

Lifting the temporary restrictions on non-essential travel to the EU

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented health emergency across the European Union. To protect public health and limit the spreading of the virus, most EU Member States and Schengen Associated States introduced measures restricting free movement across the EU. At the same time, travel restrictions were also applied to all non-essential travel from third countries to the EU+ area.¹

Now the time has come for easing the restrictions on non-essential travel to the EU. This process started on 1st July 2020. The principles, criteria, a checklist as well as a coordination mechanism to guide this process are set out in the Council Recommendations² adopted on 30 June 2020.

How was the list of third countries drawn up and how often will it be amended ?

Restrictions are lifted on the basis of the common principles and objective criteria set out in the Recommendation. These principles include proportionality and non-discrimination. The criteria also include an assessment of the epidemiological situation in the third country, the containment measures in place, including physical distancing as well as economic and social considerations. Likewise, reciprocity towards the EU will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

This list will be reviewed every two weeks following the same assessment

Will all EU+ States apply the same list?

Yes, the list as agreed by Council should in principle be applied by all EU+ States. However, individual states may choose to maintain travel restrictions towards the countries on the list, or decide to lift them only at a later date. National health measures may also differ.

For which countries were the travel restrictions lifted as of 1 July?

Algeria, Australia, Canada, Georgia, Japan, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Rwanda, Serbia, South Korea, Thailand, Tunisia, Uruguay and China. Regarding China the easing is subject to confirmation of reciprocity.

Where can I find information about restrictions in place inside EU Member States and their gradual lifting of travel restrictions?

You can verify whether and what restrictions remain in place intra-Schengen prior to your departure by consulting the EU's website 'Re-open EU' ([link](#)).

¹ The "EU+ area" includes all Schengen Member States (including Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania) and the Schengen Associated States. It also includes Ireland and the United Kingdom if they decide to align.

² Council Recommendation of 30 June 2020 on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction, document 9208/20.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9208-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

As for detailed information on travel restrictions at external borders and measures taken at national level with regard to social distancing, testing requirements and restrictions of movement, you must verify the websites of the relevant Member State's competent national authorities: Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Interior or Ministries of Health.

Will residents of third countries that are not included on the list not be allowed to travel?

Where temporary travel restrictions continue to apply to a third country, essential travel is still allowed for the following categories of travellers residing in those countries:

- Healthcare professionals, health researchers, and elderly care professionals;
- Frontier workers;
- Seasonal workers in agriculture
- Transport personnel;
- Seafarers;
- Diplomats, staff of international organisations, and people invited by international organisations whose physical presence is required for the well-functioning of these organisations, military personnel, humanitarian aid workers and civil protection personnel in the exercise of their functions;
- Passengers in transit;
- Passengers travelling for imperative family reasons;
- Third country nationals travelling for the purpose of study;
- Highly skilled third country nationals (holders of national or European highly skilled migrant work permits) if their labour force is necessary from an economic perspective and the work cannot be postponed or performed abroad;
- Family member of EU+ citizens regardless whether or not they are returning home;
- Third country nationals residing permanently in an EU+ state.

Individual states may, however, introduce additional health measures and restrictions for these travellers, especially when their trip originates in a high risk region.

As for detailed information on travel restrictions at external borders and measures taken at national level, you must verify the websites of the relevant Member State's competent national authorities: Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Interior or Ministries of Health.

When can I submit my visa application?

Following the easing of restrictions at the external borders by 1st July, the progressive resumption of international travel connections and the easing of confinement measures in third countries, travellers should be able to apply for visas in their country of residence and (full) visa operations should be resumed and synchronised with those developments. In each location, Member States are responsible for agreeing on a common date for the resumption of the collection of visa applications also for the purpose of non-essential travel.

The eased travel restrictions list applies to all residents of a given third country. Will this have an impact on my application?

It is already the general rule that a visa application should be lodged in the location where the applicant legally resides. All applicants are to provide information on their place of residence when filling in the application form.

However, visa holders may be requested to prove legal residence during the controls at the EU's external borders.

I am a national of a country for which restrictions are still in place, but I reside in a country for which restrictions have been lifted. Can I travel to the EU?

Yes. The restrictions on non-essential travel apply to third countries, i.e. the traveller's place of residence and not his or her nationality.

The visa requirement continues to depend on nationality, so if you need a visa you must apply at the consulate of the country you wish to travel to, in your country of residence.

I am of a nationality that does not require a short stay visa to travel to the EU. Do I have to prove my place of residence when I travel to the EU?

