



Biometrics in Offshore Visa Processing

Frequently asked questions for clients

What is the Biometrics in Offshore Visa Processing Program (the program)?

The program is an Australian Government initiative that introduces biometric collection into the offshore visa application process.

What are biometrics?

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

Why is biometrics collection being introduced?

The government is undertaking this program to strengthen Australia's national security by increasing its capacity to identify overseas clients.

What biometrics will be collected? How will they be collected?

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.

When will the program start? Which countries are included in the program?

Biometrics collection will commence at selected locations from late 2010. The first stage of the program will include visa applications processed at ten Australian missions across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Locations will be announced as they are rolled out.

How will biometrics collection be implemented in the offshore visa application process?

Australia and the UK have signed an agreement to share a global network of Visa Application Centres with biometrics collection facilities.

What are Australian Visa Application Centres?

Australian Visa Application Centres are run by commercial Service Delivery Partners contracted to the Australian Government to provide visa application lodgement and biometrics collection services.

Does the Australian Visa Application Centre make a decision about my visa application?

No. All applications will be assessed and decided by the visa and immigration office at the Australian mission in accordance with Australian migration legislation and policy.

Will it be necessary to make an appointment to attend an Australian Visa Application Centre?

Yes. To avoid long waiting times, applicants are encouraged to make an appointment at an Australian Visa Application Centre to lodge their application and/or have their biometrics collected.

Please note that each person included in the visa application must attend the Australian Visa Application Centre in person to have their biometrics collected.

Will the Australian Visa Application Centre offer services in languages other than English?

Australian Visa Application Centres provide services in English and in the main language of the region. You can contact your relevant Australian Visa Application Centre for more information on languages spoken by staff.

Who needs to provide biometrics?

If you lodge a paper-based visa application in selected locations, regardless of your nationality, you will need to attend an Australian Visa Application Centre to lodge your application and/or provide biometrics.

For a list of included visa subclasses see Attachment A.

Who is excluded or exempt from providing biometrics?

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

Some people are exempt from providing biometrics, for example Heads of State and accredited diplomats.

For a list of excluded and exempt people see Attachment B.

Will biometrics be collected from Australian citizens?

No. Australian citizens and permanent residents do not need to provide their biometrics.

Will biometrics be collected from minors, incapable persons or those physically unable to provide a fingerprint scan?

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

Minors aged over 15 and less than 18 years of age will need to provide both fingerprint scans and a facial photograph.

What is the definition of an incapable person?

The *Migration Act 1958* (the Act) defines an incapable person as someone who is incapable of understanding the general nature, effect and purpose of a requirement to provide a personal identifier such as biometrics.

The definition of an incapable person includes, but is not limited to, persons with an intellectual disability.

Can a parent or legal guardian be present when biometrics are collected?

Yes. If an applicant is under 18 years of age or is incapable according to the Act, a parent or legal guardian will be asked to give consent and be present when the applicant provides their biometrics.

Will I be charged an additional fee for the collection of my biometrics?

No. The biometrics collection process will be free of charge; however you will still need to pay the Visa Application Charge.

Australian Visa Application Centres may offer additional optional services, such as courier services or photocopying, which you may choose to use on a fee-for-service basis.

How long does it take to have my biometrics collected and to lodge my application?

Biometrics collection should only take a matter of minutes for each person. The average appointment at an Australian Visa Application Centre, including time for biometrics collection and application lodgement, is around 10 minutes.

Will biometrics collection increase the processing time for my visa application?

The introduction of biometrics collection is a new step in the visa application process, however in the majority of cases it will not increase the overall visa processing time.

Processing time may be reduced if you lodge a complete application, including all supporting documentation, and provide your biometrics.

Will I have access to mobile biometrics collection devices?

No. Mobile biometrics collection facilities will not be available during the first stage of the program.

What will happen to my biometric records?

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (the department) values your privacy. Facial images and fingerprint scans will be kept on secure departmental databases.

Only authorised officers under the Act, as regulated by the *Privacy Act 1988*, may access your biometric records.

Who has access to biometric records?

Under the Act, the department is allowed to provide your biometrics for permitted purposes to certain Australian Government departments, agencies and countries.

The purposes may include verifying identity, combating identity fraud or determining if an applicant has a criminal history.

How long will my biometric records be kept by the department?

The department retains client files, which may include information such as photographs and fingerprints, for over 80 years. Storage and disposal of biometric data is regulated by the Act and the *Archives Act 1983*.

I am a regular visitor to Australia. Will I need to provide my biometrics each time I apply for a visa?

