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# Information Session on Best Practices in Visa Procedures for Civil Society

Auditorium La Pastorale - 16 September 2025



# Welcome message by Amb. Yannick Roulin

Director of the International Geneva Welcome Center ([CAGI](#))



# Welcome message by Mr. Pierre Strauss

Head of the Good Offices & Security Section - Swiss Mission



# Today's Agenda



## 1. Best Practices in Visa Procedure

Step-by-step guidance on documentation, deadlines, and best practices.



## 2. Appeal Procedure following a Visa Refusal

Deadlines and conditions for lodging an appeal.



## 3. Entry/Exit System (EES) & European Travel Information Authorization System (ETIAS)

Understanding the new digital border systems and their impact on international travel.

## 4. Q&A





# Best Practices in Visa Procedure

- Key responsibilities in Swiss Visa Processing
- Visa Competence Center (CCV)
- Types of Visas by Duration and Purpose
- Visa Application Process
- Essential Documentation
- Critical Deadlines
- Role and responsibility of the inviting party



# Visa Competence Center (CCV)

**Host State Division of the Permanent Mission of Switzerland, Good Offices and Security Section, Mr. Pierre Strauss**

**Team of 9 persons, Ms. Marie Brüning**



Visa Review & Decision



Coordination for Operations &  
Conferences



Interface & Liaison



# Key Responsibilities in Swiss Visa Processing

## State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)

**Primary authority for migration and visa policy implementation**

**More than 95% of visa applications**

**Timing:** 15 days, may be extended to 30-60 days

**Visa refusal:** right of appeal

**Entry/Exit System (EES) and ETIAS:** at national level, the SEM is the competent authority for implementing the projects.



## Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)

**Key responsibilities:**

- **Holders of governmental passports** (diplomatic, service, official or special passports)
- **Official Delegates:** Persons called upon in an official capacity by an intergovernmental organisation that has concluded a headquarters agreement with the Swiss Confederation

**Applications processed as a priority** (appointments/fees/processing times)

**If a Swiss representation intends to refuse a visa, the inviting party is consulted**



# Types of Visas

## C-Type Visas (Schengen)

### Short stay visa

**Up to 90 days (within a 180-day period).**

Ideal for conferences, meetings, and short-term official business in the Schengen area.

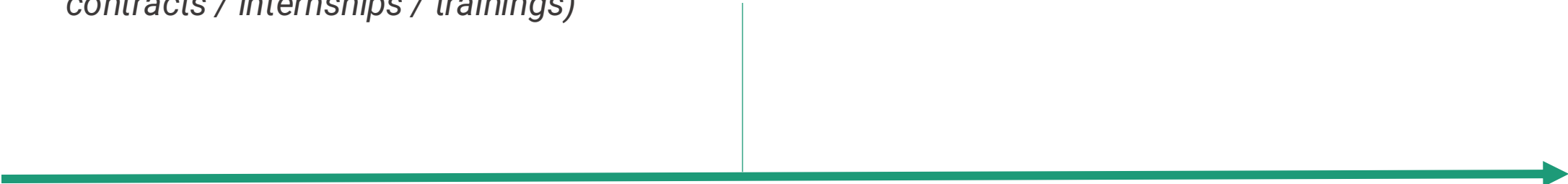
*NB: Taking up functions < 90 days (short contracts / internships / trainings)*

## D-Type Visas (National)

### Long-stay visas

**Exceeding 90 days**

Long-term employment and family reunions.



90 days



# Visa Application Process



1

## Appointment Scheduling & Document Preparation

Secure an appointment well ahead (max. 6 months and min. 20 days prior the planned date of departure) and gather all required documents including application form, passport, invitation letter, and supporting materials.

2

## Embassy Submission

Submit complete application to [Swiss Embassy or Consulate](#) competent for the official place of residence with all supporting documentation.

3

## Interview Process

Attend interview if required, prepared with detailed information about the meeting and role.

4

## Decision & Collection

Receive decision and collect visa, or address any refusal through proper channels.

→ Major conferences: inform the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)



# Essential Documentation

## Core Documents

- Schengen visa application form duly completed and signed
- Valid travel document (issued < 10 years ago and valid >3 months beyond the scheduled date of return)
- Recent passport-sized photograph
- Valid residency permit when needed

## Supporting documents

- Personal invitation letter from Swiss organisation (*please note that a confirmation of registration may NOT be sufficient to support the visa application*)
- Health insurance proof
- Sufficient financial guarantees to cover the stay
- Flight and accommodation reservations



Additional documents may be required by the Swiss Embassy or Consulate depending on specific circumstances.







# Critical Deadlines

## Schengen Visa Deadlines

Applications should be submitted well in advance, considering processing times and potential delays.

- **Max. 6 months** at the earliest
- **Min. 20 days** at the latest
- **15 days:** processing time upon receipt of a complete application by the Swiss representation (Schengen consultations)

### Recommendation:

**Given the large volume of visa applications processed by certain diplomatic missions abroad, it is highly recommended to secure an appointment as early as possible (even if the application is not yet complete) to avoid long waiting times (sometimes several weeks!).**



# Role and responsibility of the inviting party

As inviting party, you play a crucial role in the visa process:

1. **Issue the invitation letter** to the participants considered as essential to the meeting (mentioning the name of the organisers, venue and dates).
2. **Provide all the information required to support the visa application**, mentioning (if applicable) the role and expenses covered for the applicant's participation to the meeting.
3. **Encourage participants to prepare thoroughly for interviews** when submitting visa applications.



