COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 7 February 2003

6183/03

SCH-EVAL 7
VISA 27
COMIX 83

NOTE

from :	General Secretariat
to :	Working Party Schengen Evaluation
No. prev. doc. :	15548/02 SCH-EVAL 45 VISA 184 COMIX 712 5398/03 SCH-EVAL 2 VISA 12 COMIX 29
Subject :	Catalogue of recommendations for the correct application of the Schengen acquis and best practices: Issuing of visa

PART FOUR: ISSUING OF VISA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **3**

RECOMMENDATIONS/BEST PRACTICES **4**

1. ACCESS TO THE CONSULATE 4
2. SECURITY OF THE BUILDING 6
3. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS 8
4. PROCESSING THE APPLICATION 9
5. FILLING IN THE VISA STICKER 12
6. NOTIFICATION OF REFUSAL 13
7. SECURITY (THE SECURITY ASPECTS OF THE BUILDING ARE DEALT WITH IN CHAPTER 2) 14
8. EDUCATION AND TRAINING 17
9. IT IN GENERAL 18
10. EQUIPMENT FOR DETECTING FALSE DOCUMENTS 19
11. VISA ISSUED IN REPRESENTATION 20
12. CONSULAR COOPERATION 21

Introduction

The list of recommendations and best practices set out in this document has been established by visa experts from the Schengen States (cf. below) and from the European Commission on the basis of the Common Consular Instructions (CCI) . Furthermore the results of recent evaluations of various consulates have served as a valuable basis for the work.

The legal framework for the processing of visa applications remains the CCI, but the aim of the "best practices" exercise is to deepen harmonisation of practices, where possible, and where the provisions of the CCI are of a more general nature.

The recommendations and best practices have been drawn up for a fictitious consular representation which has a large number of applications in a high risk area. Although it may be difficult to achieve this standard worldwide, it is recommended, while, taking into account the varying local circumstances, to keep and observe these standards as far as possible.

The question of compulsory insurance, be it health or travel insurance, is not listed in this catalogue as a recent survey has established that no best practice exists in this area at the moment.

As the local consular cooperation is an important source of information, it is recommended that initiatives taken and experience gained with these best practices within the local consular cooperation be reported to the central authorities, so that they can serve as a basis for improvement and adaptation of current legislation.

In the following "Schengen States"/"States" shall mean the States applying in full the provisions of the Schengen acquis.

Recommendations/Best practices

Recommendations	Best practices
1. Access to the consulate	
a. Written information To avoid the submission of incomplete visa applications and repeated visits to the visa section by applicants, the relevant information should be disseminated as widely as possible. Besides general information about the Schengen visa, information on how to apply should be available in several languages, including at least the language of the host country and of the mission. This information should be widely available and visibly displayed outside the building or precincts.	Leaflets providing guidance to applicants are available in sufficient quantity at all relevant contact points in the host country and also published on the mission's website, if any. They give details of: - the different categories of visas - the visa section's address and telephone/ fax numbers. - opening hours - which country is responsible for issuing which visas (in accordance with the CCI) - fees to be paid for the processing of any visa application, their amount, and the moment at which they must be paid. It is explicitly indicated that no other fee is due, and that in the event of refusal the fee is not reimbursed - when the visa advice helpline, if any, is available.
b. Contact by telephone Information concerning visa should as far as possible be given only by visa section staff, either via a helpline operating at fixed hours or an answering machine providing information in different languages.	A multiple-choice telephone system is installed, where technically feasible, allowing callers to request by touchtone or voice-command information in different languages relevant to their specific travel plans.
c. Application forms To avoid trading in application forms, these should be widely available free of charge at the offices of travel agencies and airlines, as well as at offices representing business associations, cultural institutes etc.	Application forms are available from relevant contact points and institutions in the host country and also accessible online, allowing applicants to fill in and send in their forms electronically prior to presenting themselves in person at the visa section.
Examples of correctly filled in forms are on display (and where possible published on the Internet).	Examples of correctly filled in forms are displayed as a guide to applicants.

