

## Visiting the UK? Here's more on the new visa requirement

New visa checks are to be introduced on March 3 for five countries after they failed to pass Britain's strict new Visa Waiver Test, the UK government announced earlier this month.

Following Britain's first global review of who needs a visa to come to the UK, regimes will now be introduced in Bolivia, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland and Venezuela. Already, three quarters of the world's population need to apply for a visitor visa.

The widening of the visa net is just one of a raft of measures the UK government has put in place to further tighten border security and only allow entry to those the UK wants and needs. There is now a triple ring of security protecting Britain. The measures include fingerprint visas that lock people to one identity, a high-tech electronic borders system that checks people against watch-lists and ID cards for foreign nationals.

### Countries fall short on the required standards

The Visa Waiver Test reviewed all non-European countries and regions to determine the level of risk their citizens potentially posed to the UK in terms of illegal immigration, crime and security, by not having to apply for a visa before they travelled.

In July 2008, the UK Border Agency (UKBA) found 11 countries fell short of the required standard and over the past six months, along with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), has worked closely with them to improve their passport and border control systems. With the mitigation period over, it was decided visa checks would now be required for five of these countries in order to stop fraudulent attempts to enter Britain.

Already, nationals from Bolivia, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland and Venezuela need a visa to work or settle in the UK, as do all non European Economic Area (EEA) nationals. Now, however, visitors from these countries who are coming to the UK for less than six months will need to apply for a visa before they are given the all clear to travel to the UK. In the case of Venezuela, visitors who have new secure fingerprint passports issued since 2007 will be allowed to enter the UK without applying for a visa.

### Don't say we didn't warn you

Border and Immigration Minister Phil Woolas said, "The government said it would get tough and we meant it. Already our shake-up of border security is delivering results, with three million fingerprints taken from visa applicants and 3,000 people caught trying to hide their identity.

"The February announcement sees these tough checks extended to a further five countries. Fingerprint visas make up one part of Britain's triple ring of security, alongside hi-tech watch-list checks at the border and ID cards for foreign nationals.

"The message is clear - we will not shy away from widening the visa net further wherever we think there's a risk to the UK."

Anyone wishing to travel from these five countries via the UK *en route* to a third country will also now need transit visa. The same transit visa requirements have also been extended to Jamaican nationals wanting to

pass through the UK.

Britain's tough border means that nationals of over 100 countries - three-quarters of the world's population must apply for a six-month visitor visa to come to the UK.

### **New regulations kick in on 3 March**

The UK's visa checks now require everyone to be fingerprinted, locking them to one identity, and checked against government watch-lists. They are then screened and counted in and out of the UK using the UK Border Agency's e-Borders system.

Criteria for the Visa Waiver Test included looking at passport security and integrity, the degree of cooperation over deportation or removal of a country's nationals from the UK, levels of illegal working in the UK and other immigration abuse, and levels of crime and terrorism risk posed to the UK. In addition, the UK authorities also looked at the extent to which a country's authorities were addressing these threats.

First-time visitors to the UK from South Africa will need to apply for visas from 3 March 2009 with the full visa regime coming into effect by mid-2009, along with the rest of the new regimes.

For further information and guidance on applying for a visa to the UK, go to the [UK Border Agency website](#)

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