

Migrant Voice briefing on EU Settlement Scheme survey

16 January 2020

I'm writing from UK charity Migrant Voice to remind you about the urgent need to improve and revise the EU Settlement Scheme to ensure that all EEA nationals and their families in the UK maintain their rights and that no one becomes undocumented.

The Withdrawal Agreement Bill will soon become law but there are still many opportunities to improve this scheme before the application deadline – both through legislation (that would make this a declaratory scheme, for example) and through changes to the way applications are processed in order to address problems with functionality and accuracy.

In summer 2019, Migrant Voice conducted a survey of people eligible for the scheme. We found that many are facing serious problems with the application, or delays and wrong decisions by the Home Office. Scaled up, the percentages of those experiencing problems represent tens or even hundreds of thousands of people, and the issues they raise are deeply troubling. ***See full report attached.***

Some key findings (see pp.7-9 of attached report for full list):

- 49% of people who had applied found the process difficult (ranging from "slightly" to "very"). 35% said they faced complications in the application process.
- 38% of respondents had been asked to provide further evidence of their residence in the UK beyond their National Insurance Number. Many said this shouldn't have been necessary. "It's a slap in the face to pay taxes for 10 years and then find out that the state doesn't even have your records," one person said.
- Dozens told us they had experienced technical glitches and communication problems with the Home Office during the process. Several found the app didn't work even on a device that was supposedly compatible. One person described their dealings with the Home Office Resolution Centre as "a farce".
- Many said the experience or prospect of applying had caused significant stress, anxiety or even depression. One said the process had left them feeling like "committing suicide".
- 33% of respondents told us they hadn't applied (yet), with many fearful that they will face problems. One person said their mental disability made the prospect of applying so daunting that they are leaving the UK in order to avoid doing it.
- Family members of EEA nationals are facing much longer waiting times than their EEA relatives. One respondent from Zimbabwe had been waiting more than three months, while their husband and daughter were granted status within a few days. It is "like there is some segregation of some sort," they said.

Our recommendations to the Government include the following (see p.10 for full list):

- Enshrine the rights of all EEA nationals and their families in the UK in law, ensuring their rights are protected whatever the outcome of Brexit;
- Ensure that no one becomes undocumented as a result of not having applied to the scheme, or not upgrading pre-settled to settled status after five years, by making this a declaratory or registration scheme that is not time limited;
- Increase the level of support for vulnerable groups who are eligible for the scheme across the UK and ensure that any gaps are swiftly filled;

- Improve the functionality of the systems individuals are using to apply to the scheme, including the app.

We, alongside other organisations, will continue to work for a Settlement Scheme that works for all EEA nationals and their families in the UK and leaves no one undocumented. Will you use your position in Parliament to help us achieve that goal?

We would be delighted for the chance to meet with you to discuss how we can work together on this urgent issue affecting millions of UK residents.