

# Webinar “Better cross-border travel: Europe’s external borders and freedom of movement”

*10 September 2025, 15.00 – 16.30 CET*

## Webinar Summary





## Transition pathway for EU tourism

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# Introduction

## Scope and objectives of the webinar



### Target audience

National, regional and local authorities, DMOs, SMEs and larger companies, Industry Associations, Chambers of Commerce, academia and any other tourism stakeholder interested in the topic.

### Scope and objectives

As global mobility rebounds and digital innovation accelerates, the EU is taking steps to modernise and streamline cross-border travel. Central to this transformation is the EU's common visa policy, which enables nationals from 102 non-EU countries to access the Schengen area with a single visa and visa-free for nationals of 60 countries. Freedom of movement between 25 EU and 4 non-EU states has transformed the offer of multi-country itineraries enjoyed by long-haul visitors, as well as provided a daily convenience to EU citizens commuting or doing business cross-border.

Policy and strategy matter, but the future of travel is also about embracing solutions that improve the pre-departure experience, and make journeys easier, safer and more efficient for all.

This webinar delves into the intricacies of seamless cross-border travel, focusing on the digitalization of Schengen visa procedures for non-EU nationals, and digitalizing travel documents for EU citizens for improved and faster border processes. Industry experts from aviation, rail and road sectors share practical insights while European Commission representatives provide updates on the Entry/Exit System (EES), the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS), as well as digital health certificates and their lasting impact on international mobility.

# Agenda

<b>15:00 - 15:10</b>	<b>Welcome and introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Moderator:</b> Tim Fairhurst, Director General, European Tourism Association - ETOA</li></ul>
<b>15:10 - 15:35</b>	<b>Session 1 – EU travel unveiled: policy and institutional insight</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Vaya Mousa</b>, Team Leader for EES, Digital Schengen unit, DG HOME</li><li>• <b>Aurora Joala</b>, Policy Officer DG Health and Food Safety (SANTE), Unit C1 Digital Health</li><li>• <b>Dirk Glaesser</b>, Director, Sustainable Tourism and Resilience, UN Tourism</li></ul>
<b>15:35 - 16:05</b>	<b>Session 2 – Practical solutions for seamless cross-border travel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Suzanne Hoadley</b>, Senior Advisor – Passenger Transport, IRU [Brussels]</li><li>• <b>Alberto Mazzolla</b>, Executive Director, CER aisbl – Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies</li><li>• <b>Davide Maistro</b>, Policy Director, Airlines for Europe (A4E)</li></ul>
<b>16:05 - 16:25</b>	<b>Q&amp;A and Roundtable discussion</b>
<b>16:25 - 16:30</b>	<b>Closing remarks and next steps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Vangelis Panayotis</b>, Chair of the T4T Skills and Resilience Subgroup</li></ul>



