

World Tourism Organization



# UNWTO

## **Visa facilitation:**

Stimulating economic growth  
and development through tourism

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# Visa facilitation:

## Stimulating economic growth and development through tourism<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

- In 2012, destinations around the world required on average two thirds of the world's population to obtain a visa prior to departure. On the other hand, some 18% of the world's population was able to enter a destination without a visa, while another 17% could receive a visa on arrival.
- Globally there is a big variety in visa policies, from countries allowing almost any citizen to enter freely, to countries requesting Visas indiscriminately.
- Overall, emerging economies tend to be more open than advanced ones.
- South-East Asian, East African and Caribbean destinations are among the most open.
- Central African and North American destinations are the most restrictive.
- Notable progress towards visa facilitation has been made over recent years. While at the beginning of 2008, destinations requested from an average 77% of the world's population to apply for a traditional Visa prior to departure, this percentage was down to 63% by 2012.
- Many destinations showed remarkable and substantial improvements between 2010 and 2012. In total, improvements in visa requirements were made between 5,080 destination-source market country pairs.
- A total of 43 destinations significantly facilitated the visa process for citizens of 20 or more countries between 2010 and 2012, by changing their visa policies from "Visa required" to either "eVisa", "Visa on arrival" or "no Visa required".
- Destinations, when reviewing their visa policies, tended to thoroughly review and introduce changes.
- The most popular facilitation measure was the introduction of "Visa on arrival". Nearly 70% of all improvements noted comparing 2010 and 2012 data were from "Visa required" to "Visa on arrival".

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1. Paper prepared by Dirk Glaesser and John Kester with valuable input from Márcio Favilla, Sandra Carvão, Lorna Hartantyo, Birka Valentin, Lisa Fürbaß, Kate Holmes, Jacinta García and Alberto G. Uceda.

## Introduction:

### The dimensions of international tourism

Over the past six decades, tourism has continued to expand and diversify; it is now one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Many new tourist destinations have emerged alongside the traditional ones of Europe and North America. From 1980 to 2011, international tourist arrivals (i.e., overnight visitors) more than tripled worldwide, leaping from 279 million in 1980 to 996 million in 2011, corresponding to an average growth of 4.2 % a year.

In the same period, the export value of tourism - that is, international tourism receipts, including international passenger transport - increased from US\$ 125 billion in 1980 to US\$ 1,240 billion in 2011. In real terms, this corresponds to an average growth of 4.1 % a year, which is virtually the same pace as tourist arrivals.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) long-term forecast **Tourism Towards 2030**<sup>2</sup>, international tourist arrivals are expected to continue to grow at the sustained pace of 3.3% a year on average, reaching 1.8 billion by 2030. International tourist arrivals in the emerging-economy destinations of Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East and Africa will grow at double the pace (4.4 % a year) of advanced economy destinations (2.2 % a year). As a result, arrivals in emerging economies are expected to surpass those in advanced economies by 2015. In 2030, 57 % of international tourist arrivals will occur in emerging-economy destinations (versus 30 % in 1980 and 47 % in 2010). Arrivals in advanced-economy destinations will make up 43 % of arrivals overall (versus 70 % in 1980 and 53 % in 2010).

In order to fully reap the benefits international tourism can bring to an economy, it is necessary to put in place conditions that make the country easy to visit as well as attractive to develop, and to facilitate investment in its Travel & Tourism (T&T) sector.

## The functions of Visas

Visa policies are among the most important governmental formalities influencing international tourism. The development of policies and procedures for visas, as well as for other important travel documents such as passports, is closely linked to the development of tourism. With the swift growth of international tourism in the last six decades, the quality, reliability, and functionality of visa and other travel documents has evolved. Only half a century ago, travel was heavily impacted by customs regulations, currency exchange limitations, and visa formalities. A great deal of progress has been made in facilitation, which contributes to the remarkable growth of the tourism sector. Especially noteworthy are the multilateral agreements that mutually exempt all or certain categories of travellers from the visa requirement. However, despite the progress made, current visa policies are still regularly mentioned as inadequate and inefficient, and are thus acknowledged to be an obstacle to tourism growth.

Visas perform several functions. They serve to ensure security; to control immigration and limit the entry, duration of stay, or activities of travellers; to generate revenue and apply measures of reciprocity; and to ensure a destination's carrying capacity and control tourism demand. Although "security" is commonly stated to be the most important reason to impose a visa requirement, in practice, all the functions noted here can be observed and form a reason to introduce or maintain a visa.

