Passport and Visa Systems

Section 3.1

Topics:
- Passport Foundations
- Passport System Design
- Visa Systems
- Security Features and New Directions
The security of international travel depends on trustworthy documents and systems of international cooperation and information exchange. International standards are necessary for an effective global passport and visa system. This Section will discuss important policy questions and practices for the production and management of credible international travel documents.

The equipment chosen to operate the system, its costs, how it will be acquired, the level of security to be achieved in the documents, and the design of the issuing process are all open to review and will be explored in this Section.

The international community, through the UN and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), has established expectations, practices, and standards for international travel and its attendant documentation. Advice and assistance is available through ICAO and bilaterally. Every State may contribute to the harmonization of international standards as set out by ICAO and to the security of travel through a commitment to the enhanced security and credibility of its own documents.

**Learning Objectives**

- understand the purpose of passports and visas
- identify the elements of passport and visa systems
- understand the function of national passport and visa systems
- identify new technologies being introduced into passport and visa systems
Background

Passports and visas are official documents that enable people to travel legally across national borders. The role of a passport is to identify citizens of a State for the benefit of foreign countries, and to guarantee their right of return. National passports for citizens and visa systems for non-residents manage the orderly movement of people between States on a temporary or permanent basis.

The movement to standardize passports that began decades ago as an efficiency measure has now evolved into a crucial security tool as well. Greater security measures are being introduced by many States in response to the threat of global terrorism. Many countries are assessing the need to upgrade the quality and security of their passport and visa systems in response to global security threats.

Increased security is one of the highest priorities for governments and transportation carriers. The foundation for international travel security is proof of identity and citizenship. The passport is also important for the protection and support of a State’s citizens abroad.

What You Need To Know About Travel Documents

The reliability of the basic documentation required to obtain a passport or visa is key to the credibility of the system.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a UN body of over 180 members, sets the standards for passports and other travel documents, including visas.

Security features for machine-readable passports, travel documents, and visas are constantly evolving and becoming increasingly sophisticated. The increased costs are being transferred to the user—the international traveller.

Machine-readable passports, machine-readable travel documents, and machine-readable visas are of benefit to government agencies responsible for examining travellers, to transportation carriers, and
Guiding Questions

1. To what extent does the passport production and issuing process in your State conform to international standards?

2. To what extent does the visa production and issuing process in your State conform to international standards?

3. What is the weakest link in your State’s passport issuing system?

4. How well does your State use its passport and visa system to defend against security threats that involve international travel?

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using new technology in passport and visa systems?

6. What steps need to be taken to improve the security of these processes?

7. What are the implications of present practice for the citizens of your State and for the image your State wants to present in the international community?

to travellers themselves. ICAO has adopted specifications for machine-readable passports, machine-readable travel documents, and machine-readable visas that are in use or being introduced by 110 countries.
Key Message

Passport and visa documents are only as good as the weakest link in the systems that produce and manage them.

Your State’s passports, travel documents, and visas are important to how your State is perceived in the international community. By making these documents highly secure, your State contributes to the fight against international crime and terrorism.

Changes by a State to its passport and visa system will result from:

- understanding the current system
- identifying what needs changing
- deciding whether to change the system and how to change it.

Terms and Concepts

API
Machine-readable travel documents permit the use of Advance Passenger Information (API) systems by enabling airlines to electronically send a passenger list to customs, immigration, and other authorities at the destination. This allows border officials to process the passenger information in advance of the flight arrival.

Authentication
Actions taken to ensure that a travel document is genuine. Authentication can include biometric technology applied to a Machine-readable Travel Document (MRTD).

Biometrics
Physical characteristics including facial geometry, a fingerprint, or the iris are inserted in a Machine-readable Travel Document (MRTD) in a way that permits them to be compared with the document holder as he or she uses the document. This provides a means of authenticating the document by proving that it is legitimate because the holder is the rightful bearer. Individual biometric information may also be stored in a database or ID card to authenticate a visa-exempt traveller who is pre-screened for entry.