**Proper preparation significantly improves visa approval rates and reduces processing delays.**



## More information

Consult the Swiss Mission's website – *Manual Visas* / documents section

CHECKLIST FOR INVITING PARTICIPANTS TO MEETINGS IN  
SWITZERLAND AT THE INVITATION OF A NONGOVERNMENTAL  
ORGANISATION (NGO)







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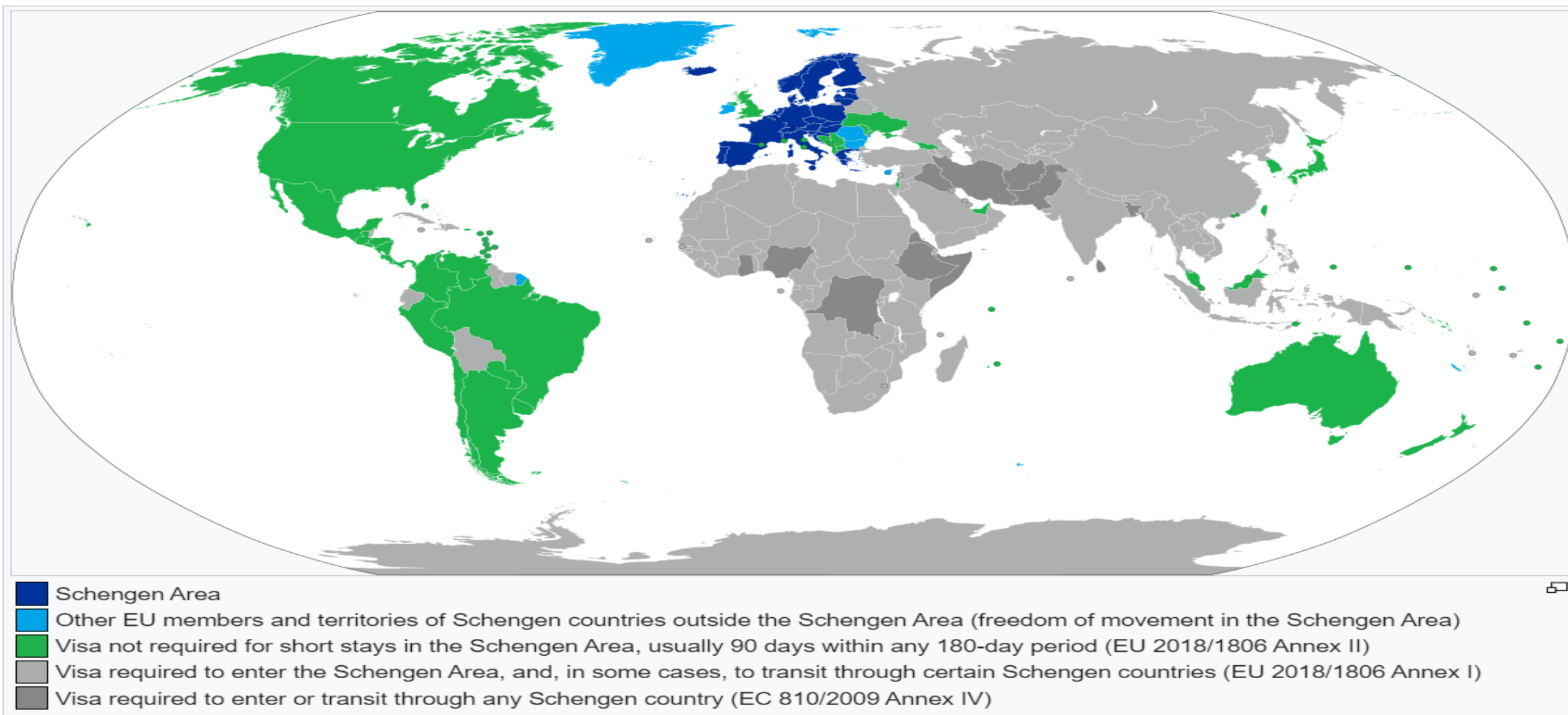
# Appeal procedure following a visa refusal





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# Visa obligation







## Do I Need a Visa?

Information on visa requirements for your nationality is available at [Link](#)

### No

#### **What do I need to keep in mind when entering Switzerland?**

Your stay in the Schengen area (including Switzerland) may not exceed 90 days in any 180-day period.

Please note the [Entry requirements](#) for Switzerland.

If you enter Switzerland without a visa, you may be questioned by the border authorities on the reason for your stay and on your financial means. You may be refused entry if there is any doubt as to the reasons for your stay, or if you do not have sufficient financial means. In the case of the latter, you may be required to submit a declaration of sponsorship by a guarantor at the border.

If you are travelling to Switzerland to visit someone, it may be helpful to have a personal invitation from your host to show to the border authorities or to be met by your host at the airport. This is not mandatory, however.

### Yes

#### **Where should I submit my visa application?**

If you require a visa, you can submit your application to the [Swiss embassy or consulate](#) responsible for your place of residence

#### **Where can I obtain an application form?**

You can download the [Application form](#) from our website or obtain the application form free of charge from the appropriate Swiss embassy or consulate.

#### **What documents do I have to enclose with the application?**

##### **How much does the visa cost?**

You should enclose your travel document, proof of health insurance and any other documents to support the purpose of your visit.

You can obtain information on the documentation required and visa fees on the [website](#) of the appropriate embassy/consulate.

#### **Do I need to submit a declaration of sponsorship?**

The embassy/consulate will decide whether you need to submit a declaration of sponsorship (see information sheet *Declaration of Sponsorship*).

→ [https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/themen/einreise/merkblatt\\_einreise.html](https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/themen/einreise/merkblatt_einreise.html)





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# Where to find the list of required visa documents ?