Recommendations	Best practices
d. Signs and notices Notices should be put up informing visitors that there are no charges - e.g. for admission or application forms - other than the fees to be paid at the visa counter. There should also be signs to guide visitors to the right entrance or counter.	At the entrance to the representation and also at the entrance to the visa section additional notices are displayed, informing visitors in the language of the host country. The representation informs applicants about the fees to be paid for the processing of the visa application, their amount, and the moment at which they must be paid. It is also explicitly indicated that no other fee is due, and that in the event of refusal the fee is not reimbursed. Signs or a member of the representations' local staff or security staff guide visa applicants to the right entrance and, in large visa sections, to the right queue. Information should be published in the local press about peak periods in order to invite applicants to apply for a visa outside these busy periods.
e. Pre-check of applications Forms handed in by waiting applicants should be checked by a member of the representation's local staff or security staff to ensure that they are filled in correctly, duly signed and accompanied by the necessary documents.	In large visa sections preliminary check of forms filled in by waiting applicants is carried out. In smaller visa sections with sufficient staff and facilities, all applicants presenting themselves during opening hours are allowed to hand in their applications. In medium-sized visa sections a number system is established, whereby applicants receive an "appointment number" when the application is handed in. Strong efforts are made to prevent trading in numbers. Where very large numbers of visa applicants have to be dealt with, an appointment system is set up. The deadline for obtaining appointments is to be agreed upon within the framework of local consular co-operation to avoid creating" visa shopping".

Recommendations	Best practices
f. Access management Long queues outside the visa section should be avoided as well as jostling for or trading in places in the queue.	Staff and technical facilities are sufficient to allow all applicants presenting themselves during opening hours to hand in their applications without having to wait longer than is locally customary.
2. Security of the building	
a. Security features	
1) Outside the building - In large visa sections without an appointment system movable barriers may be used to ensure orderly queuing. Assistance from local police forces should be sought and a rotation scheme for these officers should be established. - It is recommended that the staff can enter/leave the visa section building through a separate entrance/exit. **2) Waiting room** In some cases waiting rooms may be inside the embassy building, with no separate entrance or no possibility of separate, supervised access to different parts of the building. In such cases security checks on visitors and their belongings must be carried out at the entrance. Wherever possible, contacts between visa section staff and visitors should take place at counters fitted with glass screens. At the end of opening hours, the waiting room should be checked by a security officer for any objects that have been left behind. It is advisable where possible that there is a clear separation between the waiting room and the counters	- The waiting room for visitors to the visa section is easily accessible through a separate entrance. - Where the waiting room has no separate entrance, there must be no connecting door between the waiting room and the visa section.

Recommendations	Best practices
3) Visa counters	
- Counters should be fitted with safety glass screens, allowing documents to be handed over without any danger to staff and permitting easy yet discreet communication. - There should be a system to ensure that applicants are dealt with in accordance with the appointment list or in the order in which they arrive.	- Bullet-resistant plate glass is used. - Underneath the screen counters are fitted with draught-proof bullet-resistant pass-throughs suitable for documents in A4 format. - Appropriate equipment is installed to permit easy, yet discreet communication, e.g. an intercom system with a microphone and loudspeaker or headphones for the visa section officer, and a microphone (incorporated in the screen so as not to be covered by documents), headphones or telephone receiver for the visitor. - Between the counters there are sound-absorbing partitions up to roughly head height. - A discretion zone is clearly marked in front of each counter. - In certain countries special measures are to be taken for cases requiring particular discretion (a cubicle with its own door and seats for visitors). - To ensure that applications are processed in the correct order, applicants can be called in e.g. over a loudspeaker installed in the waiting room or by their number being shown on a display operated by the visa officer. - Ground-floor windows are barred. - Appropriate alarm systems are in place. - Access takes place through a single or double-door system that can only be operated by remote control.
4) The building itself	
- The building should be protected against burglary and other acts of violence. - A lock-type access control system should be installed at the entrance. - Equipment should be available to allow for security checks to be carried out on visitors and their belongings (see above). - Visitors should walk through a metal detector portal or at least be checked by a portable detector.	

