



International Civil Aviation Organization

**WORKING PAPER**

A38-WP/246  
EX/82  
9/9/2013  
English only

**ASSEMBLY — 38TH SESSION**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Agenda Item 16: Facilitation and Machine Readable Travel Documents**

**VISA FACILITATION AS MEANS TO STIMULATE TOURISM GROWTH**

(Presented by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO))

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Facilitation measures are an important element of both aviation and tourism policies, with visa requirements and visa processing a continuing constraint on the growth of both sectors, and thus on economic development and employment. While UNWTO analyses show progress in recent years, further efforts could have major positive impact.

**Action:** The Assembly is invited to:

- a) urge ICAO Member States to continue the process of visa facilitation; and
- b) agree that ICAO and UNWTO should jointly address the subject of visa facilitation at a strategic level.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Objectives B — <i>Security</i> and C — <i>Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development of Air Transport</i> .
<i>Financial implications:</i>	No additional resources required. For eVisas, there could be development of a public-private partnership.
<i>References:</i>	A37-WP/136 EC/7 A37-WP/382 P/47 Annex 9 — <i>Facilitation</i>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Over the past six decades, tourism has continued to expand and diversify; it is now one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. According to the UNWTO long-term forecast *Tourism Towards 2030*<sup>1</sup>, international tourist arrivals are expected to continue to grow at the sustained pace of 3.3 per cent a year on average, reaching 1.8 billion by 2030.

1.2 Liberalization of travel has historically generated large increases in tourism demand, spending and employment. In spite of the great strides made in recent decades to facilitate tourist travel, there are still important areas of opportunity. The 20th Session of the UNWTO General Assembly (Victoria Falls, Zambia/Zimbabwe, 24-28 August 2013) has just confirmed connectivity as one of the Organization's policy priorities alongside visa facilitation.

1.3 UNWTO is committed to working with ICAO on advancing these issues. In March this year the ICAO and UNWTO Secretaries-General signed a Joint Statement aimed at further optimization of the benefits of aviation and tourism, with specific reference to enhancing air transport connectivity further through cooperation regarding visa and other travel document formalities and issuance, including the simplification of visa processing and the development of multi-State regional visas and e-visas.<sup>2</sup>

1.4 Travellers see visas mainly as a formality that imposes a cost. If the cost of obtaining a visa – either the direct monetary cost imposed in the form of fees or the indirect costs - which can include distance, time spent waiting in lines, and the complexity of the process - exceeds a threshold, potential travellers are simply deterred from making a particular journey or choose an alternative destination with less hassle.

1.5 This finding is not new. In 1963, the delegates of 87 States agreed, at the United Nations Conference on International Travel & Tourism in Rome, which was attended by ICAO, that “Governments should extend to the maximum number of countries the practice of abolishing, through bilateral agreements or by unilateral decision, the requirement of entry visas for temporary visitors”<sup>3</sup>. ICAO itself has long-standing Recommended Practice that “Contracting States should waive or abolish, for a maximum number of States, the requirement for an entry visa for nationals seeking entry as visitors”.<sup>4</sup>

1.6 Fifty years after the UN Conference, in November 2012, the UNWTO/World Travel Market Ministers' Summit in London concluded that visa processes and policies still present major barriers to travel and tourism. The Summit noted that restrictive visa-issuance policies and complicated entry formalities are still stifling tourism growth, particularly from emerging economies, which are also some of the fastest-growing source markets for tourism.

## 2. THE FUNCTIONS OF VISAS

2.1 Visas perform several functions. They serve: to ensure security; to control immigration and limit the entry, duration of stay, or activities of travellers; to generate revenue and apply measures of reciprocity; and to ensure a destination's carrying capacity and control tourism demand.

