



EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES

# SKOPJE - MACEDONIA

## Ask the Consul

The United States remains a popular destination for business, tourism, study, and temporary work. Unfortunately, many misconceptions and myths exist about U.S. visa policy. That's why we want to speak directly to you about the policies and procedures for U.S. visitor visas. In our "Ask the Consul" column, our goal is to answer your questions about traveling to the United States, be it as a tourist, businessperson, student, or legal permanent resident.

For our first column, we have selected a few frequently asked questions we hear from our applicants from Macedonia and Kosovo.

### **1. I applied for a U.S. visitor visa last year and the consular officer told me I didn't qualify because my ties aren't strong enough. What did she mean, especially since she didn't even look at all the documents I brought with me?**

U.S. immigration law requires all applicants for non-immigrant visas to overcome the presumption that they are intending to immigrate to the United States. Successful applicants do this by showing strong social and economic ties to a country outside of the United States. Consular officers evaluate a combination of factors like length of residency and/or employment in Macedonia or Kosovo, family ties outside of the U.S., financial situation, record of previous travel abroad, and purpose of travel to the U.S. Each case is treated individually, as each applicant has an individual set of circumstances. A consular officer will evaluate the applicant's documents for any additional information. Because documents are submitted before the applicant speaks to an officer, the documents are generally reviewed before the interview begins. However, it is the totality of the applicant's circumstances that determines the decision, and it varies on a case-by-case basis.

### **2. Don't believe everything you hear...**

If you would like to apply for a non-immigrant visa to visit the United States, your best source of information regarding both the application process and relevant law is the Non-immigrant Visa Unit's web page at [http://skopje.usembassy.gov/non-immigrant\\_visas.html](http://skopje.usembassy.gov/non-immigrant_visas.html). The Non-immigrant Visa Unit's web page describes the application process step-by-step, providing information about how to make an appointment, download and complete application forms, gather the recommended supporting documentation for your interview, pay the non-refundable visa application fee, have your photo taken and, finally, bring your application to the Consular Section of the United States Embassy in Skopje. The web page also will include frequently asked questions (and answers) regarding non-immigrant visas and links to past "Ask the Consul" articles.

You should be cautious of accepting advice regarding the non-immigrant visa process and relevant law from other sources. Given the high level of interest in travel to the United States, many people, be they friends, family members or individuals holding themselves out as experts, have beliefs about the non-immigrant visa process and relevant law that are simply incorrect. So we urge you to come directly to the source and visit our web page for information instead of accepting the word of individuals who may be unintentionally (or intentionally) misinforming you.

Also, please note that consular officers only speak to applicants within the consular section. Anyone outside the Embassy who claims to be a consular officer and offers to help on a specific case is committing fraud and should be reported to the consular section immediately. Furthermore, the only fees connected to a visa are paid either at the bank or within the section. Anyone offering to procure a visa for money should be reported to the police.

Please also remember to call to schedule your non-immigrant visa appointment several months before the date of

your intended travel. Keep in mind that you are now required to fill out your non-immigrant visa application on the Internet. The Electronic Visa Application Form is available at [http://skopje.usembassy.gov/apply\\_niv.html](http://skopje.usembassy.gov/apply_niv.html) or <http://evisaforms.state.gov>.

### **3. How can I be sure I am prepared for my immigrant visa interview?**

Every day, many applicants leave the U.S. Consular Section without their visas due to lack of preparedness. You can avoid this by having all the required documents completed. While the instructions may appear daunting, reading them thoroughly will ensure that you are well-prepared for the interview. Depending on the type of visa, most applicants should have an Application for Immigrant Visa (Form DS-230), certificates of birth, marriage, and (if applicable) divorce, a medical report, a police certificate, and an Affidavit of Support (Form I-864).

The DS-230 must be completed in advance. Make sure all names and dates of birth are correct, and that marriage and divorce certificates are included and correct. Do not sign the form. The DS-230 must be signed in front of the consular officer. Please be sure to answer all questions truthfully and accurately. If you fail to answer a question or answer a question untruthfully – for example, concealing a prior arrest – this will delay your visa issuance and perhaps result in a permanent refusal.

Birth, marriage, and divorce certificates must be current and legalized. Before you come to the Consular Section, make sure all names and dates of birth are correct. A simple misspelling of a name could delay visa issuance for a week or more.

Medical examination results are valid for one year. The results of medical examinations must be submitted in the original envelope. Please do not open the envelope.

Police and Court Certificates require accurate names and dates of birth. If they are in a language other than English, Macedonian, or Albanian, you will be asked for a translated copy. An extra minute to confirm the name, date, and stamp before leaving the Police Office and/or the Court Office will save you delays and a return trip for a new report. Police and Court Certificates are also valid for one year.

You must have one Form I-864 (Affidavit of Support) from the petitioner. If the petitioner does not meet the financial requirements to support the applicant, you will need a Form I-864 from one or more joint sponsors. A copy of the most recent U.S. Federal tax return must accompany each Form I-864.

For immigrant visa applications based on a marital relationship, you will need to convince the consular officer that your marriage is bona fide and was not done for the purpose of obtaining a visa. Evidence that you can bring includes (but is not limited to) photographs (preferably taken in different places over a period of time), emails or letters, and phone bills. If your marriage was arranged by your respective families and you consequently have known each other only a short time, you will need to be able to show a relationship with your spouse's family, and to show that you followed the traditions of your culture.

Finally, check your passport. Make sure it is not about to expire.

Taking each of these steps improves your chances of obtaining your visa promptly. Qualified applicants will be able to pick up their issued visas the day after their interview.

4. If I qualify for the visa, how long do I have to wait to have it put in my passport? Will the Consulate hold my passport while I wait?

Most applicants receive their visas either the same day as their interview, or one working day after the interview. A small number of applicants are subject to additional administrative processing. If your application is subject to administrative processing, we return your passport to you at the time of the interview and contact you once the additional processing is done. Once the visa is ready, the applicant simply drops off the passport for visa issuance the next business day.

What have you always wanted to “Ask the Consul” about U.S. visas? Send your questions to [asktheconsulskopje@state.gov](mailto:asktheconsulskopje@state.gov). Please note that questions sent to this email address must be of general interest; we will not respond to questions about specific cases sent to this email address.