Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Guidance on the implementation of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU, the facilitation of transit arrangements for the repatriation of EU citizens and the effects on visa policy.

On 16 March 2020, the European Commission (EC) adopted a Communication calling for a temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU in view of the coronavirus (COVID-19). In order to assist the member states in implementing these new rules, the EC adopted a guidance document last week providing information as follows:

- **The introduction of a temporary travel restriction applying to all non-essential travel from third countries to the EU+ area**:  
  o The guidance document clearly states that the temporary restriction should not apply to persons with an essential function or need, including transport personnel;  
  o Coordinated and reinforced health checks should be carried out for those individuals permitted to enter the EU+ area;  
  o Member states may limit the number of border crossing points which remain open to the categories of travellers still permitted to enter the Schengen area. This measure may help to ensure that the public health measures which were introduced in relation to the coronavirus (COVID-19) are fully respected and that there is a strengthened and focused control at the external border. The member states are requested to communicate the list of these border crossing points to the EC by 1 April 2020;  
  o Member states are also requested to find mutual agreement with their neighbouring third countries as to which land or maritime border crossings remain open for entry and/or exit checks. Member states are requested to communicate those agreements to the EC by 1 April 2020;  
  o In view of a possible limitation by the member states of the number of border crossing points open to travellers at the external borders, member states may refer to Article 9 of the Schengen Borders Code (temporary relaxation of border checks) which allows giving priority to entry over exit checks at the external borders. The member states should therefore take into account the measures proposed by the EC on the implementation of Green Lanes.

- **Minimum service in consulates for processing visa applications**:  
  o Most Schengen countries have suspended the processing of short-stay visa applications for non-essential travel. However, the Schengen countries’ consular authorities are invited to follow the guidelines on ‘minimum service’ for the processing of visa applications from specific categories of visa applicants during the coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency period;  
  o Despite the temporary partial closure of visa sections, the member states’ consulates (and possibly external service providers) should remain open and accept/deal with visa applications from those travellers who are exempt, including transport personnel;  
  o The general rules on the examination of applications for short-stay visas and airport transit visas (Visa Code) should be applied;

---

1 The EU+ area is defined by the European Commission as all Schengen member states (including Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania) as well as the four Schengen associated states (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Lichtenstein).
Validity of the issued visa: it is recommended that multiple entry visas and visas allowing for multiple airport transits are issued by default with a validity of minimum six months, and an authorised duration of stay of 90 days;

Visa holders should be reminded that they will be required to justify the purpose of their travel and present supporting documents at the border crossing point. They should also be informed of the fact that they need to undergo health screening as well as the possibility of further action upon their arrival in the EU (i.e. possibility of being subjected to self-isolation).

- Dealing with overstay caused by travel restrictions, including persons from visa waived third countries:
  - The stay of visa holders present in the Schengen area who cannot leave at the expiry of their short-stay visa may be extended up to a maximum stay of either 90/180 days by the designated member state authorities;
  - If visa holders are compelled to stay beyond the extended period of either 90/180 days, a national long-stay visa or a temporary residence permit should be issued by the competent national authorities;
  - For visa waiver third country nationals who are compelled to stay beyond the extended either 90/180 days, a national long-stay visa or a temporary residence permit should be issued by the competent national authorities;
  - Member states are encouraged to waive administrative sanctions or penalties on third country nationals unable to leave their territory due to the travel restrictions. Overstays due to travel restrictions should not be taken into account during the processing of future visa applications.