Data protection

Access to VIS data is limited to authorised staff working for visa, border, immigration and asylum authorities for the performance of their tasks.

Data is kept in the VIS for 5 years.

Any person has the right to be informed about his/her data in the VIS. Any person may request that inaccurate data about him- or herself be corrected, and that unlawfully recorded data be deleted.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND FAQs
European Commission
http://ec.europa.eu/vis
What is the VIS? *

The VIS is a system for the exchange of visa data among Schengen Member States. These States share a common area of free movement without internal border controls. They have a common visa policy which includes exchanging information on visa applicants.

The specific objectives of the VIS are to facilitate visa procedures, to enhance the security of the visa application process and to facilitate visa checks at the external borders of the Schengen Area.

* This document is meant purely as a documentation tool and [name of the Schengen Member State/associated country concerned] does not assume any liability for its content.

Advantages of the VIS

**FACILITATING VISA PROCEDURES**

The VIS allows Schengen Member States to determine a visa applicant’s reliability more easily. The VIS helps Schengen Member States to verify whether an applicant has used previous visas lawfully. These checks facilitate the visa issuance process, particularly for frequent travellers.

**PROTECTING YOUR IDENTITY**

Thanks to the use of biometric data, a visa holder can easily be identified as the person who applied for the visa. Biometric technology facilitates the detection of travellers using another person’s travel documents and protects travellers from identity theft.

**STREAMLINING OF BORDER CHECKS**

When arriving at an external border of the Schengen Area, the visa holder’s biometric data is checked to confirm his/her identity. This leads to more accurate processing and greater security.

The VIS in practice

The visa applicant’s biometric data (10-digit finger scans and digital photograph) is collected. It is a simple and discreet procedure that only takes a few minutes. Biometric data, along with the data provided in the visa application form, is recorded in a secure central database.

10-digit finger scans are neither required from children under the age of 12 nor from people who cannot physically provide finger scans.

Frequent travellers to the Schengen Area do not have to give new finger scans every time they apply for a new visa. Once finger scans are stored in the VIS, they can be re-used for further visa applications over a 5-year period.

The visa holder’s finger scans may be compared against those in the database at the Schengen Area’s external borders. A mismatch does not mean that entry will be automatically refused - it will just lead to further checks on the traveller’s identity.
**WHAT IS THE VIS?**

The Visa Information System (VIS) is a system for the exchange of visa data between Schengen States. The implementation of the VIS is a key element of the common visa policy, which together with other policies allows the European Union to establish an area of freedom, security and justice.

The main objectives of the VIS are to facilitate visa application procedures, to facilitate checks at external borders and to enhance security. The VIS facilitates the exchange of data between Schengen States on visa applications in order to ease procedures, prevent "visa shopping" and assist in the fight against fraud.

For the purpose of the implementation of the VIS, consular posts and external border crossing points of the Schengen States will be connected to the central VIS database. The VIS is progressively being rolled out in the different regions of the world, starting with North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia), the Near East (Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) and the Gulf Region (Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen).

The VIS contains biographic and biometric data of persons applying for a Schengen visa. Eventually it is expected to include approximately 80 million visa applications.

**WHAT CHANGES IN PRACTICE FOR VISA APPLICANTS AT CONSULAR POSTS AND THE EXTERNAL BORDERS OF THE SCHENGEN AREA?**

Applicants need to appear in person for the collection of the biometric data: ten fingerprints and a photograph are collected from persons applying for a visa. However, for subsequent applications within 5 years, fingerprints can be re-used from the VIS file unless there is reasonable doubt regarding the identity of the applicant.

When the visa holder arrives at the external border, the border authorities have access to the VIS to verify his or her identity and the authenticity of the visa.

These procedures improve security in the Schengen Area.

Certain categories of applicants are exempt from the requirement to give fingerprints, including:

- Children under the age of 12;
- Persons for whom fingerprinting is physically impossible;
- Heads of State and members of national governments, and members of their official delegations when invited for an official purpose.

**ACCESS TO THE VIS AND DATA PROTECTION**

Access to the VIS for entering, amending, deleting and consulting data is reserved exclusively to duly authorised staff of competent authorities. The VIS may in particular be consulted for the following purposes:

- Examination of visa applications and decisions related thereto;
- Carrying out checks at external borders to verify the identity of the visa holder and/or the authenticity of the visa;
- Identification and return of illegal immigrants;
- Facilitating the determination of the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application.
Under specified conditions, access to VIS data may be requested by the European Police Office (Europol) and national law enforcement authorities for the purposes of prevention, detection and investigation of terrorist offences or other serious criminal offences.

The data entered in the VIS is subject to strict data protection rules, including Directive 95/46/EC and Regulation EC 45/2001. Data is kept for a maximum period of 5 years. This retention period starts from the expiry date of the issued visa, from the date a negative decision is taken, or from the date a decision to modify an issued visa is taken. Any person has the right to be informed about data in the VIS related to him or her. Any person may also request the correction of inaccurate data and the deletion of unlawfully recorded data related to him or her.

**LEGAL BACKGROUND**


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Further information
European Commission
[http://ec.europa.eu/vis](http://ec.europa.eu/vis)