Swiss embassy website



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Embassy of Switzerland to Lebanon and Syria

## Visa for business, theoretical training, short study less than 3 months, stage

### Required documents:

- ☐ One application form duly completed in German, French, Italian or English; online by typewriter or in block letters with a blue or black pen; and personally signed by the applicant (for minors' signatures of both the parents are required).
- ☐ Signed passport, issued within ten preceding years, valid at least three months beyond the planned stay in the Schengen states and containing at least two empty pages.
- ☐ One copy of the applicant's passport: first pages, last page and all pages with previously obtained visas.
- ☐ One recent passport-sized picture according to ICAO guidelines.
- ☐ Visa application fee: EUR 80.-, children age 6 to 12: EUR 40.- (**USD equivalence, exact cash**)
- ☐ Original and one copy of a travel / health insurance; **minimum coverage EUR 30,000. - valid for all Schengen states** for the whole period of the intended stay, minimum one month. The insurance policy must cover the costs for repatriation in case of disease, urgent medical expenses and/or hospitalization.
- ☐ Family register issued less than three months ago.
- ☐ Flight reservation (roundtrip) or other proof of intended transport.
- ☐ Hotel reservation for the whole trip and a detailed travel itinerary.
- ☐ Proof of sufficient financial means – Recent bank statements turnover during the last six months.

### Specific documents for business travels:

- Invitation letter from the company in Switzerland, mentioning: name of the person invited and of the company in Lebanon/Syria (if applicable), purpose and nature of the meeting, exact dates of the meeting, possible expenses coverage, typed out name of the person signing.
- Register of commerce of the company in Switzerland.
- Recommendation letter of the employer in Lebanon/Syria mentioning: profession, position, and number of years in service, monthly salary, number of annual leave, purpose and exact dates of the granted leave, typed out name of the person signing. Letter has to mention as well: name of the company visited in Switzerland, nature of the meeting, possible expenses coverage.

### Specific documents for theoretical training:

- Invitation letter from the company in Switzerland, mentioning: name of the person invited and of the company/institution in Lebanon (if applicable), purpose and nature of the training, exact dates of the training, possible expenses coverage, typed out name of the person signing.
- Register of commerce of the company in Switzerland (if applicable).
- The recommendation letter of the employer in Lebanon/motivation letter or the school/university confirmation (cf. Point 4) has to mention as well: name of the company/institution visited in Switzerland, nature of the training, possible expenses coverage.

The Embassy of Switzerland reserves the right to request additional documents.

### IMPORTANT NOTE!

- Only duly filled out, dated and signed forms as well as complete visa applications will be accepted.
- Original documents have to be presented, they will not be returned unless provided with a photocopy.
- The documents in Arabic have to be translated into French, German, Italian or English.
- The visa application forms have to be filled out in French, German, Italian or English.
- The visa application fee is payable in USD (in cash) and is not refundable.





