

EU Visa Policy: Commission upgrades the Visa Information System to better secure the EU's external borders

The proposed changes will allow for more thorough background checks on visa applicants; close security information gaps through better information exchange between Member States; and ensure full interoperability with other EU-wide databases.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *“Every year, millions of non-EU nationals enter the EU with a visa, be it for a short stay or for a longer period. With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. Criminals and potential terrorists should not be able to come to Europe unnoticed. Europe is not a fortress – but we need to know who is crossing our borders. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith.”*

The Visa Information System (VIS) is an EU database which connects border guards at the EU's external borders with Member States' consulates across the world. It provides visa issuing authorities with key information on applicants for short-stay Schengen visas while allowing border guards to detect travellers that may pose security risks. Today's proposal expands the scope of the VIS – notably by adding long stay-visas and residence permits to the system – in full respect of data protection rules, to ensure that these authorities have the information they need, when they need it. The proposal is the second step of the reform of the common EU visa policy and follows the amendments to the Visa Code, presented by the Commission in [March 2018](#).

Enhancing security and closing information gaps

The proposed upgrade of the VIS database will enhance internal security and improve border management through the following measures:

- **Enhanced security checks across all databases:** All visa applications recorded in the VIS will now be automatically checked against all other EU information systems for security and migration, such as the newly established Entry-Exit System (EES), the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), through a Single Search Portal. This obligatory crosscheck will detect applicants using multiple identities and identify anyone posing security or irregular migration risks;
- **Better data and information exchange:** Currently no information is held at EU level on long-stay visas and residence permits. The proposed upgrades will extend the scope of the VIS to also include such information. This will allow border guards to quickly determine whether

a long-stay visa or a residence permit used to cross the Schengen external borders is valid and in the hands of its legitimate holder – closing an important security gap;

- **More efficient return procedures:** From now on, copies of the visa applicant's travel document will also be included in the VIS database. This measure, coupled with the authorisation for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency staff to have access to the VIS, will facilitate the identification and readmission of undocumented irregular migrants, thereby increasing the efficiency of the EU's return policy;
- **Strengthened capacity to prosecute and prevent crime :** Law enforcement authorities and Europol will now have a more structured access to the VIS for the prevention, detection or investigation of terrorist offences or other serious crimes, under strict conditions and in full respect of the EU's data protection rules. Access to the VIS will be also opened to law enforcement authorities for the purpose of searching or identifying missing or abducted persons and victims of trafficking.

Next steps

The eu-LISA will be the EU Agency responsible for the development and management of the upgraded VIS database. As the final element of the EU visa policy reform, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to complete their legislative processes as swiftly as possible to close any remaining information gaps and facilitate travel to the EU for legitimate visitors.

Background

The common EU visa policy facilitates travel to the EU for tourism and business purposes, contributing to the EU's economy and growth and intercultural connections and dialogue. In 2016 alone, almost 14 million Schengen visas were issued for short stay visits (see the [latest statistics](#) on Schengen visas).

Since the entry into force of the [Visa Code in 2010](#), the environment in which visa policy operates has drastically changed. In recent years, the EU has been faced with new migration and security challenges. In [September 2017](#), the Commission announced it would come forward with ideas on how to modernise the EU's common visa policy. The Commission confirmed it would propose a revision of the Visa Code in its [Work Programme for 2018](#) and delivered on this commitment in [March 2018](#).

At the same time, the EU is upgrading its information systems for security and border management in order to close information gaps and enhance internal security. Following up on the [Council conclusions from June 2017](#), the Commission presented in [December 2017](#) a proposal to make EU information systems work together in a more efficient and intelligent way. Today's proposal upgrades the VIS and lays the foundation for the system to become fully interoperable with other EU databases for border and migration management

For More Information

[Factsheet](#) – Upgrading the Visa Information System (VIS)

[Factsheet](#) – EU Information Systems

Proposal for a [new Regulation on the Visa Information System](#)

[Press Release](#) – EU Visa Policy: Commission puts forward proposals to make it stronger, more efficient and more secure

[Press Release](#) – Security Union: Commission closes information gaps to better protect EU citizens