Recommendations	Best practices
b. Security checks	
1) Outside the visa section - Visitors should walk through a metal detector portal or at least be checked by a portable detector. - Security checks of visitors and their belongings should be carried out, at least at random, at the entrance prior to admission - Visitors entering the building should be received/fetched by staff. **2) Access to the main building** Visitors entering the building should be received by staff.	Local security officers, recruited directly or recruited from a local security company, are responsible for ensuring order in the visa section's precincts.
3. Submission of applications	
a. Personal appearance	As a general rule, each applicant appears in person for the interview at the consular representation. This also applies to minors and persons under custody, and any other persons included in the passport of the main applicant.
b. Diplomatic and service visas	Diplomatic and service visas should only be affixed in Diplomatic and Service passports for official trips. Only in the cases where diplomatic and service passports do not exist, can these visas be affixed in other types of passports.

Recommendations	Best practices
4. Processing the application	
a. Lodging of an application On 1.1.2003 the Council Decision on a harmonised application form for a Schengen visa enters into force cf. CCI, Annex 16 (cf. Council Decision 25 April 2002 on the adaptation of Part III of, and the creation of an Annex 16 to, the Common Consular Instructions (2002/354/EC)).	The harmonised form is translated into the principal languages of the countries where applications are lodged. The form is translated within the framework of local consular cooperation. The harmonised form shall be available on-line. Representations shall accept harmonised forms from other Schengen States.
The length of visit requested should correspond to the purpose of the visit. The replies to the questions on the form should be complete and coherent.	The form is filled in in detail (e.g. the applicant must give a full address of reference persons). The form is signed personally by the applicant who is responsible for the correctness of the information. If the applicant is a minor or disabled, the form is signed by his legal representative.
The form shall include an identity photograph of the visa applicant and shall indicate, as far as possible, the main destination of the visit.	It is checked that the photograph submitted with the application or which is in the passport : • is an actual photo of the applicant • is a colour photo • has a light background • is a close up photo sufficiently clear for details to be seen • is taken full face • is 3.5 by 4.5 cm • is a recent photo • is taken without headgear • allows for the main characteristics of the person's face to become clear. Chin, nose, cheekbones, eyes and eyebrows must not be covered. The forehead should be uncovered so that the shape of the face is apparent. A fee must be paid when a visa application is lodged, covering the processing of the application. The applicant receives a receipt and he/she is reminded that in the event of refusal, the fee is not reimbursed.

Recommendations	Best practices
b. Examination of visa applications	It is checked whether the applicant stays or resides legally in the country in which the application is lodged. Special attention is paid to persons : - whose passport contains an application stamp, an indication regarding deportation, an annulled residence permit, an exit deadline or a registered exit. - who apply for a transit visa via the Schengen territory, where the entry into the third country is not guaranteed or where the transit does not naturally lead through the territory of the Schengen States. - who submit recommendations or invitations from companies, organisations, associations etc., that are not known by the representation or the credibility which is not generally established. - who can be assumed not to be able to pay for their stay themselves or who do not have a sponsor - who are holders of Alien's Passports, refugee documents or other travel documents which are not passports. - who apply for a visa for a longer period than seems necessary for the stated purpose of the visit. - who are known or suspected to be involved in criminal activities, and/or who under the circumstances it can be assumed to commit a crime or engage in prostitution after their entry. In cases of doubt, applicants are asked to present a criminal record. - for whom the representation, after considering their background, the purpose of their visit and their financial situation, cannot establish that they are not likely to cause disturbance of public order and to return before the visa has expired. Attention is paid to the applicant's links to his/her home country or country of residence, e.g. family relations, property, employment.