Travellers see visas mainly as a formality that imposes a cost. If the cost of obtaining a visa - either the direct monetary cost imposed in the form of fees or the indirect costs, which can include distance, time spent waiting in lines, and the complexity of the process - exceeds a threshold, potential travellers are simply deterred from making a particular journey or choose an alternative destination with less hassle. This finding is not new. It is interesting in this context to note that, in 1963, the delegates of 87 states agreed, at the United Nations Conference on International Travel & Tourism in Rome, that "Governments should extend to the maximum number of countries the practice of abolishing, through bilateral agreements or by unilateral decision, the requirement of entry Visas for temporary visitors."<sup>3</sup>

2. World Tourism Organization (2011), *Tourism Towards 2030/ Global Overview*, UNWTO, Madrid.

3. See next page.



## Visa facilitation: areas of opportunity

Joint research by the UNWTO and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), presented to the 4th T20 Ministers' Meeting in May 2012, demonstrates that improving visa processes could generate an additional US\$ 206 billion in tourism receipts and create as many as 5.1 million jobs by 2015 in the G-20 economies.<sup>4</sup>

The analysis also identified five important areas of opportunity for entry visa facilitation: delivery of information, current processes, differentiated treatment, the use of eVisa programmes, and regional agreements. These are detailed below.

### Improve the delivery of information

The availability and reliability of the information on entry formalities - especially visa requirements and procedures - that destinations provide were among the simplest, but also least addressed, areas of opportunity. This information - especially the elements of entry formalities of importance to the traveller - should also be available in multiple languages.

### Facilitate current processes needed to obtain visas

A major opportunity for improvement is the way visa requests for temporary visitors are processed in general, as well as the requirements linked to this process. Whether these requirements are personal interviews, official documents, or certificates, they usually produce at least temporary bottlenecks as well as uncertainty and longer wait times. Among the techniques suitable for improving these processes are the better use of modern information technology by service providers and the consideration of visas on arrival.

### Differentiate treatment to facilitate tourist travel

The technique of facilitating the visa process for certain types of visitors is widely used among economies, especially for temporary visitors who are visiting for tourism purposes. The form this facilitation takes can range from easing restrictions depending on the means of transportation - for example, cruise passengers can be allowed to disembark from the ship without a tourist visa or to arrive by charter planes - to special treatment for specified geographical areas or ports of entry.

### Institute eVisa programmes

Currently, the most widely discussed opportunity is the use of eVisa. If an entry visa cannot be avoided, eVisa is the option preferred over the traditional, paper visa. It can be more easily obtained and requires neither the physical presence of the applicant nor the presence of the passport. These considerations are especially important for destinations without a widespread network of embassies and consulates.

### Establish regional agreements

There are already a number of regional agreements in place that allow travellers from a third country to move freely between member countries once admitted by one of the participating countries. For citizens of one of the member states of some regions, such as the Schengen area in Europe, it is even possible to travel without a passport by simply using a valid national document of identification.

3. United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism (1964), *Recommendations on International Travel and Tourism*, August 21 - September 5, 1963, Rome.

States represented at the conference were: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Ceylon, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo (Leopold-Ville), Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Guatemala, Holy See, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Republic of South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Arab Republic, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Venezuela, Yugoslavia. UN Specialized Agencies: FAO, UNESCO, ICAO, WHO, IMCO.

4. World Tourism Organization and World Travel and Tourism Council (2012), *The Impact of Visa Facilitation on Job Creation in the G20 Economies*, UNWTO, Madrid.

## The global and regional dimensions to visas

As a result of this work by the UNWTO and WTTC, at its June 2012 Summit, the G-20 leaders recognized the role of tourism as “a vehicle for job creation, economic growth and development”<sup>5</sup>; furthermore, they committed to “work towards developing travel facilitation initiatives in support of job creation, quality work, poverty reduction and global growth”<sup>6</sup>.

In spite of many recent strides, visa requirements still affect global tourism significantly. In 2012, destinations around the world requested, on average, that 63 % of the world's population obtain a visa before initiating their international journey. Another 2 % of the population was at least allowed to apply for an eVisa, while 16 % would be able to apply for a visa on arrival. Only 18 % of the world's population would not require a visa at all when traveling for tourism purposes (table 1).

