Non-Physical Authorizations to Travel

Best Practices for Issuers and Verifiers



This guidance material has been developed by the IATA Control Authorities Working Group (CAWG). It is the outcome of collaborative working arrangements between States and the airline industry to find mutually acceptable solutions for border management.

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Table of Contents

Acronyms 5
Executive Summary 6
Background 8

1. Authorizations to Travel not Affixed to a Passport 9
1.1. Three processes 9

2. Verification Challenges 10
2.1. Need for predictability 10
2.2. International Framework 10
2.3. Operational Complexities 11
2.4. Digital or Printed Proofs of Issuance 11
2.5. Web-Based Queries 11
2.6. Self-Service Limitations 11

3. Verification Solutions 11
3.1. iAPI Integration 12
3.1.1. Benefits 12
3.1.2. Limitations 13

3.2. ICAO Digital Travel Authorizations (DTA) 13
3.2.1. Interoperability 13
3.2.2. Customer experience 14
3.2.3. Security Feature 14
3.2.4. DTA and iAPI countries 14
3.2.5. Limitations 14
3.3. Minimal Harmonization 15

4. Implementation Considerations for States 15
4.1. Benefits of existing programs 15
4.2. Objectives in implementing an eVisas and/or eTAs program 15
4.2.1. Completeness of the solution 15
4.2.2. Traveler Experience 16
4.2.3. Costs savings and resources reallocation 16
4.2.4. Revenue Considerations 16
4.2.5. Pre-travel verification and automation of vetting 16
4.3. Regulatory and Policy Considerations 17

4.3.1. National legislative changes 17
4.3.2. Inter-agency coordination and stakeholder engagement 17
4.3.3. Communications to the travelling public of changes to entry requirements 17
4.3.4. Carrier's Liability 17
4.4. System Requirements 18
4.4.1. Application/Lodgement Platforms and Procedures 18
4.4.2. Outage Procedures 18
4.5. Challenges with Applicants 18
4.6 Differentiating API Data and eTA Programs. 18

5. Other Considerations 19
5.1. Countries relying on a third country visas 19
5.1.1. Overview 19
5.1.2. Challenges 19
5.1.3. Further Considerations 19
5.2. Transit without visa regimes 20
5.2.1. Overview 20
5.2.2. Challenges 20
5.2.3. Further Considerations 20
5.3. InterAirline Through CheckIn (IATCI) messaging protocols 20

Acronyms

ABC	Automated Border Controls
API	Advance Passenger Information
CAWG	Control Authorities Working Group (IATA)
CUSRES	Custom Response
DTA	Digital Travel Authorization
DTC	Digital Travel Credential
eTA	Electronic Travel Authorization
ETS	Electronic Travel System
eVisa	Electronic Visa
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
GDS	Global Distribution Systems
iAPI	Interactive Advance Passenger Information
IATCI	InterAirline Through Check-In
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IDB	ICAO Datastructure for Barcodes
MRZ	Machine Readable Zone
NATFC	National Air Transport Facilitation Committee
PKD	Public Key Directory
TWoV	Transit Without Visa

Executive Summary

States around the world are increasingly adopting **non-physical authorizations to travel such as electronic visa (eVisa) and electronic travel authorizations (eTA) programs** as part of a broader shift toward digitalized, seamless, and secure passenger processing. With global air travel expected to reach 8.1 billion passengers by 2044, States face mounting pressure to modernize their border management systems and strengthen pretravel risk assessment. When properly designed, eVisas and eTAs serve as powerful enablers of both facilitation and security, reducing the need for physical consular visits, accelerating processing, and supporting more accurate advance screening.

Despite these benefits, **verification remains the most significant challenge in current programs**. Airlines are responsible for confirming that passengers hold valid authorizations before departure as part of their document check process. Yet the proofs of issuance they receive are highly inconsistent in appearance and data. They can be easily falsified, are often unverifiable, and are subject to differing accuracy requirements. This creates a fragmented environment that undermines predictability, increases inadmissible passenger rates, and exposes airlines to operational and financial risk. This lack of harmonization forces airlines to rely on manual checks, assumptions, or ad hoc procedures, which is neither scalable nor secure.

To address these issues, the international framework provides **two recognized verification mechanisms for authorizations to travel not affixed to a passport**. The first is the **interactive Advance Passenger Information (iAPI) system**, which allows authorities to validate a passenger's authorization in real time and return a clear board/no board response to the airline. When integrated into an Electronic Travel System (ETS), iAPI offers the most robust and automated solution, eliminating the need for passengers to present printed confirmations and enabling near perfect compliance. However, fewer than 25 countries operate an iAPI system today, and even fewer have fully implemented ETS, due to cost, complexity and legal considerations.

