

# A STRONGER, MORE EFFICIENT AND SECURE EU VISA POLICY

## An upgraded Visa Information System

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The EU's visa policy makes it easier to travel to the European Union for tourism or business. At the same time, EU visa policy mitigates security risks and the risks associated with irregular migration to the EU. In an area without internal borders, strong and efficient checks on persons entering the EU are needed to detect anyone who may pose a security risk. To ensure that such persons do not pass the EU's borders unnoticed, police officers and border guards need to have the right information at the right time in order to do their job of protecting EU citizens.

To ensure that sufficient security information is available about persons travelling to the EU with a visa, the Commission is proposing to upgrade the Visa Information System – the EU database that contains information on all persons applying for Schengen visas. The upgraded system will be fully interoperable with other EU information systems. Today's proposal will also modernise and upgrade the system in light of technological developments and add long-stay visas and residence permits to the system. This upgrade will improve security checks on visa applicants and ensure that the EU is better equipped to respond to current and future security challenges.

### WHAT IS THE VISA INFORMATION SYSTEM?

The Visa Information System (VIS) contains information on non-EU nationals applying for short-stay Schengen visas. It connects border guards at the EU's external borders with Member States' consulates around the world. The system is one of the most advanced of its kind, containing over 55 million visa applications and nearly 47 million fingerprint sets as of May 2018. Every year, EU Member States process around 18 million applications for short-stay Schengen visas.

#### The VIS allows:

- ✓ Visa issuing authorities to share and rapidly check information on visa applicants.
- ✓ Border guards to conduct security checks and verify a traveller's identity.

#### What data does the VIS contain?



• Fingerprints



• Information on the visa application form



• Facial images



• Decisions on the visa application

#### Which countries participate in the VIS?

The 22 Schengen EU Member States



The 4 Schengen Associated Countries



Switzerland



Norway



Iceland



Liechtenstein

### What are the proposed upgrades?

- ▶ Enhanced interoperability with other EU information systems
- ▶ Closing information gaps and improving information exchange between Member States
- ▶ Including more information in the VIS, such as long-stay visas and residence permits

### Who can access the VIS?

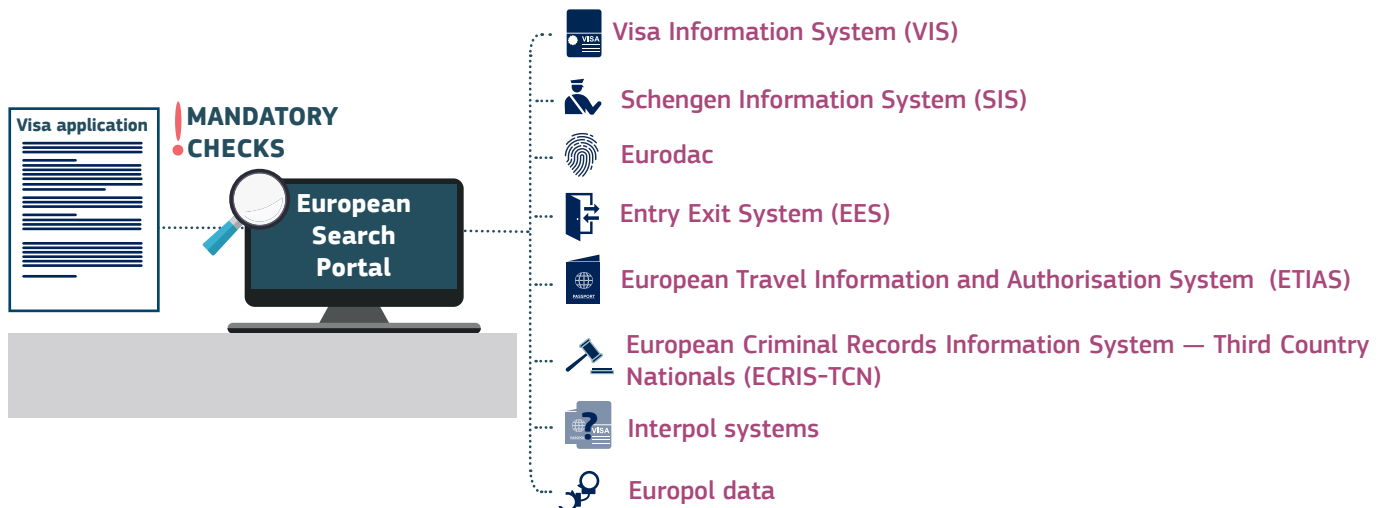
- **Visa authorities** when examining visa applications
- **Border guards**, to check the identity of the visa holder and the validity of the visa
- **Asylum authorities**, to determine the country responsible for examining an asylum application
- **Migration authorities**, to check the validity of a visa and the identity of the visa holder
- **Law enforcement authorities and Europol**, to prevent, detect and investigate terrorist and serious criminal offences

## HOW WILL THIS IMPROVE SECURITY?

### Swifter and more effective background checks

Visa officers, border guards and police officers will be able to do a single search in all EU information systems. This will significantly improve the detection of security and migration risks as well as speed up the application process and ensure quick border crossings.

### ENHANCED MIGRATION AND SECURITY CHECKS ON VISA APPLICANTS



### Close security information gaps

Currently no information is held at EU level on long-stay visas and residence permits. The upgraded VIS will include such information. This will allow border guards to quickly determine whether a long-stay visa or residence permit is valid – closing an important security gap.

### DATA PROTECTION BY DESIGN

The proposed upgrade of the VIS fully incorporates the data protection by design approach. The upgrades ensure the necessary safeguards and mechanisms to effectively protect the privacy and fundamental rights of travellers, particularly when it comes their private life and personal data.

