

MEPs want EU embassies and consulates to grant asylum seekers humanitarian visas

[16-03-2016 - 16:11]

To dissuade refugees from putting their lives at risk by entrusting them to people smugglers, EU consulates and embassies should be allowed to issue humanitarian visas to persons seeking international protection, said Civil Liberties Committee MEPs voting on an update of the EU Visa Code on Wednesday. These visas would enable holders to enter the country issuing the visa in order to apply for asylum.

The call to issue humanitarian visas, backed by 46 votes to 4, with 7 abstentions, was part of a legal update to the EU Visa Code, designed to make visa grant procedures less cumbersome, so as to facilitate legitimate travel to the EU.

“Given the human drama that we are facing in Europe, we as politicians need to deliver. And that is precisely what we have done here. We shall stand firm together when it comes to negotiating the question of humanitarian visas with the Council. As legislators, we should be proud to use every instrument at our disposal to improve people’s lives”, said rapporteur on the proposed update Juan Fernando López Aguilar, (S&D, ES).

MEPs underline that issuing humanitarian visas to persons seeking protection would enable them to travel to the EU “in a safe manner”. To that end, they propose that EU member states be empowered to accept visa applications, in the country where the applicant is, on humanitarian grounds, for reasons of national interest or to meet international obligations. Humanitarian visas would have limited territorial validity, since the sole purpose of the journey would be to lodge an application for international protection.

Simplified visa application procedures

The proposed update simplifies and modernises visa application procedures, without modifying the criteria against which applications are assessed. Among other changes, some applicants may not need to present their applications in person, processing periods are reduced and interviews may be conducted remotely.

MEPs inserted amendments to allow applications to be lodged nine months before the intended journey, instead of six as proposed by the Commission, and to extend the range of potential beneficiaries of multiple-entry visas. They also inserted a provision allowing visa applications to be presented in the consulate of another EU country if the competent one is more than 500 km away from the applicant’s place of residence.

Next steps

The committee agreed to start talks with the Council of Ministers with a view to reaching an agreement on the legislation at the first reading. The negotiating mandate was approved by 53 votes to 3, with 1 abstention.

Procedure: Co-decision (Ordinary Legislative Procedure), first reading

Press release

Further information

- EPRS: EU legal framework on asylum and irregular immigration 'on arrival'
:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/551333/EPRS_BRI%282015%29551333_EN.pdf
- Press release: Refugees: MEPs want Dublin rule changes, humanitarian visas and global strategy (10.09.2015)
:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150904IPR91613/html/Refugees-MEPs-want-Dublin-rule-changes-humanitarian-visas-and-global-strategy>
- European Commission: EU visa policy
:
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm
- Profile of rapporteur Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D, ES):
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/96812.html>
- Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/libe/home.html>

Contact

Estefania NARRILLOS

BXL: (+32) 2 28 31324

STR: (+33) 3 881 73661

PORT: (+32) 498 98 39 85

EMAIL: libe-press@europarl.europa.eu

TWITTER: EP_Justice