The second mechanism is the **ICAO Digital Travel Authorization (DTA)**, a standardized credential designed to harmonize the display and security of eVisas and eTAs. DTAs include predictable data fields and a digitally signed barcode compliant with ICAO's Data structure for Barcodes (IDB), which enables more reliable verification in environments where an iAPI system is not available and offers a practical and globally consistent alternative to the current patchwork of formats.

DTAs and iAPI systems are not necessarily mutually exclusive and a State implementing authorizations to travel not affixed to a passport, may find benefit in both an iAPI integration and DTA issuance model.

For States unable to implement an iAPI system or DTA immediately, a **transitional approach based on minimal harmonization of proofs of issuance** can still provide meaningful improvements. Standardizing the visual layout and data elements of printed or digital confirmations, mirroring the DTA format but without the digital signatures, can enhance predictability for airlines and reduce the risk of errors. However, this option remains less secure and should be viewed as an interim measure.

Beyond verification, States must consider broader implementation factors. Successful programs require clear communication to travelers, strong interagency coordination, and early engagement with airlines and other stakeholders. They also demand robust outage procedures, user friendly application platforms, and mechanisms to reduce applicant errors. When these elements are in place, eVisa and eTA programs can deliver substantial benefits, including faster processing, reduced consular costs, improved border security, and increased tourism revenue. Conversely, poorly designed or incomplete programs risk higher rates of inadmissible passengers, operational disruptions, and diminished traveler confidence.

Airlines require a reliable and streamlined mechanism to verify nonphysical authorizations to travel when these are mandatory for border security and cannot be checked upon arrival. In the absence of such a mechanism, airlines should not be held liable for passengers who arrive without a valid authorization.

Overall, this document underscores **the need for States to adopt a comprehensive, end-to-end approach to eVisa and eTA implementation**. This includes prioritizing iAPI integration where feasible, leveraging the ICAO DTA for global interoperability, and using harmonized proofs of issuance as a temporary bridge. By doing so, States can ensure that their programs genuinely enhance border security while supporting a seamless, predictable, and modern travel experience.

Background

Cross-border passenger movements must become increasingly efficient and streamlined to keep pace with global travel demand. IATA forecasts that passenger traffic will double from 2024 levels, reaching 8.1 billion travelers by 2044. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Doha Declaration on Facilitation of International Air Transport (April 2025) underscores the need for States to enhance the passenger experience and improve the movement of aircraft, passengers, crew, and cargo.

A range of tools and processes now support States in more accurately identifying travelers and conducting risk assessments prior to travel. These include:

- **Electronic passports (ePassports)** and the **ICAO Digital Travel Credential (DTC)**, which enable biometric supported solutions such as Automated Border Controls (ABC).
- **Passenger data**, including Advance Passenger Information (API) in batch and interactive formats, and Passenger Name Record (PNR) data.
- **Authorizations to travel**, whether physical counterfoil visas affixed to passports or, increasingly, electronic visas (eVisas) and electronic travel authorizations (eTAs).
- **Pretravel verification platforms**, such as mobile applications or web portals, which allow authorities to collect additional information directly from travelers before their journey.

Used in various combinations, these tools and processes enhance border security while facilitating the travel of legitimate passengers.

It remains the sovereign prerogative of States to impose authorizations to travel. When a State requires visas for certain travelers or determines that additional information is needed from visa-exempt travelers, eVisas and eTAs can provide significant facilitation and border security benefits. They eliminate, in many cases, the need for physical visits to consular offices and enable expedited, often near-instant, authorization decisions. These authorizations to travel not affixed to passports contribute meaningfully to the digitalization of air travel and support a more seamless passenger experience.

However, the shift toward non-physical authorizations also introduces challenges, particularly in the verification process, which involves third parties such as airlines and foreign border authorities. As more States adopt eVisa and eTA programs, estimated by IATA Timatic[1] at around 100 worldwide, these programs play an increasingly important role in the transition toward a fully digital passenger journey. They reduce manual interventions, decrease errors, and support more predictable and efficient processing. This Best Practice document focuses on the areas where authorities and airlines must collaborate most closely: issuance and verification.

Purpose of this Best Practice – Drawing on the experience of States that have already implemented eVisa and eTA programs, this document highlights both the opportunities and limitations observed by national agencies and airlines. It aims to support States that are considering new programs as well as those seeking to improve existing ones.

The policy recommendations in this document focus on issuance and verification considerations for States seeking to genuinely enhance border security through pre-travel risk assessment. Travelers must obtain their authorization prior to departure, i.e., this entry requirement cannot be fulfilled upon arrival. Airlines, in turn, are expected to take necessary precautions during the document check process to ensure passengers hold valid authorizations. Passengers who fail to comply will be deemed inadmissible and may expose the airline to financial penalties.

