

The Home Office — Written evidence (EBM0011)

Questions

What is the purpose of the UK's new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)? How does the introduction of the ETA fit into the Government's longer-term strategy for digital borders?

One of the Government's number one priorities is keeping the UK safe. On 25 October 2023, the Government launched the UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme to secure our borders and make the UK safer.

The introduction of an ETA scheme is in line with the approach many of the UK's international partners have already taken to border security, including the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

The scheme applies to those passengers visiting or transiting the UK, who do not currently need a visa for short stays or do not have a valid UK immigration status prior to travelling. ETAs will also be required by those seeking entry under the Tier 5 creative worker concession in advance of their travel to the UK.

The ETA scheme enhances the Government's ability to prevent the travel of those who pose a threat to the UK upstream, before their journey to the UK border. The ETA scheme will allow security checks to be conducted and more informed decisions taken on the information obtained at a much earlier stage of the passenger journey, to determine whether individuals should be allowed to travel to the UK. Consequently, it will also give those individuals more assurance of their ability to travel to the UK at an earlier stage, before making travel plans.

In addition to improving the security of the UK border, the ETA scheme will improve the overall passenger experience. We want to transform the way passengers cross the border, with improvements to security, passenger experience and queue times. By knowing more about people in advance of travel our longer-term ambition is to increase automation of passenger clearance at the border. This will improve the end-to-end experience for legitimate passengers and promote the UK as a top destination for tourism and business passengers.

Has the Government addressed concerns about the potential impact of the ETA on the Common Travel Area?

The UK Government remains committed to the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and in support of this ensuring there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

As now, the UK will not operate routine immigration controls on journeys from within the CTA, with no immigration controls whatsoever on the Ireland-Northern Ireland land border.

However, as is currently the case, individuals arriving in the UK, including those crossing the land border into Northern Ireland, will need to continue to enter in line with the UK's immigration framework, including the requirement to obtain an ETA. Irish citizens are not required to obtain an ETA.

Visa nationals are already required to obtain a visa for the UK when travelling via Ireland, in order to lawfully enter the UK. This is a well-established requirement, and we are simply extending this same principle to individuals requiring an ETA.

The UK has listened carefully to concerns raised about cross border travel and has agreed to exempt those third country nationals who are legally resident in Ireland from the ETA requirement for journeys within the CTA.

In order to benefit from this exemption, residents will be required to use physical evidence which demonstrates that they are legally resident in Ireland. The Home Office has published guidance on acceptable physical evidence.

The Home Office considered the request to exempt tourists visiting Northern Ireland from Ireland from the ETA requirement but, ultimately, such an exemption would have undermined the rationale for introducing an ETA scheme and the opportunity the scheme provides to further secure the Common Travel Area. Therefore, those visiting the UK, including those crossing the land border into Northern Ireland will be required to obtain an ETA.

The Government is committed to working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the ETA requirement is communicated effectively through targeted messaging and a variety of channels; and to mitigate against any risk of it being seen as an increased barrier to cross-border tourism on the island of Ireland.

How much awareness is there of the UK's system and whose responsibility is it to raise awareness? What would be the most effective way to raise awareness?

The introduction of an ETA scheme is a significant change for many people who can currently travel to the UK without any prior interaction with the Home Office. The roll out of the scheme has, and will continue, to be supported by a comprehensive engagement and communications campaign to drive awareness and action.

We are targeting people travelling to the UK through an upstream international communications campaign, aligned to the rollout of the ETA scheme with activity increasing as the scheme opens for specific nationalities. This will help to ensure those impacted are aware and understand what the new requirement means for them, with ample time to prepare.

Our activity to date includes targeting Gulf and Jordanian nationals through collaborating with key partners, including global airlines, and international media to raise awareness of the scheme and drive those eligible to apply for an ETA pre-travel.

We are committed to working closely with global airlines, maritime and rail carriers, as well as UK ports to help ensure the ETA scheme is implemented smoothly.

Our suite of communications, which has been developed collaboratively with stakeholders and based on customer feedback, has been amplified extensively and received positively.

In addition, over the last 12 months we have hosted over 200 engagement events with over 8,000 participants, spanning other governments, the transportation, tourism and hospitality sectors, international businesses, education providers, and to other relevant organisations that draw visitors to the UK.

