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European Entry/Exit System (EES)

What Travellers from the UK Need to Know

Independent travel guidance by TravelLynStyle

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European travel has changed, and a digital border system now applies when entering most countries in the Schengen Area. The European Entry/Exit System (EES) modernises border control, improves security and replaces passport stamping for eligible non-EU travellers.

If you hold a UK passport and travel to Europe, this system affects you. It does not prevent travel, introduce visas for short stays, or change where you can go – but it does change how your entry and exit are recorded.

This guide explains the EES clearly and practically, so you know what to expect before you travel.

What is the European Entry/Exit System (EES)?

The EES is a digital system that records the entry and exit of non-EU nationals travelling to the Schengen Area for short stays.

Instead of a passport stamp, travel movements are logged electronically. The system records:

- Your name and passport details
- Date and place of entry and exit
- Length of stay
- Biometric data (facial image and fingerprints)

This allows border authorities to monitor stays accurately and ensure travellers do not exceed permitted time limits.

Who does the EES apply to?

The EES applies to:

- UK passport holders
- Travellers from other non-EU countries
- Visitors entering the Schengen Area for short stays (up to 90 days in any rolling 180-day period)

It does not apply to:

- EU passport holders
- Travellers holding a valid long-stay visa or residence permit issued by a Schengen country

Irish passport holders and the Common Travel Area

Irish passport holders are EU citizens and are not subject to the EES when travelling within the EU.

The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland also operate under the Common Travel Area (CTA), a long-standing arrangement that allows British and Irish citizens to travel and live in each other's countries without needing immigration permission.

In practical terms, airlines and ferry operators may require official photo identification (often a passport), and travellers may be asked to demonstrate identity and nationality on arrival, particularly when travelling by air. Travel between the UK and Ireland is not affected by the EES.

Which countries are affected?

The EES applies to countries that are part of the Schengen Area. This includes most EU member states, as well as several non-EU countries that participate fully in Schengen.

Schengen Area countries (EES applies):

EU Schengen countries include France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Non-EU Schengen countries (EES applies):

- Norway
- Iceland
- Switzerland
- Liechtenstein

EU countries outside the Schengen Area (EES does not apply):

- Ireland
- Cyprus (Cyprus is an EU member but is not currently part of the Schengen Area, so EES does not currently apply when entering Cyprus.)

Travel to non-Schengen EU countries is governed by national entry requirements rather than the Schengen system, and entry and exit movements are not recorded under the EES.

Is EES now in operation?

Yes. The Entry/Exit System became fully operational at Schengen external border crossing points on 10th April 2026, following a phased introduction that began on 12th October 2025.

However, implementation has not been entirely uniform. Technical and operational difficulties mean that the experience can still vary between countries and individual border crossings. In some circumstances, border authorities may adjust biometric processing to manage queues and maintain the flow of travellers.

UK travellers should therefore be prepared for EES registration when crossing an external Schengen border, even if they have previously travelled through another border without being asked to complete the full biometric process.

What happens at the border?

Your first entry under the EES may take slightly longer than before.

At the border you will:

- Present your passport
- Have a facial image taken
- Provide fingerprints

Your digital EES record is normally valid for three years, or until your passport expires. You may still be asked to provide a fingerprint or facial image on later journeys so that border authorities can verify your identity.

If you travel on a new passport, a new EES record may need to be created.

What does this mean for queues and airport timings?

Travellers may experience:

- Longer queues at some border points
- Additional processing time at busy airports, ports and rail crossings

Technical or operational issues can also affect processing times, so the experience may vary between border crossings.

Allowing extra time at borders, particularly during peak travel periods, is sensible.

How long can UK travellers stay in Europe?

The EES enforces the existing rule:

- A maximum of 90 days in any rolling 180-day period within the Schengen Area

This rule has not changed. What has changed is how it is monitored.

Overstays are recorded automatically, making accurate trip planning more important than ever, particularly for frequent travellers and multi-country itineraries.

Is the EES the same as ETIAS?

No. The EES and ETIAS are separate systems with different purposes.

- EES records your entry and exit at the Schengen border
- ETIAS will be a paid travel authorisation completed before travel

ETIAS is not yet in operation and applications are not currently being accepted. The European Union has said that the specific launch date will be announced several months before the system starts. Once introduced, travellers from visa-exempt countries, including most UK passport holders, will apply online before travelling and pay a €20 application fee. Some travellers, including those under 18 and over 70, will be exempt from the fee.

Until ETIAS is officially launched, do not use websites claiming to accept ETIAS applications. Apply only through the official EU channel once applications open.

ETIAS is not a visa. It is a pre-travel authorisation, while EES records eligible travellers when they cross the external Schengen border.

What this means for your travel planning

For most leisure travellers, EES represents an additional border process rather than a barrier to travel.

It is particularly relevant for:

- Frequent travellers to Europe
- Longer stays
- Itineraries combining multiple Schengen countries

Understanding how long you can remain within the Schengen Area, and how trips overlap, allows you to travel with confidence and avoid issues at the border. It is also sensible to retain evidence of your journeys, such as boarding passes and flight, rail or ferry confirmations, particularly if you travel frequently. These can help demonstrate your actual travel dates if an entry or exit is ever recorded incorrectly.

Important notice and disclaimer

While every effort is made to keep this information accurate and up to date, travellers are responsible for ensuring that their travel documentation is valid and that they meet all entry requirements at the time of travel. Entry rules can change and are applied by border authorities.

Sources and further information

For the most up-to-date official guidance, travellers can refer to:

- European Commission travel portal: <https://travel-europe.europa.eu/ees>
- UK government guidance (FCDO): <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/eu-entryexit-system>

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