



Home Office

Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Tel: 020 7035 4848
www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Monique Hawkins
the3million
9 Bath Buildings
Bristol
BS6 5PT
monique.hawkins@the3million.org.uk

23 September 2021

Dear Ms Hawkins

I am writing in response to the publication in June of your report, 'A Digital Status in Practice: First Report on the Findings from the3million's Digital Status Reporting Tool'. All feedback is valuable, and the Home Office thanks the3Million for their report. We have carefully considered the findings of the report and have the following comments.

The report is based on reports by 374 individuals which should be seen in the context of more than 5,100,000 million grants of status under the EUSS to 30 June 2021. Whilst we recognise greater numbers will now need to use the online system to share evidence of their immigration status following the end of the grace period on 30 June, the number of issues reported to the3Million represent a tiny fraction of the overall number of grants of status.

As you are aware, the Home Office is developing a border and immigration system which is digital by default, which, over time, means we will increasingly replace physical and paper-based products and services with accessible, easy to use online and digital services. We acknowledge the move away from physical documents represents a change which some individuals and service providers may take time to get used to. For this reason it has, and continues to be, rolled out incrementally and with plenty of support available to help holders use their new status.

All successful applicants to the EUSS receive written notification of their immigration status, which they can retain for their own records and can use when contacting the Home Office. They will also be given access to the online 'view and prove' service which includes a digital version of their immigration status information, or eVisa. This information can be accessed at any time via the online service, and unlike a physical document cannot be lost, stolen or tampered with. Individuals with an eVisa can allow third parties, such as an employer or a landlord, to have secure, time-limited access to relevant information about their immigration status, to confirm their entitlements.

The ability to share immigration status information online has been in place since the online right to work service first launched in 2018, and this has expanded with the subsequent introduction of the 'view and prove' service in 2019 and the right to rent service in 2020. As a transitional measure, EU citizens were able to use their passport or national identity card to demonstrate their rights until 30 June 2021, in parallel with using the online service.

We are committed to delivering an approach which enables people to demonstrate their status and access the services for which they are eligible in the simplest and most secure way possible. Many people already use online services, for example to access banking, claim benefits or pay their taxes. Moving in this direction, as we are across the border, immigration and citizenship system, is the right overall approach.

As part of our wider reform of the immigration system, we are increasingly enabling other government departments and public authorities to automatically access immigration status information. Currently, this includes the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), NHS England and NHS Wales. The data made available is specific to the need of each department and contains only the necessary information to inform their decision making. By making data available in this way, we are reducing the number of occasions on which an individual needs to prove their rights.

Whilst the vast majority of adults aged 16-74 in the UK in 2020 were recent internet users, and the number of internet users aged 75 and older has doubled since 2013, we recognise the need to deliver a service which reflects the diverse needs of all users and some people may need additional support. We have designed our digital services and products to be easy to use, based on user research, along with putting in place support for those who need help both in making an online application and on how to use their online immigration status, including how to share it with prospective employers and landlords.

Anyone who needs help accessing their eVisa can contact the UKVI Resolution Centre (RC), which provides telephone and email support to those using online immigration status services, seven days a week. This includes supporting users through the online journey by:

- helping them to access or recover their account
- helping them to update their personal details
- sharing status on behalf of individuals if they are unable to do so themselves

The RC can also assist users who are experiencing technical issues with their online immigration status, and where necessary, enable individuals' status to be verified through alternative means. We also provide a telephone helpline for employers and landlords to provide guidance on conducting right to work and right to rent checks.

Feedback so far on the 'view and prove' service has been positive. Users find it simple and easy to use, with user satisfaction scores consistently over 70% since the service launched. User feedback is captured to enable ongoing improvements to the service to be made.

Between October 2019 and end June 2021, there have been over 5,800,000 profile views by individuals and over 640,000 views by organisations checking immigration status.

EUSS processing times

Regarding the comments in the report about processing times, the success of the EUSS means there has been a higher volume of applications than any estimate. We saw significant increases in the number of people applying ahead of the 30 June 2021 deadline, with

more than 400,000 applications received in June alone. As of 30 June, the date of the 3 Million report, 10% (approximately 600,000) applications had not yet been concluded, the majority of which were less than 3 months old. The total number of applications as of 31 August 2021 was 6,159,800, of which 108,940 were received after 30 June 2021. The total number of concluded applications as of 31 August 2021 was 5,709,200, of which 264,650 were concluded after 30 June 2021.

The Home Office has over 1,500 staff currently working to process applications. It usually takes around five working days for complete applications to the EUSS to be processed, if no further information is required. Extra resource has been put into concluding applications as quickly as possible.

Using the status

The EUSS and online immigration status is not a barrier to accessing public services and participation. Quite the reverse, it enables those who qualify under the EUSS to easily and quickly demonstrate their status.

Unlike a physical document, if a person loses access to their online account or eVisa they can recover it by making a phone call to the RC, whereas holders of physical documents are required to make an application for a replacement, pay a fee and may need to re-enrol their biometrics.

As stated above, we are taking further steps to reduce the number of circumstances where individuals need to provide evidence of their immigration status by developing services to make the relevant immigration status information available automatically through system to system checks with other government departments and the NHS. This means at the point at which a person seeks to access public services such as NHS healthcare and DWP benefits, the service provider will check status directly with the Home Office, removing the need for the individual to prove their status.

