

Written evidence submitted by UKinbound (EEE0010)

EU Entry/Exit and the UK border

House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee

Evidence submission by UKinbound

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About UKinbound

UKinbound is a travel trade association that represents the UK's inbound (international visitors travelling to the UK) visitor economy, the UK's second largest service export industry, forecast to be worth £30.9 billion¹ in 2023, exceeding the export values of automotives and North Sea oil². We have over 400 UK businesses in membership that facilitate international visits to the UK, including tour operators, destination management companies (DMCs) destination management organisations (DMOs), accommodation providers, attractions and service providers.

Background

The introduction of the EU Entry and Exit System (EES) and the proceeding European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) have implications for both international visitors travelling between the UK and Europe, and businesses that facilitate this transportation, such as tour operators, DMCs and coach operators. In addition, we also have the UK's introduction of its Electronic Travel Authorisation system (ETAs). Foremost, the industry wants to ensure that international visitors can traverse these new requirements with ease, ensuring that travel to and from the UK is as straightforward and seamless as possible, thereby contributing to perceptions of the UK as a welcoming destination.

In 2022, the UK welcomed 4.6 million visitors from the USA, who spent over £6 billion³, the UK's number one inbound market, and many of these visitors will have undertaken a trip that involved both the UK and another European destination. London and Paris is a travel itinerary that is sold by numerous UK tour operators due to its popularity and high demand, and many of these visitors are likely to travel between the two cities via an organised tour/coach operator.

This is an itinerary many third country nationals undertake and if it is perceived by these nationals that it would be easier to forgo the UK portion of their visit, due to the EES, the UK will lose valuable export revenue to a second Schengen location.

Challenges

We have two key concerns, specifically relating to the juxtaposed border control. Firstly, regarding the operational challenges the Port of Dover, Folkestone Eurotunnel terminal and the St Pancras international terminal, will face when EES becomes fully operational, and the implications for international travellers who have visited the UK and are continuing their travels in the Schengen Area.

A large majority of international visitors will be travelling by coach and will require processing at Dover and Folkestone. Due to the design of these ports, its likely that passengers will need to exit their vehicle initially to enrol in EES, providing their fingerprints and photograph. These checks may also be required on subsequent crossing as it may not be possible for photographs to be taken and/or checked from within the vehicle. These new checks will take additional time, which will place significant strain on all three juxtaposed borders, but especially Dover, where disruption can already be seen during periods of high demand. This will likely be exacerbated during the initial roll out when

¹ 2023 Inbound Forecast, VisitBritain, 18 July 2023

² UK trade: September 2023 Office of National Statistics, 10 November 2023

³ <https://www.visitbritain.org/research-insights/inbound-markets/united-states-america-usa>

passengers and operators are getting used to the new system, and when a substantial proportion of passengers are undertaking their initial enrolment in the EES.

This also directly impacts the coach and tour operator businesses that facilitate trips between the UK and Schengen. Not only do they need to manage passenger expectations, but ever-changing queue lengths and new logistics at the border, making it more difficult to plan and execute successfully managed trips, and to fall within legal driver times.

There are further implications for the local area, in particular at Dover and the South East. As seen numerous times in the past, queues at the port can spill over into the local and regional road networks, creating disorder and distress for local residents, as well as putting off travel from domestic and international visitors. This is further highlighted in regional and national media coverage on the issue, with reputational implications for both the port and region.

This leads to our second key concern; how the EES will affect the travel experience of third country nationals, specifically international visitors to the UK, who are travelling on to Schengen. Historically, the juxtaposed borders have been a significant success and have enabled easier travel for international visitors to the UK. However, lengthier queues due to additional border formalities and potential missed crossings, due to passenger/ coach operator difficulties judging when to arrive at the terminal to begin the process, despite the best efforts of the operators to provide accurate and up-to-date information, could both lead to additional stress and dissatisfaction when travelling from the UK to Schengen.

The perceived welcome, which encompasses all aspects of an international visitor's experience coming to the UK, from booking to arriving and departing the country, is significant and directly impacts an individual's decision to travel to the UK or choose an alternative destination. Currently the UK's rank for welcome remains low, dipping to 19th place in 2023, out of 60 nations, the lowest rank ever received for this measure⁴. Potential disruption due to the EES will only exacerbate this. International tourism is a competitive industry, and if it is perceived that it is easier to travel to two destinations in Schengen, rather than a UK and Schengen visit, travellers will do this.

Next Steps

Clear and concise communications is imperative to the successful roll out of both EES and ETIAS. Although October 2024 has been suggested, no official confirmation has been officially issued. This date needs confirming soonest, along with a large-scale communications campaign which includes specific details for inbound UK travellers transiting through the juxtaposed borders. This will allow both businesses and travellers to make the necessary arrangements. The inbound tourism industry is committed to working with the UK Government to aid this communications process and disseminate details to the industry.

The juxtaposed border controls could continue to be successful if special dispensation were given to them, by allowing travellers to undertake all their biometrics off-site and digitally, in advance of arriving. This would help significantly alleviate traffic at the three borders, aiding businesses, the consumer welcome, staff working at the ports and local residents that live in the vicinity. We welcome the mobile app that the EU intends to launch, allowing passengers to provide much of their information in advance, however their fingerprints will still be required at the border. If fingerprints could be uploaded on the app, this would ease border queuing issues.

A further solution, which would streamline the entry process for both consumers and businesses would be to have interoperability between the ETAs and ETIAS systems. This would also aid the UK's welcome as the process of applying for both an ETA and ETIAS would be streamline.

⁴ <https://www.visitbritain.org/research-insights/uks-image-overseas-nbi>

The introduction of the EES, ETIAS and ETAs all have implications for the UK's valuable inbound tourism industry, and will impact international visitors to the UK; however, the above minor adjustments before their roll outs will ensure a seamless, secure and positive UK border experience for all.

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