

## **Biometric Requirement Schengen Visa Starting 2nd November, 2015**

On 2 November 2015, the Visa Information System (VIS) will start operations in the so-called "20th region", comprising all South Asian countries – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives.

As of November 2, 2015 it is required that applicants for a Schengen visa type C ( Duration less than 90 days) will need to provide biometric data (fingerprints) when submitting an application. The biometric data of persons applying for a Schengen visa will be stored in a new Visa Information System (VIS).

The biometric data are stored for a period of 59 months and can possibly be reused.

Exemptions for the fingerprinting requirements are granted to:

- Children under the age of twelve;
- Persons for whom the collection of fingerprints is physically impossible;
- Heads of State and members of National Governments and their accompanying spouses, as well as the members of their official delegation when invited by Member States' governments or by international organizations for an official purpose.

Frequent travelers 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 VIS, they can be re-used for further visa applications over a 5-year period.

As of 2 November 2015, each individual applying for a Schengen visa at the Embassy of Italy in Islamabad, must appear in person at a Visa Application Centre of Gerry's, so that the necessary biometric data – ten fingerprints can be collected.

### **General information about the Visa Information System:**

The VIS is a central database which supports the exchange of data on short-stay visas between Schengen States, in particular between consulates, central visa authorities and border guards.

It is a key element of the EU common visa policy and provides Schengen States with a modern and efficient visa application system and represents a major step forward to enhance legitimate mobility and increase security of Pakistani citizens when they travel to the EU.

The VIS will help Schengen States in streamlining visa applications and border control procedures, which will also benefit Pakistani citizens. The VIS will indeed facilitate the rapid examination and efficient processing of visa applications of regular travelers given that the consulates will have access to information on the visa applicant's previous visa applications and visas issued. It is important to note that the introduction of the VIS in a given country does not have any impact on whether nationals of that country require a visa. It only means that visa applications lodged in that country and decisions taken on those applications are stored in the VIS.

The implementation of the VIS is not specific to your country. The VIS has already started in nineteen regions since October 2011 (North Africa, the Near East, the Gulf region, West and Central Africa, East and Southern Africa, South America, Central Asia and South-East Asia, in Central and North America, the Caribbean, and Australasia, in Turkey and the Western Balkans, in the Eastern Partnership countries, and in Russia) and the roll-out of the VIS in East Asia and South Asia (including Pakistan) will be in October and November 2015, respectively. By end November 2015 the VIS will be deployed in all Schengen consulates worldwide.

All Schengen States' consulates will be connected to the VIS and register data on short-stay visa applications in the system together with the decisions taken by the visa authorities on these applications. Visa applicants' biometric data, i.e. a digital photograph and 10 fingerprint scans, will also be collected and registered in the VIS.

The use of biometric identifiers during the visa application process will protect applicants better against identity theft. It will also prevent false identifications which in certain cases lead to the refusal of the visa or to refuse entry to a person who is entitled to enter.

The use of biometric technology guarantees safe, accurate and efficient procedures. The fingerprinting is not to be associated with crime. It is used commonly inside the EU to make travel documents more secure (e.g. when issuing passports for EU citizens including diplomats); the EU has also been supporting partner countries in the introduction of this technology for their respective travel documents.

Visa applicants will only have to come to the consulate for the collection of fingerprints every 5 years and the procedure for the collection of biometric identifiers is very quick, simple and discreet. During this 5-year period, the fingerprints will be copied from the first visa applications, so that frequent travelers will only have to complete the procedure once within this period.

Exemptions from the obligation of fingerprinting are provided for the following categories of applicants only:

- Children under 12,
- Persons for whom the collection of fingerprints is physically impossible;
- Sovereigns and other senior members of a royal family, Heads of State and members of the national Governments (with their official delegations and spouses) if they travel for official purposes.

Holders of diplomatic passports are not as such exempted from the fingerprinting obligation. However, they may be exempted from the visa requirement under visa waivers granted in bilateral agreements with certain EU Member States. Holders of Pakistani diplomatic passports don't need a Schengen visa to travel to Italy.

Government representatives and officials travelling to attend regular political and technical dialogue meetings with the EU (e.g. senior officials meetings, subcommittees) are not automatically exempted either.

The VIS will contain all the applications lodged by an applicant over five years and the decisions taken by the consulates. This will allow visa applicants establishing more easily the lawful use of previous visas and their bona fide status, for instance when applying for a multiple-entry visa.

The VIS central database is very secure and data will be processed in accordance with the highest data protection standards. Any person has the right to obtain communication of the data recorded in the VIS and may request that inaccurate data related to him/her be corrected or that unlawfully recorded data be deleted.

The experience with the use of the VIS so far has shown that the system functions very well.

**Embassy of Italy, Islamabad**