



IATA/CONTROL Authorities Working Group

BEST PRACTICE FOR ELECTRONIC TRAVEL SYSTEMS

Version 1.0
27 OCT 2015

THE IATA/CONTROL AUTHORITIES WORKING GROUP (IATA/CAWG)

The IATA/Control Authorities Working Group (IATA/CAWG) was established as an IATA initiative in 1987. The main goal was to bring Immigration Authorities and representatives of the National Aircraft Operators together in an informal setting to develop mutually acceptable working arrangements, recognising the needs and limitations of the two parties.

Members of IATA/CAWG are the National Aircraft Operators and Immigration Departments (sometimes supplemented by Civil Aviation and Border Police) of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and the United States. The Airlines for America, the National Airlines Council of Canada, and the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines are also represented.

The IATA/CAWG Vision Statement is:

"For Airlines and Control Authorities to develop and pursue a cooperative programme for the facilitation and processing of a growing number of passengers, whilst ensuring effective action against illegitimate traffic, and to focus on such concepts as risk management, sharing of information and convergence of processes".

GUIDELINES FOR ELECTRONIC TRAVEL SYSTEM

➤ 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to outline the areas of concern and best practices identified by the IATA/Control Authorities Working Group (CAWG) for countries who have, or are considering, implementing an electronic version of visa issuance or travel authority.

- 1.2 Over the past several years, more and more governments are requiring passengers to apply or register online prior to boarding a flight for travel. These countries are using mixed terminology such as “electronic visa”, “electronic travel authority”, or “visa on arrival” to describe their online programs.
- 1.3 In January 2008, the United States introduced an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) which requires passengers from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries to apply online for prior authorization to travel to the U.S. Canada implemented a similar program in 2015. Both countries use the term “electronic travel authorization” for visa exempt nationals.
- 1.4 Australia provides an Electronic Travel Authority (ETA) to eligible passengers to travel to Australia for tourism or business purposes. It replaces the visa label or stamp in a passport and removes the need for manual application forms. Australia also provides an electronic system that is used to lodge visa applications online for a variety of other visa subclasses.
- 1.5 Countries such as Mexico, India and the United Kingdom have introduced similar travel authority programs, but these are used as a means to exempt certain nationals from obtaining a visa by making the individual complete, prior to travel an online electronic travel authorization request. Aircraft operators are required to verify the passenger’s acceptance for travel via paper printouts or accessing a government web site.

1.6 Countries such as Sri Lanka and Nigeria allow for visa required nationals to submit an eVisa application on line which then authorizes them to be issued a visa upon arrival.

1.7 Since there is no universally accepted definition for an eVisa or an electronic travel authorization, this paper will introduce and uses throughout, a generic term “Electronic Travel System” (ETS) to describe and make the recommendation that an ETS be considered an automated process for the lodgement, acceptance and verification of a passenger’s authorization to travel to a country.

1.8 The purpose for implementing an ETS is to expedite the pre-vetting and acceptance of low risk passengers into a country, while providing a secure method for applicants, governments, and airlines to verify the acceptance for travel in accordance with the “*Guidelines on Advance Passenger Information (API)*” and “Appendix IIB - API Response Message (CUSRES) Implementation Guide” adopted by the WCO/ICAO/IATA

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 Electronic Travel System (ETS) is an automated process for authorizing a passenger’s acceptance for travel to a country, in lieu of the standard counterfoil paper visa.

2.2 Interactive Advance Passenger Information (iAPI) is a type of system whereby required data elements are collected and transmitted by aircraft operators to public authorities at the time of check-in. An iAPI CUSRES response message for each passenger is transmitted back to the aircraft

operator within existing business processing times for passenger check-in.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 IATA CAWG conducted a review of various countries’ programs that offered an online application process for obtaining a visa or an electronic travel authority, and found that there were some common practices in the areas of pre-vetting, acceptance and verification to determine a passenger’s acceptance for travel to a country.

3.2 In the past, ICAO has received working papers to support removing barriers in visa issuance by implementing an eVisa program¹, but with no internationally accepted definition for a visa, the term has failed to obtain international recognition.

3.3 Australia implemented the ETA in 1996. The IATA/CAWG considers the Australian ETA to be a model of how countries can introduce and integrate all of the elements for an ETS.

3.4 The Australian Government also has a universal visa policy, requiring all non-Australian citizens, including those who have lawful permanent residence permits, to hold the appropriate visa before travelling to Australia.