### Sub-regions of destinations by percentage of world population affected by visa policies, 2012

	Openness <sup>a</sup>	% of world population affected by Visa policies			
		No Visa	Visa on arrival	eVisa	Visa required <sup>b</sup>
<b>World</b>	31	18%	16%	2%	63%
Advanced economies <sup>c</sup>	26	24%	0,4%	2%	73%
Emerging economies <sup>c</sup>	32	17%	21%	2%	61%
<b>By UNWTO regions:</b>					
<b>Africa</b>	29	8%	29%	0%	62%
North Africa	16	15%	1%	0%	84%
West Africa	23	7%	22%	0%	71%
Central Africa	6	2%	7%	0%	92%
East Africa	49	6%	62%	0%	33%
Southern Africa	29	29%	0%	0%	71%
<b>Americas</b>	37	31%	8%	1%	60%
North America	14	11%	0%	5%	84%
Caribbean	45	39%	8%	0%	53%
Central America	37	30%	10%	0%	60%
South America	35	29%	9%	0%	62%
<b>Asia and the Pacific</b>	37	20%	19%	7%	54%
North-East Asia	27	25%	2%	0%	73%
South-East Asia	51	23%	35%	8%	35%
Oceania	41	27%	16%	6%	51%
South Asia	24	4%	20%	11%	65%
<b>Europe</b>	26	21%	6%	0%	72%
Northern Europe	26	26%	0%	0%	74%
Western Europe	23	23%	0%	0%	77%
Central/Eastern Europe	26	16%	14%	0%	70%
Southern/Mediterr. Europe	27	26%	1%	0%	73%
- of which EU-27 <sup>d</sup>	24	24%	0%	0%	76%
Middle East	20	1%	20%	10%	70%

a. The higher the score, the better. Openness indicates to what extent a destination is facilitating tourism. It is calculated by summing the percentage of the world population exempt from obtaining a Visa, with the percentages of Visa on arrival weighted by 0.7 and eVisa by 0.5.

For the (sub)regional totals, the percentages of the four different visa categories and the resulting openness score represent the averages of countries in that group (where countries are weighted by the natural logarithm of the population size in order to take account of differences in destination size).

b. Visa required: Visa has to be obtained prior to departure and is not an electronic Visa.

c. Classification based on the International Monetary Fund (IMF), see the *Statistical Annex of the IMF World Economic Outlook of April 2012*, page 177, at [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01). Destination countries weighted by ln (1000 population).

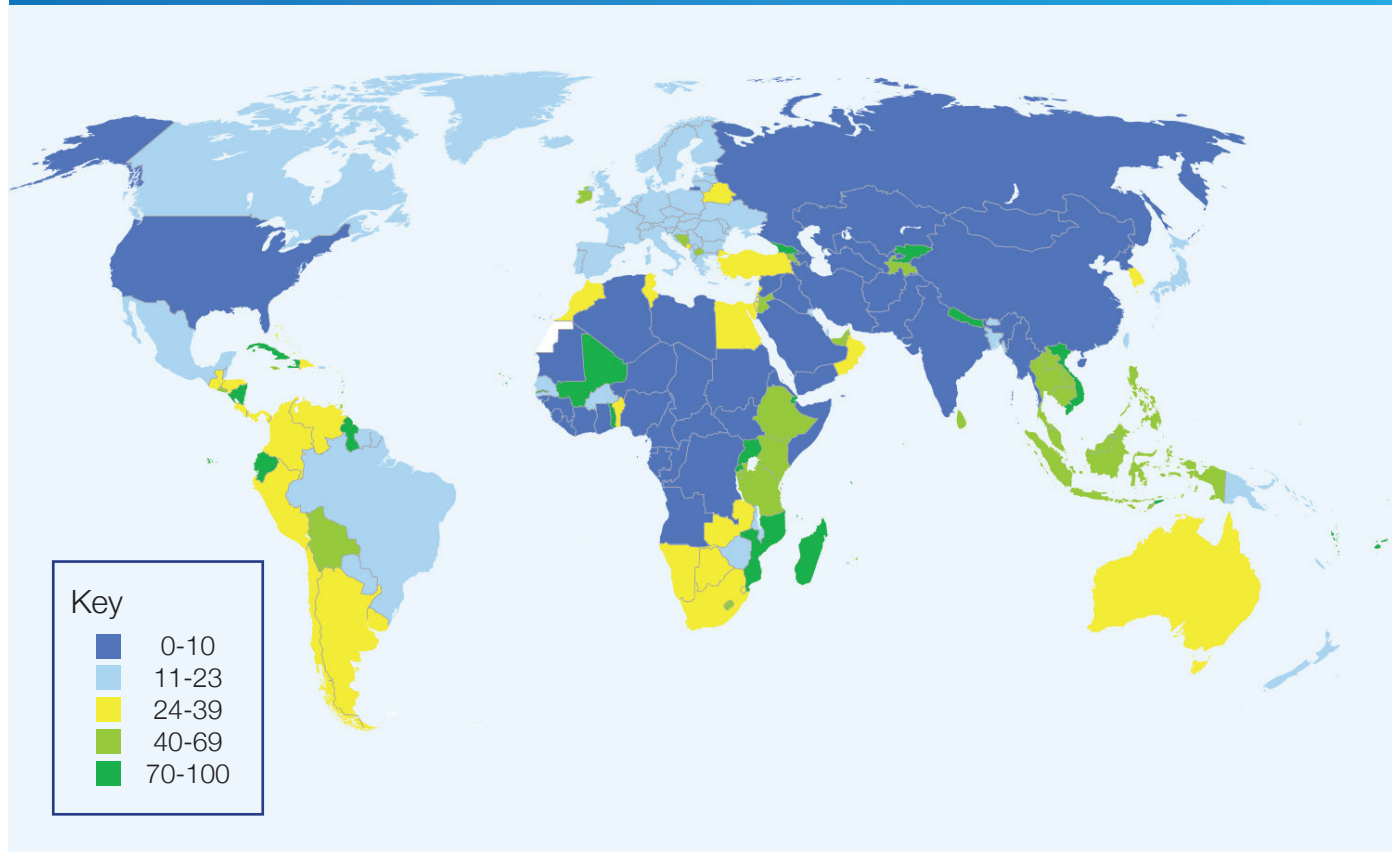
d. The EU-27 countries are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Rep., Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Ireland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Note: Due to rounding the sum of the separate figures may not be 100%.

Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions.

5. & 6. See next page.

## Openness Visa Facilitation



Note: The higher the score, the better. Openness indicates to what extent a destination is facilitating tourism. It is calculated by summing the percentage of the world population exempt from obtaining a Visa, with the percentages of Visa on arrival weighted by 0.7 and eVisa by 0.5.

Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions.

Disclaimer: The maps elaborated by UNWTO are for reference only and do not imply any judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

Emerging economies are, overall, more open in terms of travel requirements than advanced ones (table 2)<sup>7</sup>. When traveling to an emerging-economy destination, on average, 61 % of the world's population needs a traditional visa and 2 % an eVisa; for advanced-economy destinations, 73 % needs a traditional visa and 2 % an eVisa. However, full exemption from a visa is more common in advanced economies (24 % versus 17 %), whereas in emerging economies obtaining a visa on arrival is much more common (21 % versus 0.4 %).

From a regional perspective, destinations in Asia and the Pacific have facilitated international travel the most. To visit these regions, 20 % of the world's population

does not require a visa, 19 % could obtain a visa on arrival, and 7 % could use an eVisa. South-East Asia is the most open subregion because of the large number of visa-on-arrival requirements (this is sufficient for 35 % of the world's population, on average) and the considerable number of visa exemptions (23 %) and eVisa alternatives (8 %).

When traveling to the Americas, 60 % of the world's population is required to obtain a traditional visa prior to departure. However, this figure varies widely across the subregions of the Americas. While North America is one of the most restricted subregions, where only 11 % of the world's population can enter without a visa<sup>8</sup>, the Caribbean is the third most open subregion in the world: 39 % of the

5. World Tourism Organization and World Travel and Tourism Council (2012), *The Impact of Visa Facilitation on Job Creation in the G20 Economies*, pages 17 - 18, UNWTO, Madrid.

6. World Travel and Tourism Council (2012), 'G20 Recognizes Travel & Tourism as a Driver of Economic Growth for the First Time and Commit to Work on Travel Facilitation', 20 June, WTTC (Online), available at <http://www.wttc.org/news-media/news-archive/2012/g20-recognises-travel-tourism-driver-economic-growth-first-time/>.

7. Weighting is as follows: Visa not required = 1, Visa on Arrival = 0.7, eVisa = 0.5. Data for regions and subregions are average data and might not fully reflect the situation for all countries, especially in less homogenous subregions such as Africa, South Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe.

