

Results Of Britains First Global Visa Review

10 July 2008

Tough new visa regimes could be introduced for 11 countries following the first global review of who needs a visa to come to the UK, the Government announced today.

Everyone applying for a UK visa now has their fingerprints checked before their identity is fixed. So far more than two million sets of fingerprints have been collected with checks flagging up almost 3,000 attempted identity swaps.

The Visa Waiver Test reviewed all non European countries against a set of strict criteria to determine the level of risk they pose to the UK in terms of illegal immigration, crime and security, to help decide where the new regime may be required.

The results of the test showed a strong case for introducing visa regimes for 11 countries. These are: Bolivia; Botswana; Brazil; Lesotho; Malaysia; Mauritius; Namibia; South Africa; Swaziland; Trinidad and Tobago; and Venezuela. These countries have a combined population of over 300 million – nearly five per cent of the world's population. This means that Britain's visa net could be widened to cover around 80 per cent of the world's population.

The Government will introduce visa requirements for short-term visitors from these countries unless they significantly reduce the risk they pose to the UK by the end of the year. This means visitors from these countries would need to apply for a six-month visa, and provide their fingerprints, before travelling to the UK.

Border and Immigration Minister Liam Byrne said:

"Our tougher checks abroad are working even better than expected. We've now checked two million fingerprints of foreign nationals applying for visas and stopped 3,000 people trying to hide their real identity.

"Now we need to decide how to widen the visa net. Three quarters of the world's population need to pass a visa check to come to Britain. We cannot and will not shy away from going wider and will wherever we think there's a risk to the UK."

The Government will now work with these countries over the next six months to reduce the risk they pose. If they are able to show evidence of change there will be no need to introduce a visa regime. No final decisions will be made until early 2009.

The criteria for the test included looking at passport security and integrity; the degree of co-operation over deportation or removal of a country's nationals from the UK; levels of illegal working in the UK and other immigration abuse; levels of crime and terrorism risk posed to the UK; and the extent to which a country's authorities were addressing these threats.

Notes to Editors:

1. Currently nationals of over 100 countries - three-quarters of the world's population - must apply for a six-month visitor visa to come to the UK.
 2. In March 2007, the Visa Waiver Test was announced as part of the 'Securing the UK Border' strategy. A copy of this can be found at the following link: www.homeoffice.gov.uk
 3. The UK Border Agency – a new single border force, which combined the Border and Immigration Agency, UKVisas and Customs at the border - sees 25,000 staff working across 135 countries. Already the Agency has:
 - barred almost 6,000 illegal migrants from entering Britain at juxtaposed controls since the beginning of 2008;
 - seized £83 million worth of illegal drugs, including almost 200 separate seizures of cocaine and heroin, since the Agency launched in April;
 - seized more than 200 million cigarettes worth more than £6.5 million since the Agency launched in April; and
 - taken off the streets almost 800 dangerous weapons including firearms, stun guns and hundreds of knives.
 4. Since 1 April the e-Borders pilot programme, which screens all passengers before they travel to the UK against immigration, customs and police watch-lists, has issued more than 3,200 alerts on passengers travelling to and from the UK. This has led to more than 280 arrests for offences ranging from murder, possession of firearms and drug-smuggling.
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