¹ A37-WP/136 EC/7 3/9/10 presented by the World Tourism Organization eVISAS: A PRESSING NEED FOR GLOBAL STANDARDS, SPECIFICATIONS AND INTEROPERABILITY,

- 3.5 An Australian visa provides a record that a non-citizen has authority to travel to, enter and remain in Australia. Visas can be divided into two main categories:
- “permanent” or “migrant” visas, which allow permanent residence in Australia; and
 - “temporary” visas, which have a time limit on the period of stay in Australia.
- 3.6 The ETA is a category of visa, in the form of an electronically stored authority for travel to Australia, which is linked electronically to an eligible person’s passport. The ETA allows a holder to visit Australia on a temporary basis for business, visitor or tourism purposes.
- 3.7 In addition to the online application, eligible ETA applicants can also apply through over 30,000 travel agents globally and over 85 airlines, including at the point and time of departure. Travel agents and airlines can also determine if a client has an existing ETA.
- 3.8 When a passenger checks in to fly to Australia, airline staff is required to electronically confirm that the passenger has the authority to travel to Australia prior to boarding the aircraft. This is done via Australia’s Advance Passenger Processing (APP) system²
- The APP system links with the airline’s departure control system. Airlines receive a boarding directive that will advise whether the passenger is known to Australia, that they have an ETA or a visa on file and whether it is “<OK TO BOARD>” the passenger.

Since the ETA is linked to an ETA eligible passport, the passenger must travel on that passport to obtain an “<OK TO BOARD>” response.

- 3.9 Australia no longer requires visa holders to have a visa label evidenced in their passport. A passenger’s visa status is recorded electronically within the Department of Immigration and Border Protection’s (DIBP) systems. The electronic visa record is used to confirm a person’s visa status and is accessible to airlines via the check-in system. This information is provided to DIBP via APP, which allows analysis and planning for the arrival of passengers in advance.

➤ 4. CURRENT SITUATION

- 4.1 After a review of various countries’ electronic visa or travel authority programs, the IATA/CAWG has determined that there are benefits to implementing an ETS, but there are also impacts to passengers, aircraft operators and governments when not all of the elements of the ETS are implemented.
- 4.2 The current practice for visa issuance by placing a counterfoil or stamped visa in the passport can be time consuming and may be difficult for the passenger to obtain when there is no local document issuing authority e.g. Embassy or Consulate in their country.
- 4.3 There is general acceptance among aircraft operators on how to verify a counterfoil or stamped visa to confirm a passenger’s eligibility to travel. However, the visa image or stamp can still be fraudulently manipulated and aircraft operators could be considered liable for transporting an improperly documented traveller.

² © Proprietary program developed by SITA and CPS.

- 4.4 Aircraft operators also find it difficult to manage notification from countries that a visa has been cancelled, and not to accept a passenger for travel, even though the visa still appears to be valid in his or her passport.
- 4.5 Aircraft operators can experience difficulties in maintaining training programs for check-in agents to keep them apprised of entry requirements and different types of online visas or travel authority programs for countries that they fly to.
- 4.6 Check-in agents also experience difficulties in maintaining awareness of entry requirements for a country when that country implements an online travel authority for a limited number of nationalities.
- 4.7 The introduction of an ETS can assist in the facilitation of processing and prior acceptance of low risk passengers into a country. However, since there is no universally-accepted practice for countries who have implemented an eVisa, electronic travel authority, or pre approval for visa issuance on arrival, there is confusion as to what a passenger must do to obtain an authorization for travel and what the passenger must present to the aircraft operator, if anything, in order to confirm their status for travel.
- 4.8 Aircraft operators also experience difficulties with some countries using partial implementation of an ETS. This can occur when an online application process also requires manual verification via print outs. Paper print outs can be easily forged, and depending on the program, may not be recognizable to the aircraft operators as an accepted document for travel in addition to a valid passport.
- 4.9 Other countries have programs that require aircraft operators to access a government web site to confirm a passenger's eligibility for travel. For most airlines, this type of a program is not feasible since most airline check-in counters do not have access to the internet.
- 4.10 In some cases, countries allow third party vendors to collect online visa and travel authority applications for an additional surcharge for forwarding the information to the government's web site. This may confuse passengers when searching the internet for the government's official web site to make their online application.
- 4.11 There have been examples of online application being processed for passengers of ineligible nationality.

5. ELECTRONIC TRAVEL SYSTEMS BEST PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Program description:

As outlined above, aircraft operators and the public experience difficulties with the application and verification of visa or travel authority processes when a country chooses to implement only partial measures of an ETS, see points a) to d) below. Therefore, the IATA/CAWG recommends the following be considered when an ETS is introduced to ensure a robust system is established, and avoid fraudulent documents being presented to aircraft operators, or public complaints of being overcharged.

- a) Electronic lodgement – an official electronic platform where an online application for authority to travel can be made. A country should make clear that their platform is the preferred means for applying online in order to reduce the scope of unofficial third party vendors that may charge an additional fee for the purpose of lodging an individual’s application.
- b) Automated processing - continuous vetting of relevant alert lists.
- c) ETS processes should be integrated with government systems to facilitate the vetting of passengers prior to departure and be in a position to provide real-time responses to aircraft operators during check-in as part of an iAPI CUSRES response.
- d) Electronic notification to the passenger - to replace paper evidence of an individual’s approval for travel.

