

REPORT: EUROPEAN BORDER CONTROL

Changing procedures for entering Europe and the U.K.

March 2025

Some important changes are now happening, which will affect individuals traveling from third countries to the European Union (EU) plus associated countries or the U.K. Travelers are finding they must provide more information and secure pre-trip authorization, where this may not have previously been required. It means extra administration and a modest cost for affected travelers.

This report outlines the key points of three new systems, which the authorities claim will simplify border crossings, whilst providing them with more detailed and accurate information about visitors: the U.K.'s Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) and the EU's European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and Entry/Exit System (EES).

Electronic Travel Authorisation

U.K. updates and extends travel authorization

Enhancing border security

The U.K. government started to roll out the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme with trials in October 2023 and February 2024. The ETA is intended to enhance border security by providing extra information about people seeking to visit the U.K., while preventing the arrival of anyone presenting a threat. Applicants need to provide passport and biometric details and answer questions to secure clearance to enter the U.K. Applications are entirely digital, conducted via the dedicated UK ETA mobile app online. [The ETA is digitally-linked to an applicant's passport.](#)

The ETA is replacing the existing Electronic Visa Waiver Scheme for short-stay visitors, but it's being [extended to include travelers from Europe and the U.S.](#), who currently do not need to apply for a visa to enter the U.K. The ETA does not apply to Irish nationals, as Ireland is part of the Common Travel Area (CTA). However, other travelers arriving in the U.K. via Ireland will remain subject to U.K. immigration rules, which now include the requirement for an ETA.¹

Who can apply for an ETA?

An ETA is not required by holders of a British, Irish or British overseas territories passport. Nor is it required by foreign nationals holding a visa or with permission to live, work or study in the U.K.

A trial version of the ETA launched in [October 2023](#), when Qatari visitors needed to use it to enter the U.K. The trial was extended to other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E.), although Jordan was subsequently removed from this list. Jordanian nationals now booking travel to the U.K. must now apply for a [visa to visit](#).

¹ [BTN Europe](#), March 10, 2023

More nationalities are now being added to the ETA scheme.² From [January 8, 2025](#), citizens from 49 additional countries (including associated territories) need an ETA.³ The [list of impacted countries](#) includes Australia, Brazil, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and the U.S.

From [March 5, 2025](#), nationals from a further [34 European countries and territories](#) have been able to apply for an ETA for travel from [April 2, 2025](#). The list includes most European Union countries (excluding Ireland), EFTA members and various microstates.

Any nationalities not listed cannot get an ETA and should [check to see if a visa is required](#) instead.

It currently costs a non-refundable [£10](#) to apply for an ETA, comparable to similar schemes (US\$21 for a U.S. ESTA, €7 for the EU's ETIAS). To reduce the reliance on taxpayer funding of the immigration and borders system, there are plans to increase the cost of an ETA to [£16](#), but a date has yet to be agreed for the increase, which requires parliamentary approval.⁴

Decisions on ETA applications should normally take no longer than three working days. The ETA enables [multiple visits to the U.K. over a 24-month period](#). If a traveler's passport expires during this time, they must apply for a new ETA on their new passport. An ETA does not guarantee entry to the U.K.

When to use an ETA

An ETA can be obtained instead of a visa if a traveler is:

- Visiting the U.K. for a period of up to 6 months for tourism, visiting family and friends, business or short-term study
- Coming to the U.K. for up to 3 months on the Creative Worker visa concession
- Coming to the U.K. for a permitted paid engagement

Any travelers visiting the U.K. for any other reason should check to see if they need a visa instead.

