

## **British Irish Visa Scheme - Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the British-Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS)?**

The British-Irish Visa Scheme allows for mutual recognition of short-stay visas between the UK and Ireland. This means that a British short stay visa will be valid for travel onward to Ireland, and an Irish short-stay visa will be valid for travel on to UK. Visas that are valid for use under this scheme will have 'BIVS' endorsed on them.

### **Why has this been introduced?**

The Scheme promotes legitimate travel between Ireland and the United Kingdom, helping more tourists and business visitors to travel. It supports joint Irish and British measures to secure the external border of the Common Travel Area (CTA), to ensure smooth processing of legitimate visas and tackling abuse.

### **What is the Common Travel Area?**

The Common Travel Area comprises Ireland and the United Kingdom. For citizens of those countries, there are no passport controls between the two countries.

The launch of the BIVS means that visitors can travel throughout the Common Travel Area on one visa. For the purposes of this scheme, the Common Travel Area excludes the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

### **Is this the same as Schengen?**

No. Neither Ireland nor the United Kingdom are part of the Schengen zone.

### **What are the benefits?**

Previously a traveller intending to travel to Ireland and then on to the UK had to apply for two separate short-stay visas, which required two application processes and two application fees. Now the applicant only needs to apply once. It is also possible to make spontaneous trips to Ireland or the UK – eg. if a person is visiting Dublin, they could decide to take a day-trip to Belfast without needing to apply for a further visa.

### **Should I apply for a British or an Irish visa?**

You should apply for your visa from the country in which you will arrive first. If you plan to travel to Ireland first, and then go the UK, you should apply for an Irish visa.

If you apply for a multiple-entry visa, you should note that each time you travel you must arrive first in the country which issued your visa.

### **How do I know if I have the right visa?**

If your visa has BIVS marked on it, it can be used to travel to both Ireland and the UK. You must land first in the country which issued your visa.

### **Where do I apply? How do I apply?**

From now on, all Irish visa applications must be submitted to a Visa Application Centre (VAC). First you should complete an online application form here:

<https://www.visas.inis.gov.ie/AVATS/OnlineHome.aspx>. You will then be given a link to information on our Visa Application Centres. At the VAC, you will be asked to provide biometric information.

### **What biometric information will be taken?**

Your photograph will be taken, and ten finger-prints. Your signature will also be scanned.

### **I am applying for a long-term visa (student, work visa etc.). Do I still have to apply to a Visa Application Centre?**

Yes. From now on Irish visa applications must be made to Visa Application Centres.

### **I only want to go to Ireland. Why do I have to apply at a Visa Application Centre? Why do I have to give biometric information?**

From now on, Irish visa applications can only be submitted at a Visa Application Centre. This is part of an overall agreement between Ireland and the United Kingdom to secure the external borders of the Common Travel Area, in order to facilitate and encourage legitimate travel and to prevent abuse.

### **Can I submit my application directly to the Irish Visa Office in Beijing?**

No. From now on Irish visa applications in China must be made at a Visa Application Centre.

### Where are the Visa Application Centres?

There are Visa Application Centres in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Wuhan, Shenyang, Jinan, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Shenzhen, Fuzhou, Chengdu, and Hong Kong. The centres are run by [VFS](#). When you finish your online application form at <https://www.visas.inis.gov.ie/AVATS/OnlineHome.aspx>, you will be given a link to information on the centres.

### Can I apply for an Irish Visa at any Visa Application Centre?

You can apply to the VAC which is most convenient for you.

### How much does it cost?

Please follow these links for information on [Visa Fees & VFS service charge](#) and [payment methods](#).

### Will my visa application fee be returned if I change my mind and decide not to proceed with my application?

Once the on-line payment is completed the fee cannot be refunded.

### Who makes a decision on my visa application?

If you apply for an Irish visa, the Irish Visa Office will make a decision on your application. If you apply for a British visa, the British Visa Office will make a decision on your application.

### Who is eligible?

Anyone who is visa-required to travel to or enter both Ireland and the United Kingdom, who is applying for a short-stay visa, and who has given biometric information as part of their application, is eligible for the scheme.

The scheme launched first in China in October 2014, was subsequently introduced in India, and will be rolled out in other countries later. So currently Chinese citizens who apply for their short-stay visa in China can avail of the scheme.

