Humanitarian visas to avoid deaths and improve management of refugee flows

- Access to EU territory for the sole purpose of requesting international protection
- Visa applications and issuance at EU embassies and consulates abroad
- 90% of those granted international protection in the EU arrived via irregular means
- Around 30,000 people have died trying to reach Europe since 2000

EU countries should be able to issue humanitarian visas at embassies and consulates abroad, so that people seeking protection can access Europe without risking their lives.

The European Parliament requested on Tuesday that the European Commission tables, by 31 March 2019, a legislative proposal establishing a European Humanitarian Visa, giving access to European territory - exclusively to the member state issuing the visa - for the sole purpose of submitting an application for international protection.

The legislative initiative report was backed by 429 MEPs, 194 voted against and 41 abstained.

MEPs stress that, despite many announcements and requests for safe and legal pathways for asylum-seekers into Europe, the EU lacks a harmonised framework of protected entry procedures. They underline that, due to insufficient legal options, an estimated 90% of those granted international protection reached the European Union through irregular means.

Cut the death toll, combat smuggling and improve use of migration funds

Parliament believes that humanitarian visas would help to address the intolerable death toll in the Mediterranean and on the migration routes to the EU (at least 30,000 persons have died at EU borders since 2000), to combat human smuggling, and to manage arrivals, reception and processing of asylum claims better.

The tool should also contribute to optimising member states’ and the EU’s budget for asylum, law enforcement procedures, border control, surveillance and search and rescue activities, MEPs say.
They stress, however, that the decision to issue European humanitarian visas should remain the sole competence of the member states.

**Security screening before issuing the visa**

The resolution makes clear that beneficiaries will have to prove well-founded exposure to or risk of persecution and not be in a resettlement process already. The assessment of the application should not involve a full status determination process, but before issuing the visa, each applicant should be subject to a security screening, through the relevant national and European databases, “to ensure that they do not pose a security risk”.

**Next steps**

The Parliament asks the Commission to table a legislative proposal by 31 March 2019. The Commission will have to give a reasoned reply to Parliament’s request.

**Further information**

- Adopted text will be published here (11.12.2018)
- Video of the debate (13.11.2018)
- Humanitarian visas: “A right to be heard without risking your life” (Interview with the rapporteur)
- EP Research Service: Added value assessment on humanitarian visas (October 2018)
- EP Multimedia Centre: free photos, video and audio material

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