

Delay in European Electronic Entry Program and European Travel Information and Authorization System

The start dates for the two new systems that the European Union plans to use to regulate incoming tourists have both been delayed. The delays involve both the Electronic Entry System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS). The systems are currently delayed until at least April 2025 due to technical challenges among some European Union states.

EES will operate at airports and other areas where tourists normally must show their passports. It will replace entry stamps and operates digitally, allowing for better tracking of arrival and departure dates. EES is a digital, on-arrival registration system and will be in operation in 30 countries in Europe. It will apply to all non-EU citizens, including Americans, unless they are ordinary residents with an alien resident permit or long-term visa. U.S. military and civilian personnel and their dependents on orders should be exempt from the system, but it will apply to their family members from the U.S. who come to Europe to visit.

ETIAS is a completely different system that will require travelers to the European Union to register online and obtain travel authorization BEFORE their arrival. The United States already has such a system, called ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization). Like the EES, ETIAS should not apply to U.S. Forces personnel and their dependents stationed in Europe on orders, but will apply to family from the U.S. who come to Europe to visit.

The European Union has consistently stated that EES and ETIAS are intended to address SHORT-TERM (normally not to exceed 90 days) stays of persons who do not have an independent basis for remaining within Europe. The system in its present form does not take into consideration persons with SOFA status who remain in countries where they or their sponsors are stationed for extended periods. The European Union has advised us that military service members (active duty personnel) will be granted exemption to EES/ETIAS requirements for travel to and from their country of assignment. That partial exemption does not contemplate travel to or from other countries for the purposes of leave and liberty or travel into or out of Europe for government civilians, dependents, or DoD contractors. In view of these issues, a recommended change to the DoD Foreign Clearance Guide will require SOFA identification to be issued to incoming civilian and dependent personnel prior to their arrival reflecting their SOFA status in the country where they or their sponsors are stationed. This SOFA ID would be carried with their passports. Such a system is already in effect in Germany.

While military personnel should be exempt from both systems when they report to a duty station in Europe, the new systems may pose problems when they attempt to travel elsewhere in Europe on leave or pass. For example, a Soldier assigned to a unit in Germany who travels for a day to Strasbourg, France, will be in violation of the EES

when she crosses the border with her U.S. tourist passport. EES exists only at external European borders. While the soldier was exempt upon her initial arrival in Germany, there is no way for her to register in EES prior to travel or upon crossing the border into France. If that soldier encountered law enforcement during her trip, that soldier would be subject criminal sanctions. The U.S. Department of State is currently working with the European Union on this issue.

The United Kingdom is no longer part of the EU and has already come up with a program of its own that requires travelers to obtain an Electronic Travel Authorization prior to travel. This program became effective for U.S. citizens on January 8, 2025. If you are going as a tourist to Britain, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-when-you-can-get-an-electronic-travel-authorisation-eta>.