2.2 Visa policies are among the most important governmental formalities influencing international tourism. The development of policies and procedures for visas, as well as for passports, is closely linked to the development of tourism. With the substantial growth of international tourism in the last six decades, the quality, reliability, and functionality of visas and other travel documents has evolved. However, despite some progress made in recent years, current visa policies are still often inadequate and inefficient, and are thus acknowledged to be an obstacle to tourism growth.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Tourism Organization (2011), *Tourism Towards 2030: Global Overview*, UNWTO, Madrid.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://dtxq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/pdf/18\\_statement\\_icao-unwto\\_13.pdf](http://dtxq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/pdf/18_statement_icao-unwto_13.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism (1964), *Recommendations on International Travel and Tourism*, August 21-September 5, 1963. Rome.

<sup>4</sup> Now Recommended Practice 3.19 Annex 9 Facilitation, Thirteenth Edition, July 2011.

### 3. VISA FACILITATION

3.1 Joint research by UNWTO and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), presented to the 4th T20 Ministers' Meeting in May 2012<sup>5</sup>, demonstrates that improving visa processes could generate an additional US\$ 206 billion in tourism receipts and create as many as 5.1 million jobs by 2015 in G20 economies.<sup>6</sup> As a positive outcome of this research, G20 leaders recognized consequently at their June 2012 Summit the role of tourism as “a vehicle for job creation, economic growth and development”. Furthermore, they committed to “work towards developing travel facilitation initiatives in support of job creation, quality work, poverty reduction and global growth”.<sup>7</sup>

3.2 The analysis also identified five important areas of opportunity for visa facilitation:

3.2.1 *Improve the delivery of information:* The availability and reliability of the information on entry formalities - especially visa requirements and procedures – that destinations provide were among the simplest, but also least addressed, areas of opportunity. This information – especially the elements of entry formalities of importance to the traveller – should also be available in multiple languages.

3.2.2 *Facilitate current visa processes:* A major opportunity for improvement is the way visa requests for temporary visitors are processed in general, as well as the requirements linked to this process. Whether these requirements are personal interviews, official documents, or certificates, they usually produce at least temporary bottlenecks as well as uncertainty and longer wait times. Among the techniques suitable for improving these processes is the consideration of visas on arrival.

3.2.3 *Differentiate treatment to facilitate tourist travel:* The technique of facilitating the visa process for certain types of visitors is widely used among countries, especially for temporary visitors who are visiting for tourism purposes. The form this facilitation takes can range from easing restrictions depending on the means of transportation – for example, cruise passengers can be allowed to disembark from the ship without a tourist visa or to arrive by charter planes – to special treatment for specified geographical areas or ports of entry.

3.2.4 *Institute eVisa programmes:* If an entry visa cannot be avoided, eVisa is the option preferred over the traditional, paper visa. It can be more easily obtained and requires neither the physical presence of the applicant nor the presence of the passport. These considerations are especially important for destinations without a widespread network of embassies and consulates.

3.2.5 *Establish regional agreements:* There are already a number of regional agreements in place that allow travellers from a third country to move freely between member countries once admitted by one of the participating countries. For citizens of one of the States of some regions, such as the Schengen area in Europe, it is even possible to travel without a passport by simply using a valid national document of identification.

### 4. THE GLOBAL DIMENSIONS TO VISAS

4.1 Visa requirements still affect global tourism significantly. In 2013, destinations around the world requested, on average, that 64 per cent of the world's population obtain a visa before initiating an international journey, 3 per cent of the population was allowed to apply for an eVisa<sup>8</sup>, and 15 per cent would be able to apply for a visa on arrival. Only 18 per cent of the world's population would not require a visa at all.

---

<sup>5</sup> The T20 Ministers refers to the Tourism Ministers of the G20 economies.

<sup>6</sup> World Tourism Organization and World Travel & Tourism Council (2012), *The Impact of Visa Facilitation on Job Creation in the G20 Economies*, UNWTO and WTTC, Madrid and London.