At the external borders, you may be requested to prove that you reside in a country on the 'green list', in particular when you hold the nationality of another country. Relevant documents for proving this may include residence permit, work permit, identity card or driving licence issued by the third-country of residence, and any other official documents that supports the travellers' claimed country of residence.

Travel restrictions from the country where I reside have not been lifted by the EU+ States. Can I still apply for a visa?

If the local epidemiological situation and confinement measures do not yet allow consulates to offer full visa service, they must ensure a minimum service for the following categories of essential travellers:

- Healthcare professionals, health researchers, and elderly care professionals;
- Frontier workers;
- Seasonal workers in agriculture;
- Seafarers;
- Transport personnel;
- Diplomats, staff of international organisations, and people invited by international organisations whose physical presence is required for the well-functioning of these organisations, military personnel, humanitarian aid workers and civil protection personnel in the exercise of their functions;
- Passengers in transit;
- Passengers travelling for imperative family reasons;
- Third country nationals travelling for the purpose of study;
- Highly skilled third country nationals (holders of national or European highly skilled migrant work permits) if their labour force is necessary from an economic perspective and the work cannot be postponed or performed abroad;

- Family member of EU+ citizens regardless whether or not they are returning home;
- Third country nationals residing permanently in an EU+ state.

Travel restrictions have not been lifted for the country where I reside. I am a family member of an EU+ citizen. Can I still apply for a visa?

If the local epidemiological situation and confinement measures do not yet allow consulates to offer full visa service, they must ensure a minimum service for third-country nationals who are family members of EU+ citizens.

I have a valid Schengen visa. Does this mean I can now enter the EU without restrictions?

No. Holding a uniform visa (meaning that it is valid for the entire Schengen area) never grants a right of entry as visa holders' compliance with entry conditions are checked at the external borders. Likewise, all travellers are to respect any additional travel restrictions that might be in place within the EU+ states.

All travellers are strongly advised to verify whether and what restrictions are in place in the country of destination prior to their departure. Relevant information on intra-Schengen travel restrictions can be found in the EU's website 'Re-open EU' ([link](#)).

I have already been granted a Schengen visa in the past. Do I have to submit my next visa application in person?

As a rule, you are not required to submit your application in person, if your fingerprints have been collected for a previous visa application within the last 59 months. You should verify the practical modalities for lodging visa applications at the premises of an external service provider or a consulate before starting the process. Many consulates or external service providers offer on-line services and require applicants to book an appointment in advance.

I had a valid visa that I could not use because of the travel restrictions. Can I get a new visa now or will the visa fee that I paid be reimbursed ?

Under the applicable legislation, Member States are not obliged to reimburse the visa fee to persons who were not able to carry out their intended trip because of the travel restrictions or because of the unavailability of transportation. Should you wish to travel to the same Member State for the same travel purpose, Member States are, however, encouraged to apply an exceptional and simplified application procedure. Please verify the information on the relevant Member State's website.

Have the rules for applying for a short stay (Schengen) visa changed?

The rules for applying for a short-stay (Schengen) visa remain unchanged. Consulates and external service providers will, however, have adapted practical aspects of access management, hygiene measures, payment methods etc. Applicants are advised to verify websites for information of the procedure to follow in advance.

Will health checks now be part of the application process?

Preventive hygiene and other access management measures will be in place at the entrance of consulates and external service providers (e.g. temperature checks, mandatory face-mask, hand sanitizers). Such measures are based on national rules and local practices.

Health checks or a presentation of health certificates will, however, not be part of your visa application procedure.

Do I have to submit any supporting documents regarding my health condition when I apply for a visa?

No. No additional documents are to be submitted regarding your health condition. A person's health condition at the time of application, which may be up to 6 months ahead of the actual travel date, is irrelevant.

The usual requirements for travel medical insurance continue to apply: the insurance to be presented with your application must cover any expenses which might arise in connection with repatriation for medical reasons, urgent medical attention and/or emergency hospital treatment or death during your stay in the Schengen area.

EU+ states may apply testing requirements at the moment of travel.

Individual Member States may also introduce additional health measures and restrictions for travellers, especially when their trip originates in a high risk region.

As for detailed information on travel restrictions at external borders and measures taken at national level, you must verify the websites of the relevant Member State's competent national authorities: Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Interior or Ministries of Health.

Do I need to book an appointment to submit my application ?

Most external service providers and consulates require applicants to book an appointment for lodging an application. You should verify the practical modalities for lodging visa applications at the premises of an external service provider or a consulate before starting the process.