Book format
Describes the format of a machine-readable passport
Card format
A machine-readable passport or travel card issued in a credit card size format

Chip
A small wafer of conductive material, capable of data storage and processing that can be added to travel documents. The chip will interact with a document reader to aid in authentication and/or verification.

Data page
A fixed dimension page in a machine-readable passport that contains a standardized presentation of visual and machine-readable data

Digital imaging
The insertion of a facial image into a machine-readable travel document by means of a computer that prints the photograph directly onto the identification page or insert

Doc 9303
An ICAO publication that provides specifications for machine-readable travel documents. It is currently published in three parts:
- Part 1 Machine Readable Passports
- Part 2 Machine Readable Visas
- Part 3 Machine Readable Official Travel Documents

Harmonization
The process of creating a single unified approach to travel document specifications

ICAO
The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO): a UN body of over 180 members that sets the standards for passports and other travel documents, including visas

IEC
International Electrotechnical Commission

ISO
International Organization for Standardization

MRP
Machine-readable Passport
**MRTD**
Machine-readable Travel Document: an official document issued by a State or Organization that is used by the holder for international travel. This document will contain required visual (eye readable) data and a separate mandatory data summary in a format that is capable of being read by machine.

**MRV**
Machine-readable Visa

**MRZ**
Machine-readable Zone of a machine-readable travel document or visa

**OCR-B**
The style of Optical Character Recognition printing adopted for use in the machine-readable zone of a machine-readable travel document

**Passport**
An official document issued by a State to grant permission to the person(s) identified in the passport for travel, re-admission, and protection while abroad

**RFI**
Request For Information; a process by which the TAG/MRTD asks industry to present the latest technologies that may be useful in machine-readable travel documents

**TAG/MRTD**
The International Civil Aviation Organization’s Technical Advisory Group on Machine Readable Travel Documents

**Verification**
Actions to ensure that the person bearing a travel document is the rightful bearer

**Visa**
A temporary or permanent endorsement of the bona fides of travellers issued to show that they have met the requirements for admission to a State where they are not a national

**VIZ**
Visual Inspection Zone of a machine-readable travel document
Passport and Visa Systems

Topic One

Passport Foundations

The basis for orderly international travel is credible proof of identity and citizenship. The passport is the universal official document used to identify persons and their citizenship. It also provides assurance to the country of transit or destination that the bearer can return to the country of issue. Therefore, passports are linked directly to citizenship laws. However, a passport alone may not be sufficient for international travel.

After a traveller acquires a passport (or travel document) for a journey, the first question is “do I need a visa to enter my destination country?” The answer is normally based on the citizenship of the traveller and purpose of the trip. Visas, which serve purposes of border control and facilitation, are discussed later in this Section.

Issues relating to citizenship and nationality are dealt with in greater detail in Section 3.8, Determination of Migrant Status and Appeals Systems, of this Manual.

For the Record:
The path to machine-readable travel documents

Passports have been used for centuries to establish the bearer’s identity and for diplomatic protection. They initially took a variety of forms; from a sovereign’s letter of recommendation written on large size parchment to “safe conduct” passes.

With large-scale tourism, governments wanted to reduce delays created by complex administrative control procedures at borders. They also wanted to reduce the burden of verifying the authenticity of passports and other identity documents issued by foreign States, particularly because these documents were issued in a variety of forms and according to several standards.

In 1920, the League of Nations convened a conference to adopt standard passport and visa formats for all signatory States, with uniform provisions governing their layout, content, validity, and issuing fees. A second conference, in 1926, set additional specifications for and improvements to the standard international passport format.
ICAO involvement in passports started with the initial draft of Annex 9 (Facilitation) to the Chicago Convention, as recommended by the First Session of the ICAO Facilitation (FAL) Division in 1946. The draft contained a simplified model passport card for non-immigrants, as well as various provisions governing the issuing of visas and other identity documents.

