

Beware of risks posed by unofficial ETIAS websites

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The rules of visa-free travel to Europe will change in the first half of 2025. With the introduction of ETIAS, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System, visa-free travellers will have to apply for a travel authorisation before starting their journey to any of the 30 European countries participating in the scheme.

As the launch of the system is getting closer, ensuring that the public is aware of the new travel requirements and of how to apply for their ETIAS travel authorisation is key. Visa-free travellers will be able to apply for their travel authorisations on the EU's official ETIAS website europa.eu/etias. However, Frontex has also identified over 100 unofficial websites that currently provide information on ETIAS to non-EU travellers. While some of these websites are run by legitimate businesses, others may be less trustworthy.

"We are aware of several sites that claim to already accept ETIAS applications. Travellers should be very cautious about those websites, as it is not currently possible to apply for an official ETIAS travel authorisation since the system is not operational yet," warns Francois Laruelle, Director of the ETIAS Central Unit Division at Frontex.

While commercial intermediaries will be able to apply for the travel authorisation on behalf of their clients, travellers are advised to be careful who they share their personal data with. The risks posed by dubious third parties range from identity theft to charging extortionate fees and data protection concerns. Many of the unofficial websites identified by Frontex also provide wrong information about whom ETIAS applies to and on the application process.

Some of the unofficial websites use various techniques to seem trustworthy – they may mimic the layout of the official ETIAS website, use domain names that seem official, or use copyrighted EU materials. The best way to avoid high fees, fraud, and misinformation regarding the new travel requirement to Europe is to consult europa.eu/etias, the only official ETIAS website.

Frontex, together with three other EU institutions and 30 European countries, is currently preparing for the launch of ETIAS, which will affect 1.4 billion potential travellers from around 60 visa-free

countries. It will carry out a pre-travel risk screening of incoming visa-free travellers, further strengthening Europe's internal security while reducing administrative burden at border crossing points.

Once the system launches next year, the ETIAS Central Unit hosted by Frontex will be operational 24/7 to support travellers and carriers and to process ETIAS applications.