



Home Office

Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Future Borders and
Immigration

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14 April 2021

Dear Chair,

INBOUND TRAVEL IN THE UK

I am writing in response to your letter dated 7 April, where you ask for information regarding travellers entering the UK.

We are in a global health pandemic and people should not be travelling unless absolutely necessary. The UK Government has introduced a host of measures for outbound and inbound passengers to minimise travel across international borders and reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

As part of the UK Government's layered approach to mitigating the risk of the spread of imported infections there is the requirement to complete the Passenger Locator Form, provide proof a negative pre-departure test, to self-isolate on arrival; and, for all arrivals from high-risk areas, who cannot be refused entry, the requirement to enter the Government's contracted managed quarantine facilities for ten days.

There is also the ongoing requirement to comply with the restrictions still in place across the four nations of the UK. Border Force Officers make it clear to arriving passengers they must comply with domestic regulations. Home Office statistics show there has been a significant reduction in the number of people coming into the UK with around 91% fewer arrivals in January 2021 compared to the same month in 2020.

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?

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?**

In considering an application for leave under the visit rules, Border Force and UKVI Entry Clearance Officers must continue to consider each case on its merits and in line with the Immigration Rules and relevant guidance.

Appendix V: Visitor of the Immigration Rules sets out the requirements which a person seeking entry to the UK as a visitor must meet. This includes that a visitor must satisfy the decision maker they are a genuine visitor who intends to leave the UK at the end of their visit and will not live in the UK for extended periods through frequent or successive visits, or make the UK their own home.

Nationals of countries in Appendix Visitor: Visa national list are required to apply for a visa before they visit the United Kingdom. UKVI Entry Clearance Officers can refuse visa applications for any visitor intending to come to UK to carry out activities which are not allowed under the current health restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic, where it is clear the individual will be visiting the UK when these health restrictions are in place.

Border Force officers can refuse entry to any passenger seeking entry as a visitor or can cancel an existing visit visa if they are not satisfied the stated purpose of their visit is credible because they believe the individual has travelled to the UK to carry out activities not permitted under current relevant health protection regulations.

Furthermore, since January 2021, UKVI Entry Clearance Officers have paused all decisions on visitor visas to applicants applying from a 'red list' country or where it is apparent an applicant has visited one of those countries in the last ten days. Border Force can also refuse entry under the Immigration Rules to people travelling from 'red list' countries, except for British or Irish nationals or those deemed to be resident for these purposes.

Operational guidance has been provided to Border Force officers about the border health measures introduced during the Coronavirus pandemic and their role in enforcing those measures whilst carrying out their duties. As always, Border Force are able to seek advice and authority as appropriate when making operational decisions.

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?

The Home Office collects information from those applying for Entry Clearance overseas and routinely publishes information on Entry Clearance decisions the latest of which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-statistics-data-tables-year-ending-december-2020>

Publication of Home Office statistics, including on visas, for the period to the end of March 2021, will take place on 27 May 2021. However, whilst visa data will provide an indication of the purpose for which people are coming to the UK, the numbers of visas will exclude visitors from visa-free countries, and the numbers granted will not necessarily reflect the numbers who arrive as some people travel at a later date or do not use their visa at all.

The Home Office have also provided data on air arrivals since the Covid-19 pandemic began, and published the most recent data on 25 February at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-relating-to-passenger-arrivals-since-the-covid-19-outbreak-february-2021>

These indicate that in the month of January 2021, 631,500 passengers arrived by air, an average of 20,371 per day, and 91% fewer arrivals than the same month one year earlier. Of the January 2021 total, just under one third (200,100) were British nationals, and around two thirds non-British nationals. Although the reduction in numbers of air passengers over last year will have been impacted by the temporary lifting of lockdown over the summer, in the period from April to December 2020 as a whole the number of air arrivals was 88% lower than the same period the year before. Additionally, as the statistics report states, non-British nationals will include foreign nationals who are UK residents returning to the UK, non-British dependents of UK residents, and other non-British nationals including those who are studying or working in the UK.

Home Office analysts have undertaken an additional one-off analysis of provisional management information for January, February and March 2021, which suggests the numbers in January were affected by people returning from overseas, likely having left the UK before Christmas prior to the imposition of the latest lockdown. Numbers of arrivals were lower in February and March 2021 compared to January 2021, and in these months over two thirds of arrivals were either British or EEA plus Swiss nationals. The largest number of arrivals in these months are from nationalities who are likely to be working in the UK and, therefore, appear to be mostly returning resident workers and not 'visitors' or 'tourists'.

Provisional management information from the Department of Health and Social Care shows that between 15 February and 31 March, the estimated air arrivals from Red List Countries have averaged between 150 to 350 a day, although the coverage and data from this source differs from Home Office data.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Foster', followed by a period.

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Future Borders and Immigration