The rapid growth of international air passenger traffic prompted the ICAO Facilitation Division in 1968 to consider proposals for the introduction of a machine-readable passport or passport card that might eventually replace the conventional passport and accelerate clearance through passport controls.

ICAO established the Panel on Passport Cards in November 1968, comprising members from ten contracting States. The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) were invited to participate as observers. The Panel developed recommendations for the production and use of machine-readable passports.

ICAO Doc 9303 - A Passport with Machine Readable Capability was published in 1980 and became the basis for the initial issue of machine-readable passports by Australia, Canada, and the United States who pioneered the change in the production and issuance of such passports.

In 1981 and 1982, the European Community adopted resolutions calling for its contracting States to issue uniform passports by 1 January 1985 and stipulating that the personal information items of the standard European passport should follow the specifications found in ICAO Doc 9303.

In 1986, ICAO established a new group, the Technical Advisory Group on Machine Readable Travel Documents (TAG/MRTD), for which the terms of reference were broadened to include the development of specifications for machine-readable visas and other official travel documents.


Important Points

1. The weakest link in the system that produces and issues travel documents, or in the source documents used by these systems, will determine how effective they are. The basic challenge for countries...
in their passport and visa documents and systems is to ensure credible proof of a person’s identity. The underpinning for credible passports is the reliability of the documentation that is required to obtain the passport. With this as a foundation, the next component for ensuring certainty of identity is the system that governments employ to produce and issue passports.

Example

This is an example of a forgery on an identity document that will be a weak link in the system unless it is detected.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) provides the principal collective source of standards for international travel today. The foundation for passport and visa standards, production, and issuance worldwide has been constructed through ICAO. The ICAO was created as a specialized agency of the United Nations by the Chicago Convention, which was signed in 1944 and came into force in 1947. The signatories now number over 180 States, making it one of the world’s most widely accepted international legal instruments.

UN Document A32-18 backs up the work of ICAO and outlines an action plan for signatory States. The main elements of this action plan are:
A Statement to the effect that international confidence in the integrity of the passport is the very essence of the functioning of the international travel system

A Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly requesting that ICAO consider ways and means to enhance international cooperation to combat the smuggling of aliens, while emphasizing that such efforts should not undercut the protection provided by international law to refugees

Resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council requesting that member States establish or improve procedures to permit the ready discovery of false travel documents

Resolutions requesting that member States cooperate bilaterally and on a multilateral basis to prevent the use of fraudulent documents

Resolutions requesting that member States take measures to provide penalties for the production and distribution of false travel documents and the misuse of international commercial aviation

Resolutions requesting that member States develop high-level cooperation among States to strengthen resistance to passport fraud, including:
- forgery or counterfeiting of passports
- use of forged or counterfeit passports
- use of valid passports by impostors
- misuse of authentic passports by rightful holders to enable them to commit offenses
- use of expired or revoked passports
- use of fraudulently obtained passports.

The UN General Assembly endorsed actions related to the security of passports and other travel documents, specifically actions to strengthen and approve specifications for machine-readable passports and other travel documents.

The Assembly requested a study of specific actions and measures for improving the effectiveness of controls on passport fraud, including the possible preparation of necessary Standards and Recommended Practices, as well as guidance material. These actions are to be implemented by contracting States in order to maintain the integrity and security of passports and other travel documents.

Finally, the Assembly called upon all contracting States to intensify efforts to safeguard the security and integrity of their passports, to protect their passports against passport fraud, and to assist one another.
What Do You Think?

Many important benefits derive from standardizing travel document formats and including machine-readable data in consistent forms.

- Data pages that are laid out in a uniform and standard manner need less time for individual inspections meaning that the focus can shift to cases where more time is needed to examine the document and its holder, and to visual authentication.

- Machine-readable travel documents promote efficiency and save resources by facilitating the rapid and precise identification of travellers. This will decrease the misuse of travel documents to advance criminal activity or to cross borders illegally.

