

Home Affairs Committee

Committee Office House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
Tel +44 (0)20 7219 2049 Email homeaffcom@parliament.uk
Website www.parliament.uk/homeaffcom

From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
SW1P 4DF

16 December 2020

Dear Home Secretary

National Audit Office report into *Digital Services at the Border* (HC 1069)

In its report on Digital Services at the Border (DSAB), published 9 December, at page 38, the National Audit Office noted the effect of the loss of access to the Schengen Information System upon the DSAB programme:

In May 2020, the Department decided to remove future connections to the Schengen Information System (SIS II) from all its programmes, including Digital Services at the Border. SIS II is the most widely used information sharing system for security and border management in Europe, but the EU Commission's view is that there is no legal basis on which the UK could continue to participate in SIS II after its departure from the EU. The Department has plans in place to remove all SIS data from all systems including Semaphore, Warnings Index and Border Crossing on 31 December 2020. While it plans to mitigate the loss of access to SIS II, the implications of replacing this key data source for the programme's stakeholders are yet to be worked through. Partners across law enforcement and government face similar challenges in assessing the impact of lost access to SIS II. If an agreement with the EU cannot be reached about participating in SIS II, the Department intends to use Interpol channels to exchange information with EU member states, alongside other bilateral channels.¹

The Home Affairs Committee in this Parliament and the previous Parliament has expressed concern about the effect on law enforcement capability of losing access to SIS II data at the end of the transition period. It is therefore concerning to see that its loss could have a serious effect on a programme as important as DSAB, which is vital to maintaining and modernising security at the border.

¹ National Audit Office, [Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General: Digital Services at the Border](#) (HC 1069), 9 December 2019, p. 38

Please could you respond to the following questions:

Loss of SIS II data: wider ramifications for UK security

1. The NAO reports that a decision to remove SIS II data from all programmes was made in May 2020.
 - a) What was the basis for this decision, and for the timing of it?
 - b) At that time, what steps did you take to draw the decision to the attention of a) Parliamentarians; b) other stakeholders?
2. What work has been done to ensure that, when SIS II data is removed from systems on 31 December, it is immediately replaced as fully as possible with data from the proposed alternatives across all law enforcement functions?
3. What estimate has the department made of the overall proportion of currently available law enforcement data that would be removed from UK systems on 31 December?
4. What assessment has your department made of the possible increase in any vulnerability as a result of loss of access to SIS II data? Please indicate:
 - a) What you assess these vulnerabilities to be
 - b) Your estimate of how, and by how much, these vulnerabilities could grow as a result of removal of SIS II data
 - c) What plans are in place to counter the growth of such vulnerabilities

Loss of SIS II data: impact on DSAB programme

It is concerning that the full implications of loss of SIS II access on DSAB “are yet to be worked through”. Please answer the following questions relating to plans to address concerns this could raise for the programme:

5. What assessment have you made so far of the impact of the loss of SIS II data on the effectiveness of new systems due to be rolled out as part of DSAB? Please describe any possible negative impacts that have registered as risks to the programme and its components, and how the Home Office intends to mitigate each risk.
6. What assessment have you made of the impact of the loss of SIS II data on the effectiveness of current systems operating at the border?
7. When do you expect a full review and assessment of the impacts of SIS II data loss on the DSAB programme to be complete? Upon completion, please provide this Committee with the findings of any such review.
8. Will parts of the DSAB programme which would have used SIS II data be reconfigured or redesigned to make use of other sources of data? If so what will the impact of this work be on

the programme's cost, benefits, and timelines? If not, for what reasons has it been determined that reconfiguration or redesign is unnecessary?

9. Law enforcement bodies intend to make greater use of INTERPOL databases from the point of the UK's full exit from the EU:
- a) Will INTERPOL notices be readily integrable with all DSAB components? What additional work will be required to carry this out?
 - b) Will INTERPOL notices be readily integrable with current border systems from 11 pm on 31 December 2020, and immediately accessible by officers at the border?
 - c) What assessment has been made of the impact of using INTERPOL notices rather than SIS notices on the efficacy of each relevant DSAB component?
 - d) What plans do you have, if any, to integrate other possible data sources with components of the DSAB programme to mitigate lost capability resulting from the removal of SIS II data?

Please provide responses to these questions before the end of the transition period.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper'.

Yvette Cooper MP