, pupils and participants of youth projects and initiatives), the requirement for submitting excessive and expensive in obtaining documents before issuing visas, often in-person.

The Youth Forum believes that the Schengen visa regime should not discourage young people from becoming active and involved citizens in and within Europe.

The Commission's proposed revision of the Union Code on Visas, is generally a positive proposal in that it puts in place a number of changes making it easier for visa applicants. However, the Youth Forum believes that this is not enough and would like to see changes as stipulated here:

YOUTH FORUM DEMANDS

Lodging Application (Article 8)

Applicants should have the opportunity to lodge their application earlier than three months before the start of their intended stay in the EU.

Rationale: This will allow for better planning on the part of the applicant and the hosting organisation of that applicant.

Visa & Service Fees (Article 14)

Visa & service fees must be waived for representatives and participants of non-profit organisations aged 35 or less participating in seminars, conferences, sports, cultural or educational events, organised by non-profit organisations.

Rationale: The current limitation or exceptions to visa & service fees for representatives and participants aged 25 or less from NGOs appears to be irregularly implemented across EU member-states, with many Youth Forum member organisations reported not benefiting from this reduction. Given the extension of the transition to autonomy for young people that we have seen especially during the financial crisis all over the world, the Youth Forum feels that the age limit should be raised & the reduced fees should be abolished together. The implementation of the measure should be better monitored to avoid the irregular application

Supporting Documents (Article 13)

Only a limited number of relevant support documents should be required when applying for a uniform or transit visa. The power of Member States to require additional support documents should be limited to exceptional circumstances.

Rationale: The Youth Forum membership reports that visa denials are often justified through referring to the absence of a long list of support documents that are often requested by the Member State. In particular, the requirement on an applicant to provide proof of their economic means can be difficult for young people to comply with. Participants and representatives from a poor socio-economic background attending with the financial support of a host organisation often find it particularly difficult to obtain sufficient proof of solvency and, therefore, face the highest barriers to their mobility.

A fast-track procedure (Article 20)

There should be a fast track procedure for representatives and participants of non-profit organisations aged 35 or less participating in seminars, conferences, sports, cultural or educational events, organised by non-profit organisations.

Rationale: Due to application procedures and short term planning for attendance in seminars, conference and project organised by European Union institutions or civil society organisations the Youth Forum recommends fast track procedures for gaining a visa which would be shorter than 14 days.

Information to applicants

Member States should be mandated to provide applicants with all relevant information, specifically through the clear highlighting of exceptions or reductions in visa for service fees by visa granting authorities and consulates.

Rationale: Exceptions or limitations to visas or service fees should be clearly communicated to all applicants so they benefit from them. Clear and accessible information on multiple-entry visas for representatives of civil society organisations travelling for the purpose of educational training, seminars and conferences, is relevant in order to foster a vital cooperation between Schengen States and third countries.

Common application centres

Member states should make more use of Common Application Centres, which pool the visa services of many EU countries in one country.

Rationale: Common Application Centres generally provide an easy and centralised method for visa applicants, through centralising the Schengen visa application procedures in one country, therefore we encourage EU Member-States to put in place more of these centres. This would also avoid that some applicants have to travel to another country to apply to the consulate of a specific EU country