- A transportation carrier can verify the authenticity of documents by using an automated passport reader at the check-in counter that is linked to several databases. This will allow the carrier to run the information against its own “customers of interest” list, connect the customer/document to baggage handling and Passenger Name Record information, input into a flight (or other) manifest, and eventually, verify boarding after check-in.

- Machine-readable travel documents permit the use of Advance Passenger Information (API) systems, which enable airlines to transmit a list of passengers to border authorities at the place of destination, allowing databases and lookout lists to be checked prior to arrival of the flight.

- Automated issuance of passports and other travel documents allows issuing authorities to electronically monitor and control the issuance of the document at all stages of the application and issuance process. This has potential benefit for blank passport control, fee control, verification of citizenship, and name clearance.

- Governments can build databases as a uniform source of information in standardized format to speed the process of border control by using machine-readable visas and/or passports as a source of reliable data. Such databases will be useful in tracking high-risk categories of travellers. The creation of databases for stolen or fraudulently obtained documents supports the voluntary sharing of this information across national boundaries, and between the public and private sectors. The EU-Schengen Area, US/Canada/Mexico, and Australia/New Zealand offer current examples of various versions of cross-border sharing of databases.

- The potential benefits expand significantly as more and more countries issue machine-readable travel documents. The greater the use of such documents, the less costly the technology
needed to produce and read them. Benefits multiply as the search progresses for improved security to prevent counterfeiting and alteration, and as verification technology (biometrics) comes into more general use.

Example

BIOMETRIC IDENTIFICATION TO PROVIDE ENHANCED SECURITY AND SPEEDIER BORDER CLEARANCE FOR TRAVELLING PUBLIC

Facial recognition was selected as the globally interoperable biometric for machine-assisted identity confirmation with Machine-readable Travel Documents (MRTDs). In a comprehensive analysis of various available biometrics, the face rated highest in terms of compatibility with key operational considerations, followed by fingers and eyes. The face has long been used by border control authorities and airline staff at airports to confirm identity with a “photo ID”. Facial recognition technology automates this process, using a camera to capture the image of the face, while a computer validates facial characteristics.¹

Apply What You Have Learned

1. To what extent are machine-readable travel documents part of your State’s passport and visa system?

2. What is the weakest link in your State’s passport issuing system?

3. To what extent does the passport production and issuing process in your State conform to international standards?

4. How does your State use its passport and visa system to defend against security threats that involve international travel?
5 What are the implications of present practice for the citizens of your State and for the image your State wants to present in the international community?

6 What passport and visa issues are of greatest importance to your State? How would you address them?
Passport System Design

The role of a passport is to identify citizens of a State for the benefit of foreign countries and to guarantee their right of return. For the issuing State, it also identifies a person’s eligibility for consular services abroad and their right of admissibility on return. In addition, a passport identifies travellers for transportation carriers and defines who does not belong to the State. For this reason, the fundamental basis for passport issuance is citizenship law and the criteria adopted by a country for conferring citizenship.

A discussion of the foundations for citizenship and international law can be found in Section 1.4, Authority and Responsibility of States.

A State must address several key areas when a system for issuing passports is designed. The first issue is to clarify which department or ministry will be responsible for issuing the passport. Most countries assign this task to the Department/Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has a presence domestically and abroad. Passports are issued under the authority of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Consular services are usually provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Under this model, the issuing Ministry works with partners from other departments such as Interior, Citizenship, or Migration.

Many States must address the issue of their obligation to non-citizens, i.e., refugees or stateless persons, within their borders who wish to travel but who do not have a passport. In such cases, States that are signatory to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees are obliged to issue a Travel Document (TD) to refugees who need to travel abroad. The TD is never valid for the country from which the person fled but shows that the person concerned has a “protector” State. States issue TDs (including certificates of identity) to stateless and refugee residents using the same processes as for issuing passports.