Additional services with other government departments are being planned for development in the latter part of 2021 and beyond, so individuals will increasingly not need to provide evidence of their immigration status as the Home Office will do so on their behalf.

We note the findings in the report about a small number of people having issues with accessing and sharing status, and the error messages they receive. We investigate any issues which are reported and aim to fix them quickly. We are also considering whether we can improve the messaging on our service to make sure the individual is signposted to the support they need in the interim.

The RC can assist users who are experiencing technical issues, and where necessary, enable a user's status to be verified through alternative means. We advise any applicants who experience issues to contact the RC so these can be investigated and resolved, including any issues with update documents or other details.

At the border

Carriers are not currently required to check the status of an EU citizen before bringing them to the UK because they are non-visa nationals. Holders of EUSS status can, however, use the online 'view and prove' service to demonstrate they have such status where the carrier asks for it for their own purposes. To do this, the passenger needs to log onto the service and generate a 'share code', which can be given to the carrier. The carrier can then use the 'share code' (and the individual's date of birth) to enable them to check the passenger's status information, using the ['Check someone's immigration status'](#) service.

The usual obligations for carriers to check the validity of passengers' travel documentation remains in place.

To communicate the changes to carriers, we have so far shared communications/partner pack materials and key messages with over 100 industry stakeholders, including carriers across all modes of travel. We have also engaged directly with high priority stakeholders including major airlines, airline trade bodies, maritime carriers and rail carriers to ensure they understand the change and are cascading the messages. We have held 3 sets of industry sessions over the last 6 months covering aviation, maritime and rail carriers to emphasise the ID card changes and to answer any questions. Further sessions are planned in the coming weeks.

EEA citizens who have an eVisa are not required to provide this at the UK border. Provided the individual travels using a document they either used to apply under the EUSS, or have additionally registered to their UKVI account, their eVisa will be automatically recognised at the border. Where an individual travels on a document which is not known to the Home Office, they may be asked further questions or further manual checks may be conducted at the desk to verify their status and allow them to proceed.

More information on how information is checked at the border, and how to tell the Home Office of an alternative travel document can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/view-and-prove-your-immigration-status-evisa>

Since 1 January 2021 all EEA citizens who arrive at the UK border as visitors do not require a visa, however they are required to meet the requirements of the Immigration Rules. This means they must not intend to undertake prohibited activities in the UK, such as work, and they must intend to leave the UK at the end of their visit.

All visitors are also required to meet the requirements of COVID-19 health measures. Where an individual cannot meet these requirements, they may be refused entry to the UK, which makes them liable to be detained.

In most cases, individuals who are refused entry at the border are removed directly from port on the next available flight. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been reduced flight availability and additional COVID-19 testing requirements have meant removal has been delayed in some cases. There is a presumption an individual is granted immigration bail rather than detained, and staff have been reminded to take into account COVID-19 related delays to removal when considering whether an individual should be granted bail to await their removal.

Communications and guidance for checking organisations

The Home Office has delivered an extensive, wide-reaching campaign and engagement programme targeting UK employers with information on their obligations and responsibilities concerning [right to work checks](#), and we are also communicating with landlords and their representative groups in England about conducting [right to rent checks](#).

As of mid-June 2021, we have delivered over 380 events reaching over 28,000 stakeholders, including employers, landlords, financial institutions, educational establishments, umbrella organisations, local authorities, foreign administrations and citizens, about the EUSS and points-based immigration system.

Since 2019, communications and guidance on GOV.UK have carried clear and consistent messaging checks must be completed in a non-discriminatory manner, and has included specific information about online immigration status and changes to the checking process for EU, EEA and Swiss citizens.

We have published a [guide for EU, EEA and Swiss citizens about viewing and proving their immigration status](#), which explains what people should expect when crossing the UK border and how to get help accessing their immigration status.

We continue to work closely with employers and landlords, our [Advisory Groups](#), EU Consular Group and EUSS Safeguarding User Group to ensure information is effectively cascaded through stakeholder networks, listen to feedback and adapt our communications to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Employers and landlords are already successfully using our online checking services. The latest published statistics show from January 2019 to the end of June 2021, for the right to work online service there have been over 2 million profile views by individuals, including those who hold EUSS status, and over 660,000 views by employers carrying out right to work checks digitally. The online right to rent checking service went live in November 2020, and since then has seen over 87,000 profile views by individuals, and over 20,000 views by landlords carrying out right to rent checks digitally. Updates have been made to the online services as of 30 June to make the expiry date for pre-settled status holders visible to employers and landlords. Prior to this, no expiry date had been shown, to retain parity with those EU, EEA and Swiss citizens who chose to use their physical documents for checks ahead of the end of the grace period.

Guidance on Know Your Customer checks has also been updated to make clear to financial institutions how to conduct checks on those who hold an eVisa and the new UK format biometric cards: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biometric-residence-documents-information-for-financial-providers>

Regarding checks on immigration status by schools, it would be a breach of the statutory [School Admissions Code](#) for state-funded schools to require evidence of immigration status to be submitted before they decided whether to admit a child. Independent schools which hold a sponsor licence may need to check immigration status to comply with their duty to check every student at the institution who is subject to immigration control has permission to study in the UK throughout the whole period of their study.

Thank you again for preparing this report. We will continue to engage with the3Million on these important issues.

Yours sincerely

Simon Tomlinson

Email: Public.Enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk