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From: Presidency
To: Visa Working Party/Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/Liechtenstein)
Subject: Visa shopping – best practices and way forward

On 24 June 2025, the Council published a compilation of the 2024 annual reports drawn up on Local Schengen Cooperation¹, on the basis of Article 48(7) of the Visa Code. The published document revealed, *inter alia*, that visa shopping, i.e. third-country nationals applying for a visa from a Member State other than the Member State they actually intend to travel to, due to more advantageous terms, was a recurring theme throughout the reports. Local Schengen Cooperation repeatedly stressed this both as an increasing challenge in 2024 and as an objective for improvement in 2025. Building on previous discussions held in the Visa Working Party², the Danish Presidency is committed to creating a forum for discussion on the best ways forward to support this 2025 objective of reducing the occurrence of visa shopping.

¹ 9531/25.

² 15207/24 and 1242/24.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted consulates to reduce their capacities in light of the reduced travel levels. However, travel into the Schengen area is now reverting to pre-pandemic levels – possibly outpacing Member States' ability to add sufficient resources to match the higher demand for visas to the Schengen Area. While, previously, visa shoppers may have had other objectives when choosing the Member State to which they would submit their visa application, e.g. Member States having a lower refusal rate, visa shopping based on the availability of visa appointments is increasing.

The limited availability of visa appointments in turn creates incentives for visa shopping in several ways, some examples of which are mentioned below:

- Visa applicants seek out consulates with available time slots and shorter waiting times, and decide to “shop” wherever the terms are more beneficial for the applicant, despite the applicant actually intending to travel to a different Member State.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies enable applicants to submit a convincing travel plan, making it difficult for consulates to identify visa shopping.
- AI technologies make it easier for intermediaries to track when new time slots are released in order to book and sell appointments to applicants for profit.
- The external service provider VFS Global has informed that applicants choose the purpose of the visa application, e.g. ‘business’, when the real purpose is a family visit, based on Member States’ prioritising of applications or the availability of time slots, with more time slots being made available for certain purposes, such as business visits.

In light of the ongoing challenges faced by Schengen consulates, the Presidency wishes to discuss visa shopping, as well as best practices and possible ways forward with regard to a coordinated effort to prevent visa shopping. Delegations are therefore invited to reflect on the following questions:

1. How do you identify cases of visa shopping, considering how both professional agents and AI have made it easier to submit credible, but dishonest, applications?
2. What steps, if any, have you taken to prevent intermediaries or agents booking all time slots as soon as they are released?
3. Do you consider it important for reducing visa shopping to make more visa appointments available across all of your consulates, and is it an option you are considering?
4. Do you have any other experiences with visa shopping and what prevention measures, if any, have you implemented? Do you consider any of them crucial to reducing visa shopping?
