EES is the EU's Entry/Exit System.

EESy come, EESy go

The EU's Entry/Exit System (EES) recently came into force, adding an extra checkpoint for non-EU nationals entering Europe for short stays. Paul Sillers looks at the implications for airports of this latest initiative to strengthen border control.

The European Union's Entry/Exit System (EES) is a semi-automated IT set-up for registering non-EU nationals each time they cross the external borders of 29 European countries for up to 90 days within any 180-day period.

Any non-EU citizen arriving at an EU border crossing point (in force since 10 November 2024) has to provide their name, date of birth, nationality, gender, travel documents, facial image and/or fingerprints, which are stored in a digital file.

This process can be quicker if they register their data in advance, using dedicated (self-service) equipment, available at some border crossing points, or by using a mobile app – if made available by the country of arrival or departure.

Regardless of how they register, they will be met by a passport control officer.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Though the prospect of this new checkpoint upon arrival at the airport sounds like an unwanted burden, stakeholders are upbeat regarding the benefits – at regional airports too – whilst acknowledging some challenges.

Montserrat Barriga, Director General of the European Regions Airline Association (ERA), told *Regional Gateway*: "The implementation of EES technology in regional airports offers enhanced security and improved efficiency by automating entry and exit processes, as well as collecting biometric data.

"Regional airports face significant challenges due to budget constraints and the scale of required upgrades. The high upfront costs for installing biometric systems and automated gates can put strain on smaller airports, which may lack the financial resources of larger hubs.

"Additionally, adapting their infrastructure to accommodate these new systems, including allocating space and integrating them into existing processes, may pose logistical difficulties for these airports. Hence, we believe regional airports would benefit from a tailored solution for compliance."

The ERA was involved in the preparation for the EES leading up to 2022, when it was first scheduled to launch. However, Barriga noted that due to delays from technical issues and installation setbacks, the system was postponed to November 2024.

She said that during this period, the ERA worked with its members and stakeholders to ensure readiness, "addressing concerns about airport infrastructure, passenger experience and public communication to ensure a smooth transition when the system goes live".

Furthermore, the ERA has been

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actively supporting its stakeholders with the smooth implementation of EES by participating in working groups and high-level meetings with organisations such as EU-LISA and DG HOME to manage the rollout.

"We have been focused on addressing concerns such as the operational burden on both airlines and airports, ensuring that staff are adequately trained, and the installation of necessary equipment," said Barriga.

EES ROLL-OUT ACROSS EUROPE
Across Europe, airports have been gearing up in anticipation of the implementation of EES.

Doron Sajet, Senior Spokesman, Royal Schiphol Group, told *Regional Gateway*: "Schiphol Airport is fully prepared for the implementation of the EES. In collaboration with the government, the airport has completed all necessary preparations, including the installation of self-service kiosks and the enhancement of wayfinding systems. Furthermore, our staff are ready to assist travellers, providing them with all the necessary information and support."

Meanwhile, at Fraport AG, spokesperson Dieter Hulick said: "In principle, Fraport supports the efforts of the EU and the member states with regard to establishing modern and sustainable border control processes. Due to the high connectivity of FRA Airport, many third-country nationals (TCN) travel through our hub and will therefore be directly affected by the introduction of EES."

Hulick emphasised that the introduction of the EES leads to a "changed local border control process for this group of people", so to provide a seamless and convenient process for passengers after the introduction of the EES, Fraport "has been intensively preparing for its introduction for several years. Together with our partners (federal police, airlines and others), we are taking infrastructural and procedural measures to ensure that the EES is implemented as seamlessly and effectively as possible."

Sounding a note of caution, he added: "Fraport AG sees the introduction of an (IT) system that has not been fully tested as a risk that should not be underestimated. It can lead to disruptions in the entire European and global air traffic network – with potentially significant disruptions for

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Across Europe airports have been gearing up to ensure minimal disruption in the implementation of EES.

At Prague Airport, the emphasis is on the installation of automated self-service kiosks and the adaptation of existing infrastruction for EES.

passengers and effects on the operation of our airport."

For this reason, Fraport supports a "soft start" approach which allows a gradual ramping up of the entire FRA system for border control operations under EES over several days and weeks.

"In our opinion," concluded Hulick, "the structured start-up takes into account the high risk of introducing an untested system. We see great advantages in achieving system stability and creating appropriate reaction options at individual process points."

INTEROPERABILITY ARCHITECTURE

In the Czech Republic, preparations for the EES entry into operation have been co-ordinated by the Foreign Police, which is responsible for both the development of the national part of the EES and the acquisition of the necessary technical equipment.

Ondřej Krátoška, Department of Communication, Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, told *Regional Gateway*: "EES is one of the main pillars of the interoperability architecture between justice and home affairs information systems. It aims to increase

security in the EU and contribute to more efficient border controls for people entering the EU.

"The EES is also one of the main steps towards automated border crossings which will facilitate travel to the EU in the long term. In addition, thanks to the digitalisation of entry/exit records, the EES will allow travellers to check their possible length of stay in the EU in the system in a clear and swift way through a web portal."

In terms of implementation at Prague Airport, Krátoška said the main emphasis "was on the installation of automated self-service kiosks and the adaptation of the existing infrastructure for the changes connected to the EES. In this respect, close co-operation with Prague Airport from the very first moment was one of the main prerequisites for achieving readiness for the EES."

Krátoška said that implementing the EES at airports could pose challenges, adding: "Biometric checks could lead to processing delays during peak times, but the Czech Republic has invested in upgrading infrastructure to accommodate new legal and technical requirements."

The country has also invested in extensive staff training to ensure border

procedures run smoothly without operational disruptions.

On site at Prague Airport, Communication Director Eva Krejčí told *Regional Gateway* that the airport has "been working on the EES kiosks for about five years, especially on the preparation of the infrastructure, their placement and optimal numbers.

"Since May this year, we have been working intensively with the Czech Police on testing, modifying the kiosk questionnaires and currently on the navigation and sorting of passengers at border control."

She revealed that one of the main challenges is "definitely the limited space into which all EES elements have to fit in order to be efficient and to have the least impact on border control throughput".

On the upside, Krejčí anticipates that "once EES is in place, passengers will experience an acceleration of border control at departure. At exit border control, passage through automated passport control counters is to be allowed. In the future, this is also envisaged at arrival for selected countries." ∎