[1] IATA Timatic is a provider of real-time information on travel document requirements for international air travel.

While States pursue eVisa and eTA programs for diverse reasons, the principals outlined in this document are relevant regardless of the basis of the program where verification by airlines is a requirement.

This CAWG guidance is based on the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) of ICAO Annex 9, Seventeenth Edition, Amendment 30 (March 2025), unless indicated otherwise.

1. Authorizations to Travel not Affixed to a Passport

Authorizations to travel that are not affixed to a passport lack the physical linkage of traditional counterfoil visas. Instead, they are presented either in physical or digital form as a separate credential. There are two primary categories of such authorizations: electronic visas (eVisas) and electronic travel authorizations (eTAs).

An eVisa can be understood as an authorization to travel not affixed to a passport which confirms the lodgment and acceptance of a traveler's authority to travel to a State. It is issued in lieu of a standard visa or a non-machine readable counterfoil visa and serves the same purpose as traditional visas.

An eTA can be understood as an authorization to travel not affixed to a passport issued to a visa exempt national which confirms the lodgment and acceptance of a passenger's authority to travel to a State.

In recent years, more countries have implemented eTA requirements on third-country nationals who would traditionally have been visa-exempt (e.g., visa waiver nationals). eTAs allow authorities to collect additional information and conduct light-touch vetting to strengthen pre-travel verification. While eVisas may take days or weeks to process, eTAs are often issued within hours or even instantaneously.

1.1. Three processes

The management of any authorization to travel program involves three core processes: application (lodgement), acceptance (issuance), and verification. Depending on the type of authorization, these processes may be manual, electronic, or a combination of both.



For traditional visas, all three processes are generally manual or semi-automated. Travelers submit paper applications by mail or in person at a consulate or embassy. A counterfoil or sticker is then affixed to the passport, and verification is performed manually or semi-automatically through the Machine Readable Zone (MRZ), where available.

The digitalization of these processes unlocks significant facilitation and security benefits for States, passengers, and airlines. Applications and issuance decisions occur through digital platforms, such as mobile apps or web portals, and notifications can be delivered electronically through the platform or by email.

The verification process introduces an additional party, typically airlines. In some cases, a third country authority may also act as a verifier, for example, when a State relies on another country's authorization to grant visa free transit or entry to travelers. **Verification is where the majority of current challenges arise**, particularly when authorizations are not affixed to a passport and lack standardized, secure, and interoperable formats.

2. Verification Challenges

2.1. Need for predictability

Airlines operate in a globally interconnected environment where effective facilitation depends on predictability and standardization. Consistency in the appearance, structure, and terminology of travel documentation is essential for airlines to meet their obligations under ICAO Annex 9 Standard 9.35, which requires airlines to take necessary precautions at the point of embarkation to ensure that travelers possess the documents prescribed by transit and destination States.

For authorizations to travel, airlines must verify that the authorization is valid, belongs to the holder, and is not grossly falsified. A single airline may operate to more than 80 countries, each with its own entry requirements. Because document checks occur before the first flight of a connecting itinerary, airline staff, often in small or remote locations, must interpret and apply entry and transit requirements for destinations worldwide.

Predictability is generally straightforward for traditional visas issued in accordance with ICAO Doc 9303. For authorizations to travel not affixed to a passport, predictability is best achieved through an iAPI system functioning as an Electronic Travel System (ETS), as recommended in Annex 9. In the absence of an iAPI system, the ICAO Digital Travel Authorization (DTA) offers an alternative means of standardizing the proof of issuance.

2.2. International Framework

The international framework supports eVisa and eTA programs through ETS-related recommended practices in ICAO Annex 9 and the ICAO DTA technical specifications. An iAPI system provides a secure and scalable method for airlines to verify that a passenger has been granted an eVisa or eTA. Recommended Practice 9.17 in Annex 9 outlines the ETS[2] concept, emphasizing the electronic execution of lodgment, issuance, and verification, with iAPI serving as the electronic verification mechanism.

However, fewer than 30 countries operate an iAPI system, and fewer than 10 have implemented a full ETS. As a result, proofs of issuance carried by passengers vary widely in format, security, and data elements. This lack of harmonization, security, and interoperability with the proof of issuance, whether presented on paper or on a mobile device by passengers, creates the core verification challenge for airlines.