Recommendations	Best practices
c. Verification of documents	
The mission shall mark non-official documents in order to avoid them being re-used.	Supporting documents are thoroughly checked and documents (or copies thereof) relating to the decision on the issuance of the visa are kept in the file. If appropriate, locally issued documents are verified by relevant local bodies. In order to improve the detection of false and falsified documents, information is exchanged within the framework of consular cooperation. If possible and/or applicable, representations contact local authorities, banks etc where false and falsified documents are detected.
d. Types of visa	
	The visa issued must correspond to the profile and the needs of the applicant in order to avoid misuse of the visa, to anticipate/avoid unnecessary repeated applications and unnecessary issuance of LTVs as an emergency procedure. Where the profile and need of the applicant clearly indicates that more than two entries will be necessary within the duration/validity, the visa is issued as a multiple entry visa with a duration corresponding to the needs of the applicant. Multi-entry visas of long validity are not be issued to first-time applicants. Attention is also to be paid to the correct use of previously issued Schengen visas and to entry and exit stamps.
e. Filing	
Where a visa has been issued, the application should be kept for at least one year after the visa has expired and for at least five years in cases where a visa has been refused.	Visa applications are filed in the files of the consular representation. All pages of the visa application are filed. If the staff does not have electronic access to the file, when the visa has been issued, a copy of the visa sticker is kept in the file at the representation. Supporting documents (originals or copies) are kept in the files.

Recommendations	Best practices
5. Filling in the visa sticker	
a. General In general, visas can be issued at the earliest 3 months before the beginning of its validity. The visa sticker should be filled in before being affixed to the passport. The stamp and the signature should be placed on the sticker once it has been affixed to the passport or travel document. Under the national entries section, there is a section which is meant to be electronically scanned. This section is made up of two lines of 36 characters. The font used (OCRB 1) allows optical reading with specific equipment used at external borders so as to facilitate control. Only diplomatic and consular missions having the necessary computer equipment can print the electronically scanned section. No entries may be made into this section. **b. Machine readable zone** The machine readable zone shall be filled in by all "Schengen representations". The control number should be entered into the visa sticker in accordance with the ICAO recommendations. **c. Use of the stamp of the issuing authority** If used, the stamp, should be affixed in the rectangle between the left-hand side of the sticker and the section "Comments" and the rotogravure section and the section to be electronically scanned. In respect of stickers containing a photograph, the stamp should be placed at the right-hand side of the heading "Comments"; part of the stamp should extend onto the page of the passport or travel document. The size and content of the stamp and the ink to be used should be determined by the national provisions of the Schengen States.	The printer used for printing out the visa sticker must allow high-quality reproduction of a colour photograph (at the latest from 3.6.07). The visa sticker is placed on the page of the passport so that it covers the identification stamp of the application. The page must be free from any other entries or stamps. In the case of technical problems, the sticker is filled in manually.

Recommendations	Best practices
d. Signature In cases where the law or practice of a Schengen State requires a signature the sticker affixed to the page of the passport should be signed by the official responsible in this regard. The signature is placed at the right-hand side of the heading "Comments"; part of the signature should extend onto the page of the passport or the travel document, but it must not cover the section to be electronically scanned.	Specimen signatures of the officers authorised to sign visa are kept by the central administration of the Member State concerned from the beginning of their employment period
e. Delivery of visas granted The passport or travel document should be returned to the applicant in person or handed to a person or travel agency authorised by the applicant to that effect.	The diplomatic or consular representation makes sure that the passport and travel documents are returned to their rightful holder.
f. Destruction of visa When a visa sticker is destroyed, the OVD-Kinegram should be destroyed. If an error is detected when the sticker has been affixed to the passport, the OVD-Kinegram should also be destroyed.	All information on invalidated and destroyed visas must be entered into the visa register. The information must be available in the common visa system
6. Notification of refusal	
	The applicant is notified of a refusal either verbally or in writing within a reasonable time, in accordance with the provisions of national law. The legal reasons and reasons of substance that have justified the decision on rejecting the applicant are given in accordance with the provisions of the CCI. Information on the possibilities of appeal (administrative and judicial) is given with indication of the deadline for lodging an appeal. Information is given as to whether an applicant who has been refused a visa can submit a second application if an appeal has been lodged against the decision on the first application and the decision on that appeal is pending.