Transiting through a U.K. airport

Contrary to original U.K. government advice, travelers no longer need an ETA if transiting through a U.K. airport without passing through border control; in other words, when making an airside transfer. For landside transfers, where a traveler will enter the U.K., even if for a short period of time, an ETA will be required (if applicable).⁵

What you cannot do with an ETA

The ETA does not allow visitors to stay in the U.K. for longer than 6 months. What's more, travelers cannot use frequent or successive visits to effectively live in the U.K. Whilst in the U.K. on an ETA, visitors cannot do paid or unpaid work for a U.K. company or on a self-employed basis, unless specifically permitted on the Creative Worker visa concession. Anyone using an ETA to visit the U.K. may not claim public benefits, marry or register a civil partnership, or give notice of marriage or civil partnership.

² [Gov.UK](#), August 30, 2023

³ [Gov. UK](#), September 10, 2024

⁴ [Gov. UK](#), ETA factsheet – January 2025

⁵ [Gov. UK](#), February 26, 2025

European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)

New visa scheme for non-EU nationals

Applies to Schengen area, EFTA and microstates

As part of its efforts to strengthen its border security, whilst digitally screening and tracking travelers entering and leaving European Union (EU) countries, the European Commission (EC) is introducing the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) for visitors from countries that are not currently part of the EU.⁶ It will apply to travel to all current EU Schengen member states plus any future members. It will also cover entry to European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, and to European microstates with open borders including Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City.

Travel authorization, not a visa

The ETIAS will check security credentials and charge a €7 (US\$7.48) per person fee for anyone visiting EU member states for business, tourism, medical or transit purposes. The ETIAS is not a visa; rather [it is a visa-waiver](#). Like the ESTA required by U.S. authorities, the ETIAS will act as a travel authorization for travelers not requiring a visa to visit Europe. It will simply demand additional security checks before permitting entry to the EU. A valid ETIAS authorization [does not guarantee entry](#).

An ETIAS will be [mandatory](#) for citizens of non-EU countries who do not currently need a visa to visit the EU. People from as many as 60 countries will in future need to apply for an ETIAS. Citizens from countries on an approved list, which includes Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S., will be able to apply for the ETIAS a minimum of [96 hours](#) before expected travel.

In the case of the U.K, the ETIAS will be required for British citizens, as well as for British nationals (Overseas), British Overseas Territories citizens (BOTC), British overseas citizens (BOC), British protected persons (BPP) and British subjects (BS).

Anyone required to have an approved ETIAS, who arrives in the EU without one, will be turned away at the border or will be denied boarding at the departure airport/port. Applicants still waiting for a decision on their ETIAS will also not be allowed to enter the EU. However, it seems that anyone entering an ETIAS country by land or by rail, will initially not require authorization. EU nationals and persons with a residence permit, card or document issued by any EU country will be [exempt](#) from ETIAS.

ETIAS applications

Because of delays to the EES Entry-Exit System (see below), which needs to be operational before ETIAS can be implemented, ETIAS has itself been subject to a series of delays. According to the EU Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, the launch of ETIAS will take place “a few months” after the introduction of the EES. Following yet another postponement beyond a planned mid-2025 implementation, ETIAS is not now expected until the [end of 2025](#), or may even be [delayed into 2026](#).⁷

After its eventual initial launch, ETIAS will be implemented gradually. Travelers should enjoy a transitional period of at least six months. While expected to apply for an ETIAS during this time, travelers arriving without one will not be refused entry, as long as they fulfil the remaining EU entry requirements, such as a valid passport. The transition period will give the EU time to iron out any operational issues. There will also be a separate grace period of at least six months, which applies only to those travelers visiting the EU for the first time since the end of the transitional period.⁸

⁶ [ETIAS](#)

⁷ [Schengen News](#), February 20, 2025

⁸ [European Union](#), ETIA timeline explained

ETIAS applications may only be made online using either the official ETIA [website](#) or the official mobile app. This should take less than 10 minutes, with a decision typically provided [within 96 hours](#) or less. Applicants will need a machine-readable or electronic passport, which will need to be valid for more than three months from the intended day of departure from the EU and be no older than 10 years from the date of issue. Biometric passports should be sufficient for most travelers, but visitors from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Georgia, Hong Kong S.A.R., Macao S.A.R., Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Taiwan and Ukraine may face some restrictions.⁹

Once issued, the ETIAS will be valid for [three years](#), or until the date of passport expiry (whichever comes first). It can be used for stays of up to 90 days in a 180 day period.

