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Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP
Chair
Home Affairs Committee
Committee Office, House of Commons
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Dear Yvette,

14 May 2019

Thank you for your letter of 25 April seeking further information on the EU Settlement Scheme.

As I noted in my letter to you of 1 May, the application process for the EU Settlement Scheme has been designed to be straightforward and user-friendly for applicants and the scheme has been developed in close collaboration with users through our advisory groups. This important work will continue now the scheme is fully open.

The Minister of State for Immigration wrote to you on 2 May to provide you with a copy of the published report on the public beta test phase, which enabled us successfully to test at scale the functionality of the end-to-end online application process. Over 200,000 applications were received during that phase and, by 16 April 2019, 187,959 of these applications had been decided. 69% of the concluded applications were granted settled status, 31% were granted pre-settled status and none was refused.

The report of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration of his inspection of the scheme was published on 2 May. The generally positive report made several helpful recommendations for the further improvement of the scheme, all of which have been accepted, with some already implemented. In particular, the report commented that: "The EU Settlement Scheme stood out as having been afforded the preparation time, resources and organisational priority to succeed, and morale amongst the staff working on the Scheme, many of them new to the Home Office, was high."

The report and the Home Office response are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-eu-settlement-scheme>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/response-to-an-inspection-of-the-eu-settlement-scheme>

On 10 April, I announced that we have awarded £9 million of funding to 57 voluntary and community sector organisations across the UK to help us reach and assist vulnerable or at-risk EU citizens and their family members in applying for status under the EU Settlement Scheme. The funding will provide support to an estimated 200,000 vulnerable or hard to reach EU citizens. Additional support is also available to those EU citizens who do not have the appropriate access, skills or confidence to apply online. This includes over 200 assisted digital locations across the UK where applicants can be supported through their application.

Your letter of 25 April raised a number of specific issues about the scheme, which I will address in turn.

What are the technical issues being experienced by applicants, why are they happening, and what is being done to solve them?

By 1 May, over 600,000 people had submitted an application to the EU Settlement Scheme. Applications have been received from over 145 nationalities; 987 devices from 92 manufacturers have successfully used the app and applicants have used all available methods of proving their identity and UK residence. Extensive testing of the application process has taken place, including two private beta test phases and a much larger public beta test phase, which collectively saw over 230,000 successful applications.

This controlled testing programme has enabled us to identify and quickly rectify technical issues, before gradually rolling the scheme out more widely. In a programme of this scale some user interactions and difficulties requiring technical changes are to be expected, for example around verifying email addresses, but currently less than a quarter of one per cent of total applicants are known to be experiencing any technical issues. We expect fixes for 90% of those affected cases to be deployed by mid-May with the final 10% deployed by the end of this month. As fixes are deployed, affected applicants will be contacted and advised if any next steps are required.

How many calls or emails the Settlement Resolution Centre (and any other Home Office helplines) have had requesting guidance or assistance regarding the Settlement Scheme since the public launch on 30 March 2019

The Home Office has put in place measures to ensure that the EU Settlement Scheme is streamlined, user-friendly and accessible to all prospective applicants. There is a broad range of support in place, including the Settlement Resolution Centre (SRC) which provides assistance to applicants who need additional information or support. An applicant can call the SRC or complete the standard email template available on GOV.UK which is then sent to a central inbox within the SRC.

The public beta report highlighted that from 21 January 2019 to 29 March 2019, the SRC handled 62,261 calls and 14,596 emails. In terms of the calls handled, around:

- 25% of calls related to pre-application, with applicants for example asking whether they were eligible to apply to the scheme;
- 27% of calls related to making an application, with applicants for example asking about using the app or what documents they would need to send in;
- 36% of calls were from applicants with questions whilst in the process of making their application;
- 2% of calls were from support organisations; and
- 10% of calls related to applicants with questions post decision

Further information on the progress of the EU Settlement Scheme, including the work of the SRC, will be published in statistical updates and a more detailed quarterly official statistics publication from August 2019. If an applicant contacts another UK Visas and Immigration call centre about the scheme, they are referred to the SRC for support.

