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United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 3: Innovative approaches to facilitate cross-border mobility in the OSCE region

As prepared for delivery by Political Officer Chad Wilton
to the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Movement
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Mr./Madam Moderator,

The United States is facilitating cross-border mobility, in line with OSCE human contacts commitments, through a range of policies and programs. Other participating States (pS) may find some of these initiatives useful.

In 2012, the United States initiated the two-year Interview Waiver Pilot Program (IWPP) in some countries to streamline processing for low-risk travelers. This allows consular officers working in U.S. Embassies and Consulates to waive interviews for certain categories of qualified nonimmigrant visa applicants. The Department of State anticipates that additional U.S. Missions abroad will participate in the IWPP once they can make necessary changes to their appointment systems.

The U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows visa-free travel to the United States for eligible nationals of 36 countries visiting the United States for 90 days or less for business or tourism. By streamlining and automating processes and procedures, the VWP makes tourism to the United States more attractive to nationals of VWP countries. We continue to consider ways to expand the program. In order to be eligible for the VWP, countries must meet certain criteria for visa refusal rates, data sharing, passport issuance and control, and must maintain high counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control, document security standards, and cooperation. Designation as a VWP country is at the discretion of the U.S. Government. Meeting the objective requirements of the VWP does not guarantee a country will receive VWP designation. Alongside efforts to expand the VWP, agencies across the Federal government are working to expand travel by nationals of existing VWP countries.

With traveler "preclearance," the United States is able to provide streamlined border processing for inbound passengers departing from 14 airports outside the territory of the United States. The traveler inspection at a preclearance location is essentially the same inspection a traveler would experience at a U.S. port of entry, but is completed on foreign soil. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) evaluates the host country's aviation security standards at each of these locations to confirm that preclearance airports are screening passengers and accessible property using procedures that provide a level of security equivalent to the security that TSA screening provides in the United States. Passengers on the precleared flights do not have to be rescreened at TSA checkpoints upon arrival in the U.S.

Partnerships with non-governmental organizations and the business community are another often overlooked tool that can help to make cross border travel easier. The Department of State has greatly benefited from ongoing partnerships between consular sections and business

organizations overseas, most prominently the American Chambers of Commerce. As the U.S. Government confronts the challenges of upholding border security and facilitating legitimate travel in an increasingly mobile world, we have partnered with airline carriers, airports, and other travel industry stakeholders to increase participation in programs that provide expedited and more efficient processing to frequent, low-risk travelers. These partnerships encourage innovation and collaboration, and advance the U.S. Government and the industry's mutual goals to attract international visitors to the United States.

New technologies, especially digital tools, can improve processing visa applications, and beyond this, enhance cross-border mobility. Management-based initiatives also enhance mobility by expediting arrival procedures at ports of entry in the United States. The United States has automated many of its travel documents for VWP and other travelers. The visa application process incorporates multiple biographic and biometric security checks, all supported by a sophisticated global information technology network. This system allows the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to apply a risk management-based approach to the visa adjudication while facilitating travel and maintaining security. Machine Readable Passports (MRP) and Visas (MRV) have biographic information entered on the data page according to international specifications and contain biometric information about the passport holder.

TSA has developed the “My TSA” mobile application to provide passengers with 24/7 access to the most commonly requested information about security procedures at airport checkpoints on their mobile devices. The application is available for free, and can be accessed on any device with a web browser.

Several U.S. Government programs for travelers allow expedited immigration, customs, and agriculture processing and clearance for pre-approved, low-risk air program participants upon arrival in the United States. The Trusted Traveler Programs employ a thorough vetting of travelers who have voluntarily applied for membership, paid a fee, and provided personal data (including biographic information, photos, and fingerprints) to U.S. customs officials, who then perform rigorous background checks and an in-person interview of the applicant well before date of travel. The Global Entry, Privium, and NEXUS international traveler programs also provide similar benefits through dedicated lanes and automated kiosks at selected international airports outside the United States.

These are just a few of the good practices the United States has employed to simplify visa and entry procedures to the United States.

A number of more traditional tools are available to OSCE participating States, effective use of which can make cross-border travel easier. Issuance of multiple entry visas and extended length visas are two traditional visa tools that can achieve this. It is important to understand however that the United States bases visa validity on the legal principle of reciprocity—i.e., that the United States grants to other countries, in so far as practicable, the equivalent validity and category of visa that the host government grants to U.S. citizens.

Data-sharing and information exchange between states, whether digital, electronic, or otherwise, is another traditional tool available to OSCE participating States to enhance cross-border mobility. It allows states to mutually evaluate security procedures and risks, and affords opportunities to modify visa regimes to facilitate international travel, as exemplified through the Visa Waiver Program.

Preserving security and facilitating travel in our era are based on an intelligence-driven, risk-based approach, allowing us to provide the most effective security in the most efficient way possible. Data collection is an inherent part of this process, but under INA 222(f) visa records of all passengers are kept confidential. Certain exceptions to the confidentiality of visa records are detailed in INA section 222(f).

The United States uses a number of programs to educate potential visitors on the rules of entry and residence in the United States. Our government makes information available via traditional outlets such as U.S. diplomatic presences abroad (Embassies, Consulates, American Corners) and relevant USG travel and transportation agencies' offices within the United States. We also conduct outreach through universities, commercial travel shows, and we partner with organizations interested in travel, including travel agents, airlines, tour companies, and travel bloggers, to name a few.

Our government also utilizes social media to extend our message on rules of entry and residence, including Department of State websites like travel.state.gov, the Department's blog Dipnote, Twitter (@travelgov), and Facebook ([Facebook.com/travelgov](https://www.facebook.com/travelgov)). A new version of the travel.state.gov (TSG) website in development will contain broader, more user-friendly information than State's current website, covering more than 35 different nonimmigrant visa categories and the Visa Waiver Program for VWP-eligible travelers. User-friendly tools such as the "Visa Wizard"—which guide the user to information most appropriate to his or her needs—will also be available on TSG.

The Department of State makes a point of explaining the visa application process in order to improve applicants' access to simple, straightforward information before, during, and after they apply for a visa. Instructions on how to apply for a visa are available on every visa-processing embassy and consulate's website, and the nonimmigrant visa application form is available in 23 languages, including Chinese, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Several consular sections have produced their own videos that debunk commonly held myths, engage audiences, and prepare applicants. The Department of State recently released a video entitled "Visit America: It's Easier than you Think" that offers welcoming images of the United States coupled with straightforward information about the visa process.

Adroit, integrated use of all of these tools, program, practices, policies, and legislation, along with those discussed in session 2, have inherent value. When used in partnership and cooperation with and between participating States in the OSCE context, these elements can provide true security while facilitating freer movement and human contacts among the people of OSCE participating States.