



# 'Crucial loopholes' in visa programs must be closed

**Matt A. Mayer**

February 1, 2016 12:16 pm | *AEIdeas*

Each week, we learn why maintaining the status quo (instead of reforming our visa processes) is a bad idea. Though some have defended the status quo, [even the US Department of Homeland Security realizes changes need to occur](http://www.politico.eu/article/europes-fake-forged-stolen-passport-epidemic-visa-free-travel-rights/) (<http://www.politico.eu/article/europes-fake-forged-stolen-passport-epidemic-visa-free-travel-rights/>) to ensure America's security. Specifically:

In the aftermath of Paris, the US Department of Homeland Security became so worried about the implications for screening travelers to America that it gave France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Greece a February 1 deadline to fix "crucial loopholes" or lose access to the US visa waiver program. The program allows about 20 million people per year from 38 countries, most of them in Europe, to enter the United States for business or pleasure without a visa.

"Crucial loopholes" certainly doesn't sound like a minor issue. It isn't. As I noted previously, [more must be done](https://www.aei.org/publication/the-importance-of-fingerprints-to-americas-security/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/the-importance-of-fingerprints-to-americas-security/>) to make sure terrorists can't enter America. Even one of France's top officials called for changes. Bernard Cazeneuve, France's Minister of the Interior, said "fraudulent passports are 'very hard to detect' because they are often genuine documents seized from public offices overrun by ISIL or taken from dead soldiers or civilians. The French minister said that combating this trade was crucial to avoiding 'further atrocities in future.'"



[http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RTS16AC\\_refugee\\_passport-e1454346841100.jpg](http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RTS16AC_refugee_passport-e1454346841100.jpg)

A migrant holds his passport and a train ticket in Freilassing, Germany September 15, 2015. REUTERS/Dominic Ebenbichler.

The article goes on to note:

One Greek intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that “between five and seven percent of all Greek passports stem from fake ID cards or birth certificates,” which he acknowledged were “fairly easy” to procure.

...

“There are certain countries, like Sweden, where you can lose your passports four to six times in a year and get four to six new passports. To date I believe there are at least 20,000 duplicates out there,” said one EU security official with knowledge of the issue, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

...

“A whole travel package, including an EU passport, can cost up to €10,000,” said an Austrian intelligence official. “From what we know, the main production units are in the Balkans, followed by Turkey.”

...

In the last six years, Interpol has seen a sharp uptick in the number of missing passports — within Europe and around the globe.

It goes without saying that the net impact of visa programs for Americans and their businesses is very positive. That doesn't mean, however, we shouldn't make reforms when events increase the risk and expose possible vulnerabilities. The combination of the [rise of Daesh](https://www.aei.org/publication/paris-attacks-isis-still-dangerous-al-qaeda-group/) (https://www.aei.org/publication/paris-attacks-isis-still-dangerous-al-qaeda-group/), the [flow of refugees into Europe](https://www.aei.org/publication/on-immigration-intolerance-and-the-wests-fundamental-dilemma/) (https://www.aei.org/publication/on-immigration-intolerance-and-the-wests-fundamental-dilemma/) from Syria et al., the [Schengen Agreement's removal of border controls](https://www.aei.org/publication/europe-considers-suspending-the-schengen-agreement/) (https://www.aei.org/publication/europe-considers-suspending-the-schengen-agreement/) across Europe, and the various visa programs requires US officials to take a closer look at our processes and the processes of our allies to ensure "crucial loopholes" are closed.

A close review isn't an unreasonable action. It is a common sense thing to do when events change the current status quo.

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/crucial-loopholes-in-visa-programs-must-be-closed/>