### Which types of visa applications will the scheme apply to?

A) UK Visas

Chinese nationals with the following UK visitor visas can travel to Ireland after the UK if the visa is

endorsed with the label 'BIVS':

- General Visitor visa
- Business Visitor visa
- Child Visitor visa – (accompanied only)
- Student Visitor visa
- Family Visitor visa
- Entertainer Visitor visa
- Private Medical Treatment Visitor visa
- Sports Visitor visa
- Parent of a Child at school
- Approved Destination Scheme
- Student Visitors
- Prospective Entrepreneurs
- Visitors undertaking Permitted Paid Employment

B) Irish visas

Chinese nationals with the following short-stay 'C' visas (single-entry or multiple-entry) can travel to Ireland as well as on to the United Kingdom if their visa is endorsed with the label 'BIVS':

- Visit (family/friend)
- Visit (tourist)
- Conference/Event
- Business

**Are there circumstances where my visa will not be endorsed with the 'BIVS' endorsement and, therefore, not eligible for use under the Scheme?**

Yes, each jurisdiction maintains the decision-making power in relation to applications for visas to travel to or enter their jurisdiction as first point of entry into the Common Travel Area, and may decide not to enter the 'BIVS' endorsement for a number of reasons, for example if you are subject to an exclusion order from the other country.

**Are students eligible?**

No. Only short-stay visas are eligible under the scheme. If you travel to Ireland on a long-stay student visa, you must apply for a separate British Visa if you wish to visit the UK.

**I am a Chinese citizen living in Hong Kong/Macau. Am I eligible?**

Yes. There is a Visa Application Centre in Hong Kong, and you can submit your application there,

after completing your online application <https://www.visas.inis.gov.ie/AVATS/OnlineHome.aspx>

**I am a Chinese citizen living outside China, Hong Kong, and Macau. Am I eligible?**

No. The scheme only applies to applicants who can provide biometric information. The scheme was launched first in China, and then India, and it will eventually be rolled out across the world.

**What about visa applications from Mongolia?**

There is no change to the process of applying for an Irish visa from Mongolia. The BIVS has not yet been launched in Mongolia.

**I am applying for a short-stay visa under EU Freedom of Movement Rights. Is the process the same for me?**

If you are a beneficiary of [Directive 2004/38/EC \(the 'Free Movement Directive'\)](#) i.e. a 'qualifying family member' of an EU/EEA /Swiss Citizen and are attending at a visa application centre for the purpose of providing your biometric information you are exempt from the service charge.

You have the option of submitting your supporting documents to the relevant Irish consular facility yourself or availing of the service offered by the visa application centre. If you avail of the service offered by the visa application service you will be required to pay the service charge at a reduced rate.

**What if I'm flying to Ireland first, but my flight transits through a UK airport?**

That's fine, and you can do that with a BIVS visa issued by Ireland. You will need to complete the transit and travel to Ireland within 24 hours of arriving at the UK airport.

**If I have an Irish visa, how many times can I visit the UK, and vice versa?**

You can visit as many times as you like, within the permitted duration of stay as decided by the Irish immigration officer when you first arrive. Your permitted duration of stay will be stamped on your passport when you first arrive. When you apply for an Irish visa, you will need to demonstrate that Ireland is your primary destination.

**If I have an Irish visa endorsed with BIVS, can I visit Northern Ireland?**

Yes. Once you have arrived first in Ireland, you can then visit Northern Ireland.

**If I get a multiple-entry short-stay Irish visa, do I have to enter Ireland first every time, or just the first time I use the visa?**

If you have an Irish BIVS visa, you will have to enter Ireland first every time you use the visa. Once you leave the Common Travel Area to any other country, the next time you enter the Common Travel Area you must arrive in Ireland first.

**If I get a multiple-entry short-stay United Kingdom visa, do I have to enter the United Kingdom first every time, or just the first time I use the visa?**

No. The first time you use the visa you must enter the United Kingdom first. Once you have done that, you can leave the Common Travel Area and then re-enter it either to Ireland or to the United Kingdom, during the life-time of the UK visa. However, your total permitted time in Ireland is 90 days or the remaining validity of the UK visa, whichever is shorter.

**I already have a multiple-entry short-stay visa for the United Kingdom, and I have used this before to travel to Ireland under the Irish Short-Stay Visa Waiver Programme. Is it still possible to use this visa now to enter Ireland?**

You can continue to use your existing multiple-entry short-stay UK visa for entry to Ireland under the Irish Short-Stay Visa Waiver Programme until that programme expires on 31 October 2016.

**I already have an Irish short stay visa. Can I use that to enter the UK?**

No, you will need a new visa. The scheme will apply to Irish short-stay visas issued after the launch of the scheme on 28 October 2014 and which have BIVS marked on them.