Yes. Each time you apply for an Australian visa you will need to provide your biometrics. If you visit Australia on a regular basis, you may consider applying for a multiple entry visa.

What are the benefits of biometrics collection?

Collecting biometrics:

- better protects clients from identity fraud
- makes travel to Australia safer
- strengthens Australia's border security
- improves national security.

Are there restrictions on what I can wear for the photograph?

Yes. Your face must be clearly visible for a photograph to be taken. This means that you cannot:

- have hair that covers the eyes
- wear a hat or scarf or any other item that obscures the face, hair or neck (with the exception of religious head coverings detailed below).

If you wear a head or neck covering for religious reasons you must ensure your face is clearly visible, from the bottom of your chin to above your eyebrows including both cheeks. If possible both ears should also be displayed. You may also need to remove your glasses when the photograph is taken.

Will I still be required to provide fingerprint scans if any of my fingers are missing, decorated or injured?

Yes. If you have fingers missing, you will still need to provide scans of your remaining fingers. Staff at the Australian Visa Application Centre will make a record on your file of any missing scans.

If you have cut or damaged your fingertips, you should make an appointment with the Australian Visa Application Centre when the injury has healed.

If you have a temporary decoration, such as mehndi, you should advise the Australian Visa Application Centre when booking your appointment to determine whether a scan will be possible.

I have an injury to my face. Can I still apply for a visa?

If you have a non-permanent facial injury, you are advised to wait until the injury has healed before having your photograph taken and lodging your visa application.

What if my religious beliefs do not allow me to have my fingerprints scanned or my photograph taken?

It is widely accepted that most religious beliefs permit fingerprint scans and the taking of photographs for official and legal purposes.

Is the fingerprint scanning machine safe?

Yes. The fingerprint scanning machine complies with all relevant international and Australian safety standards.

Can I pick up germs from the scanning machine?

The glass scanning surface will be cleaned regularly.

What if I refuse to provide my biometrics?

If an immigration officer requires you in writing to provide your biometrics under Section 46 of the Act and you fail to comply with the requirement, your application will be invalidated.

Where are the Australian Visa Application Centres located?

Australian Visa Application Centres will usually be located in the capital cities of the countries participating in the program.

Can I provide my biometrics at any Australian Visa Application Centre?

No. You can only provide your biometrics and lodge your visa application at the Australian Visa Application Centres identified by the Australian mission responsible for processing your visa application.

Will I need to travel to an Australian Visa Application Centre? Will this increase my costs?

Yes. You need to attend an Australian Visa Application Centre in person to provide your biometrics and/or lodge your visa application. This travel will be at your own cost.

Can I still lodge my visa application through an agent?

You may continue to lodge your visa application at an Australian mission through an agent. However, if you have applied for an included visa subclass (see Attachment A), you will need to wait for a request to provide biometrics from the mission before making an appointment at the Australian Visa Application Centre.

Please be aware that this might result in some delays in the processing of your visa.

Can I go directly to the Australian mission and lodge my visa application?

If you are lodging a paper-based application for an Australian visa, you will need to attend an Australian Visa Application Centre in person to provide your biometrics. Therefore it will be faster and more convenient for you to provide biometrics and lodge your application at the same time at an Australian Visa Application Centre.

I want to lodge my visa application electronically. Do I still have to attend an Australian Visa Application Centre?

If you apply online and meet the requirements for an electronic visa or Electronic Travel Authority you will not have to provide biometrics. However, if your online lodgement is unsuccessful then you will need to attend an Australian Visa Application Centre to lodge a paper-based application and provide your

biometrics.

Where do I collect my visa and passport?

You will be able to pre-arrange your preferred visa and passport collection method when attending the relevant Australian Visa Application Centre.

I will be lodging a visa application that includes my family. Will all my family members have to attend the Australian Visa Application Centre?

Yes. All persons included in the visa application must attend the Australian Visa Application Centre to provide their biometrics unless excluded or exempt (see Attachment B).

Can someone accompany me when attending an Australian Visa Application Centre?

Australian Visa Application Centres will generally only admit clients who are lodging applications and parents or legal guardians of applicants under 18 years of age. If you have special requirements, you should check with the Australian Visa Application Centre when you make your appointment.

Where can I direct feedback about the service at an Australian Visa Application Centre?

You can provide direct feedback to an Australian Visa Application Centre through their local complaints handling process.

Feedback regarding the services provided by the department can be provided through:

<http://www.immi.gov.au/contacts/forms/services/services-form.htm>

Or, you can post written feedback to:

The Client Feedback Coordinator
GPO Box 241
Melbourne VIC 3001
Australia

Will additional information be available?

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