8. Although not all eVisa programmes are technically classified as visas (for example, the Electronic System for Travel Authorization, or ESTA, in the United States is not a visa according to law), they are similar in form and function and have been therefore categorized as eVisas.

world's population can enter without a visa and 8 % has the ability to obtain a visa on arrival. Destinations in the two other subregions-Central and South America - also abolished visas for comparatively many source markets, making the Americas the leading region in visa exemptions (31 % of the world's population does not need a visa to visit the Americas; see table 2).

Africa requires a visa prior to departure from 62 % of the world's population, but, at the same time, has the highest percentage of countries whose visitors are able to obtain a visa on arrival (29 %). However, this figure varies significantly across the African subregions. In Central Africa, the use of traditional visas - required for 92 % of the world's population - is highest of all Africa's subregions. East Africa, in contrast, has the lowest in the world: only 33 % of the world's population is required to have traditional visas. Visa on arrival is popular in East Africa (62 %), making East Africa the second most open subregion in the world.

In the Middle East, 70 % of the world's population is required to obtain a traditional visa prior to departure to any of its destinations, but 20 % are allowed to obtain a visa on arrival and 10 % to use an eVisa. Interestingly, the Middle East has the highest percentage of the world's population subject to eVisa among all five regions analyzed. At the same time, however, the abolishment of any visa is the lowest among all five regions, with only 1 % of the population not required to obtain a visa of any kind.

European destinations are among the most restrictive, requiring, on average, 72 % of the world's population to obtain a visa before departure, while 21 % is not required to obtain a visa and 6 % can obtain it on arrival. All four European subregions show more or less comparable patterns.

Analyzing the importance of the different measures, we find that:

- Visa exemption is most common in the Caribbean (39 %) and Central America (30 %);
- Visa on arrival is comparatively common in East Africa (62 %) and Southeast Asia (35 %);
- eVisa is in particular popular in South Asia (11 %) and the Middle East (10 %); and
- Traditional visas are most prevalent in Central Africa (92 %) and North America and North Africa (both 84 %), followed by Northeast Asia, the four European subregions, and the Middle East (all 70 % or higher).

Least restrictive destinations		
	Name of Destination	Openness [a]
1	Cook Islands	100
	Dominica	100
	Micronesia, Federated States of	100
	Niue	100
	Tuvalu	100
6	Haiti	99
7	Macao (China)	84
8	Hong Kong (China)	80
9	Nicaragua	79
	Turks and Caicos Islands	79
	Fiji	79
12	Georgia	78
13	Guyana	76
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	76
15	Vanuatu	75
16	Kyrgyzstan	74
	Gambia	74
	Viet Nam	74
19	Rwanda	73
20	Mali	72
21	Cape Verde	71
	Nepal	71
	Togo	71
	Uganda	71
	Mozambique	71

[a] Scores range from 0 to 100; the higher the score, the better. Destinations with the same score are tied, and so have the same rank; these appear in alphabetical order in the table. Openness indicates to what extent a destination is facilitating tourism. It is calculated by summing the percentage of the world population exempt from obtaining a visa, with the percentages of visa on arrival weighted by 0.7 and eVisa by 0.5.

Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions.



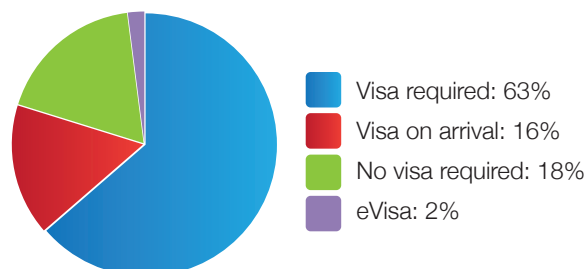
## Progress in recent years

Looking into the evolution of visa formalities in recent years, data show a recent and strong tendency toward improvement. At the beginning of 2008, destinations around the world required, on average, 77 % of the world's population to obtain a traditional visa before visiting, but this percentage went down to 74 % in 2010 and dropped further, to 63 %, in 2012 (figure 1).