# Speakers



**Moderates: Tim Fairhurst**  
Director General  
European Tourism  
Association - ETOA



**Vaya Mousa**  
Team Leader for EES  
Digital Schengen unit,  
DG HOME



**Aurora Joala**  
Policy Officer  
DG SANTE, Unit C1  
Digital Health



**Dr. Dirk Glaesser**  
Director, Sustainable  
Tourism and Resilience,  
UN Tourism



**Suzanne Hoadley**  
Senior Advisor –  
Passenger Transport  
IRU



**Dr. Alberto Mazzola**  
Executive Director  
CER aisbl



**Davide Maistro**  
Policy Director  
Airlines for Europe



**Vangelis Panayotis**  
Chair of the T4T Skills/  
Resilience subgroup

# Webinar in numbers



**106** Registrations



**70** Participants

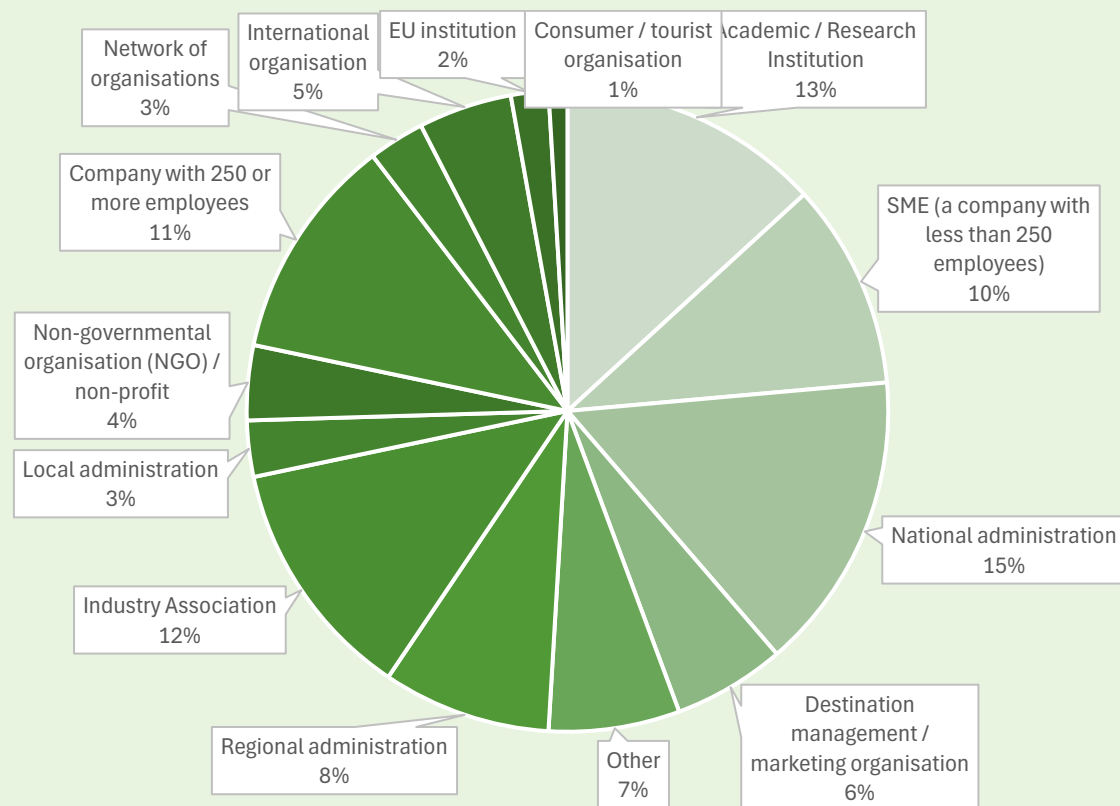


**Participants from 20 EU  
MS and 2 non-EU  
countries**



**7** Speakers

## Participants' Organisations



## Results of the post-webinar survey



**100%** of the respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with the webinar.



**100%** of the respondents found that the webinar provided useful information.



**100%** of the respondents feel that they have obtained a better understanding and knowledge of the topic after attending.

# Key discussion points (1/3)

Representatives from the **European Commission – DG HOME and DG SANTE**, **UN Tourism**, **IRU**, **CER aisbl**, and **Airlines for Europe** discussed the following:

1

## Session 1: “EU travel unveiled: policy and institutional insight”

- **Vaya Mousa**, Team Leader for EES at the Digital Schengen unit of DG HOME presented the **Entry/Exit System (EES) and ETIAS**, the two new systems aiming to modernise and change **EU border management**. EES, an automated IT system will change the way that borders are managed, by digitising border checks for non-EU nationals on short stays, replacing passport stamping with biometric registration. EES introduction aims to facilitate and modernise travelling and reinforce security, while allowing real-time information sharing between EU MS. The EES system, launching on 12 October 2025, will be progressively deployed over a period of six months, during which MS will progressively deploy the system across their border crossing points in phases, introduce biometric functionalities and record all third-country nationals. The second system presented, ETIAS, an electronic travel authorisation system to be operational as of Q4 2026, will require visa-exempt nationals travelling to the Schengen area and Cyprus for short stays to apply online for pre-travel authorization, with 3-years validity, increasing traveller confidence in meeting entry requirements and facilitating border crossings and reduce wait times. The importance of official information channels was also stressed, highlighting that a global communication campaign will start 6 months before the entry into operation of ETIAS to motivate and inform travellers on the actions they have to take.
- **Aurora Joala**, Policy Officer at the Unit C1 Digital Health of **DG SANTE** gave an overview of the main **digital health solutions for cross-border travel**, highlighting the **EU Digital COVID Certificate's** role in pandemic response and its adoption by the WHO for the establishment of the Global Digital Health Certification Network. This network is a mechanism to support verification of different health documents and certifications exchanged between the participating countries. Further, the **European Health Data Space (EHDS)** was presented, aiming to ensure that electronic health data can move with EU citizens when they are travelling in Europe, enabling patients and health professionals to access electronic health data across borders. The EHDS builds on the existing voluntary MyHealth@EU infrastructure, a voluntary system for exchanging patient summaries, prescriptions, and dispensations, which will become mandatory with new services and new data categories, with full implementation expected by March 2031.