How much time Home Office employees have spent providing help and guidance to applicants / How many people the Home Office currently employs to provide help and guidance in the Settlement Resolution Centre, and whether the department plans to recruit any more

Currently there are around 280 staff employed across the SRC, including managers, call agents and support staff, with around 230 of these staff providing a telephone service seven days a week. In addition, we currently have offers of employment out to around 40 recruits who are going through standard employee checks.

How much money the Home Office has made from people calling the helpline

The Home Office does not charge or receive revenue for this service. Calls to the SRC from within the UK cost the same standard charge as dialling any 01 or 02 number. This can be up to 10p per minute from a UK landline and between 3p to 40p per minute from a mobile, depending on the provider. Applicants may get free calls to some numbers as part of their call package. We also have an 02 number available for those calling from overseas.

What preparations the Home Office has made for the provision of paper application forms, who is entitled to a paper application form, and what take-up of this option has there been

The Home Office has committed to delivering a quick and simple application process, and we expect the overwhelming majority of applicants to apply online and take advantage of the streamlined online process which is the easiest and simplest way of applying. However, we have also committed to making paper application forms available to applicants who are unable to apply online, even with the help of our comprehensive assisted digital service, because of their specific needs or practical issues such as their location. Applicants in such circumstances will be issued by the SRC with a paper application form requested on their behalf by our assisted digital provider once it has confirmed that it is unable to support them to make an online application.

In some circumstances it is mandatory for the applicant to apply using a paper application form, which will be issued to them on request by the SRC. These are where the applicant:

- states that they are unable to obtain or produce the required identity document – a valid passport, (for EEA or Swiss citizens) a valid national identity card or (for non-EEA citizens) a valid biometric residence document – due to circumstances beyond their control or to compelling practical or compassionate reasons and therefore wishes to rely on alternative evidence of their identity and nationality; or
- is applying on the basis of a derivative right to reside under EU law (Chen, Ibrahim & Teixeira and Zambrano cases); or
- is applying as the family member of a qualifying British citizen (Surinder Singh cases).

Such cases are inevitably more complex and require additional sets of questions to be asked to establish identity/nationality or eligibility. As such they cannot be accommodated in the streamlined online form and bespoke paper application forms have been created. These can be requested by eligible applicants by contacting the SRC.

To date approximately 650 paper application forms have been requested and issued.

How many applications received since 30 March 2019 have been successfully processed, and how long the current backlog of applications is.

The total number of applications received since the testing of the scheme began on 28 August 2018 is now over 600,000, including over 50,000 on the opening weekend after the scheme was fully launched on 30 March. Applications to the EU Settlement Scheme are usually being processed in less than two weeks where no additional information is required.

The Home Office plans to publish high-level progress information on the EU Settlement Scheme through managed statistical updates, and a more detailed quarterly Official Statistics publication from August 2019, alongside the department's quarterly Immigration and Transparency statistics.

You also mentioned in your letter a data breach in relation to the scheme. It is very regrettable that, on 7 April, three emails were sent to applicants in which a total of 240 email addresses were made visible to other recipients, in breach of our normal procedures. No other personal data was included in the communication. As soon as the error was identified, the Home Office Data Protection Officer was informed, and the Department voluntarily notified the Information Commissioner's Office. We have apologised personally to all the applicants affected, and also put in place strict new controls on the use of bulk emails when communicating with members of the public. I have also asked Sue Langley, a Home Office non-executive director, to carry out an independent review of the Department's compliance with its data protection obligations.

I would like to assure you I am confident the Home Office's data processing activity within the EU Settlement Scheme is legally compliant with our data protection obligations and Treaty rules. The ways in which the Home Office may process personal data it gathers under the scheme are clearly set out via the scheme personal information guidance page, and the Border, Immigration and Citizenship System Privacy Information Notice, which are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/eu-settlement-scheme-how-we-use-your-personal-information>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-information-use-in-borders-immigration-and-citizenship/borders-immigration-and-citizenship-privacy-information-notice>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Javid', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP