SAFE PASSAGE

Suspension of Visa Requirements for Refugees from War Areas and Dictatorships

What does it mean?

Every country has the right to decide who can and who cannot enter its territory. In the EU, Regulation 539/2001 lists the States whose nationals need a visa to access EU territory. As it currently stands, all main countries of origin of refugees are on the list, including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, etc.

Suspending visa requirements for nationals of the countries worst affected by war or dictatorships, known as the countries of origin of the majority of refugees in the EU, would allow asylum seekers to travel safely to a Member State and to claim protection on

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Why is it important?

Currently, there are nearly no legal ways to access Europe in order to claim international protection. The obligation to have a valid Schengen or national visa and the imposition of carriers sanctions on transport companies who carry passengers without the appropriate documentation means that people have to resort to dangerous and irregular ways in order to flee their countries in search of safety.

A suspension of visa requirements for countries embroiled in war or affected by dictatorships (for example, Syria or Eritrea) would allow people to travel in a safe and legal manner, without having to resort to irregular means. It would thus make a significant contribution to dismantling the business model of smugglers and criminal networks.

What is the current status?

The Schengen Convention foresees the possibility of lifting visa requirements for refugees; however, this issue is not presently debated at the European level.

It is clear nonetheless that the suspension of visa requirements for nationals of certain countries represents a viable possibility to provide protection to those worst affected by conflicts and dictatorships.