Recommendations	Best practices
	In the case of refusal motivated by a "SIS alert", reference is made to the existence of a "SIS alert" If the applicant requests further information on the data relating to himself that is processed in the SIS, information is provided about the competent data protection authority. The reasons for refusing a visa to a family member of a EU/EEA citizen must be communicated to the person concerned, unless this is contrary to the interests of the security of the state involved (Directive 64/221, Article 6).
7. Security (the security aspects of the building are dealt with in chapter 2)	
a. Staff	
1) Division of tasks between expatriate staff and local staff The tasks are clearly divided between the expatriate staff and the local staff: *Local staff* may*:* • work at the counter and have contact with the applicants with supervision by an expatriate • check whether the documents presented are complete • prepare the electronic processing of the application (e.g. insert data into database) • print the sticker • hand out the visas and cash the visa and/or handling fee For security reasons a rotation scheme for local staff should be established. *Expatriate and local staff with EU/EEA nationality* may*:* • receive negative answers from the SIS and national databases • receive negative answers to CCI-Annex 5 consultations • decide whether further information or interview is required	

Recommendations	Best practices
Expatriate staff may*:* • decide whether a visa is granted or refused • carry out contact to local partners, if necessary in particular cases	
2) Checks upon recruitment and further evaluation	
	All staff are checked before being recruited, as a minimum their criminal record is verified, by national services of the recruiting State In the case of doubt concerning the loyalty of an employee, new checks are carried out.
3) Misuse of professional position	
Local staff misusing their professional position should be removed from the visa section or fired, depending on the gravity of the misuse. If possible and/or applicable a report to local law enforcement should be made. *Expatriate staff* misusing their professional position should be subject to disciplinary or judicial procedures in cooperation with the respective national authorities.	
4) Unauthorised contacts with local authorities and links to criminal organisations	
	Unauthorised contacts with local authorities and links to criminal organisations is reported to the security officer of the representation
5) Protection of staff	
	During contact with the applicants the staff are protected by physical separation (cf. chapter 2.). Local staff are informed about the consequences of unauthorised contacts with local authorities, organised crime, local mafia etc. If a given area becomes a risk area, the members of staff concerned are removed temporarily or permanently from the dangerous area.

Recommendations	Best practices
b. Documents	
1) Transport Visa stickers should be transported by diplomatic courier. **2) Storing** Visas should be stored in a safe immediately upon receipt at the consular representation. Only the number needed for printing should be handed out. **3) Access** Only a limited number of persons at the consular representation should have access to this safe (e.g. chancellor/head of the visa section and deputy). Other personnel should only receive the number of stickers needed for the daily work, and any unused stickers should be returned at the end of the working day. **4) Monitoring of stock** The stock monitoring should be done by means of IT. It should at any time be possible to establish, which visas are physically stocked at the representation, and which visas have been used and how they have been used.	
c. IT	
1) Login Passwords should be changed regularly. **2) Unauthorised entry/access** **3) Encryption**	The login into the Visa-IT-system is made by a user-ID and a password Access to the consular IT-system is regulated by national instructions Unauthorised entry is controlled by the login-concept. The workstations are placed specially secured server-rooms within a controlled area of the representation the which the public has no access. All communication is to be encrypted so as to ensure that the communication is highly secured.

