



Biometrics in Offshore Visa Processing

Fact sheet for external audiences

The Biometrics in Offshore Visa Processing Program (the program) is an Australian Government initiative that introduces the collection of biometrics into the offshore visa application process.

The term 'biometrics' commonly refers to a measurable physical characteristic or personal behavioural trait that is unique to an individual such as fingerprints, facial structure, the iris or a person's voice.

Biometrics are an important tool in identity management globally, helping countries reduce fraud and integrity risks. France, Ireland, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (USA) and countries in the Middle East have already introduced biometrics to improve visa and border checking processes.

The benefits of collecting biometrics include:

- better protecting clients from identity fraud
- making travel to Australia safer
- strengthening Australia's border security
- improving national security.

The first stage of the program will include visa applications processed at ten Australian missions across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

Australia and the UK have signed an agreement to share a global network of Visa Application Centres with biometrics collection facilities. Visa applicants will need to lodge their visa applications and/or provide their biometrics at an Australian Visa Application Centre. Australian Visa Application Centres are run by commercial Service Delivery Partners contracted to the Australian Government to provide visa application lodgement and biometric collection services.

While Australian Visa Application Centres are contracted to accept visa applications, decisions about granting or refusing visas will continue to be made by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (the department).

Selection of Australian missions and participating countries

The overseas locations were selected on the basis of:

- the Australian government's intention to provide broad geographic coverage for the scheme and to test biometric collection across a range of client service environments
- Australia's national security and fraud risks in visa caseloads
- the availability of UK Visa Application Centre infrastructure.

Program commencement

Biometrics collection will commence at selected locations from late 2010. Locations will be announced as they are rolled-out.

Visa application lodgement and the biometric collection process

Applicants lodging paper-based visa applications in selected locations, regardless of nationality, will need to attend an Australian Visa Application Centre in person to lodge their application and/or provide their biometrics.

For a list of visa subclasses included in the first stage of the program see Attachment A.

Biometrics will be collected using a quick, discreet and non-intrusive process that captures a facial image with a digital camera and a 10-digit fingerprint scan with a digital finger scanner.

Applicants will not be charged an additional fee for the collection of their biometrics. Australian Visa Application Centres may offer additional optional services on a fee-for-service basis.

Safekeeping and use of biometrics

Facial images and fingerprint scans will be kept on secure departmental databases. Only authorised officers under the *Migration Act 1958* (the Act), as regulated by the *Privacy Act 1988*, may access the biometrics of applicants.

Under the Act, the department is allowed to provide the fingerprints and photographs of applicants to certain Australian Government departments and agencies in addition to international organisations and countries for a permitted purpose. This includes for the purpose of verifying identity, checking whether a client has effective protection in another country, combating identity fraud or determining if the client has a criminal history.

In all cases where biometrics are provided to other agencies or countries, the department will take steps to protect the applicant's privacy.

Exclusions and exemptions

Australian citizens, Australian permanent residents and New Zealand citizens are excluded from biometrics collection.

Applicants who apply online and meet the requirements for an electronic visa or Electronic Travel Authority are also excluded from the program.

Some people, for example Heads of State and accredited diplomats, are exempt from the program.

For a list of exclusions and exemptions see Attachment B.

Applicants who are under 15 years of age, persons incapable of providing consent, or those physically unable to provide a fingerprint scan, will only need to provide a facial photograph.

If an applicant is incapable or less than 18 years of age, a parent or legal guardian will be asked to give consent and be present when biometrics is collected.

Contact

If you would like more information on the program please visit <http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/biometrics>

ATTACHMENT A

List of visa subclasses that require biometrics to be collected from visa applicants

| Permanent Family Visas | | Temporary Family Visas | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|---|
| 100 | Partner | 300 | Prospective Marriage |
| 101 | Child | 309 | Partner (Provisional) |
| 102 | Adoption | 445 | Dependent Child |
| 114 | Aged Dependent Relative | 461 | New Zealand Citizen Family Relationship (Temporary) |
| 115 | Remaining Relative | | |
| 116 | Carer | | |
| 117 | Orphan Relative | | |
| Visitors and Other Temporary Visas | | Student Visas | |
| 302 | Emergency (Permanent Visa Applicant) | 570 | Independent ELICOS Sector |
| 303 | Emergency (Temporary Visa Applicant) | 571 | Schools Sector |
| 406 | Government Agreement | 572 | Vocational Education and Training Sector |
| 411 | Exchange | 573 | Higher Education Sector |
| 415 | Foreign Government Agency | 574 | Postgraduate Research Sector |
| 417 | Working Holiday | 575 | Non-Award Sector |
| 419 | Visiting Academic | 576 | AusAID or Defence Sector |
| 421 | Sport | 580 | Student Guardian |
| 423 | Media and Film Staff | | |
| 426 | Domestic Worker (Temporary) Diplomatic or Consular | | |
| 427 | Domestic Worker (Temporary) Executive | | |
| 428 | Religious Worker | | |
| 456 | Business (Short Stay) | | |
| 457 | Business (Long Stay) | | |
| 462 | Work and Holiday | | |
| 675 | Medical Treatment (Short Stay) | | |
| 676 | Tourist | | |
| 685 | Medical Treatment (Long Stay) | | |
| 771 | Transit | | |

ATTACHMENT B

Persons and categories of visa applicants exempt or excluded from having their biometrics collected

Applicants lodging paper-based visa applications (as listed in Attachment A) in the selected participating countries will need to provide their biometrics (fingerprints and facial photograph) at an Australian Visa Application Centre unless exempt or excluded.

Persons Excluded from the First Stage of the Biometrics in Offshore Visa Processing Program

- Australian citizens and Australian Permanent Residents
- Applicants for an Australian Declaratory Visa or Australian citizenship
- New Zealand citizens
- Applicants who are eligible to apply for, and have been granted, an Australian visa online (including Electronic Travel Authority)
- APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) holders

Persons Exempt from Biometrics Collection

- Sovereigns, Heads of State and members of their families forming part of their household, whether travelling officially or privately
- Heads of Government, Cabinet Ministers and their immediate family members travelling to Australia, whether travelling officially or privately
- Diplomats and consular officers accredited to Australia and their dependants (dependants must also be accredited and hold a subclass 995 visa)
- Senior government officials and senior officials of international inter-government organisations (including the Commonwealth) and accompanying family members
- Diplomatic Passport Holders visiting Australia on official business for their government and Diplomatic Couriers
- Special Purpose Visa (SPV) holders