5.2 Information required from the passenger:

Countries who have implemented an ETS have found that not all passports follow the ICAO DOC 9303 requirements and experience issues with applicants trying to enter their travel document information when applying for an authority to travel. Lessons learned from previous governments’ implementations, include examples where German “Kinderreisepass” were being confused as passports or the applicant was not able to recognize if the travel document number characters were displaying as letters or numbers. The following best practices were shared by some governments who have already implemented an ETS.

- a) The information required should be kept to the minimum in accordance with national laws and regulations of that country.
- b) The application form requirements should be easily understood by the applicant.
- c) The application should include tools built into the application to assist individuals to avoid errors when completing the application form (e.g.: avoid entering zeros for the letter “O”).
- d) Full disclosure from 3rd party vendors who are completing the application on behalf of the applicant. The 3rd party vendor should confirm they have advised the passenger of the extra charges for their services and confirmed they have reviewed all questions with the applicant.

- e) The online application should have clear instructions as to the applicability of who requires to apply for an ETS, and not allow application processing for non-eligible passengers. (e.g. nationality and/or document type).

5.3 Requirements for Airline Verification:

- a) The Government system should be able to integrate with the airline reservation and departure control systems using data messaging standards in accordance with international guidelines in order to provide a real-time response to the aircraft operator during check-in.
- b) To prevent stranding passengers in a third country, the aircraft operator providing transportation into the country requiring an authority to travel should seek to extend the uplift verification check to the point of origin rather than the last leg before entry to the destination country. This will greatly depend on other aircraft operators' interline thru check-in capabilities and the relationship between the aircraft operators.
- c) Countries with ETS processes should consider back up procedures in the event of a system outage, such as the introduction of a 24/7 support line. e.g. Australia has an Entry Operations Centre (EOC) which provides assistance to airlines in cases of boarding issues.

5.4 Government Communication Strategies:

- a) Governments should allow for a generous implementation schedule to build awareness regarding upcoming changes.

- b) Governments should use bilateral and multilateral agreements with other governments and organizations to communicate out the planned implementation of an ETS. e.g. Foreign Affairs, Embassies, IATA, Airlines for America (A4A), National Airlines Association of Canada (NACC), Association of European Airlines (AEA), and Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) and other national and international organisations.
- c) Governments should include a period of time after implementation where passengers are allowed entrance into the country but informed of the new requirements. e.g. handing out a tear sheet with new requirements)
- d) Governments should provide information to individuals in multiple languages.
- e) Governments should consider setting up a support network to field inquiries from travellers who need assistance with completing the online application, e.g. call centre, web Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), email help desk.
- f) Governments should design communication strategies that incorporate all sectors of the travel industry, including travel agencies, airlines, and travel and tourism associations.
- g) Governments should use multi-faceted mediums such as print ads, community associations, trade shows, inflight magazines and social media to notify the traveling public of the ETS requirements. The message should be tailored to local market audiences.

- h) Aircraft Operators should consider informing their passengers of ETS requirements at time of booking.

5.5 Cost and validity:

The imposition of additional costs for a passenger is viewed by aircraft operators as an added deterrent to where a passenger chooses to travel. Governments need to be sensitive to the combined cost of all fees and taxes when implementing an ETS and should consider the following as a best practice:

- a) If there is a cost associated with the ETS, application fees charged should only be for cost recovery and not served as a source of revenue for other government programs.
- b) In accordance with national laws, it is recommended that governments allow for a one-time application per passenger, allowing for multiple entries over a set period of time that meets both public and government's interests.

7. BENEFITS OF AN ETS

- 6.1 For passengers, it provides a seamless process for obtaining and verifying an authority to travel to a country.
- 6.2 A well implemented and robust ETS, which is linked to an interactive API system, also enables aircraft operators to effectively verify that passengers have authority to travel before issuing boarding passes. This saves time for aircraft operators at check-in and reduces the likelihood of uplifting improperly documented passengers.

6.3 Similarly, an ETS benefits governments by enabling pre-arrival assessment and processing, which ensures that border integrity is maintained.

6.4 An ETS uses fewer resources, thereby providing a more cost effective way to deliver a level of service consistent with the expectation of today's passengers.

7. SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATION

7.1 IATA/CAWG supports the concept of more countries implementing an ETS where there are apparent benefits for governments, the public and industry. ETS implementation can be used to simplify the process for individuals to seek prior authority to travel to a country when the guidelines are clearly communicated and easily understood. Aircraft operators will be more successful in preventing improperly documented arrivals when there is automated verification of a passenger's authority to travel tied into the air carrier's departure control system in accordance with the "*Guidelines on Advance Passenger Information (API)*" and "Appendix IIB - API Response Message (CUSRES) Implementation Guide" adopted by the WCO/ICAO/IATA

7.2 Countries that are considering implementing improved visa issuance regimes should consider the best practices outlined in this paper for implementing an ETS. This should include the online processes for the lodgement of the applicant's information, automated vetting against watch lists, electronic notification of an applicant's acceptance or non-acceptance for travel and an automated verification process for both travellers and aircraft operators to confirm authorization to travel.