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**Swiss Embassy**



Appeal within  
30 days of  
notification of  
the decision

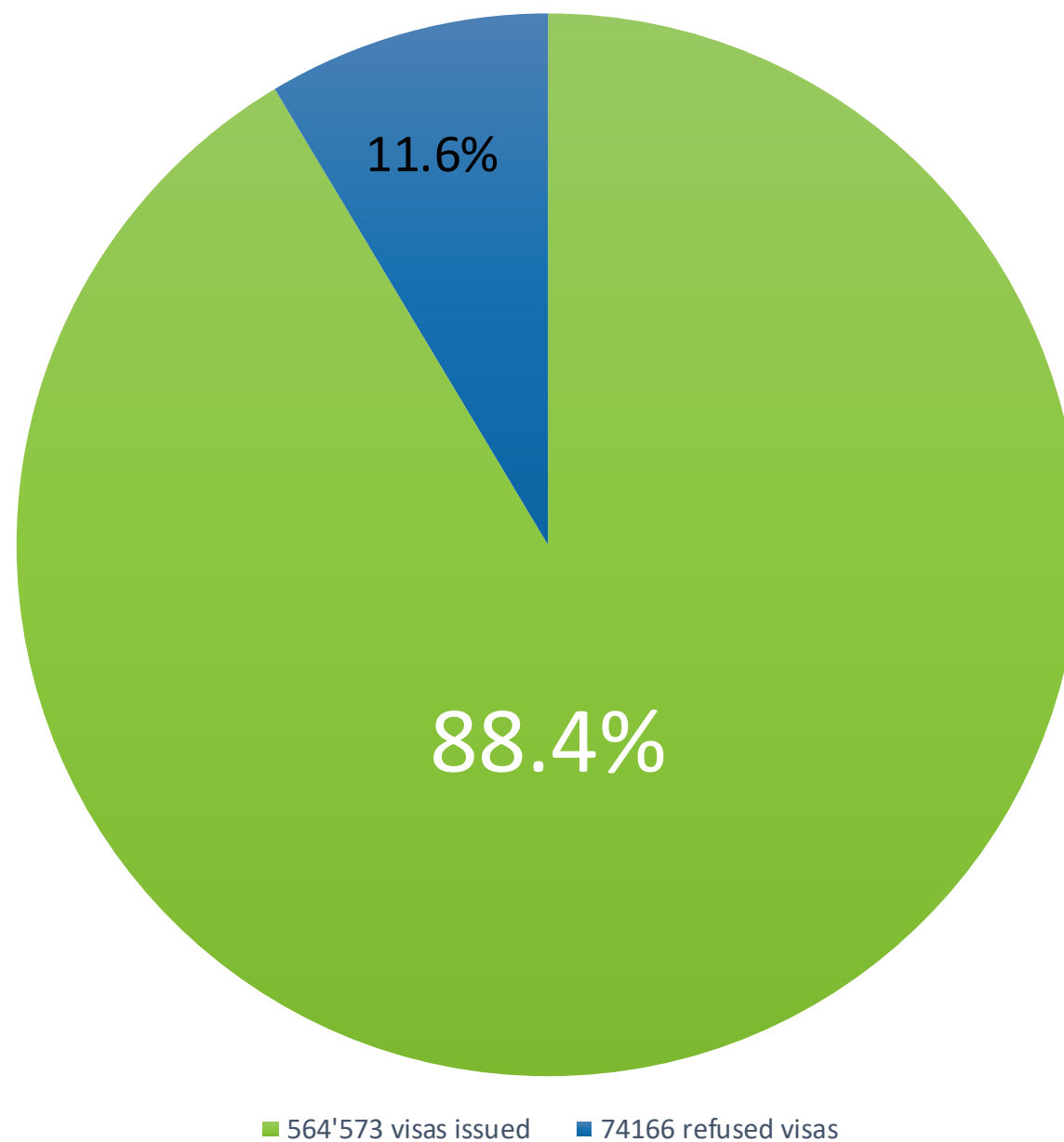


**SEM** (State  
Secretariat for  
migration)





## Visa applications to the Swiss authorities in 2024







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# Visa refusal decision

- reasons for refusal indicated on the decision
- legal remedies indicated at the end of the decision





# Conditions for formal admissibility of an appeal

- Appeal written in one of the three swiss national languages
- Appeal containing the grounds and objections raised
- Compliance with the 30-day appeal period
- Appeal signed by hand or with a swiss qualified electronic signature





# NEW

The objection must be lodged:

by the applicant, or by a duly authorised representative, namely their host, a company expecting them in Switzerland or a lawyer.

In accordance with the case law of the Federal Administrative Court, the host or any other third party may not lodge an objection without presenting **a power of attorney authorising them to represent the person concerned by the procedure.**

For the objection to be admissible, the host or third party must either:

- have a written power of attorney from the applicant authorising them to act on their behalf in the proceedings or
- file the objection jointly with the applicant (signature of the host next to that of the applicant).

The authority is required to verify, upon receipt of the objection, the existence of such a power of attorney or co-signature. In the absence of a power of representation, the SEM must require the presentation of a power of attorney before examining the objection; otherwise, it is inadmissible.





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**SEM** (State  
Secretariat for  
migration)



detailed  
reasoned  
decision

Appeal within 30  
days of  
notification of  
the decision



**FAC** (Federal  
Administrative Court)





# Important elements that the SEM takes into account

- Clearly defined purpose of the stay ;
- Concordance between the various documents provided ;
- A personal and detailed letter of invitation from the organization based in Switzerland ;
- The visa applicant should be aware of the important elements of their trip for the interview at the embassy ;
- Clarity on the coverage of travel costs ;
- Other ordinary visa requirements fulfilled (health insurance, valid travel document, etc.) ;
- Binding ties in the country of origin (migration risk assessment).

