Description of the Working Party on Visa Issues

In light of the challenges that some Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) attendees have faced in attending ICANN meetings, this working party (WP) aims to understand the different types of issues faced while obtaining visas and finalizing tickets to be able to attend ICANN meetings. The WP also aims to generate proposals so as to help overcome these challenges in the future. The WP at present has 22 members and is expanding. It is open to members of all stakeholder groups within the broader ICANN community and beyond.

Working methods

Before ICANN54 in Dublin, the WP planned to list all the experiences related to travel issues (visa, tickets, etc.) shared by its members. A non-exhaustive list of these experiences were compiled and added in this document under the section titled "Problems." Problems that are more prevalent and those regions and countries that are more affected are discussed in order to generate suggestions of how to overcome these issues for future attendees of ICANN meetings. Members of the WP can also add suggestions and what they think could be done better in order to avoid these type of challenges in the future.

Aims

The aim of this Working Party is to help overcome the challenges faced while obtaining visas to be able to attend ICANN meetings. It will come up with suggestions for the ICANN staff and the visa applicants (meeting attendees) that will help the participants be able to avoid certain issues when obtaining visas for ICANN-related events or meetings. The solutions include but are not limited to proposed changes to ICANN's travel arrangement processes, best practices for the visa applicants, and other useful information to avoid delays and problems in the visa process.

Action Items

1. Those that have faced visa issues will explain the problems, as you can see with some of them that have been listed below. If you had a similar problem, please write down your country of origin and the country you were traveling to.
2. Complete this document - work on objectives, working methods, and problems. Please add any other title as you see necessary.
3. Compile a list of ICANN policies that can affect obtaining a visa.

Problems

1. There is no embassy of the host country in the attendee's country or it is in another city and applications cannot be sent by mail. There are costs involved (non-refundable by ICANN) when an applicant is traveling to the other city.
2. The embassy is in a different city from where the attendee lives and it is only open for a few hours.
3. The embassy requires visa appointments to be booked online, and there are very limited appointment slots, especially as the date of travel approaches.

4. The issue of a visa requires a mandatory personal interview, which is a non-trivial process for a large country when the applicant lives in a smaller city, requiring travel, accommodation and expenses in addition to time.
5. There are issues with transit visas including but not limited to confusion over when they are required given the specific route to the meeting and layover time, or the requirement for a transit visa may become apparent only at the point of ticketing or at some other late stage in the travel preparation process.
6. Missed flights due to strict border controls that delayed the attendee so he/she could not catch the connecting flight.
7. The attendee is temporarily a resident of another country and the local embassy/consulate does not issue visas for non-permanent residents.
8. Geopolitical issues between countries limit the probability of grant of visa (eg., Azerbaijan and Armenia)
9. A visa is issued but only a few days before the meeting when there is not much time left to plan and finalize travel, especially if the meeting location is far and/or outside the applicant's region.
10. Visa is issued but the meeting has already passed resulting in high cost in terms of finances, time, and energy that is of no benefit at that stage.
11. Visa was denied on first attempt but granted on second attempt with no refund for both visa processes from ICANN (this applies to those funded by ICANN).
12. Actual visa cost is refunded (for funded attendees) without considering unofficial exchange rates and travel costs.
13. A visa is denied on grounds of the personal finances of the applicant despite the travel, accommodation, and stipend being covered by ICANN.
14. For ICANN55 in Morocco, there was a mandatory requirement that a fax/letter needed to be sent from the Embassy of Pakistan in Rabat to the Embassy of Morocco in Islamabad. And the participants from Pakistan did not have access to the Pakistani embassy in Morocco but only the Moroccan embassy in Pakistan. So, we could not ask them to issue a letter/fax for us.

Solutions

1. Some countries can be established as "preferred transit hubs" for visa transit issues, as they present fewer issues to travelers from various countries and regions.
2. The host country can exceptionally accept visa applications by mail.
3. The host country's government and the private sector that arrange travel visas should work together to resolve the issues. Or the private company that is a host should be required to address visa issues by discussing with government officials (an example includes a possible arrangement whereby a visa is issued upon entry to non-Schengen states). There is also an opportunity to work with the GAC in collaboration with ICANN staff on this issue.
4. ICANN Fellows, compared to regular attendees of the meetings, are likely to face more challenges since they (in general) have traveled less, are generally from the Global South where obtaining visas tends to be more difficult, and frequently face challenges obtaining a visa as a student or as a less frequent international traveler. Thus, for the Fellows, there could be some special arrangements as discussed in point 3. The invitation letters for Fellows can be issued as soon as the Fellows are announced by giving them more time for the visa application process. This is because, in certain cases, it takes months for the visa to be issued (or not even issued at all).
5. ICANN should plan to cover the fees resulting in an applicant needing to travel to another city/country to apply for a visa.
6. ICANN should be more flexible with the ticketing process by giving Fellows from "risk countries" with good traveling records the choice of buying their own ticket and to reimburse them later. This implies either allowing some exceptions or modifications of the Fellowship Terms and Conditions regarding the **Transportation** item 1.b:"*Fellows are not entitled to create their own travel itinerary, nor are they entitled to reroute or extend the itinerary created by ICANN's travel service provider unless agreed upon by the ICANN Constituency Travel team and executed by the ICANN travel service provider.*
7. Suggestion: a translation/interpreter help section. Although ICANN has the language services dpt, collaborators to this working group can volunteer to help others w/ translation issues. For IGF 2015 in Brazil, for instance, help was needed on Portuguese/English translators (also Spanish) (Renate volunteered).
8. Experience with visas section: volunteers can be recruited to explain visa processes, preferably collaborators who already have some of the more difficult visas to get (e.g., individuals from the Global South).
9. Produce general guidelines for a successful visa application. Also, list factors that could lead to issues and denials.
10. Delays in the return of travel documents (e.g., passport due to protracted visa or transit visa processing). In case of a transit visa-only requirement, it can prevent the person using an alternative route to attend the meeting.
11. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the host country must send an internal memo, circular letter, and/or fax to its embassies and consulates around the world mentioning the names of all the attendees from a specific country and requesting that they provide expedited (and free) visa delivery for meeting participants. Alternatively, ICANN staff can

liaise with the host country to ensure the embassies and consulates closest to attendees from specific countries are informed about the situation.

12. Host country of the next ICANN meeting should have a booth during the previous ICANN meeting and could start delivering visa process for participants13. Community members and ICANN could collaborate to design a specific logo which could be placed on the invitation letter serving as a sign or alert for the embassies to place ICANN Meeting visa applications to a more emergent level than tour and some other purposes of visas. As commented by Wolfgang Kleinwaechter on 10th, March on the NCUC mailing list, "Why not have something similar to the Red Cross. Let´s proposed a "Green Gate". A specific logo can help expedite the visa application process like a Red Cross does to help save human beings in emergencies.

13. Preference may be given to locations that allow easy access to visas through the use of e-visas or other means that don't require a lengthy process including passport submission.

14. ICANN should workout modalities with host country for visa on arrival.

15.

LAYOUT SUGGESTIONS

We should map the perceived/suggested solutions to the immediately tractable problems either in matched numbering or layout (e.g., as a table).

PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS

As document evolves for navigational assistance with Document Map (MS Word's ribbon View >> Navigation Pane) with respect to if exported as an MS Word file we should label sections in heading format (e.g., Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.)