Recommendations	Best practices
4) Data protection	All handling of personalised data is written in a log file that can be checked in case of suspected violation of the EU or national guidelines for data protection. These log files are kept at least for five years.
8. Education and training	
a. In-service training	
1) Expatriate staff: Expatriate staff may be trained locally/"on the job". Future visa officers to be posted should be trained by the respective department of the central authority.	Expatriate staff are trained by central authorities. Expatriate staff are provided with training programmes adapted to local circumstances. Besides the ordinary training, the expatriate staff are given "multi-disciplinary" training adapted to local circumstances by central authorities. In risk areas the staff are given basic training in detecting false or falsified documents (e.g. how to use specialised equipment) Additional presence or availability of document specialists or other qualified staff for detecting false or falsified documents is recommended in risk areas.
2) Local staff (including EU/EEA nationals) Expatriate staff should train local staff. Local staff may be trained locally/"on the job".	Local staff are provided with training programmes adapted to local circumstances. Besides the ordinary training the local staff are given "multi-disciplinary" training adapted to local circumstances by central authorities.
b. IT-training	
1) Expatriate staff Expatriate staff should know the registration system. Expatriate staff should be able to enter/consult the SIS and their central authorities. **2) Local staff (including EU/EEA nationals)** Local staff should be able to register applications in databases and do status checks.	

Recommendations	Best practices
9. IT in general	
a. Access to databases, SIS	
Implementation of an information system, which supports a coherent and efficient procedure for case processing, should be built around a common database and be well integrated with adjacent systems. Users are given direct access to current database information.	The common IT support tools must have direct access to the SIS-database or extracts of it and should also be integrated with a system for administration of visa referrals to the Vision rules. A separate management information system produces statistics based upon the database information. This information is compiled and sent to the central authorities.
b. Distribution of information (CD-ROM, updates, direct access, browsing)	
All users should be given direct access to the common central IT supports through a web-based interface, which requires the installation of a browser.	The database information is updated at least once a month. In case of technical difficulties, it is advised to request assistance within the local consular co-operation.
c. Rules for the access to the system	
The user must be part of an authorisation group in the database and be identified with the login procedure. User identity and passwords are personal and may not be passed on to others. They must be stored in such a way that unauthorised persons cannot access them. Implementation of authorisation rules and an authorisation check system is set up. Only authorised users are allowed access to the system.	An authorisation check system regulates what the different user groups can carry out and retrieve from the central alien database. The system contains different authorisation groups for staff at the diplomatic representations, the central migration authority and the police. Each level of authorisation provides access to different parts of the system (searching information in the database, updating and adding information to the database etc.). The access can be restricted to data field level and information concerning a specific diplomatic mission.
d. Back-up, emergency situation	The back-up structure has to fulfil the applicable requirements such as search in databases and Vision communication.

Recommendations	Best practices
	The back-up solution should support relevant activities, such as: • administration of visas • searches in SIS database • print-out of stickers.
10. Equipment for detecting false documents	
In low risk areas the staff should receive at least basic training the required equipment include: ultra-violet light source (portable ultra-violet lamps); magnification/lighting (hand-held lenses or transparent slide – oblique light source, and combined document testing device equipped with magnifier, transmitted light and oblique light sources); special testing devices (retro viewer to check reflective materials, and test lenses, filter screens, etc. to check for latent security features in standard documents); and reference materials (EU Handbook of Genuine Identity, Travel and Residence Documents and the Fraud Bulletin). In intermediary risk areas the staff should receive basic training, and additional presence or availability of document specialists or other qualified staff from the visa office for the detection of false or falsified documents is necessary. The required equipment include: ultra-violet light source (portable and fixed ultra-violet lamps); magnification (low-power stereo zoom microscope, light source with flexible fibre-optic light guide, and light box for examinations using transmitted light); special testing devices (retro viewer to check reflective materials, and test lenses, filter screens, etc. to check for latent security features in standard documents); and reference material (EU Handbook of Genuine Identity, Travel and Residence Documents and the Fraud Bulletin).	Representations must use UV-lamps and magnifiers to detect forgeries, at least in countries with a high migration risk. Specimens of the documents most often presented must be available.
In high-risk areas, the staff should be composed of highly qualified officers widely experienced in the detection of forgeries and/or permanently stationed document specialists. Equipment required include: ultraviolet light source (portable and fixed ultra-violet lamps); magnification (stereo zoom microscope, light source with flexible fibre-optic light guide, and light box for examinations	Some States have “travelling experts” who train the expatriate staff in detecting falsified documents by evaluating the situation on the spot.