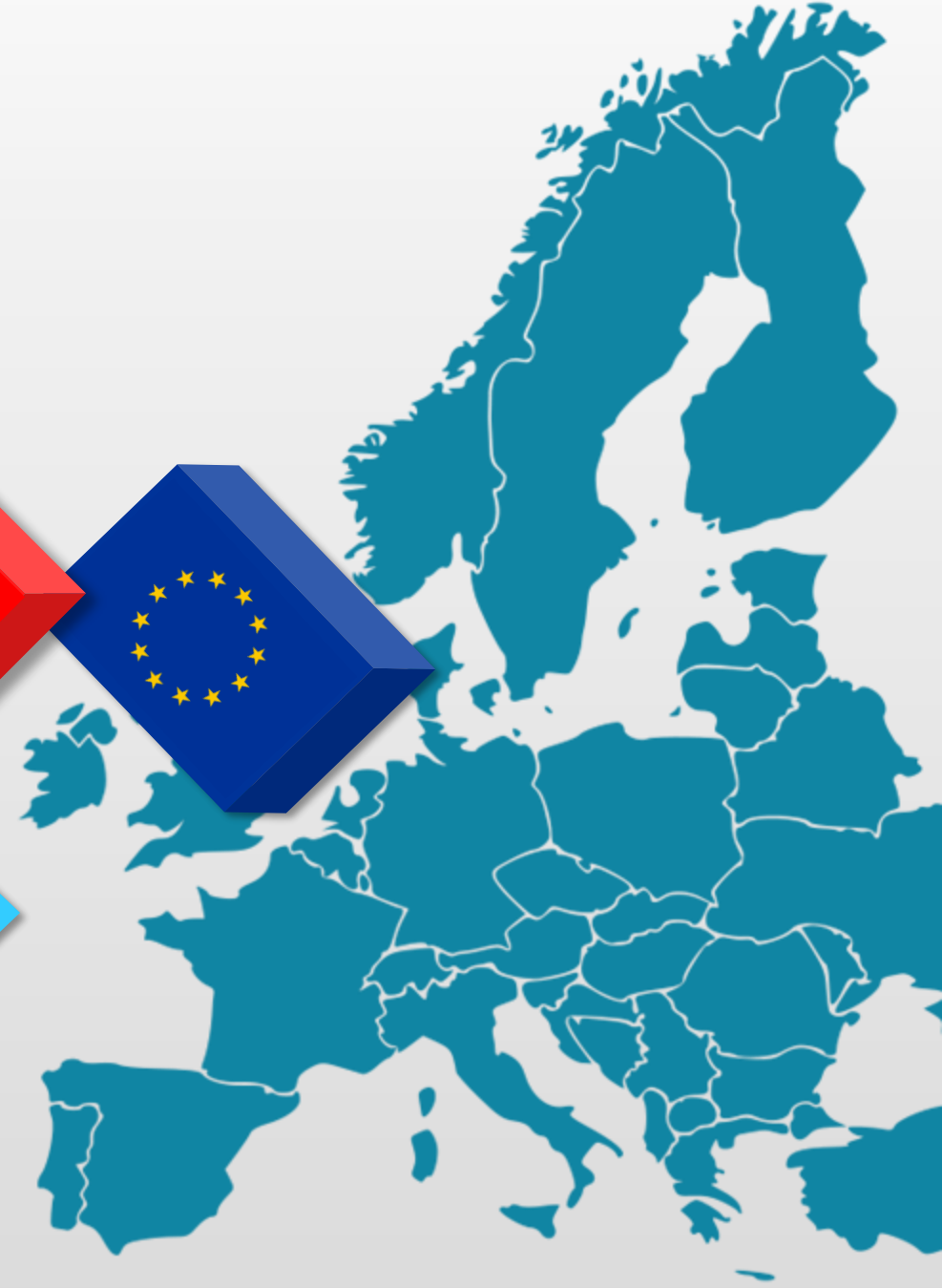




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# Entry/Exit System (EES)



EUROPÄISCHE UNION  
Fonds für die innere  
Sicherheit ISF





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# The Entry/Exit System

What is the EES?







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# The Entry/Exit System

What is the EES?



To whom does the EES apply?







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# The Entry/Exit System

What is the EES?



To whom does the EES  
apply?



To whom does the EES  
not apply? See [link](#)







# The Entry/Exit System

What is the EES?



To whom does the EES apply?



To whom does the EES not apply? See [link](#)



Which Data are collected by the EES?







# The Entry/Exit System

What is the EES?



To whom does the EES apply?



To whom does the EES not apply? See [link](#)



Which Data are collected by the EES?



How long does the EES keep the personal data?







# The Entry/Exit System

What is the EES?



To whom does the EES apply?



To whom does the EES not apply? See [link](#)



Which Data are collected by the EES?



How long does the EES keep the personal data?



What is new during the border checks?







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# Useful links

Official **EES** website:

<https://travel-europe.europa.eu/ees>

Migration and Home Affairs:

[https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/smart-borders/entry-exit-system\\_en?prefLang=de](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/smart-borders/entry-exit-system_en?prefLang=de)

EES Regulation (EU) 2017/21226:

<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2017/2226/oj>

EES Regulation (EU) 2025/1534:

<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/1534/oj>

Amendment to the Schengen Borders Code Regulation (EU 2017/2225):

<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2017/2225/oj>







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Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP

**State Secretariat for Migration SEM**  
Entry Division

# CH ETIAS

Geneva, 16 September 2025



Co-funded by  
the European Union



## Agenda

- **ETIAS basics**
- **Application process**
- **Hit assessment and war zone stay**
- **ETIAS with limited territorial validity**