Countries may also facilitate travel of stateless persons through a TD, certificate of identity, or a laissez-passer. Note, however, that a TD without guarantee of return is virtually useless.
UNMIK Travel Documents
The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) issues various identification and travel documents for residents of Kosovo. Over one million ID cards have been issued. Habitual residents of Kosovo who have an UNMIK Identification card may apply for an UNMIK Travel Document in their municipality of registration. This is a booklet type document with a validity of two years. There is presently no UNMIK Travel Document issued for children, although there is a plan to address this.

UNMIK Travel Documents are accepted in the following countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA.

Temporary Travel Documents issued in Kosovo
A Temporary Travel Document is a one-trip document issued in very exceptional situations. Most countries do not accept it except in extraordinary situations, for example, emergency medical treatment. Temporary travel documents are no longer issued to residents of countries such as Switzerland, Italy, and Germany that do not guarantee re-entry to the holders of the document. Temporary Travel Documents will not be issued to anyone who attempts to travel with a false or altered passport, and any visas in such documents are forfeited.

Important Points

1. Passports are constantly being improved with more sophisticated security features that are harder to reproduce. Digital photos are replacing laminate photos. Holograms are increasingly being used, as is special or optically variable ink. Some passports employ hidden features, for example, a second photograph that appears only under ultraviolet light.

2. States can decide whether to issue passports in a centralized or decentralized way. Volume and geography may be the most important factors to consider. A blended approach is possible when service points are decentralized while issuance is centralized.

3. States decide the extent to which a third party can be used in providing application services and information without compromising security. Some countries (Australia, USA) enable citizens to apply for passports at a Post Office. These countries contract out to private sector call-centres to
provide information for citizens.

4 States decide whether the total cost of a passport system should be charged to the users. Most countries charge the full cost of passport production based on the principle of user (traveller) pays. This is often driven by the fact that the quality, security, and technology required for today’s passports is expensive and “user pay” is justified by the fact that the applicant relies on the credibility of the systems and security requirements backing the passport as a part of the facilitation of travel.

5 States must ensure the credibility and security of the source documents used for passport issuance. States with Identity Card/Household Registration Systems have a head start in terms of the credibility and security of “identifier” information used in the issuance of a passport. States without such systems usually rely on a birth certificate and/or a citizenship document (for naturalized citizens) as the primary identifier along with a secondary identifier such as a driver’s license. Some States use third-party guarantors to further identify applicants. Photographs are required by all countries, but in States without personal delivery or pick up of passports, this can be a security gap.

6 States decide the types of passports they will issue. There are three basic types of passport:
   • regular/ordinary
   • diplomatic
   • emergency
In addition, some States have business or frequent traveller passports with extra pages as well as an official/special/service passport.

7 States decide how long their passports will be valid. Most countries issue passports with a five-to ten-year validity. Such time limits restrict illegal usage and recognize that personal appearances change, requiring new photographs. In addition, issuing systems and security features are changing with increasing regularity. In fact many countries no longer renew passports but require an entirely new application to receive an entirely new document. Travel and identity documents are usually issued for a shorter duration, such as one to three years.

What Do You Think?

The use of biometric identifiers is an attractive emerging technology primarily because of its accuracy for identification purposes. The technology must maintain a balance between privacy and civil liberties on the one hand and the opportunity for enhanced security capabilities on the other.
Current biometric identifiers include iris (eye) identification, face measurement computer systems, finger prints, and palm prints. Several considerations influence the introduction of this technology. The biometric system offering the highest accuracy at the least cost needs to be determined and the balance between privacy and civil liberties and security must be maintained.

Apply What You Have Learned

1. What has been decided by your State for each of the six points given in this Topic under “What you need to know about State decisions about passport system design”?

2. What are the most recent and sophisticated passport security features used by your State?

3. Regarding biometric technology, what should the balance be, and what balance should your State find between privacy and civil liberties on the one hand and increased security on the other?

4. What Ministry in your State is responsible for issuing passports and what partners from other departments such as Interior, Citizenship, or Migration are involved?
Topic Three

**Visa Systems**

A visa is permission or authority granted to travel to a country of which the traveller is not a national. A valid visa is often not a guarantee of entry into that country. Normally, an officer at the port of entry will make the final decision whether the traveller still meets admission requirements upon arrival.