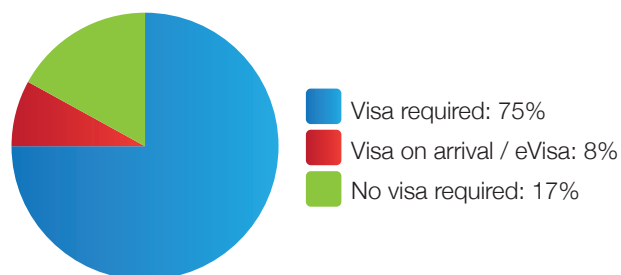
The reason for this remarkable and substantial improvement to facilitation between 2010 and 2012 is the determined action taken by governments. In total, visa requirements were facilitated for 5,080 destination-source market pairs between 2010 and 2012 (table 3). Destinations facilitated visiting by citizens of another country by either simply abolishing the visa requirement altogether, or allowing a visa to be obtained on arrival or in electronic form - that is, an eVisa. A total of 43 destinations significantly facilitated travel for citizens of 20 or more countries by changing their visa policies from visa required to eVisa, visa on arrival, or no visa required. These 43 destinations introduced a total of 5,044 individual measures and contributed by far the majority of the 5,080 total improvements introduced by all destinations between 2010 and 2012. This significant improvement demonstrates that destinations, when reviewing their visa policies, tended to thoroughly review and introduce changes.

Analyzing all facilitation techniques, the most common change was from visa required to visa on arrival, which represented nearly 70 % of all changes. Although eVisa and similar measures were also introduced, their importance was still minor in comparison to the other facilitation measures.

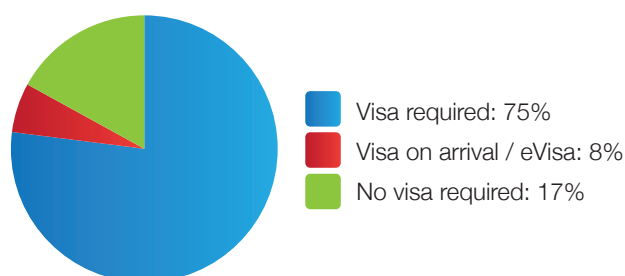
**2012 - World Population affected by Visa Policies**



**2010 - World Population affected by Visa Policies**



**2008 - World Population affected by Visa Policies**



## Destinations which improved Visa procedures for 20 or more countries of origin (2010-2012)

Number	Destination	Number of improvements
1	Micronesia, Federated States of	194
2	Niue	194
3	Palau	194
4	Sao Tome and Principe	194
5	Tuvalu	194
6	Djibouti	192
7	Haiti	190
8	Mozambique	189
9	Rwanda	181
10	Burundi	179
11	Togo	179
12	Cape Verde	178
13	Mali	172
14	Kyrgyzstan	166
15	Uganda	161
16	Guyana	157
17	United Arab Emirates	150
18	Lao (P.D.R)	144
19	Kenya	138
20	Ecuador	126
21	United Republic of Tanzania	126
22	Armenia	123
23	Bolivia	121
24	Macao (China)	120
25	Gambia	115
26	Sri Lanka	114
27	Georgia	112
28	Nicaragua	109
29	Tajikistan	77
30	Bangladesh	55
31	Bonaire	54
32	Cayman Islands	51
33	Zambia	50
34	French Polynesia	49
35	Saint Lucia	44
36	Saint Kitts and Nevis	39
37	Nauru	37
38	Burkina Faso	36
39	Ethiopia	35
40	New Caledonia	33
41	Trinidad and Tobago	26
42	Australia	24
43	Senegal	22
<b>Subtotal</b>		5,044
Other destinations		36
<b>Total</b>		5,080

Note: An improvement is the facilitation of a visa formality by either simply abolishing the traditional paper visa or allowing an eVisa or visa on arrival.

Each destination country of origin pair is calculated.

Source: Data compiled by the UNWTO, based on information from national official institutions.

## Outlook

In 1963, the United Nations Conference on International Travel & Tourism in Rome stressed the dependency of tourism development on the actions of governments, especially the facilitation of governmental formalities for international travel. Fifty years later, in November 2012, the UNWTO/World Travel Market Ministers' Summit in London concluded that visa processes and policies still present major barriers to Travel & Tourism. The summit noted that restrictive visa-issuance policies and complicated entry formalities are still stifling tourism growth, particularly from emerging economies - which are also some of the fastest-growing source markets for tourism.

However, it is also evident that the link between visa facilitation and economic growth through tourism is increasingly recognized by national authorities, which have accompanied such recognition with concrete facilitation measures. Furthermore, the clear tendency to ease visa procedures observed during the period 2010–2012, as demonstrated in this chapter, is likely to continue.

The UNWTO will continue to promote and advocate for visa facilitation to support economic growth and development through tourism. The 94th session of the UNWTO Executive Council (held in October 2012) requested that the Organization make visa facilitation a priority area. The Executive Council further requested, in cooperation with the International Civil Aviation Organization and other partners, that it continues providing case studies as well as benchmarking information to support this process and to better understand the progress already made.



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