# Key discussion points (2/3)

1

## Session 1: “EU travel unveiled: policy and institutional insight” (continued)

- **Dr Dirk Glaesser**, Director in Sustainable Tourism and Resilience at **UN Tourism** focused on the work and experience of UN Tourism in the field of seamless travel, with a special attention given to **facilitation**, one of the most important challenge and opportunity of modern travel. Global trends in **visa facilitation** were presented, highlighting that while 47% of the world’s population are still subject to traditional visa, there has been a steady shift in visa policies from traditional visa toward eVisas, visas on arrival, and visa-free travel. Openness to tourism varies widely by region, with emerging economies advancing over the years in openness significantly more than advanced economies which are stagnating. It was highlighted that in practice, reciprocal action is one of the policy barriers advancing visa and visa policies, with reciprocally closed policies in 2023 observed in 20% of the visa policy pairs between countries, and 17% reciprocally require traditional visas, but restrictive reciprocal visa requirements have dropped significantly since 2008. He also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on border closures and the need for balanced policies that support both security and tourism recovery, referencing UN Tourism’s ongoing research and reports on travel restrictions and visa openness, and stressing the close interlink between public health, sustainability, resilience and travel.

2

## Session 2: “Practical solutions for seamless cross-border travel”

- **Suzanne Hoadley**, Senior Advisor at Passenger Transport, **IRU** addressed **the road transport market, highlighting the significance of bus, coach, and taxi services in EU passenger mobility**, which account for over a third of collective journeys and are characterised by a fragmented operator landscape. Key operational challenges included unpredictable intra-Schengen border controls, inconsistent procedures for irregular cases, and administrative burdens associated with new digital systems such as EES and ETIAS. Divergent urban vehicle access regulations and the relocation of coach infrastructure complicate city access, while disparities in VAT, fuel duty, and state aid create unfairness across transport modes. The ongoing driver shortage was noted as a critical issue. Despite these challenges, coach tourism was presented as an enabler of more distributed travel and longer stays, offering low-emission, socially inclusive transport. Collaboration with cities and targeted policy solutions were highlighted as essential for supporting sustainable and accessible tourism across Europe.



# Key discussion points (3/3)

2

## Session 2: “Practical solutions for seamless cross-border travel” (continued)

- **Dr. Alberto Mazzolla**, Executive Director of **CER aisbl**, presented **the role of rail transport in achieving sustainable tourism**. Rail travel was described as a low-emission alternative to flying, with strong green credentials and the ability to offer attractive, scenic journeys and convenient holiday experiences. The importance of infrastructure investment, integrated ticketing solutions, and a level playing field for all transport modes was highlighted as essential for unlocking rail’s potential. Policy recommendations included expanding high-speed rail networks, enabling seamless international booking, and supporting night train services. Survey results indicated that a large majority of Europeans would opt for high-speed trains over flights for short and medium-distance trips if fast and reliable connections were available. The expansion of the European high-speed rail network and the implementation of CER’s ticketing roadmap were identified as key enablers for modal shift, with research and innovation seen as critical to future progress. Railways were positioned as a backbone for sustainable, accessible, and enjoyable cross-border travel in Europe.
- **Davide Maistro**, Policy Director at **Airlines for Europe**, addressed the **need for greater predictability and efficiency at external borders from the airlines view**, particularly concerning the rollout of the Entry/Exit System (EES). Delays at border controls were identified as a major operational risk, with even minor disruptions cascading through airline schedules and impacting thousands of passengers. Concerns were raised about member state readiness and system reliability, highlighting the importance of clear communication and harmonised procedures. Divergent approaches to crew border formalities were noted as an area requiring further alignment. The future vision centres on a fully digitalised, end-to-end passenger journey, with interoperable digital travel credentials enabling advance border checks and reducing bottlenecks. Survey data indicated strong passenger support for sharing immigration data before departure and for biometric solutions. Maintaining Europe’s attractiveness as a tourist destination was linked to airline competitiveness, with rising compliance costs and the catalytic role of air transport in tourism and employment underscored..

# Conclusions

1

Travellers should use official information channels and prepare early for the new EU digital border systems to be applied.



2

Accelerate the implementation of the European Health Data Space (EHDS) ensuring secure sharing of health data across EU borders



3

Pursue greater regional and global cooperation on visa facilitation, including expanding reciprocal visa-free agreements and adopting more flexible visa policies for smoother international travel and support tourism recovery.



4

Harmonised border procedures and fair regulation are key to unlocking sustainable coach tourism across Europe.



5

Integrated ticketing and investment in high-speed rail are essential for railways to drive sustainable cross-border travel.



6

Efficient digital border management is vital for airline competitiveness and seamless travel in Europe.



# Thank you!

The document has been prepared for the European Commission in the context of the project “Transition Pathway Stakeholder Support Platform: Implementation for Tourism Ecosystem” (the Project) in accordance with the signed contract No EISMEA/2022/OP/0018. This report reflects the views and results of the webinar discussion between the tourism stakeholders and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission. The action recommendations, however, do not necessarily represent the position or endorsement of all stakeholder groups nor the position of individual Member States or the European Commission.