<sup>7</sup> World Travel & Tourism Council (2012), “G20 Recognizes Travel & Tourism as a Driver of Economic Growth for the First Time and Commit to Work on Travel Facilitation”, June 20, available: <http://www.wttc.org/news-media/news-archive/2012/g20-recognises-travel-tourism-driver-economic-growth-first-time/>.

<sup>8</sup> In 2012, eVisas were accounted for separately for the first time. In 2008 and 2010, eVisas and visas on arrival belonged to the same category.

4.2 Reciprocity is an important element of visa policies.<sup>9</sup> Between 2008-2013, reciprocally open policies, i.e. both countries do not require each other's citizens to obtain a visa, have slightly increased from 14 per cent of all pairs to 16 per cent. In the same period, reciprocally closed policies, i.e. both countries do require each other's citizens to obtain a visa, have considerably decreased to 36 per cent down from 57 per cent. However, the biggest shift has been observed in other combinations (29 per cent to 46 per cent) where countries have unilaterally opened up by introducing no visa required, visa on arrival or eVisa.

4.3 Advanced economies have among each other a high level of reciprocity in openness with 89 per cent reciprocity of no visa required. Only in 11 per cent of the pairs, no visa is required by one country, while a traditional visa, an eVisa, or visa on arrival is required by the other. However, a negative reciprocity is dominating relationships between emerging economies with 41 per cent of mutual policies requiring a visa, while 21 per cent of policies are reciprocally open and in 3 per cent both countries issue a visa on arrival.

## 5. **PROGRESS IN RECENT YEARS**

5.1 The evolution of visa formalities in recent years shows a recent and strong tendency toward visa facilitation. At the beginning of 2008, destinations around the world required, on average, 77 per cent of the world's population to obtain a traditional visa before visiting; this percentage went down to 75 per cent in 2010 and further down to 64 per cent in 2013.

5.2 The reason for the substantial improvement between 2010 and 2013 is the determined action taken by governments. A total of 44 destinations significantly facilitated travel for citizens of 20 or more countries by changing their visa policies from visa required to eVisa, visa on arrival, or no visa required. 44 destinations introduced a total of 5 180 individual measures and contributed by far the majority of the 5 930 total improvements introduced by all destinations between 2010 and 2013.

5.3 Analyzing all facilitation techniques, the most common change was from visa required to visa on arrival, which represented nearly 60 per cent of all changes. Although eVisa and similar measures were also introduced, their importance was still minor in comparison to the other facilitation measures.

5.4 Citizens around the world are differently affected by visa policies. While some countries' citizens enjoy enormous advantages as they are rarely requested to obtain a visa, others are constantly faced with the challenge of obtaining a visa before departing from their own country. However, when comparing data of 2013 and 2008 the total mobility score improved for citizens of all countries without exception.

## 6. **UNWTO AND ICAO COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY**

6.1 ICAO is the recognized global authority for the specification of standards for Machine-Readable Travel Documents, including visas, while UNWTO's interest lies facilitating international tourism. The two Organizations have co-operated in a complementary manner on facilitation matters including visas since they agreed a Working Arrangement in 1978.

6.2 At A37, UNWTO presented the case for eVisas (A37-WP/136 EC/7). The eVisa system, when robustly applied by States, has demonstrated especially compared to traditional visa considerable advantages from the perspectives of both security and facilitation. The absence of global standards, specifications and interoperability there is a danger of fragmentation and security gaps. The Assembly supported UNWTO's proposal that ICAO should explore with international partners the development of global standards and specifications for eVisas as a matter of priority. Resource limitations have constrained follow-up on this issue in the past triennium. UNWTO hopes that the matter will be pursued during the coming triennium.

6.3 UNWTO remains committed to working in close co-operation with ICAO on facilitation matters as they affect tourism, and in particular on visa facilitation.

— END —

---

<sup>9</sup> World Tourism Organization (2013), Tourism Visa Openness Report: Visa Facilitation as Means to Stimulate Tourism Growth, UNWTO, Madrid.