What are the potential drawbacks of the ETA and what mitigations might be put in place to address these? What lessons can be learned from the experience of other countries with similar schemes?

As part of the development of the UK ETA scheme, the Home Office has engaged closely with our international partners who operate similar schemes to learn from their experience. As a result of these discussions, we have decided to roll out the ETA scheme incrementally, on a nationality-by-nationality basis. Moreover, during the implementation phase, we will not be strictly enforcing the requirement: we recognise ETAs are a massive change for a cohort of travellers who are currently used to travelling to the UK without making any application in advance of travel. We are therefore using this time to give the travelling public and carriers (who will be responsible for checking whether an ETA or another type of permission is held) time to get used to the new requirement.

What is the potential impact on someone who is refused an ETA?

Those deemed unsuitable for an ETA are advised to apply for a visit visa, if they still wish to travel to the UK.

How can small ports and airports adjust to the ETA requirements?

The effective operation of the ETA scheme requires the scheme to be implemented upstream, at the point of carriage, *before* the arrival of any passengers at the UK border. It requires carriers to check and confirm individuals' permission to travel (whether that by an ETA, visa or another UK immigration status) prior to travel.

It is our ambition for carriers operating scheduled services across all modes – air, rail and maritime – to use an interactive passenger system to confirm a passenger permission to travel prior to check-in and boarding. We are currently adding interactive functionality to the different systems that carriers use to send passenger data to the Home Office.

Carriers will provide Advance Passenger Information and, in turn, receive confirmation from the Home Office that each individual has permission and may be carried to the UK; does not have permission and may not be carried; or that their permission needs to be determined by the carrier.

As a result, no one should arrive at the UK border without a permission. On arrival at the UK border, all individuals holding an ETA will still need to seek leave to enter at the border in the way they do now; either by passing through an eGate if eligible, or by seeing a Border Force officer.

How will the introduction of ETAs affect citizens who still require a visa to enter the UK?

Those nationalities who ordinarily require a visa to visit the UK will still need to apply for a visa; these nationalities cannot obtain an ETA but instead their visa will act as their permission to travel to the UK. The [Check if you need a UK visa tool on GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\) can be used](https://www.gov.uk/check-uk-visa), to check whether you need a visa to visit the UK.

Those who are not required to obtain a visa will be required to obtain an ETA.

Those seeking to live, work or study in the UK must obtain the relevant immigration status under the UK Immigration Rules and it will be that status that will demonstrate their permission to travel to the UK.

ETAs will only apply to non-visa national visitors to the UK and those seeking leave to entry under the Tier 5 creative worker concession.

How does the ETA differ from the EU schemes, and equivalent schemes adopted by other countries (including non-European countries)?

The UK ETA, EU ETIAS and similar schemes adopted by other countries are very alike in concept and seek to achieve similar outcomes. Both the UK ETA and EU ETIAS broadly seek to provide relevant authorities with the opportunity to screen travellers upstream before any travel.

Whilst we do not hold full information on the EU's ETIAS scheme, based on the publicly available information, we understand that there are some differences reflecting different operating conditions. The UK ETA costs £10 while the EU ETIAS is 7 Euro. If granted, a UK ETA is valid for two years or until the expiry of the passport used to apply, whichever is sooner. An ETIAS is valid for three years or until the end of the validity of the travel document used in the application process, whichever is sooner.

In comparison to ETIAS, as part of the ETA application process, we will collect biometrics (facial only at this point) upstream, away from the UK border. Collecting more information about travellers in advance, including a biometric, will enable us to increase the numbers of passengers cleared through automation at the UK border; only directing those who need to, to see a Border Force officer. It will improve the overall passenger experience and promote the UK as a top destination for business and tourism.

Is the UK prepared for the launch of the EU's Entry/Exit System (EES) and the Electronic Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)? Are there further steps the Government could take to seek mitigations from the impact of the EES and ETIAS?

HMG regularly engages with the French Ministry of the Interior and European Commission to understand its plans to implement EES and ETIAS, to ensure the UK is well prepared. Officials are working closely with French partners, and with carriers and operators at juxtaposed locations, to support them in developing their plans and readiness for EES and ETIAS.

What impact will the schemes have in respect of travel between the UK and the EU?