Recommendations	Best practices
using transmitted light); special testing devices (retro viewer to check reflective materials, and test lenses, filter screens, etc. to check for latent security features in standard documents); infra-red scanning equipment (infra-red document examination apparatus); devices for the machine inspection of documents (OCR scanning devices with verification of check digits); machine authentication devices (e.g. for kinegram patterns); reference material (EU Handbook of Genuine Identity, Travel and Residence Documents and the Fraud Bulletin, database systems on genuine and false documents and subject-search systems to identify stolen documents)	
11. Visa issued in representation	
	Statistics are kept of visas that it has been impossible to grant in representation, and this information is exchanged with the represented State. Visas can only be issued in representation, but not refused: if the representing State finds that the conditions are not fulfilled, the applicant is given written information on how to apply at the nearest permanent consular or diplomatic mission of the represented State. The information must emphasise that the representing State is not in the position to issue the visa, but that this is not a final refusal. The application is not transmitted to a consular or diplomatic mission of the represented State, nor to the central authorities of the represented State. The "application stamp" is always used to show that an application has been submitted to the diplomatic mission or consular post of the representing State. The stamp is used also if the representing State finds that the conditions not fulfilled. The representing State informs the applicant about the rules governing handling fees (cf. points 1a), d), and 3a).

Recommendations	Best practices
12. Consular cooperation	
a. Harmonisation of supporting documents for visa applications Harmonisation initiatives should be implemented at local level, as account must be taken of the specific circumstances of the visa applicants in each case. Initiatives taken and experience gained should be reported to central authorities. As local circumstances vary from one country to another, it is necessary to demand more guarantees in some cases than in others.	The harmonisation of the supporting documents to be submitted along with visa applications, depending on the purpose of the journey and the type of visa, is established reached through local consular cooperation. The following documents could be required: * household register * bank statements * leave of absence * proof of business or employment * proof of marital status * invitation * financial guarantee * health insurance
b. Visa fees **1) Harmonisation of fees** The aim should be to eliminate differences in the level of visa fees (in cases where, according to Annex XII of the CCI, differentiated fees are allowed for or if the exchange rate from Euro to local currency varies too much).	
2) Exemption of fees The fees to be charged for the issue of visas are listed in Annex 12. In individual cases, the fees may be reduced or there may be no fees at all in accordance with national law for the purpose of facilitating cultural exchanges or in the field of foreign policy, development policy or in other areas of vital public interests.	Groups of school children under 18 years of age may be granted a visa free of charge, if they travel for educational, cultural or sports purposes.

Recommendations	Best practices
	The fees to be charged may also be reduced or waived altogether for holders of diplomatic, official or service passports, where the holder of the passport travels for official purposes, and for members of the staff accredited by a diplomatic mission or a comparable representation in a Schengen State and for their family members. The amount of fees may be reduced further or waived altogether for persons who are entitled to a visa free of charge under an international agreement, and for persons participating in a conference held under the auspices of the United Nations or its specialised agencies, the Council of Europe, the European Union or the OSCE. Reduction or cancellation of fees is also recommended for humanitarian reasons in cases of major accidents and other comparable emergencies. Schengen States must issue visas to family members of EU/EEA citizens free of charge (cf. Directive 68/360, Article 9, and Directive 73/148, Article 7) and afford them every facility (Directive 68/360, Article 3 and Directive 73/148, article 3)
c. Treatment of visa applications submitted by travel agencies Consular cooperation should in particular be developed at those posts where travel agencies are allowed to submit visa applications. **d. Use of the "CCI stamp"** The size, content and use of the "CCI stamp" should be harmonised by all States.	

Recommendations	Best practices
e. Regular exchange of information The embassy or consulate of the Member State holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union should regularly organise exchange of information on issues relevant in the specific post. **f. Exchange of staff among representations** Consular representations should on a bilateral basis exchange officials to improve the knowledge of and harmonisation of visa practises.	Reports from local consular cooperation meetings are drafted by the Presidency in office and forwarded to other Schengen States locally and to the central authorities.