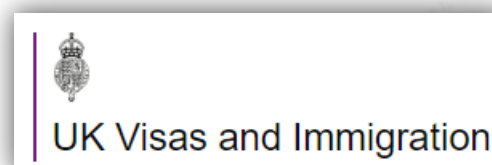
# ETIAS basics



**E** Electronic  
**T** Travel  
**I** Information  
**A** Authorisation  
**s** System



# Travel authorisation systems worldwide



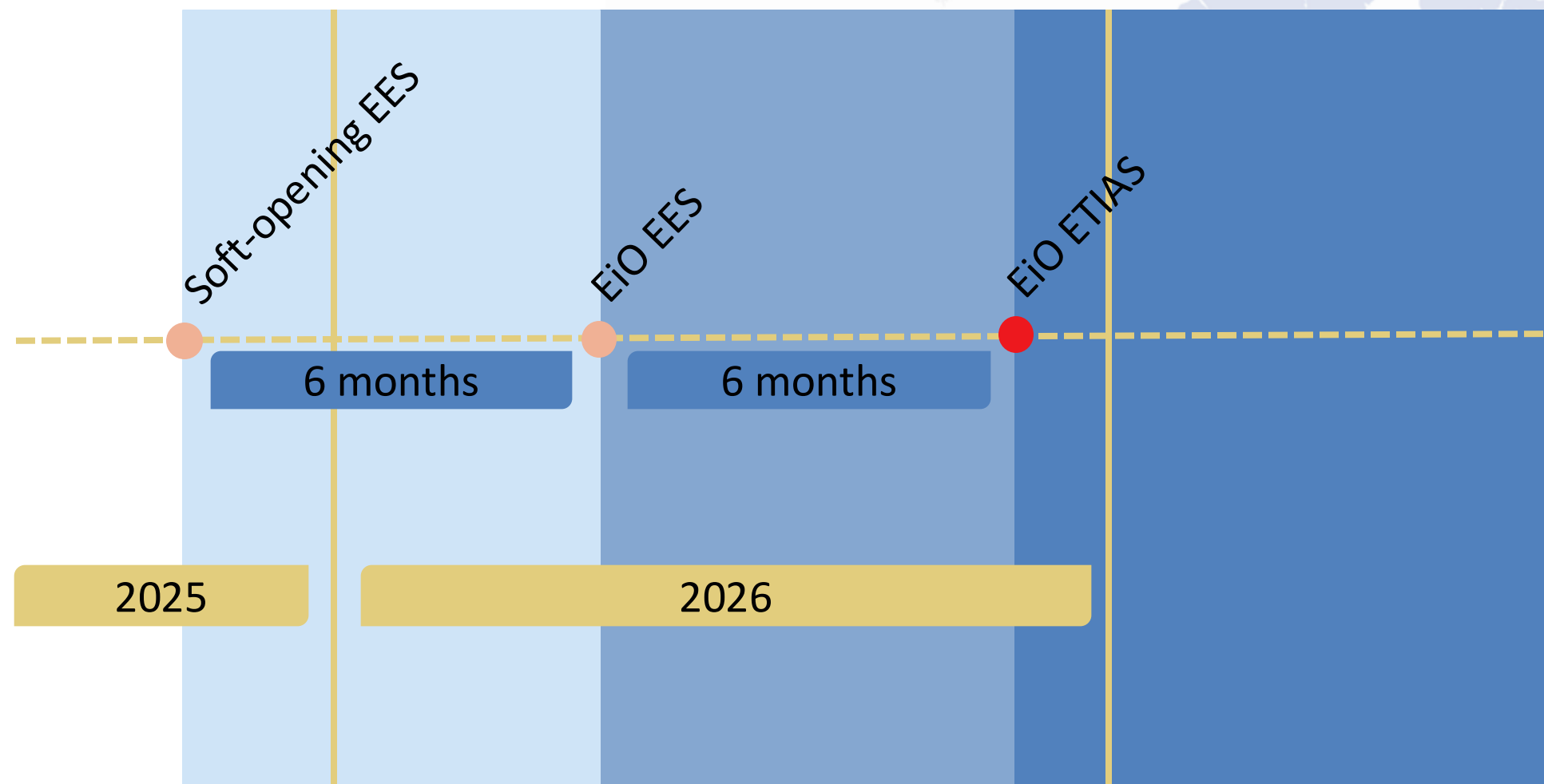


## European countries requiring ETIAS





## ETIAS timeline





## Who needs an ETIAS?

Third country nationals

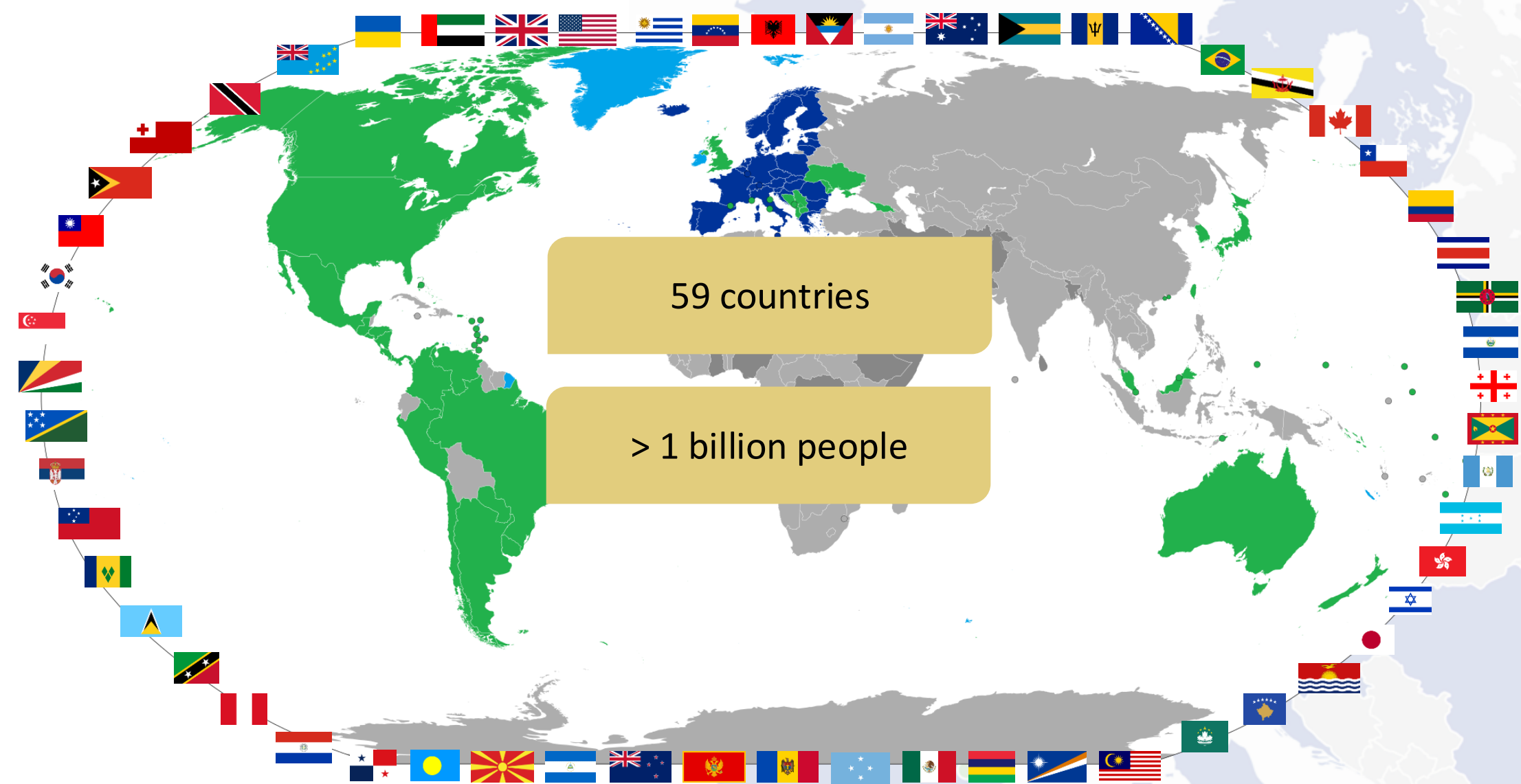
Visa required

Visa exempt

Visa

ETIAS





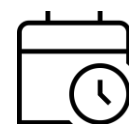


## Visa vs. ETIAS



90 €

20 €



various

3 years  
multiple entry

According to destination

According to hits in EU-  
systemsEmbassies, SEM,  
Migration Offices

National ETIAS-Unit



Case-by-case review

Manual verification for  
individual cases



## Exemptions from the ETIAS requirement

- Nationals of the UK who are beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement
- Nationals of Andorra, San Marino, Monaco, the Holy See or Ireland
- Refugees or stateless persons who hold a travel document issued by an European country requiring ETIAS
- Holder of residence permit or residence card issued by an European country requiring ETIAS
- Holder of a uniform visa, national long-stay visa or local border traffic permit