ETA: EEA citizens and Swiss nationals will be required to obtain an Electronic Travel Authorisation before travelling to the UK if they do not already have a valid UK immigration status or visit visa.

EES: will require non-EU citizens (excluding EU residents and those protected by the Withdrawal Agreement) arriving in a Schengen destination to register their fingerprints, provide a facial scan, and answer questions about their stay. It will end wet stamping of passports and track compliance with the maximum stay of 90 in 180 days. Children under 12 will not be fingerprinted but all travellers, including babies, will be photographed and have a digital record created.

At the juxtaposed controls of Port of Dover, St Pancras (Eurostar) and Folkestone (Eurotunnel), this process will take place in the UK before departure in line with current passport checks. While the process itself is relatively quick (around 90 seconds per person), it will be a separate process from existing passport checks carried out by the French Police aux Frontières (PAF) and will significantly change the customer experience in some locations.

On departure, the passenger's record will be verified either at a kiosk or border control to ensure they have complied with the maximum stay duration of 90/180 days.

ETIAS: will require non-EU citizens to apply online for authorisation to travel. They will need to provide their biometric data (name, dob, passport details), answer questions and pay €10 (free for under 18s and over 70s). If they do not have ETIAS approval, they will not be able to travel and will be denied boarding.

What are the implications for dual nationals of the UK and an EU country?

The effective operation of the universal 'permission to travel' requirement, whereby everyone except British and Irish citizens seeking to travel to the UK must obtain permission in advance of travel, will require carriers to check and confirm individuals' permissions prior to travel.

British citizens are not required to obtain a permission from the Home Office in advance of travel, as their British citizenship is the basis of their permission to travel under the universal 'permission to travel' requirement.

It is recommended that a dual national with British citizenship should travel on either a British passport or a non-British passport that is endorsed with a certificate of entitlement to the right of abode, in order to demonstrate to a

carrier that they are a British citizen and therefore have permission to travel to the UK on this basis.

If a dual national is seeking to travel solely on a non-British passport, without a certificate of entitlement stamp, they could experience difficulties when trying to travel to the UK and risk being denied boarding if their non-British passport provides no evidence of their claimed British citizenship.

What is the Government's role in respect of the juxtaposed borders?

The UK has entered into bilateral and multilateral arrangements with our French, Belgian and Dutch counterparts to conduct frontier controls on one another's territory in advance of departure on certain maritime and rail routes. These arrangements allow the authorities of the State of Destination to carry out their frontier controls in a defined Control Zone within the territory of the Host State in the same way as they would in their own territory. This brings a number of benefits, allowing us to examine a passenger's eligibility for entry prior to travel, preventing the importing of dangerous and prohibited goods, reducing the numbers of clandestine concealments in vehicles, and improving traffic and passenger fluidity.

What will the borders of the future look like?

Our vision is to transform the UK border into a streamlined, digitised system, which enables automated entry to the UK for most passengers across all modes of transport at all ports.

We will do this by requiring people who want to travel to the UK to provide their information before they make their travel plans. We can then carry out security checks and make decisions at the pre-travel stage, including refusing permission if an individual does not pass those checks.

The use of all this information will also help us build an intelligent border – one with security at the forefront. We will use the data to identify individuals who need to be questioned by a Border Force officer and those who can use automation alone to confirm their identity, that they hold a relevant permission, and that nothing has changed from a security perspective to warrant an intervention.

We are exploring technologies and approaches that support the move towards contactless border crossing, including but not limited to facial recognition technology for passengers presenting both in person, and in vehicles at all UK border ports.

However, physical documents such as passports are likely to remain for the foreseeable future as it is not expected that all journeys or countries will accept digital or contactless approaches, or implement in the same time scales as those already making these transformations.

Is the UK's Border Force equipped to deal with future challenges?

We are working to deliver the border of the future. By transforming the end-to-end border process, Border Force will significantly enhance its approach to risk, ensuring that as threats and global circumstances change, it will be able to continue focusing on high-harm activity and the things that really matter. By planning for the future from an end-to-end perspective, rather than individual incremental changes, it will be able to articulate the total value of the border, therefore building a compelling case to secure investment to deliver transformative change.

With an increasing emphasis on technology, Border Force and the Home Office will also be able to ensure greater resilience to demand growth, whilst also ensuring digital resilience is optimised to mitigate against cyber threats and vulnerabilities.

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