

## **EMBARGO LIFTS 00:01 TUESDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2019**

A survey by charity Migrant Voice has found that many applicants to the EU Settlement Scheme are facing serious problems with the application, or delays and bad decisions by the Home Office. While the majority of those who completed the survey had a fairly positive experience, a significant minority did not. **See full embargoed report, 'Unsettling', attached.**

All EEA nationals and their family members are required to apply to the scheme if they want to continue living in the UK after Brexit. Those who do not apply before the deadline (either 31 Dec 2020 or 30 June 2021) will be considered to be in the UK unlawfully and could be removed.

The survey was conducted online between 27 June and 2 September 2019 and was open to anyone eligible to apply to the Settlement Scheme, whether they had applied or not. We received 229 valid responses and several further submissions from organisations working with EEA nationals. At least 36 different nationalities were represented.

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

- 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".
- Several people faced problems proving their identity to the Home Office, including two women who had changed their surname when they got married, and two transgender people. One transgender person said they were "scared about applying".
- Dozens told us 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". Many are angry they are being made to apply to stay in their homes at all.
- 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. 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.
- There is widespread anger at the scheme's data policy, which allows the Government to share applicants' information with unnamed public and private sector organisations around the world, and

at the lack of physical proof of their new status. One person described that as a "disaster waiting to happen".

**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;
- End the current data sharing policy and ensure that applicants' data is used only for the processing of their application and shared no further.

**Nazek Ramadan, Director of Migrant Voice, said:**

*"These findings are deeply concerning, especially given the vast scale of this scheme and the devastating consequences for those who are failed by it or who do not apply before the deadline: the sudden loss of lawful residence in the UK and all the rights that go with that.*

*"While we welcome the fact that many people are finding the process a smooth one, it is troubling that so many people are facing significant technical problems, poor guidance, delays and a lack of communication. The severe impact on the health and wellbeing of so many of those applying or facing the prospect of it is equally concerning.*

*"We call on all UK politicians and all who have a role to play in the continued development and implementation of the EU Settlement Scheme to read this report and act swiftly on its recommendations.*

*"The message, repeated so often by our politicians, that EEA nationals and their families are welcome here must be made a reality through legislation that guarantees their rights, regardless of the outcome of Brexit, and through a declaratory or registration scheme that works for all."*

Please contact me if you would like any more information. See pp.15-16 of the report for an explanation of our methodology, where we also acknowledge its limitations.

Nazek Ramadan has some availability for interviews. Several of those who completed the survey and faced difficulties with the application or have not yet applied due to concerns about the scheme are also available for interviews.