The cornerstone of a sound visa system is the State’s visa policy. Policy development surrounding visa requirements often rests with the agency responsible for border control, and this may be a police function under the Interior or Home Ministry.

For most States, visa issuance falls logically to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with their widespread geographic distribution and their overall responsibility for international relations. Within Foreign Ministries, visa functions are usually assigned to the staff responsible for consular affairs. Consular staff may be delegated broad authority to issue tourist visas but often need authorization from another agency to issue other temporary visas (e.g., for employment) and for all long-term visas.

Some States have dedicated departments or agencies for migration management functions. Australia and Canada largely assign visa issuance to immigration specialists posted abroad. On the other hand, the US assigns visa issuance to the State Department, while visa policy and border control come under the Department of Homeland Security. Regardless of the scenario, visa requirements and visa issuance involve inter-agency coordination and cooperation.

Section 1.9, Developing an Administrative Framework, discusses options for the administrative organization of visa issuance.

**Important Points**

1. Because visas are only recommendations on the bona fides of the traveller, border officials usually have the final say on the duration of the stay, and they choose to shorten it. However, any change should be clearly written on the visa or in the passport.

2. Over the last decade, most States have significantly increased the amount a traveller has to pay
in order to obtain a visa. Many States try to recover the cost of their visa operations through visa revenues. High visa charges can often be attributed to the costs for implementing sophisticated issuance systems and the adoption of a “user pays” principle. Charges of US$ 50 for tourist visas and US$ 100 or more for work visas are normal. Long-term residence (immigrant) visas may cost US$ 300 or more. Some States charge a non-refundable processing fee, regardless of whether the application is accepted or refused. In addition, some States charge an additional fee for visa issuance.

Easily traversed borders with strong inter-connecting family and economic ties favour visa waivers. Natural borders, however, such as mountains or the sea (an island), may encourage visa impositions. Security issues may be pre-eminent in deciding to impose visa requirements if a country or too many of its citizens are seen as a potential threat. Demography has played a significant role in the immigrant visa policies of Australia, Canada, and the US, and with aging populations and skilled labour shortages, many States in Europe are liberalizing work visa policies. Some States may impose visas as a temporary health measure as Malaysia did with Canada during the SARS incident in 2003.

What You Need To Know About...

Types of Visas

There are two basic categories of visa: Temporary and Permanent.

A Permanent Visa is issued to non-nationals meeting requirements to reside in the State as immigrants. Some conditions may apply to Permanent Visas, often depending upon the category under which the visa was authorized.

Section 3.2, Immigration Systems, provides more information on permanent residence.

Temporary Visas of all types carry conditions. The most typical restrict duration of stay and require sufficient funds to cover the expenses of stay and departure arrangements.

The duration of stay is tied to the purpose of entry.

- Most tourist visas are valid from 30 to 90 days, with some countries prepared to grant up to six months.
- Work visas are usually authorized for periods of a year or more, although time may be quite restricted in such fields as entertainment or emergency repairs.
- Study visas are also usually for longer durations of a year or more.
The duration of validity for presentation of a visa at the border is usually for periods of 3 to 12 months from the date of issue, but may extend for several years in the case of multiple entry visas. Travellers may confuse the period of validity for presentation at the border or port of entry with the period for duration of stay. For clarity and transparency, these should be made clear on the visa.

Multiple entry visas may be given to travellers, such as businesspeople or long-term temporary visa holders such as students or workers.

Tourist visas, the most common temporary category, usually prohibit work and study. However, some countries permit attendance at short-term language or non-academic courses as a form of cultural tourism.

Business visas may be used for entrepreneurs to conduct business transactions. They may also be included under tourist or work visas depending on the precise nature of the activity.

Work (Employment) visa conditions usually restrict employment to a specific job, with a specific employer, and (sometimes) at a specific location.

