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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Visa Working Party/Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/Liechtenstein)
Subject: Kickoff discussion on VIS statistics and asylum

This semester, the Belgian Presidency initiated a discussion with Member States regarding **the future of EU visa policy**. After several exchanges at various levels (within the Visa Working Party, SCIFA and Justice and Home Affairs Council), a broad consensus emerged on the importance of addressing abuses, both from nationals of visa-free and visa-required countries. In this context, Member States emphasized the need to develop **comprehensive statistics on visa abuse** to get a better understanding of the situation.

The discussion today will focus on abuse of visas by nationals from visa-required countries and the need to optimize the use of existing tools, including the Visa Information System (VIS). Indeed, to this day, the number of asylum applications lodged by visa holders remains unknown due to various factors, among which the non-systematic check of the VIS by Member States when examining asylum applications and the absence of a legal obligation to produce and compile VIS statistics. Consequently, it is currently **impossible to assess the scale of this phenomenon**. While the interoperability framework combined with the new Eurodac should significantly improve the situation in the long run, it does not offer a short-term solution. Moreover, insufficient checks of the VIS by border guards at external borders, coupled with inadequate fingerprinting, not only contravenes legal obligations but also poses a security risk and undermines the functioning of the future Entry/Exit System.

Although various measures have been proposed to prevent visa procedure abuse under the German and Swedish Presidencies – such as creating risk profiles, providing regular training for consular staff, and facilitating information exchange between Member States – there is still lot to be done in this regard. The Belgian Presidency believes that to make effective progress herein, Member States will need to **take ownership of this issue** and consider measures to be implemented at national level or in cooperation with other Member States.

More specifically, during the Visa Working Party in April, the Presidency proposed to put in place a collaborative approach, for example through the organization of workshops or joint discussions on VIS statistics, bringing together asylum and visa authorities. This approach was broadly supported by the delegations. In addition, during the last JHA Council on 13 June, the **Ministers insisted that the development of statistics on visa abuse should be a priority for the next institutional cycle.**

Consequently, the Presidency has decided to organize a **kick-off discussion on VIS statistics and asylum**, in the presence of Asylum colleagues. The Presidency believes that this first exchange of practices will be a great opportunity for Member States to reflect on what could already be done in the short term with the current tools, particularly by shedding light on the valuable information that can be obtained by producing and compiling VIS statistics, the benefits they offer in detecting potential abuse, and the technical requirements for achieving these results. This will also allow the Commission to present some important information on the future developments in the context of the interoperability framework between the VIS and the new Eurodac.

Workshop Structure

The workshop will feature three presentations:

1. Belgian Immigration Office

The Belgian Immigration Office Statistics Unit will provide an overview of efforts deployed to capture/investigate the relationship between visas and asylum using VIS data. The speaker will explain the importance of VIS hits and related statistics and present statistics project of the Belgian Immigration Office, detailing the set-up stages, success factors and limitations. The presentation will include detailed examples and specific case studies illustrating how these statistics could support the decision-making process.

2. Swedish Migration Agency

Experts from the Swedish Migration Agency will present how Sweden uses VIS in the asylum process and what statistical data is retrieved and shared with consulates processing visas. The working method aims to improve the risk assessment in the visa issuance and potentially discover new trends, where several examples will be presented. This will be followed by a presentation of different follow up methods that are used depending on whether the visa was issued by Sweden or another Member State.

3. European Commission

The Commission will conclude with a presentation on the future developments in the context of the interoperability framework between the VIS and the new Eurodac.

After each presentation, delegations will be invited to ask questions or provide additional information they deem useful from their national perspective. As the workshop aims to foster a constructive and interactive exchange, the Presidency warmly encourages Member States to actively participate.