To address this, ICAO developed the DTA[3] specifications in Doc 9303. The DTA harmonizes the display of eVisas and eTAs and secures the credential, whether digital or printed, using a digitally signed barcode compliant with

[2] ETS is defined in Annex 9, Seventeenth Edition, Amendment 31, as: The electronic process for the lodgement, acceptance and verification of a passenger's authorization to travel not affixed to a passport.
[3] DTA is defined in Annex 9, Seventeenth Edition, Amendment 31, as: Proof of issuance of an authorization to travel not affixed to a passport containing a digitally signed barcode using an ICAO Datastructure for Barcode (IDB), as specified in Doc 9303.

ICAO Data Structure for Barcodes (IDB)[4] technical specifications. This credential provides a standardized, secure alternative for third-party verification, either aside or in complement to an iAPI system.

2.3. Operational Complexities

Limited adoption of ETS and DTA standards has forced airlines to develop bespoke verification processes for each non-standard program and left airline staff into making certain assumption about verification in order to maintain operational viability. This has led to increased numbers of inadmissible passengers, erroneous boardings, refusals, and unnecessary stress for travelers.

2.4. Digital or Printed Proofs of Issuance

While airlines can perform basic checks to confirm that a printed or digital proof of issuance appears to belong to a passenger and seems valid, these documents are easily falsified and lack the security features of visas affixed to passports, undermining predictability. Layouts and data elements vary significantly across issuing States, and no third party can reliably verify that these proofs are valid authorizations and legitimately issued. With more than 100 eVisa and eTA programs worldwide, training staff to manually review each format is impractical, and maintaining scalable IT solutions is difficult given the heterogeneity of proofs of issuance.

Airlines also cannot determine whether an authorization has been revoked or whether a single or limited-entry authorization has already been used. By contrast, for traditional visas, Annex 9 requires States to clearly indicate each use, allowing quick assessment without specialized tools.

2.5. Web-Based Queries

Some States provide web portals for airlines to verify eVisas. This approach is operationally unsustainable: many check-in counters lack internet access, and even where available, querying each passenger would disrupt the time-sensitive check-in processes. Some States have proposed tablets or non-interactive service calls, but these solutions are not scalable in a global, high-volume environment where verification may occur at any one of thousands of airports in hundreds of countries.

2.6. Self-Service Limitations

Current eVisa printouts prevent passengers from using self-service options such as online check-in or automated bag drop. This reintroduces manual processing at airline counters, reducing efficiency and undermining the benefits of digitalization.

3. Verification Solutions

This section explores the benefits and challenges of the two internationally recognized verification methods for verifying authorizations to travel not affixed to a passport, one a system-based model (iAPI), and the other one a credential-based model (DTA):

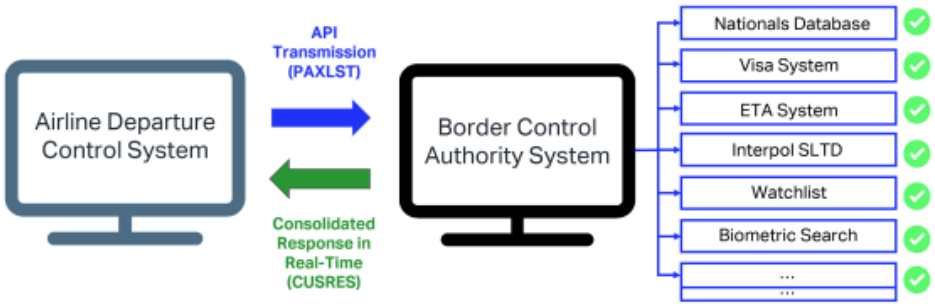
[4] ICAO Datastructure for Barcodes (IDB), ICAO Doc 9303 Technical Report, available here: https://www.icao.int/Security/FAL/TRIP/PublishingImages/Pages/Publications/ICAO%20TR%20-%20ICAO%20Datastructure%20for%20Barcode.pdf



The presence of an iAPI system does not preclude a State from issuing DTA as a proof of issuance, particularly for the specfic use cases described in section 4.1.1. Challenges. For States that do not operate an iAPI system and do not intend to implement the technical specifications for the DTA, a minimum set of data elements to be displayed on the physical or digital proof of issuance is proposed as a third, albeit less desirable option is presented in this Section.

3.1. iAPI Integration

ICAO defines an iAPI system as an "electronic communication system that transmits, during check-in, API data elements collected by the aircraft operator to border control agencies who, within existing aircraft operator's business processing times for passenger check-in, return to the aircraft operator a response message for each passenger." This enables authorities to determine whether each passenger may board the aircraft, based on screening against national and international databases.



