

Mr Kevin Foster MP

By email: Kevin.foster.mp@parliament.uk
MinisterforImmigration@homeoffice.gov.uk
CC: SUGqueries@homeoffice.gov.uk

22nd July 2021

Dear Kevin Foster MP,

EU Settlement Scheme Telephone Helpline - ongoing problem

Following [our letter of 16th July](#), you acknowledged that people were wrongly being charged for calls to the Home Office helpline for support proving their EU Settlement Scheme digital status. You told [The Guardian](#) that this was due to a 'technical error' and committed to remove the charges.

We are grateful to you for committing to remove the charges. However, we are writing to you again today to inform you that, despite that commitment, people are still experiencing significant problems when they call the UKVI helpline referred to in the [View & Prove guidance](#). These include:

1. Opening hours

The opening hours of the UKVI helpline (after choosing option 3 then option 1, as directed for those requiring assistance with "*viewing and proving your status online or updating your UK visas and immigration details*") are stated on a voice message as "*from Monday-Thursday from 9am until 4:45 pm and Friday from 9am to 4:30pm.*" These hours were confirmed by the Home Office employee we spoke to when we called the number.

However, the View & Prove guidance clearly states that the opening hours should be "*Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays), 8am to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday, 9:30am to 4:30pm*".

2. Helpline not able to deal with EUSS issues

When we telephoned the UKVI helpline during opening hours, the member of staff we spoke to told us that the UKVI helpline cannot help with any EUSS related issues, and that we would need to hang up and call the EU Settlement Resolution Centre helpline instead.

3. Wait times

Our call to the UKVI helpline took 37 minutes before being connected to a member of staff (who was then not even able to assist with viewing and proving digital status, as explained in (2) above). The EU Settlement Resolution Centre helpline is widely reported as having even longer wait times, and many say that they cannot even get in the queue, instead being told that the line is too busy to accept callers.

We are receiving daily reports of people whose identity document number and date of birth are clearly recognised by the View & Prove service, as an authentication code is sent to their telephone or email address, but who then face an error message and an inability to view or share their status. It is unacceptable for people to have to wait on hold for a significant period of time when they call the helpline only to be told, when they finally do get through to someone, that they cannot be helped.

It does not need saying that accurate guidance around how to obtain help with this brand new digital-only way for people to prove their rights to live and work in the UK is paramount, particularly in context of the Government's 'hostile environment' policies.

We note that during our recent litigation the High Court referred to the following assurances given by the Home Office:

“The Secretary of State has repeatedly informed the Claimant that she is continually reviewing the support available to ensure that it meets the needs of users, including exploring whether there are any further enhancements that can be made to the already comprehensive support that is being provided. During the grace period, the Home Office will continue to develop support for those who identify difficulties with using the online View and Prove service, to ensure that no users will be disadvantaged by having to use the online service to prove their immigration status. The Secretary of State is committed to developing a digital service which allows everyone to use it effectively and welcomes working with third parties, including the Claimant, to ensure that the objective can be delivered.”

We therefore trust that you will accept both this and our previous letter in the spirit of ensuring that no users will be disadvantaged by having to use the online service.

We hope that the additional information provided in this letter is helpful and enables you to understand the variety of issues people are facing with the helpline. The commitment to remove the call charges is of course a step in the right direction, but the other issues identified in our letter of 16th July, and this letter, remain. As such, we still look forward to receiving substantive answers to all the six questions in that earlier letter within the timeframe requested.

Kind regards,

Monique Hawkins
Policy and Research Officer, **the3million**