

ECASBA POSITION PAPER



SCHENGEN AREA – BORDER VISAS FOR SEAFARERS/EES

BACKGROUND:

The issuing of border visas for arriving and departing seafarers, often at short notice, is paramount in ensuring that crew changes and repatriations do not avoid cause delay or disruption to the movement of ships and the efficient movement of cargo at European ports. In the Schengen Area there is significant variation in the interpretation of the applicable regulations and therefore the ability of ship agents to readily obtain transit visas for on- and off-signing crew. Proposals by DG-HOME to review the Annexes to Regulation 810/2009 that establish the rules for the issue of border visas, with the possibility that further restrictions could be placed on the issue of same, is also a matter of concern. The planned introduction in 2022 of the Entry-Exit System (EES), with its emphasis on electronic verification of passports and visas using biometric data, may also impact on crew changes and on non-EU seafarers travelling on International Labour Organisation-approved Seafarer Identity Documents.

ECASBA POSITION:

Given the vital role played by the ship agent in overseeing and coordinating the arrival and repatriation of ship's crew, ECASBA and its members should be consulted whenever any new developments in laws or procedures related to the issue of border visas are proposed.

The following issues are important for the agent:

- National immigration authorities and border force staff should recognise that international merchant shipping regularly requires seafarers to arrive or depart at short notice
- The processes for obtaining border visas for arriving and departing crew should therefore be made as simple and efficient as possible, without the need for extended lead times and complex application processes
- Procedures should also be implemented to allow accredited ship agents to accompany arriving and departing crew between the airport and the ship
- International conventions (ILO Conventions 108 and 185) allow ship's crew to travel using a Seafarer Identity Document as their sole form of identification and this convention should also be applied by countries in the Schengen Area
- The EES must accommodate Seafarer Identity Documents as a valid form of identification, alternatively other facilities must be in place to process the holders of such documents
- Those procedures should also be consistently applied within individual Member States and also across the European Union

PARTIES INVOLVED:

- ECASBA Secretariat and Member associations
- DG-HOME
- National immigration authorities and border force staff
- Other European associations

VALIDITY:

2021 - 2024

RESPONSIBLE ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS:

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