

New Europeans UK – Written evidence (CIT0009)

We are an OISC registered group, receiving funds from the HO since 2019 to work with vulnerable groups of EU/EEA Citizens. We work in communities and have strong links with Italian welfare agencies Commit.Es and Patronato as well as the Roma Support Group and community groups working with European citizens of other origins, e.g., Albanian, Somali.

Along with other organisations working in this sector and arising from our work of the last three years, New Europeans UK is worried about what could happen to older EU citizens and their family members after the 30 June deadline, both in terms of exercising their rights granted under the Withdrawal Agreement/the Citizens' Rights Directive, and in respect of accessing their digital EUSS status.

Concerns for older EU citizens, with whom we have extensive experience.

In 2020 the Migration Observatory (Oxford) estimated there were 139,000 long term EU/EEA residents, with an average age 68, who may assume they do not need to apply or face other challenges.

The HO applications show 122,000 applicants over 65 have applied for status in the quarterly statistics published in March 2021. They represent less than 2% of the 5.42 million .

We believe there are a significant number of older Europeans who have still not applied. We are particularly concerned for:

- Italian nationals who came post war to work in the health service and other fields, many of whom are now pensioners.

For the last 2 years we have supported approx. 800 older Italians each year to apply for status, during this time we have encountered many individuals who have no mobile phone, no digital access and inappropriate or no documentation. Many of them, over 65 and resident in the UK for more than 30 years, had to submit additional evidence to prove their continuous residence in the UK when applying. One reason for this may be that the automatic check using tax records only goes back 7 years. More recently, we have worked with a care home, where residents had been unable to apply due to lack of documentation and COVID restrictions, we submitted 10 paper applications on their behalf, which took 2 months-we await the outcomes. **We consider there may be more such cases, but reaching care homes in the wake of COVID interruptions and/or establishing the number of individuals supported by Local Authorities is difficult, where local authorities do not record nationality.**

The Italian consulate keeps track of Italians living in the UK, via a register AIRE. Last year, the AIRE Register counted 415,000 registered Italian nationals (of which 408,629 in England and Wales). 10% of these were over 65 years old, hence 41,500 (data published July 2020).

Using AIRE, the consulate identified 40,000 individuals on their lists who appeared not to have made an application in March 2021 and wrote to them.

-Care givers

Another group, known to advisors, although we have no hard data on them, are older people who are financially dependent on children. So unpaid care givers (taking care of grandchildren or said children themselves if the adult is vulnerable adult).

Advisors are concerned that these older individuals and their families may not be aware that the person needs to apply for EUSS/pre-EUSS.

Considering that these senior Europeans tend to be isolated and marginalised by the virtue of domestic focus, caring responsibilities, and their own vulnerabilities (language, age, disability, IT literacy, access to technology) and do not have any 'natural' link with external world (like schools for children, for example) there is a lot to be said about potential risk of falling out of the system in this group.

Our concern is for those older people, who may not have applied and risk losing status on 1st July, who will be unable to access support and services, including medical treatment, whose pension or housing benefit and ability to travel in and out of the UK will be affected.

We recommend a declarative provision is made for over 65s who have not been able to apply.

Access to and use of Digital status

We believe this is particularly problematic for the older people we have worked with who are digitally excluded.

Access

In the summer of 2020 New Europeans UK, and the Roma Support group undertook research with 263 individuals, which we published in November 2020 (<https://neweuropeans.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Digital-Status-Handle-with-care-report-NEUK.pdf>).

Our research showed that 54% had no smart phone or email address and that 68% of respondents did not know of to prove their status. These people were relying on someone else, or simply did not know, who was "looking after" their digital status.

The issue of digital status is particularly problematic for older people. The original transition to **Digital Britain** was accompanied by intensive investment and support to ensure access for all, notwithstanding 10% of the UK population remain digitally excluded. To require these older Europeans to function with a fully digital system seems to fall outside the government's commitment to EU citizens in its Equalities statement, "**to provide certainty and clarity so that they can carry on with their life here with minimal disruption**".

Use by providers

Furthermore, even for those who are digitally able, access to the Home Office 'view and prove your status' facility is not straightforward. It requires one to navigate the Gov.uk pages and provide:

1. Details of the identity document used when you applied (your passport, national identity card, or biometric residence card or permit)
2. Access to the mobile number or email address you used when you applied –
3. Date of Birth

Landlords, employers, and health care providers may not be confident with technology, so unable or unwilling to check the immigration status of a potential user online.

Making changes

Making changes to ones' status, be it updating passports, changing address, or changing mobile phone number requires a different approach.

Language

Currently the Home Office's technical and digital EUSS support is in English, the use of community languages would improve access and support for vulnerable people.

Safeguarding

The Government has stated that the digital status will limit concerns for those experiencing domestic abuse, exploitation, or trafficking and reduces the risk of forgery. We think that, on the contrary, having the digital status managed by someone else risks creating a new form of dependency, or deepening existing dependency, for many vulnerable EU citizens, with the risk of abuse or exploitation. This would be the case for those who lack the skills to access their status, and for those who lack IT skills but who would otherwise be self-sufficient.

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