

EGAST

Component of ESSI



European General Aviation Safety Team

FIS - FLIGHT INFORMATION SERVICE

FOR GENERAL AVIATION PILOTS

SAFETY PROMOTION LEAFLET



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1. Introduction

A 'Flight Information Service' (FIS) is a form of Air Traffic Service (ATS) which is available to any aircraft within a 'Flight Information Region' (FIR).

This leaflet is intended to assist pilots - particularly VFR-pilots - in the correct use of Flight Information Service (FIS) frequencies. As the pilot is not only required to contact FIS at AFIS aerodromes or in certain circumstances such as crossing international borders this leaflet also describes the advantages and limitations of 'Flight Information Service'.

Usually the service with the callsign suffix "*information*" is offered free of charge and provides not only 'Flight Information Service' but also 'Alerting Service'. FIS is provided by a 'Flight Information Service Officer/Operator' (FISO), usually located at a 'Flight Information Centre' (FIC) and responsible for flights following Visual Flight Rules (VFR).

Any FIS-unit provides information and assistance useful for the safe and efficient conduct of the flight, at the request of the pilot.

As sometimes FIS is provided by air traffic control units, you might be talking to a controller when trying to get FIS in some countries (especially in northern Europe). If so, remember that the provision of ATC always takes precedence over the provision of FIS!

When in contact with any FIS/ATC-frequency, English phraseology needs to be used in most cases, especially when in contact with ATC. In some countries the national language can be also used. For that and many other reasons you should always check national regulations in the respective AIP. You may also find national leaflets on FIS and/or further information on websites of the particular *Air Navigation Service Provider (ANSP)*.



2. General tasks of FIS

Flight Information Service is defined as “information pertinent to the safe and efficient conduct of flight”.

The details of FIS may vary throughout Europe due to different national regulations. The core tasks are published in ICAO-documentation (e.g. Annex 11 & Doc 4444) and include the provision of pertinent information in regard to the following elements:

- a) **Weather conditions**, both reported and forecasted (e.g. SIGMET/AIRMET, weather-reports en-route and/or for destination/alternate aerodromes);
- b) Information on changes in the **availability of radio navigation services**;
- c) Information on **changes in condition of aerodromes and associated facilities**, including information on the state of the aerodrome movement areas when they are affected by snow, ice or significant depth of water – and NOTAMs in general;
- d) Information on **unmanned free balloons**;
- e) Information **concerning volcanic activity** and the release into the atmosphere of radioactive materials or toxic chemicals constituting a danger to aviation;

- f) and any other information **likely to affect safety** (e.g. actual information on the use of airspace, e.g. activation of CTRs and/or danger/restricted areas, known parachute activities as well as traffic information on other flights).

Furthermore ICAO requests any provider of FIS to offer other pertinent information of which the FIS-unit is aware. In Europe, this often includes **actual information on the usability of airspace**, e.g. due to activation of a CTR or a danger/restricted area and also **information on other traffic** known to the FIS-station which might conflict with your flight, possibly derived from radar. However, that service only provides information about other traffic - it will not provide positive separation. That is still the responsibility of the pilot.



3. Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS)

In many countries throughout Europe, an Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS) is provided at airfields where, despite not being busy enough for full air traffic control, the traffic is such that some form of service is necessary. An AFIS-unit issues information to aircraft in its area of responsibility to achieve a safe, orderly and expeditious flow of air traffic on and in the vicinity of an aerodrome with the object of assisting pilots in preventing collisions.

In contrast to ordinary FIS-frequencies, two way radio communication is usually mandatory at AFIS-aerodromes.

Both AFIS and FIS use the radio callsign “information”, so pilots must be aware whom they are talking to and what level of service is available at a given station.

4. Benefits of “Information”

Even though Flight Information Service is only providing information **as far as practicable and when deemed necessary** for the safe conduct of flights, there are many reasons why calling FIS – especially where supported by the use of radar – is beneficial for VFR-pilots:

1. **Radio-checks** and/or **transponder-checks**
2. Information concerning **severe weather**
3. **Traffic information** about other flights, depending on airspace classification
4. **Navigation support** if pilots are unaware or unsure of position
5. **Airspace (intrusion) warnings** (e.g. for danger/restricted areas)
6. **Assistance for obtaining necessary clearances** to enter controlled airspace
7. Very important: **support and assistance in case of emergency**. For a pilot in emergency it's always easier just to ask on radio for the nearest airport with VMC than searching for VOLMET frequency and tuning COM 2 radio.

FIS has basically access to all the required information and should be able to assist him/her as best they can. Often a FIS-station also has access to (for example) a weather radar picture, so they can guide the aircraft away from the worst meteorological conditions.



5. Limitations of “Information”

Nevertheless, pilots should never solely rely on the assistance received by FIS, as there are certain limitations in the provision of this service:

1. Radio communication facilities: especially when flying at low level, in valleys through mountainous terrain or in other regions with poor radio communication, radio transmissions to and from ground might be impossible because VHF radio waves travel in straight lines.
2. Radar coverage: even where FIS is provided with radar and the aircraft is high enough to receive the radar signals, there are often other limitations of the coverage.
3. Even if a squawk has been allocated and received, this does not mean that your aircraft has been identified or that your flight is being continuously monitored on radar.
4. FISOs are not licensed to provide air traffic control service therefore **any advice given is only a suggestion and shall not be considered as binding**. FIS usually has no knowledge concerning obstacles on a pilot's route and cannot determine whether the aircraft is in VMC or not.
5. Any particular FIR will often have one or more dedicated FIS frequencies where aircraft can make first contact for

information. The range of the information provided is limited by the geographical area covered by radio stations. Sometimes there is no opportunity for a continuous two way communication, e.g. when flying outside of controlled airspace in valleys where radio coverage is poor. In some less populated FIRs or at quiet times, it might even happen that some frequencies may not be staffed. A FIS-unit might suggest an aircraft to contact a more suitable ATC or FIS frequency, (e.g. a local airport's radar unit), if that unit would be in a position to provide a better service.



6. Procedures for contacting FIS frequencies

Before departure:

Flight Information Service must never be considered as a substitute for any part of a careful and comprehensive pre-flight information briefing, which must contain the following as a minimum:

- weather at departure & destination aerodromes, as well as en-route
- significant weather reports (SIGMET/AIRMET)
- national regulations as laid down in the applicable AIPs
- NOTAMs and airspace restrictions (AUP, UUP, etc.)

Flight Plan:

When flying to or via another country or through controlled airspace where an ATC-clearance is needed, a flight plan (or at least abbreviated information) is usually mandatory. Further information can be found in national AIPs. A filed flight plan makes work for any FIS-unit less difficult, as the most important information about a flight is already saved and can be quickly viewed. In some countries a flight plan might be mandatory - even for VFR flights.

In exceptional circumstances it might be possible to file a flight plan in the air (AFIL). Usually this can be done on the FIS-frequency and it is then distributed to the appropriate AIS.

Getting in contact:

Having established two-way radio communication the following data should be transmitted, regardless whether the pilot has filed a flight plan or not:

- aircraft identification (radio callsign) and type of aircraft
- aerodromes of departure and destination, and the intended route of flight
- present geographical position and altitude
- the currently selected transponder-code

Finally a specific request may also be stated, e.g. “request flight information service”, “request traffic information”, or any other request such as e.g. “request latest weather information for destination airport”, etc.

Transponder codes:

If FIS is provided with radar, the responsible operator decides on a case-by-case basis whether a code (“squawk”) needs to be assigned. Not necessarily every flight receives a squawk; for example there may be no or poor radar coverage, or the aircraft is remaining only for a short period of time on the “Information” frequency (e.g. for a specific request).

Transponder codes are issued by FIS for a better overview on the radar screen, for better coordination with ATC units and for accurate traffic information, but **never for air traffic control or for “flight following”**. The “flight following” service provided by “flight service stations” in the United States is not offered in Europe!

After landing:

If a flight plan has been filed, the actual time of arrival (ATA) needs to be reported to the appropriate AIS in order to avoid unnecessary activation of the Alerting Service (INCERFA).



7. Summary - Always remember

- » Advice and information provided by FIS is not an ATC clearance!
- » Flight Information Service must never be considered as a substitute for a careful and comprehensive pre-flight information briefing!
- » Never rely on being kept under surveillance, even if a transponder code is issued. Be aware that traffic information can only be issued as far as practicable. The pilot is never relieved from the responsibility to visually scan the airspace.
- » It is good airmanship to notify the FIS-unit before leaving its frequency. It also avoids unnecessary alerting phases!
- » Do not hesitate to ask for help when in trouble – FIS is there to help and you'll be given priority!
- » Pilots always remain solely responsible for the safe conduct of their flights.

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