Study visas usually specify the field of study and the institution. Generally, employment is not allowed, although some countries may permit on-campus work. A recent trend is to allow employment after university or college graduation with a view to using the student’s skills to meet labour and/or demographic needs.

Transit visas may be employed in a variety of short-term situations, varying from same-day airport connections to as many as five days, during a multi-country itinerary.

What do you think about these three approaches to national visa policy?

There are three main approaches to developing a national visa policy, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. States will decide between universality, reciprocity, and practicality on the approach that is best for them.

1. The Universality approach requires every foreign national to obtain a visa for entry. Universality has the virtues of simplicity and equality. However, it can be complex to administer and expensive to operate, unless completely cost recovered. This approach can discourage travel, especially from major sources of business and tourism. Australia adopted this
approach over a decade ago and uses travel agents and technology to overcome these draw-
backs.

2 The Reciprocity approach requires visas for the citizens of those countries that require visas of your citizens. Reciprocity appears logical and fair but may not always be practical. For example, reciprocity may lead to a visa exemption for a country whose citizens cause signifi-
cant immigration enforcement problems, while requiring visas for another country whose citizens are important to tourism and cause no problems. Reciprocity will cause a State to respond to another country’s imposition of a visa requirement with a reciprocal imposition, but this may not serve the State’s economic interests.

3 The Practicality approach may be based on considerations of geography, volumes of travel-
lers, experience with violations, and tourism or business needs, or any combination of these. Many States adopt a pragmatic approach, based on a combination of factors, including geography, history, economics, foreign relationships, and immigration violations. Many of these factors come into play, for example, in the relationship within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as among members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Consequently, within these two groupings, each country exempts the other’s citizens from most temporary visa requirements. Many States maintain and analyse statistics to determine immigration violators, by nationality. When visa-exempt
4. To what extent does the visa production and issuing process in your State conform to international standards?

5. What durations of stay are granted for each travel purpose discussed in this topic? Are these in line with international practice?

6. What geographic, demographic, or other factors determine visa impositions and waivers in your State?
Topic Four

Security Features and New Directions

Most of the security features associated with passport systems also apply to visa systems. Increasingly sophisticated security features include:

- high-quality papers and adhesives
- special or optically variable inks
- holograms
- digital photos—some States include a photograph on the visa counterfoil
- Machine-readable Zones (MRZ)

Important Points

1. The world’s most advanced and streamlined visa authorization system probably belongs to Australia with its Electronic Travel Authority (ETA). Instead of visa exemptions/waivers, Australia permits citizens of 33 low-risk countries to obtain an “electronic visa” as part of the existing travel/airline reservation system. The ETA is electronically stored and accessible to airlines and travel agents and Australian officials, but no document is issued.

2. The EU with its Schengen Visas has pioneered visa harmonization amongst a group of countries. This approach includes:
   - A sophisticated combination of machine-readable passports/visas/identity documents and visa systems
   - Elimination of controls on persons at the internal frontiers, which are invisible
   - Securing of the external border by harmonized policies, procedures, and automated systems
   - An integrated and automated system at the border to prevent unauthorized entry and residence, and to combat illegal immigration and employment
   - Harmonized visa criteria, security, and issuance among member States. One Schengen visa is valid for all contracting States
   - Exchange of information on counterfeit travel documents.

3. Since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the United States has been in the forefront in
developing a national security zone. A major link in the US passport and visa security system requires that citizens of countries defined in the US Visa Waiver Program must present machine-readable passports based on ICAO standards as the condition to enter the US without a visa. Those without machine-readable passports must obtain a non-immigrant visa starting October 2004.

- Countries on the Visa Waiver Program must also meet US Standards for: refusal rate; reciprocity; passport security; political and economic stability; border controls; and law-enforcement cooperation. The criteria required by the United States for machine-readable passports are those set out by ICAO document 9303, Annex 9 Facilitation and Annex 17 Security.

