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Upgrade for the Swiss passport 2003



Keystone

Biometric passports are coming soon.

Last autumn, based on a feasibility study conducted by the Federal Office of Police, the Federal Council decided to introduce biometric data in the Swiss passport.

This decision allows Swiss citizens to apply for a biometric passport as of the end of 2005. The new documents will be issued initially within the framework of a five-year pilot project (up to 2010). Persons who urgently require a biometric passport will be first in line to apply for such a document. This primarily concerns Swiss na-

tionalists who wish to travel to the USA after 26 October 2005 without a visa and do not hold a machine-readable passport (Model 2003) issued prior to 26 October 2005 (see also the article in the

Official News section of the "Swiss Review" 5/04, "USA tightens entry conditions"). According to the information available at this point in time, passports issued prior to this date also entitle holders to enter the USA without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The current machine-readable passport (Model 2003), which does not have a biometric chip, will continue to be issued in parallel with the pilot project. Swiss nationals can still use this passport to travel for several years to come. Likewise, holders of the Passport 85, which is valid until 31 December 2007, can still continue to travel with this document but will require a visa for entry to the USA. Binding information on entry conditions to the USA is available from the nearest US representation or at www.state.gov.

In Switzerland, identity checks for biometric passport applications will probably be conducted by the applicant's commune of residence. The biometric data will then be registered by one of five specially-equipped regional application centres. The location of these centres has yet to be decid-

ed. Swiss nationals living abroad can apply for a biometric passport to individual Swiss representations which are still to be defined. The biometric passport has an integrated chip on which the holder's biometric data are stored. There is still some uncertainty about the technical life of these chips. The federal administration is therefore considering limiting the validity of the biometric passport to five years (the current machine-readable passport has a ten-year validity period).

The government estimates the costs of the project in the order of CHF 14 million. The fee has to be adjusted in order to cover the cost of production for the biometric passport.

*Service for the Swiss Abroad/DFA
Gabriela Brodbeck*

Translated from German.

INTERNET

<http://internet.bap.admin.ch/d/themen/index.htm>
www.dhs.gov/us-visit

What is biometrics?

Biometrics is the science of measuring physical characteristics. In particular, it provides a way of recording, measuring and documenting a person's individual physical attributes. For example: physiognomy, fingerprints, iris pattern, ear shape, body dimensions, eye colouring etc. These biometric details can be used to reliably identify a person. Even now, electronically encoded biometric data are used for a number of different applications (for example,

admission to secure installations). The biometric information will be stored on a chip which is integrated in the passport. The requisite technical standards were laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in the spring of 2004. The chip must be integrated in the passport such that it is protected from exposure to weather, mechanical and other damage. It must also be optimally protected against forfeiting and manipulation. The ICAO defined an elec-

tronically stored picture of the face as a binding biometric identification criterion. Fingerprints and/or iris pattern are also provided as optional criteria. Currently the USA requires only an electronically stored picture of the face. In view of the international trend, particularly in the EU, the pilot project also plans to integrate fingerprints and – as far as technically possible – iris pattern in the new passport. BDK

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www.ch.ch: Fully operational since 1 January 2005

The virtual government portal www.ch.ch, also known as "Guichet Virtuel", is a joint project between the Confederation, cantons and communes. The information portal provides the Swiss population with electronic access to Swiss authorities.

A pilot version of www.ch.ch, the information portal of the Confederation, cantons and communes, has been in operation since 1 February, 2003. In the autumn of 2003 it was opened to a wider public. The "Guichet Virtuel" is designated as one of the key projects in the e-government strategy approved by the Federal Council in February, 2002. The aim of this strategy is to provide transparency about government activities and promote the Swiss people's trust in government and administrative operations. The Federal Council is pursuing four objectives with this strategy: to improve the flow of information and communication, to facilitate adjustments to a changing environment, to create transparent administrative and governmental processes, and to encourage participation in political processes.

The "Guichet Virtuel" project is run jointly by the Confederation, cantons and communes and is based on the existing distribution of responsibilities within Swiss federalism. Only the web content of the Confederation, cantons and communes is accessible via www.ch.ch. The individual authorities are responsible for creating and managing their information content.

The aim of the "Guichet Virtuel" project is to provide Swiss citizens with access to state authorities by means of a special electronic navigation system. Once they have accessed the home page at

www.ch.ch, visitors are guided around the administrative offices of the Confederation, cantons and communes. Answers to specific questions are listed by topic and contain Internet links which, in a mouse click, take the visitor to different home pages operated by the relevant authorities at all levels of government.

Not only does the website provide important information; in future, visitors will also be able to process official documents electronically (for example, filling out their tax declaration). The portal is available in the four national languages as well as in English. All federal offices, cantonal websites as well as 99 percent of communes are now connected to www.ch.ch.

Relations between Swiss citizens and administrative authorities can take the following form:

- Access to information provided by authorities
- Exchange of information
- Interaction with processes or services.

www.ch.ch is divided into eight sections:

- Your life
- Society
- Health and social security
- Work
- Environment and mobility
- Security
- State and politics
- Economy.

"Your life" also contains a special platform for Swiss Abroad ("Living abroad"). The information provided for Swiss Abroad is wide-ranging and continually enhanced. For example, you can also find information about your rights and obligations, completing a Swiss course of study abroad, returning to Switzerland and lots more. A visit is well worth while.

Service for the Swiss Abroad/DFA

Gabriela Brodbeck

INTERNET

www.ch.ch

www.admin.ch/ch/d/egov/

Change of address

Please do not contact Berne

If you change address, please notify only the relevant Swiss embassy or consulate. These alone are responsible for managing Swiss Abroad addresses and for sending the "Swiss Review" to the correct address.

You will help to avoid the time-consuming research which the Service for the Swiss Abroad is obliged to conduct when copies of the "Swiss Review" are returned as undeliverable. BDK

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We look forward to your online visit.

New initiatives

The following new people's initiative has been launched and is open for signature:

"Verbandsbeschwerderecht: Schluss mit der Verhinderungspolitik – Mehr Wachstum für die Schweiz!" ("Organisations' right of objection: For an end to obstructionist policy – more growth for Switzerland!")

(until 16.05.06)

Initiative Committee "Schluss mit der Verhinderungspolitik", c/o FDP des Kantons Zürich, Spitalgasse 8001, 8001 Zürich

You can download signature forms for current initiatives from www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis10.html. BDK

The Verein gegen Tierfabriken VgT ("Association Against Animal Factories"), an organisation founded for the protection of animal and consumer rights, and specialising in domestic animals and animal products, has submitted a federal initiative "Against fur imports", calling for an amendment to Article 80 of the Swiss constitution.

The initiative opposes the production of fashion furs and hence is against the caging of fur-bearing animals and cruel trapping practices and calls on the government to ban the import of furs and fur-related items. Sheepskins, goatskins and cow hides as well as artificial furs would be exempt from the import ban. BDK

Dates of forthcoming referenda in 2005

5 June / 25 September / 27 November

Translated from German.