



U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen Announces Targeted Security Enhancements To The Visa Waiver Program

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DHS Continues to Raise Security Standards Across the Board

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen M. Nielsen announced that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Department of State and other federal agencies, is taking action to further strengthen the already robust national security and immigration enforcement elements of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). These enhancements include requiring VWP countries to use counterterrorism information to better screen travelers, assessing VWP countries to ensure they implement safeguards against the aviation sector, and requiring certain VWP countries to initiate public information campaigns to reduce overstays.

“The United States faces an adaptive and agile enemy, as terrorists continue to explore ways to reach our country and to direct, enable, and inspire attacks against us,” said Secretary Nielsen. “It’s critically important we stay ahead of these threats by improving our security posture. These enhancements will strengthen the program, and they are part of our continued efforts to raise the baseline for homeland security across the board.”

DHS is introducing the following security measures applicable to all countries in the VWP:

- Requiring VWP countries to fully implement existing information sharing arrangements by systematically screening travelers crossing their respective borders

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against U.S. counterterrorism information;

- Assessing VWP countries on the effectiveness of safeguards against insider threats in the aviation security environment; and
- Requiring VWP countries having a two percent or greater rate of business or tourism nonimmigrant visitors overstaying the terms of their admission into the United States to initiate a public information campaign to reduce overstay violations by educating their nationals on the conditions for admission into the United States.

DHS is also calling on Congress to codify existing VWP requirements to bolster efforts in the following areas:

- Reporting of foreign terrorist fighter information to multilateral organizations, such as INTERPOL and EUROPOL;
- Systematically collecting and analyzing passenger travel data (Advance Passenger Information/Passenger Name Records); and
- Concluding arrangements to permit U.S. Federal Air Marshals to operate onboard U.S. air carriers for last point of departure flights to the United States.

As part of its regular cooperation with VWP countries, DHS will develop targeted engagement plans to support implementation of these measures. Importantly, DHS has assessed that these security enhancements will not hinder lawful trade and travel. Qualified nationals will continue to be able to travel to the United States under the VWP. These measures will benefit all U.S.-bound visitors by promoting a safe and secure travel system.

The VWP is a comprehensive security partnership with many of America's closest allies. VWP permits citizens of 38 countries to travel to the United States for business or tourism for stays of up to 90 days without a visa. The countries must meet high security standards to participate in the VWP, and all visitors are thoroughly vetted and must have an approved travel authorization issued by the Electronic System for Travel Authorization to travel to the United States. Each year, the United States welcomes over 20 million visitors traveling under the VWP.

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