Entry/Exit System

Automated registration system

Manual system for arrivals from third countries to be replaced

The Entry/Exit System (EES) will automate the registration of non-EU nationals each time they cross an external border of the European Union (EU).¹⁰ It will cover both short-stay visa holders and visa-exempt travelers, i.e., those who do not need a visa to stay for a maximum of 90 days in any 180-day period. Affected travelers will [need a biometric passport to use the EES](#).

The EES will [not apply](#) to:

- Nationals of European countries using the EES, including Bulgaria and Romania, as well as Croatia, Cyprus and Ireland
- Non-EU nationals holding residence cards/permits, and who are immediately related to an EU national or a non-EU national allowed to travel throughout Europe like an EU citizen
- Non-EU nationals arriving as part of an intra-corporate transfer or for the purposes of research, study/education, training, voluntary service and au-pairing
- Holders of residence permits and long-stay visas
- Nationals of Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City
- Anyone exempt from cross-border checks or holding local border traffic permits
- Anyone holding a Facilitated Rail Transit Document or Facilitated Transit Document

The EES will record an individual's name, type of travel document, biometric data (fingerprints and facial images, which could be done in advance using self-service systems at some border crossing points) and the date and place of entry and exit. It will also record any refusals of entry into the EU. The European Commission (EC) claims the EES will fully respect fundamental rights and data protection.

The EES will replace the existing system of manually stamping passports, which is time consuming, fails to provide reliable data on border crossings and is less effective at detecting travelers exceeding the maximum duration of their authorized stay. The EES should also be more effective in identifying cases of document and identity fraud.

Genuine arrivals from third countries should benefit from faster border crossings, particularly since the introduction of the EES will facilitate wider adoption of self-service systems.

⁹ [European Union](#), What you need to apply

¹⁰ [European Commission](#), Migration and Home Affairs, EES

The EES was originally expected to be operational by the [end of May 2023](#). The launch date was subsequently pushed back to November 10, 2024 by the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs.¹¹ With France, Germany and the Netherlands struggling to have their border control systems ready in time, implementation of the EES has since been postponed yet again, throwing the ETIAS timetable into disarray, especially since a revised launch date has yet to be advised.¹² The EU is currently aiming for EES implementation "later in 2025," and it will announce the date several months prior to its launch.

More information about EES can be found on the dedicated [Entry/Exit System](#) website.

Get extra support from BCD's marketplace partners

Obtaining and managing vital travel documents has never been easier

BCD Travel has partnered with three companies, which can help travelers obtain and manage their vital travel documents.

VisaHQ provides an end-to-end solution to streamline the entire visa and passport application process. Using automated technology, travelers can research, apply for and manage travel documents entirely online via a secure platform.

CIBTvisas offers visa, passport and global mobility solutions to assist travelers with obtaining travel visas to over 200 countries. With a customized web portal they provide travelers with simple and up-to-date instructions on how to get a travel visa and passport, making frequent international travel hassle free.

G3 Global Services specializes in U.S. passports, global travel visas, e-Visas, and document authentication. Its hands-on service approach and white-glove service offers personalized assistance and support for every individual traveler. Each G3 client is assigned a dedicated global support team to ensure every detail is taken care of; keeping businesses focused on where the world takes their employees.

For more information on Visa & Passport Services solutions for your travel program please visit the [Visa & Passport Services category](#) on the BCD marketplace.

The information presented in this report represents the latest view as at [March 3, 2025](#). We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please email mike.eggleton@bcdtravel.co.uk to share your thoughts.

¹¹ [Schengen News](#), Aug. 19, 2024

¹² [ETIAS.com](#), Oct. 11, 2024