- Holder of a diplomatic, service or special passport
- Holder of a travel document issued by intergovernmental international organisations
- Intra-corporate transferees, students or researchers exercising their right to mobility according to EU legislation
- Member of the armed forces travelling on NATO or Partnership for Peace business

Exceptions may occur. Please always consult the EU website before travelling: <https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias>



# Application process



## What information will be required?







Online application form



Applicant information

Travel document review

Additional personal details

Family member



Member State of first intended stay

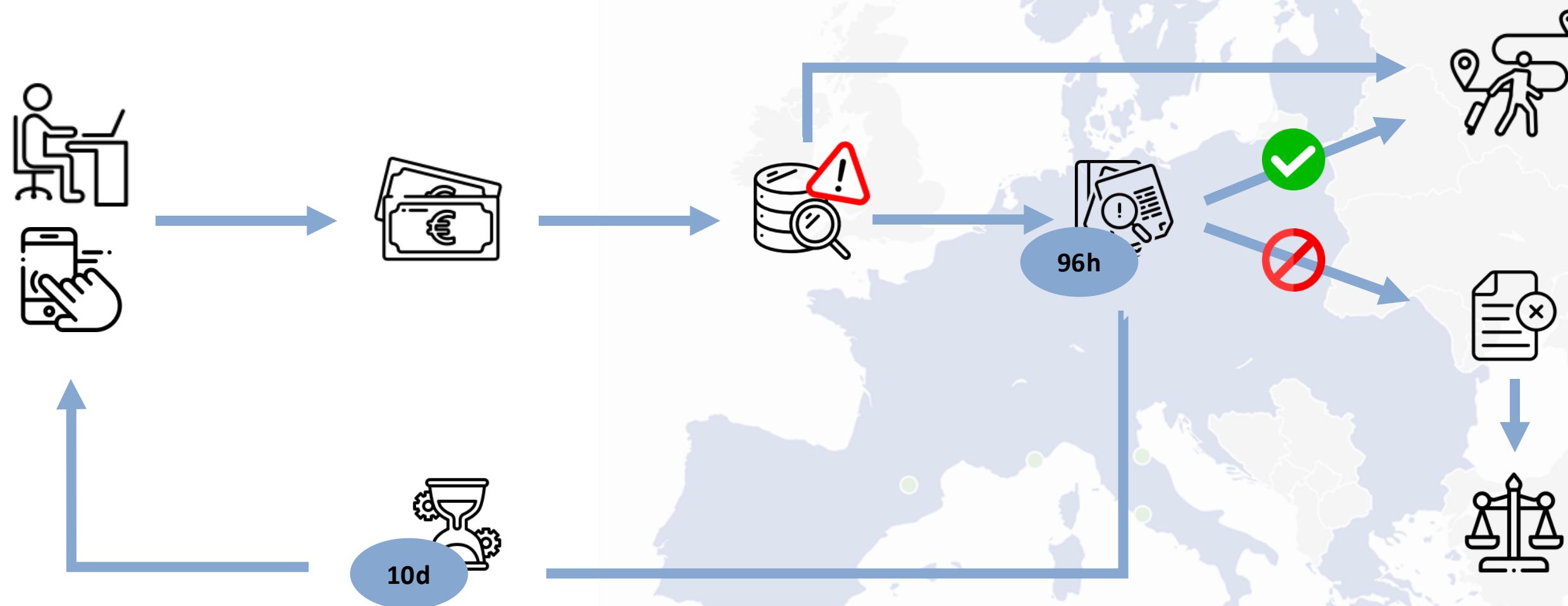
Terrorism and serious criminal offences

Past travel

Decisions to leave and return



## Processing of an ETIAS request





# Hit assessment / conflict and war zone stay



## Hits in EU systems and risk indicators

### Hits in EU systems

- ETIAS
- SIS
- EES
- VIS
- Eurodac
- Europol-Daten
- Interpol SLTD and TDAWN
- ETIAS-Watchlist

### Risk indicators

- Security risk
- Risk of illegal migration
- Health risk

### Additional questions

In the past 15 years:

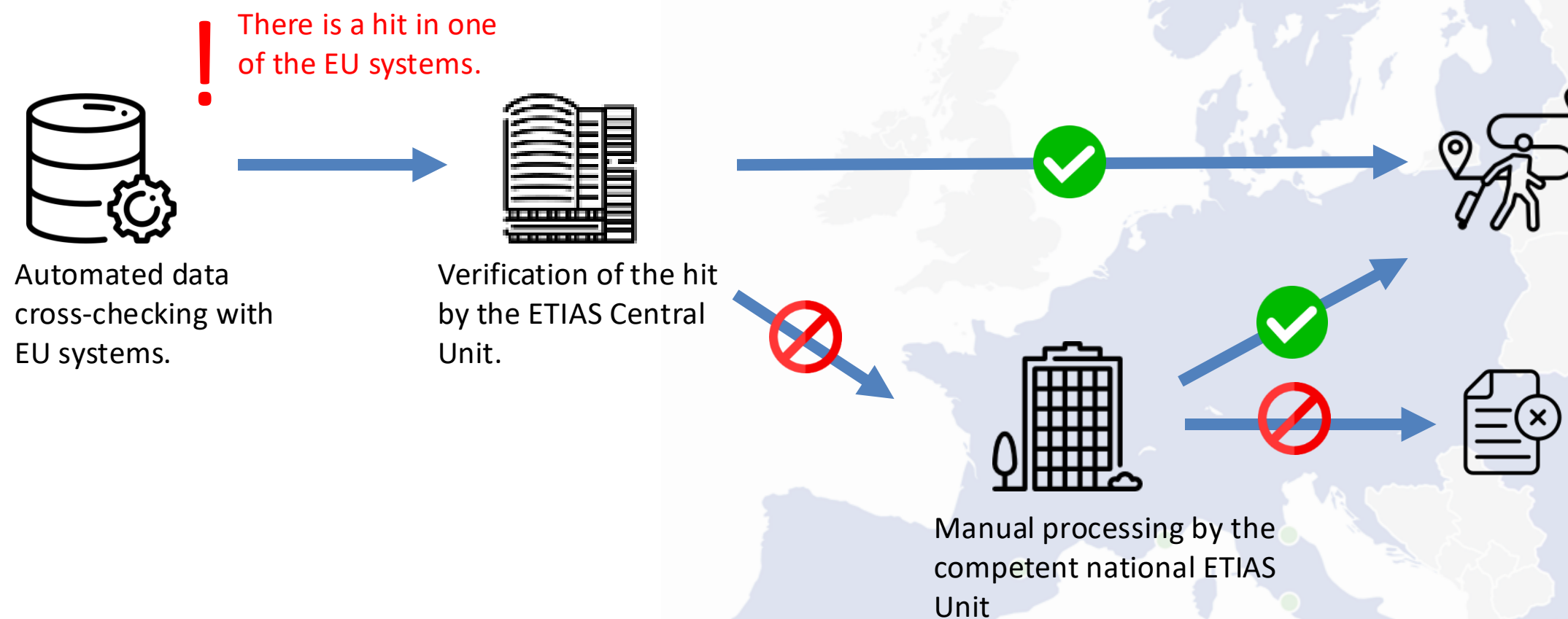
- Conviction for a criminal offence (terrorist offences 25 years)

In the past 10 years:

- Return or removal decision
- War zone stay

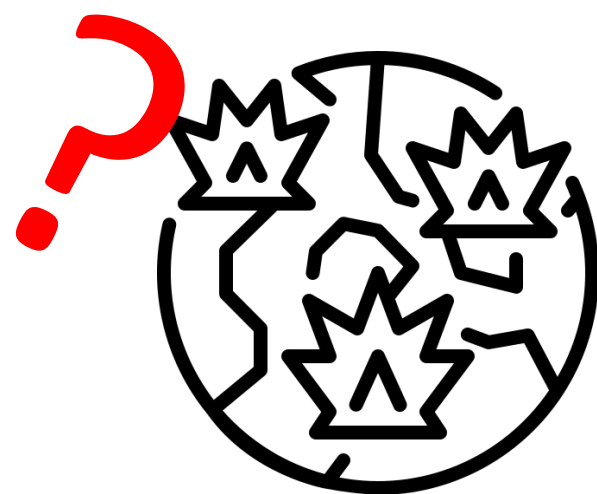


## Hit assessment process

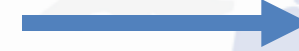




## Conflict and war zone stay



**YES**



Land and region

Period (from, till)

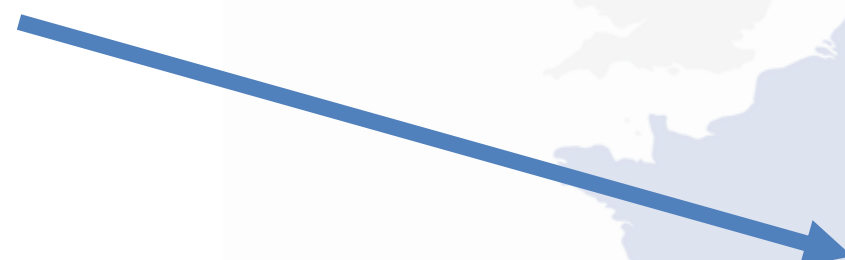
Reason of stay



# ETIAS with LTV



## ETIAS with limited territorial validity (LTV)





## Regular ETIAS vs. LTV



Tourism  
Business  
Official Travel



Humanitarian grounds  
Intern. obligations  
National interest



3 years



Max. 90 days

Member State with most  
recent hit

Country of destination



## Reasons for an LTV

### Humanitarian grounds

- Sudden serious illness or death of a close relative or other close person
- Need for urgent medical care

### National interest

- Members of a government with official reasons
- Participation in official talks
- Prominent figure with influence on Switzerland's international relations
- Proper conduct of court or arbitration proceedings

### International obligations

- Persons who are expected in an official capacity by an international organisation with its headquarters in Switzerland
- Persons who are expected in an official capacity by a diplomatic mission
- Persons with privileges or immunities



# Usefull links



## Useful links

**Official ETIAS website:** <https://travel-europe.europa.eu/en/etias>

**ETIAS FAQs:** <https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias/faq>

**ETIAS regulation:** <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1240/oj/eng>



# Q&A Session



Thank you for your attention.