4 Biometric identification systems, using fingerprints, iris (eye) scans, facial geometry, etc. appear to have significant potential for accuracy and security although cost and privacy implications may be barriers to implementation. There is increasing interest in biometric identifiers such as finger/palm prints, iris (eye) identification, and face measurement systems. The accuracy, cost, and privacy implications of each method are being reviewed and tested.

- In some cases, a voluntary approach with incentives is used. For example, a frequent traveller may apply for accelerated border clearance on the basis of security and criminality checks and a willingness to store a biometric identifier with border officials.
- Canada and the United States are pioneering this approach with the NEXUS programme, operated jointly by the primary border agencies. Fingerprints have been used as the biometric identifier at participating border crossings while iris (eye) recognition has been tested at airports in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany.

5 Increased border security causes delays in the clearance process and logistical problems at airports.

6 Advanced Passenger Information (API) eliminates repetitive data entry, which is costly, and helps identify high-risk travellers before arrival. The Advanced Passenger Information (API) System captures data from the machine-readable zone of a passport at check-in and transmits the data to border officials who check databases and lookouts before arrival of the aircraft.
## Apply What You Have Learned

1. How does your State use its passport and visa system to defend against security threats that involve international travel?

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using new technology in passport and visa systems?

3. What new security features is your State adding to its travel documents?

4. What special visa arrangements has your State made with other States?
Concluding Remarks

This Section reviewed the current developments affecting passport and visa systems around the world. The security of international travel is dependent on several key factors, including the integrity of passport and visa systems. These systems serve to protect all countries from illegal trespass by non-citizens and greater threats such as terrorism. They facilitate screening at airports and borders, thereby benefiting governments, travellers, and transportation carriers. International standards developed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and other organizations protect the credibility of travel documents and incorporate the latest authentication technology and information sharing links. Individual States are upgrading their security measures related to migration and travel. Machine-readable Travel Documents (MRTDs) are becoming the new norm.

Resources

The following links to Web sites contain more detailed information on the passport and visa systems of a number of States.

**Australia**
Information on the passport and visa systems of Australia can be found at:
www.immi.gov.au
www.citizenship.gov.au
www.eta.immi.gov.au

**Canada**
Information on the passport and visa systems of Canada can be found at:
www.cic.gc.ca
www.ppt.gc.ca

**European Union**
Information on Schengen Passport and Visa Systems can be found at:
www.europa.eu.int
www.europe.eu/int/en/agenda/Schengen

**France**
Information on the passport and visa systems of France can be found at:
www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/venir/visas
www.ambafrance_ca.org
ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization)
Information on Machine-readable Travel Documents (passports, visas, ID cards) and systems can be found at www.icao.int. Documents of special interest are:

- Document: A-32-18 International Cooperation in Protecting the Security and Integrity of Passports
- Chicago Convention
- International Civil Organization: Strategic Action Plan updated 12 June, 2002
- ICAO Document 9303; Machine Readable Documents Parts 1, 2 and 3
- The Technical Advisory Group on Machine Readable Travel Documents (TAG/MRTD)
- Guide to Document 9303 prepared by TAG/MRTD
- ICAO Facilitation Program Objectives and Strategies
- Annex 9 Facilitation
- Annex 17 Security
- Aviation Security Panel (AVSECP)

Japan
Information on the passport and visa systems of Japan can be found at:
www.ca.emb-japan.go.jp

UN
Further information on Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons can be found at www.un.org. Particular areas of interest on the Site Index are:

- Main Bodies of the UN, ICAO, UNHCR, ECOSOC, Executive Committee
- Protecting Refugees
- 1951 Convention
- Convention Plus; questions/answers on initiatives by UNHCR relating to multilateral special agreements complementing the 1951 Convention and other Forum Documents

USA
Information on passport and visa systems of United States can be found at:
http://unitedstatesvisas.gov/whatis/index
http://travel.state.gov
Endnotes

1 International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO):

2 International Aid Network (IAN):
http://www.ian.org.yu/kosovo-info/english/Basic_doc/basic-other02.htm