

WHAT IS THE VISA INFORMATION SYSTEM?

The Visa Information System (VIS) allows countries that are part of the Schengen Area to share information on visas. It is a large-scale IT system that helps the EU's common visa policy and assists border checks and consular cooperation in Europe. The system allows national authorities to enter and view data, including fingerprints, for short-stay visas for the Schengen Area. The system helps avoid 'visa shopping' (when an individual applies for a visa in more than one country at a time), supports documenting and preventing irregular migration, and assists the authorities protecting the internal security of Member States.

The Schengen Area has no internal border controls. This enables free movement of people and goods and provides the EU and its citizens with many benefits. The Schengen Area is made of 26 countries: 22 EU Member States and 4 Associated Countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein).

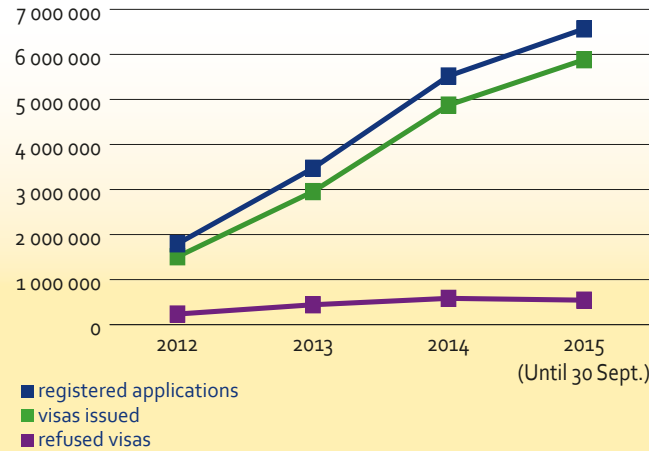
All 26 Schengen Area countries use VIS to help make life safe for their citizens.

THE ADDED VALUE OF VIS

The Visa Information System provides the following benefits:

- clearer and quicker procedures for travellers requiring a visa to enter the Schengen Area;
- security and protection for travellers through the use of biometric technology, which helps to ensure the identification of people and prevent identity theft;
- consular cooperation and consultation between national visa authorities;
- reduced risk of 'visa shopping' and fraud;
- identification of people who may not, or may no longer, fulfil the conditions to enter or stay in the Schengen Area;
- support for checks at the external borders and inside the Schengen Area Member States;
- support with the processing of asylum applications.

NUMBER OF VISA APPLICATIONS PROCESSED BY VIS



Source: Reports on the technical functioning of VIS (eu-LISA, March 2014 and June 2016)

WHO CAN ACCESS VIS?

- National visa and asylum authorities
- Authorities that carry out checks at the external borders of the Schengen Area
- Law enforcement authorities and Europol, for the purpose of preventing, detecting and investigating terrorism and other serious crime

WHAT INFORMATION IS STORED?

VIS holds the following data:

- the applicant's history related to visas (requested, issued, refused, annulled, revoked or extended),
- photographs in digital format,
- fingerprints in digital format.

VIS IN ACTION

Philip, a non-EU citizen, would like to visit Spain for 10 days and also take a day-trip to Biarritz, France. He needs to apply for a visa that allows him to travel freely to all Schengen Area Member States.

Philip goes to a Spanish consulate to request a visa. The consulate creates the application in VIS by entering his biographical data, a photograph and his fingerprints in digital format. The authority checks whether a previous application has already been entered for Philip. If so, the new file is linked to the existing one. The visa authority consults VIS for previous decisions relating to this application, for example, whether the request was annulled, revoked, extended or shortened.

Philip's application is also checked against the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) and relevant national databases. This step identifies whether, for example, the applicant has previously been refused entry into the Schengen Area. Depending on Philip's nationality, other Schengen Area countries may be asked to check the application. If Philip meets all the requirements he can return to the consular post to collect his visa.

In Spain, the border authorities will carry out all necessary checks with VIS and will search the system using the visa reference number. They will verify his fingerprints to confirm his identity, the authenticity of the visa and whether the conditions for entry to the Schengen Area are fulfilled.

HOW IS PERSONAL DATA PROTECTED?

Each visa application is held in VIS for no more than five years. The country that submits information into VIS is solely responsible for amending that data, and for ensuring the security of the data contained in its national systems. This includes the safety of data during transmission as well as the security and physical protection of data received from VIS. Only authorised personnel have access to the relevant national systems.

All people have the right to be informed about data stored in VIS on themselves and request that inaccuracies be corrected or that unlawfully held data be deleted. This process is managed by national data protection authorities and all requests must go through them.

Representatives of the national data protection authorities and the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) meet twice a year in the VIS Supervision Coordination Group to ensure coordinated supervision of the Visa Information System.

eu-LISA: CONTRIBUTING TO FREE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE

eu-LISA is the European Agency that ensures 24/7 operational management of VIS's central system and its communication infrastructure. eu-LISA is responsible for the constant maintenance as well as the evolution of the system, while strictly following relevant security and data protection regulations. The Agency provides training to national authorities on how to use VIS, produces statistics and reports, and monitors relevant strands of research.

As well as VIS, the Agency manages two other large IT systems:

- Eurodac – a centralised system that collects and processes the digitalised fingerprints of asylum seekers in Europe, and
- the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) – the largest IT system for public security and law enforcement cooperation in Europe.

In 2015 eu-LISA carried out, in cooperation with Member States, the Smart Borders Pilot project to assess new technologies on EU borders and provide decision-makers with information on the feasibility of using biometric identifiers at the Schengen Area's external borders. This has placed eu-LISA among the institutions tasked to contribute to building a stronger and smarter data management architecture for EU border checks and security. eu-LISA is focused on increasing the interoperability of the existing systems and contributing to the development of new IT systems in cooperation with the Member States.

With IT eu-LISA safeguards the EU's internal security and supports the implementation of asylum, migration and border management policies. These actions help ensure that European citizens and non-EU citizens have the freedom to live, work and travel safely throughout the Schengen Area.

The headquarters of eu-LISA are in Tallinn (Estonia), the operational management is carried out in Strasbourg (France) and a backup site is located in Sankt Johann im Pongau (Austria). eu-LISA also has a liaison office in Brussels (Belgium).

FAST FACTS

- **26 countries use VIS** (22 EU Member States and four Associated Countries)
- **VIS is accessible to all consular posts in non-EU** countries and external border crossing points of the Schengen Area
- **At the end of 2015 VIS contained over 20 million** visa applications with approximately 16 million sets of fingerprints
- **The processing power of the system** is up to 300 000 transactions per hour
- The **average time it takes to run a fingerprint search** at a border crossing is **less than 1.5 seconds**

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