

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

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

7 April 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing following reports in the Times newspaper on Monday 5 April that thousands of travellers are entering the UK every day as tourists or to visit family and friends.

According to the Times report, Border Force staff estimate that around 40% of passengers are tourists, including around 80-90% at Gatwick and Eurostar terminals, and 20-30% at Heathrow. The report also suggests that 8,000 out of roughly 20,000 people arriving into the country every day are tourists. It quotes a Border Force staff member saying they have no grounds to refuse these passengers.

These reports are very concerning given that lockdown restrictions are only now gradually being lifted, and that British families mostly cannot reunite with relatives abroad.

The Minister for Future Borders and Immigration is quoted in the article saying:

"We do not recognise these figures. We are enforcing tough health measures at the border for the small minority of people coming to the UK, including those entering on a visitor visa for legitimate reasons. [...] Border Force officers also have the right to refuse entry to any visitor who they believe has travelled to the UK to carry out activities not permitted under current local health restrictions, such as holidays or tourism, or who will not comply with self-isolation and testing requirements."

- Can you please clarify the current criteria for visitor visas to be approved for arrivals from non red-list countries, including the list of "legitimate reasons" for travel, and can you confirm whether tourism or visiting friends and family has been considered a "legitimate reason" to travel to the UK during lockdown?
- Can you tell us how many visitor visas have been granted each month since November 2020 and from which countries?

- Can you a) confirm what data is collected from arriving passengers about what kind of visa they are travelling on, and the reasons for their travel; and b) provide us with that data? In particular, can you provide us with:
 - the figures on passengers arriving each month since November 2020 and the reasons for their travel? An updated assessment of the number of travellers arriving in the UK each day from red list and non-red list countries?
- Given the statement from a Border Force officer that they have no grounds to refuse these passengers, can you explain:
 - what action Border Force officers should take when assessing an individual travelling to the UK for tourism or similar reasons;
 - which regulations these decisions are covered by;
 - why it is that some officers may believe they do not have the authority to refuse entry to a person on the basis of this being their reason for travel?

Please provide your answers by 13 April.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper', written in a cursive style.

Yvette Cooper MP