3.1.1. Benefits

When a State requires third-country nationals to obtain an eVisa or eTA, the passport data transmitted via the iAPI message allows authorities to confirm whether a valid authorization to travel is on file. The same process can apply to counterfoil visas if issuance databases are connected to the iAPI program. In such environments, standardized validation responses, consistent terminology, and 24/7 national agencies support mechanisms providing board/no board guidance are essential components of effective eVisa and eTA programs. An iAPI system functioning as an ETS, as recommended in Annex 9, Chapter 9, Section C, increases airline's confidence in a traveler's admissibility before departure and enables self-service check-in.

Fully integrated systems have allowed airlines to automate most aspects of passenger documentation review, reduce compliance failures, and minimize customer disruption. Where eVisa and eTA validation is achieved through iAPI, human interpretation is eliminated and compliance rates approach 100%. Indeed, iAPI systems eliminate the need for passengers to present, and for aircraft operators to check, or even communicate, the authorization to travel reference number, i.e. the transfer of the passport details will be used by authorities to review their own visa records and databases.



However, although Annex 9 envisions an ETS incorporating iAPI as the preferred validation mechanism, many States have introduced electronic entry documents without an ETS to support validation. The resulting digital or printed proofs of issuance carried by passengers do not follow international standards, which produces dozens of heterogeneous formats that must be manually checked by airline staff, with no assurance that the proof of issuance is valid or trustworthy.

3.1.2. Limitations

Despite their efficiency, iAPI systems are used by fewer than 30 countries worldwide, and not all of these integrate immigration vetting responses that encompass all types of authorizations to travel issued into their return messages to aircraft operators. This reduces the benefits of such systems. Integration between States and airline systems is complex, costly, and may raise legal or privacy concerns. Many States may therefore look to the ICAO DTA to strengthen verification when issuing eVisas and/or eTAs for border security purposes.

iAPI systems also do not cover all operational scenarios. In multi-leg or interline journeys, only the carrier transporting the passenger to a point where iAPI validation exists receives confirmation that the passenger is properly documented. The originating carrier may therefore lack certainty regarding admissibility for the entire itinerary.

3.2. ICAO Digital Travel Authorizations (DTA)

The technical specifications for the DTA[5] were developed to harmonize non-physical authorizations to travel. The DTA is designed to support all forms of authorizations not affixed to a passport and to provide a foundation for global interoperability, regardless of whether a State operates an iAPI system. DTAs may be presented electronically or in printed form, with both formats offering the same level of security and verification capability.

3.2.1. Interoperability

The harmonized display of DTAs supports both electronic and manual verification, in contrast to the current environment where each State uses different data elements and formats for eVisa and eTA proofs of issuance. Standardized and predictable DTA data fields simplify verification for airline agents and third country authorities. DTAs have the potential to replace the wide array of non-harmonized paper proofs currently in circulation, significantly enhancing interoperability, particularly in non-iAPI environments.

[5] Digital Travel Authorizations, Version 2.15, June 2021: https://www2023.icao.int/Security/FAL/TRIP/PublishingImages/Pages/Publications/Digital%20Travel%20Authorizations.%20(New).pdf



3.2.2. Customer experience

The DTA can enhance passengers' confidence in their documentation by providing a credential that is more accessible than a confirmation email. A common challenge with eTAs is that passengers often cannot locate the original confirmation email, sometimes issued years earlier. A DTA credential reduces confusion and enhances the travel experience.

3.2.3. Security Feature

In the absence of an iAPI system, DTAs provide an additional layer of security for document verification. While authentication is outside of the scope of airline responsibilities, the credential does include a digitally signed barcode that complies with ICAO IDB. Unlike barcodes that simply redirect to a website, this barcode embeds the data elements displayed in the DTA's visual inspection zone. It enables automated data capture remotely, where digital capabilities exist, or through scanning at airport checkpoints, functioning similarly to a Machine Readable Zone (MRZ).

3.2.4. DTA and iAPI countries

DTAs can complement and strengthen existing iAPI systems. In multileg or interline journeys, they allow the originating carrier to confirm that passengers are properly documented, even when iAPI validation occurs only later in the itinerary. DTAs also provide a reliable fallback during planned or unplanned iAPI outages, ensuring continuity of verification and enablement of third country authorities to conduct their own checks when needed. For these reasons, DTAs and iAPI should be viewed as mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive.

3.2.5. Limitations

Although technical specifications have been available since 2021, DTAs have not yet been widely adopted, making it difficult to fully assess the operational complexity of IDB verification. A further limitation is that DTAs cannot track authorizations to travel issued for a fixed number of entries. Verifiers must therefore rely on inspecting passport entry and exit stamps, assuming the issuing States still uses them, to determine how many entries remain.

