

Mr Kevin Foster MP

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

16th July 2021

Dear Kevin Foster MP,

EU Settlement Scheme Telephone Helpline

We have written to you on several occasions about our concerns regarding a digital-only immigration status, and the struggle many people will face to access and prove their rights.

We also commenced judicial review proceedings in relation to the digital-only policy earlier this year due to our fears that the policy will discriminate against vulnerable individuals who are unable to use the digital system. The High Court refused permission in that claim on the basis that it was too early at that stage to assess whether the policy will have a discriminatory impact. In reaching this decision, the Court was influenced by the mitigating measures the Home Office committed to put in place, in particular a telephone service for people unable to use the digital system.

In your letters to us of [19 April 2021](#) and [19 November 2020](#), as well as in the [High Court refusal](#), reference was made of the main such mitigating measures being a telephone service.

We previously understood that this was a reference to the existing [EU Settlement Resolution Centre \(SRC\) telephone number](#) of 0300 1237379. We were concerned about this because this helpline was set up for EUSS applications rather than View & Prove, and it has been exceedingly difficult to access in recent months due to the volume of applications. Indeed, the Home Office acknowledged how busy the SRC was in the Judicial Review permission hearing (para 20 of 5th May 2021 [judgment](#)):

“She says in relation to waiting times, and in answer to the evidence served on behalf of the Claimant, that the SRC flags quieter times of day to callers and that waiting times are expected to drop substantially after 30 June 2021. At the moment the SRC is very busy dealing with applications for leave to remain under the EUSS but that will change after the cut-off date and waiting times will inevitably shorten. In relation to cost, she says that the Defendant will not charge for calls, that the SRC number is 03 number and that these numbers are typically included in free call packages.”

We were therefore pleased to see that when the new [View and Prove guidance](#) (“Information for EU, EEA and Swiss citizens on viewing and proving your immigration status”) was published on 7 June 2021, it contained a section entitled [“Help accessing your immigration status”](#), with reference to a different, apparently dedicated, telephone number 0300 790 6268 called the UKVI Resolution Centre. You will notice that this is also an 03 number, similar to the SRC number.

We therefore adapted our signposting (on auto-reply emails, on our [Useful Links webpage](#), and many of our FAQs) to refer to this new telephone number for queries on View and Prove.

However, we have now discovered that this number charges people 69 pence per minute, and asks for a £5 pre-authorisation on a credit or debit card. These charges are on top of any [charges that may be levied by telephone providers \(as published by the Home Office\)](#). The person wanting help is notified of this after choosing the correct options to receive “assistance viewing and proving your status online, or updating your visas and immigration details”, by the recorded message *“Please note that we will apply a per minute charge of 69 pence for this call to your credit or debit card. A £5 pre-authorisation will be made before continuing so please have your card details to hand.”*

This is contrary to the assurances given - as reflected in the High Court’s decision - that the Home Office would not charge individuals who call the telephone helpline for assistance to access and prove their immigration status. Clearly this is causing a lot of distress to EU¹ citizens who are struggling to prove their status, especially in combination that there appear to be several technical issues known to the Home Office where people cannot access their digital status.

Some examples of known technical issues are:

- the fact that those with pre-settled status who go on to apply for settled status can no longer see or prove their pre-settled status, as the View & Prove scheme now only presents them as an applicant with time-limited 6-month rights rather than a holder of rights with several years before expiry
- many who could view and prove their rights in the past, but now get an error message - we have been informed that this is a known issue affecting potentially hundreds of applicants, but that people need to individually contact the Home Office before manual fixes can be applied
- people who have updated their status with new contact details and/or identity documents are frequently reporting to us that they can no longer view or prove their status

¹ We mean EU citizens to include EEA and Swiss citizens.

This is a summary of a recent report we received from an EU citizen:

"I was granted settled status in 2019. I have never tried or needed to login into the system before, either to see my records or get a code.

I'm an IT contractor, and I've been trying to get a code this week (wc 12/7/2021) as I've just started a new job and it's the first time that I'm required I prove my right to work, but when trying to obtain the code I get an error message saying that "the details entered don't match our records". I'm completely sure I'm entering the correct details as I have the 'Application submitted' email receipt, which includes the list of personal details used when applying.

I've been trying to call 44 (0)300 790 6268 or +44 (0)203 875 4669 many times throughout the day to understand where the problem is or whether there is something I need to do. Their phone line is constantly 'busy' and not getting through at all."

In light of the above, we have the following questions:

- Q1. Which is the intended helpline that EU citizens should ring when experiencing problems viewing or proving their digital-only status?
- Q2. If it is intended that they ring the UKVI Resolution Centre, will the Home Office commit to remove the call charges on that number given that it informed the High Court that "*the Defendant will not charge for calls*" made by people seeking assistance to view or prove their status?
- Q3. If instead it is intended that they ring the EUSS Resolution Centre, will the Home Office update its View and Prove guidance to direct individuals to the correct number?
- Q4. In any event, given the unprecedented change to the way EU citizens must prove their status from 1 July 2021, and the recognition from the Home Office that "*there are people who cannot access online services and will need additional support*" and that the Home Office is "*taking steps to ensure the elderly and the vulnerable are not disadvantaged by the move to digital services*", will the Home Office commit to make the relevant telephone helpline a truly free 0800 number rather than an 0300 number? (See the [Home Office website on call charges](#)).
- Q5. What monitoring is being undertaken of the ability for people to access telephone help? We continue to hear that people struggle to get through, and that if they do get through, they face very lengthy waits. When I tried to get through this week to confirm the charging regime, I needed to dial the number at least 6 times before I was able to get a connection rather than a 'line is busy' dial tone.
- Q6. In the High Court permission hearing, the Home Office said "*waiting times are expected to drop substantially after 30 June 2021*" - can you provide us with any statistics or evidence of whether this has



been the case. Anecdotally we are seeing that this is not the case, and an [FOIA request made on call centre performance metrics](#) was refused, so we would appreciate your insight on waiting times.

Please provide your response to these questions by no later than Friday 30th July 2021.

Kind regards

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