To address this, it is anticipated that DTAs may be issued for a defined period of validity rather than a specific number of entries. Ultimately, an iAPI system remains the most effective mechanism for confirming the validity and authenticity of authorizations to travel; and the only available digitized mechanism to account for single/limited-entry authorizations.

3.3. Minimal Harmonization

While iAPI integration is the most robust mechanism to achieve viable pre-travel validation of authorizations to travel not affixed to a passport, and the ICAO DTA serves as a viable non-interactive approach, not all States can achieve this level of sophistication immediately.

A simple harmonization of the proof of issuance using a standardized set of data elements and visual indicators offers an opportunity to improve automation in airline processes, facilitate data capture, and increase airline's confidence during document checks. In practice, this means issuing a DTA-like proof of issuance with the same display, data fields, and barcode, but without the digital signature that requires a dedicated PKI. The visual appearance should mirror that found in Appendix B of the ICAO DTA technical specifications (see Section 4.2.1)

4. Implementation Considerations for States

4.1. Benefits of existing programs

To increase processing efficiency and meet growing travel demand, many States have introduced digital solutions to replace traditional paper visas. Well designed eVisa and eTA programs allow national agencies to reallocate resources previously dedicated to paper-based consular processing, generate additional tourism revenue, reduce human error, enhance passenger facilitation, and strengthen border security.

4.2. Objectives in implementing an eVisas and/or eTAs program

4.2.1. Completeness of the solution

States are encouraged to develop a comprehensive, end-to-end eVisa or eTA program that delivers a seamless traveler experience, prioritizes interoperability, and enhances security across the air transport ecosystem.

Key considerations include:

- Conducting a needs assessment to determine the steps required to build a complete program within the national context.
- Working with other States to promote regional standardization and alignment.
- Engaging key stakeholders in the air ecosystem early, as their insights and input help informing decisions, identify overlaps, inefficiencies, and operational challenges.
- Piloting the program before full deployment and integrating feedback from stakeholder consultations.
- Adopting a phased implementation approach, recognizing that some States may require time to transition from physical to digital processes; maintaining the ability to verify physical documents during the transition is recommended.

4.2.2. Traveler Experience

States may pursue eVisa or eTA programs to improve the traveller experience by eliminating the need to surrender passports, reducing visits to consulates, increasing trust to proceed with the trip and increasing transparency around application status.

Traditional paper-based visa processes often require mailing sensitive documents or in person visits to consulates, which can be costly, time consuming, and inconvenient. For the traveller, this can be expensive, timely, and difficult, rendering the experience a deterrent. Digital authorizations reduce risks associated with forgery, theft, and loss, which are more prevalent with paper documents.

A well designed digital program accelerates processing and provides real-time visibility on application status. States should incorporate tracking features into their digital portals to allow applicants to access updates, application status and required actions easily.

4.2.3. Costs savings and resources reallocation

Digitalization can significantly reduce consular infrastructure and staffing costs. Virtual interviews and automated workflows can replace many traditional steps in most cases, enabling States to reallocate resources to higher value activities. Automated processes also reduce opportunities for corruption by limiting discretionary in person interactions.

4.2.4. Revenue Considerations

Visa policies are among the most effective tools for influencing tourism flows. Simplified access and low fees for passengers can increase tourism revenue, attract foreign investment, and stimulate economic growth. Digital programs also allow States to collect valuable data on traveler demographics, travel patterns, and preferences, supporting targeted marketing and tourism development.

While eVisa and eTA fees can generate revenue, States should carefully assess costs and aim primarily for cost recovery when setting fees.

4.2.5. Pre-travel verification and automation of vetting

States should automate as many steps as possible prior to departure in the application, issuance, and pre-travel verification process, including background checks and biometric collection. Early screening enhances security by enabling authorities to identify and act on higher-risk applicants before travel.

However, automation should be balanced with safeguards. While there is less forgery with electronic documents, States need to be proactive in identifying misrepresentation on applications. Emphasis cannot solely be focused on speed and automation. States need to ensure that automated vetting processing cannot be deceived into creating an approval for a fraudulent applicant. Cases refused through automated means should be referred to an officer for review.

Verification must also be straightforward for airlines and third parties. Because eVisa receipts are not standardized internationally, States should consider more reliable verification mechanisms such as iAPI or DTA.

4.3. Regulatory and Policy Considerations

4.3.1. National legislative changes

States should leverage existing systems and policies where possible to support the development of a complete, end-to-end digital program.

Measures to protect the personal data of travellers, including encryption, secure databases, and clear accountability frameworks, should be prioritized when developing a digital portal, i.e., a mobile app or a web platform. Engaging relevant stakeholders on data governance strengthens program integrity.

Biometrics integration in an eVisa and eTA program may require new legislation. States should monitor algorithmic bias and adopt mitigation strategies.

Differential impacts should be considered. Digital transitions may disproportionately affect certain groups based on age, ability, gender, race, or access to technology. States should monitor these impacts and implement mitigation measures.

4.3.2. Inter-agency coordination and stakeholder engagement

State agencies responsible for issuing electronic documents and those overseeing border security should collaborate closely throughout program development and implementation. Consultation with external air transport stakeholders and incorporation of their input will build a more effective program.

Engagement with the National Air Transport Facilitation Committee (NATFC) is recommended, as it supports collaboration and problem solving between public and private stakeholders in line with ICAO standards.

4.3.3. Communications to the travelling public of changes to entry requirements

To prevent confusion, States should ensure that travelers and stakeholders are informed of new eVisa or eTA requirements well in advance of the implementation date, through diplomatic missions, travel agencies, and global distribution systems.

States and air Industry stakeholders both play a vital role in sharing relevant communications with travelers. Joint communication efforts with industry stakeholders, including social media, print materials, and multilingual messaging, are effective in raising awareness.

4.3.4. Carrier's Liability

States vary widely in their expectations for airline verification of eVisas and eTAs. Requirements range from no enforcement, to manual checks, to full iAPI integration which is the most secure option for States using authorizations to travel not affixed to a passport for border security purposes.

In the absence of an iAPI system or DTA credential to verify an authorization to travel that is not affixed to a passport, where airlines take necessary precautions to verify documentation such as visual review of an electronic or print out confirmations of issuance, States should consider not holding airlines liable for improperly documented passengers when such authorizations to travel prove to be fraudulent or non-valid. There is an inherent risk of inadmissible passengers where non-standard authorizations to travel are relied upon, therefore, punitive measures on airlines should not be impose in addition to the airline responsibility to remove the inadmissible passenger.

4.4. System Requirements

4.4.1. Application/Lodgement Platforms and Procedures

States are encouraged to develop a digital portal, i.e., mobile app or web-based, through which travelers can submit applications, view and/or receive application updates (i.e.: approval, reasons for denial, incompleteness, etc.) access, access support, and obtain information on changes to entry requirements. The portal, which includes the application process, should be intuitive, multilingual, and accessible to diverse users.

Built-in validation tools can reduce applicant errors and minor name discrepancies, benefiting travelers, authorities and airlines. States should also provide a support network, such as a call center, comprehensive FAQ resources and additional web information

4.4.2. Outage Procedures

States should establish contingency procedures for system outages, including a 24/7 support line or operations center to assist travelers and airlines in case of boarding issues. During iAPI system outages and planned maintenance, alternative verification methods must be available. One option is to allow travelers to access an offline proof of issuance in the ICAO DTA format.

4.5. Challenges with Applicants

Manual Input / Data Errors - Self-entered data can lead to errors that complicate verification and compliance, with airlines often held accountable for minor discrepancies. Not all programs include tools to validate travel document information, while it is highly recommended.

Lack of Public Awareness - Insufficient and late communication about new entry or changes with entry requirements leads to travelers being denied boarding. All sectors of travel must be involved to communicate the changes, via local consulates, media, and travel and tourism associations. Airlines cannot be the single source of communication as the first contact with many passengers, especially in the third-party travel agency environment, does not occur until the customer arrives at the airport to check-in for their flight.

Status Visibility - Inconsistent approaches to notifying travelers of expiration or cancellation result in individuals being unaware that their authorization is no longer valid.

Application Difficulty / Non-Intuitive Processes - Language barriers and inconsistent guidance across languages can make applications difficult to complete correctly.

Proof of Issuance - Without standardized verification practices, travelers and airlines face confusion about what constitutes a valid proof. Confirmation emails and receipts often resemble approved authorizations, leading to inadvertent transport of pending or refused applicants.

4.6 Differentiating API Data and eTA Programs

An increasing number of States are implementing passenger data programs, namely API and Passenger Name Record (PNR), to support their border security, expedite the movement of legitimate travellers, and comply with their international obligations established by the United Nations Security Council, notably Resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2396 (2017), and by ICAO Annex 9 – Facilitation (Standards 9.7 and 9.22). However, many are

introducing elements and practices that deviate from internationally agreed standards, including a growing confusion between the role of an API system and that of an eTA program.

An eTA program is not a substitute for an API program. Only API data can inform the specific itinerary and identification of travelers of border authorities close to arrival, in order for States to intervene appropriately. API data is verified information that enables States to conduct prearrival risk assessments, strengthen border security, and support the prevention, detection, and investigation of terrorism and serious crime.

By contrast, an eTA program allows a pre-approval to travel. It applies only to certain categories of third country nationals who intend to travel at an undetermined future date. While a broad range of information can be collected from travelers through an eTA, this information is self-declared. The security and/or immigration status and the itinerary on which the individual will arrive can change from the time the traveler has been granted an authorization and the moment it will actually travel.

While the issuance of authorizations to travel are not mandatory as per international States obligations, the collection of API data is. ICAO is explicit that an authorization to travel does not fulfil State's obligations under Annex 9 to implement API and PNR systems.

5. Other Considerations

5.1. Countries relying on a third country visas

5.1.1. Overview

Many States elect to recognize a counterfoil visa issued by a third country as the basis for granting visa exempt entry or transit. Verification in these programs traditionally relies on manual inspection of the physical visa affixed to the traveler's passport. However, as more States transition to authorizations to travel not affixed to a passport, such as eVisas, the ability of verifiers to reliably adjudicate third country visa exemptions becomes significantly more challenging. At present, there are no known examples of States recognizing a third country's eTA program for this purpose though it is a plausible future development.

5.1.2. Challenges

While iAPI integration resolves verification challenges for authorizations issued by the receiving State, it does not address situations where a State relies on a third country's authorization. As defined, iAPI enables communication between airlines and the issuing authority, not between authorities themselves. This limitation prevents transit or destination States from validating a third country's digital authorization through iAPI. It additionally prevents an airline from leveraging an iAPI integration when the issuing State of the authorization to travel is not represented in the travel itinerary.

5.1.3. Further Considerations

States implementing a third country visa recognition program should ensure that verification remains feasible in a digital environment. This may require bilateral arrangements with the issuing State. The issuance of authorizations in the form of a DTA offers the most realistic path toward maintaining the viability of third country recognition programs, but this depends entirely on the issuing State's adoption of the DTA standard.

States that currently rely on third country visa recognition or are planning to do so should reassess the feasibility of these programs as digitalization accelerates. Some States may benefit from replacing third country recognition with their own eTA program integrated with an iAPI system. At a minimum, States should engage with

airlines to ensure that verification expectations for nonphysical authorizations to travel are clearly understood and operationally realistic.

5.2. Transit without visa regimes

5.2.1. Overview

Transit Without Visa (TWoV) programs allow eligible travelers to transit through a State without obtaining a visa, provided they meet specific conditions such as confirmed onward travel and appropriate documentation for their final destination. Increasingly, TWoV programs also include third country visa requirements as an eligibility criterion. These programs facilitate efficient movement of passengers whose destination is a third country, not the transiting State.

TWoV programs offer several benefits:

- **For States:** increased tourism and revenue for airports and local businesses, improved border efficiency through automation, enhanced fraud detection, and strengthened security.
- **For airlines:** support for the development of global hub operations, an expanded customer base, reduced minimum connecting times, and greater routing flexibility.
- **For travelers:** simplified travel logistics, reduced need for additional authorizations to travel, lower travel costs, and more flexible itineraries.

TWoV programs can operate alongside eVisa and eTA systems to improve facilitation and streamline the traveler journey.

5.2.2. Challenges

Despite their benefits, TWoV programs face challenges that have become more pronounced with the rise of eVisas and iAPI systems. Airlines continue to express concern about verifying the legitimacy of travelers' onward documentation when it is not affixed to a passport. Additionally, verifying that TWoV conditions involving third country visas are met are impacted by the move towards digitalization. The inability to inspect physical counterfoil visas for both onward travel and TWoV compliance increases the risk of transporting inadmissible passengers, creating operational, administrative, and financial burdens for both airlines and States.

5.2.3. Further Considerations

To maintain the integrity of TWoV programs, States should ensure that reliable and predictable verification mechanisms are available so that airlines can confidently facilitate transit passengers. States should ensure that eligibility criteria are clearly defined and communicated so that airlines and travelers understand the requirements. As the traveler continuum continues to modernize through digital travel documents and emerging technologies, States should periodically review the effectiveness and value of their TWoV programs, with a particular emphasis on any requirements that leverage third country visas an eligibility to ensure they continue to meet policy objectives.

5.3. InterAirline Through CheckIn (IATCI) messaging protocols

The interAirline environment presents an opportunity for further standardization. Ongoing discussions aim to enhance InterAirline Through CheckIn (IATCI) messaging protocols. The objective is to leverage iAPI responses, along with carrier bilateral agreements, to enable eTA and eVisa boarding message from the final destination

country's iAPI system to be cascaded to the originating air carrier. This would enable informed acceptance decisions before a passenger begins their journey.
