

To: Seema Malhotra MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Migration and Citizenship) and
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Equalities)

CC: D3SF (Digital Status Services Stakeholder Forum)
FBIS (Future Borders and Immigration System) Engagement Team

17 April 2025

Dear Minister,

Discontinuation of the Passenger Support Helpline

We are writing to express our serious concern about the closure of the Passenger Support Helpline, which was in operation for just over three months before closing on 31 March 2025.

On 6 March 2025, FBISengagement notified us that the Helpline would be scaled back, starting on 10 March 2025, and subsequently closed.¹ A response was sent by the3million addressing concerns about this decision.² To date, the3million has not received a response from FBISengagement.

We have long expressed the need for a 24/7 helpline to be available to passengers, to empower them should a carrier seek to incorrectly refuse them boarding.³

At a meeting with the Digital Status Services Stakeholder Forum on 17 March, both the3million and other stakeholders repeated the request to the Home Office to keep the number active, even if, using telephony functionality, the number was merely a redirect to the UKVI helpline. The Home Office representatives responded that they would take this point away for consideration. However, no further response was received.

On 31 March 2025, the following words were deleted from the GOV.UK '[Check your eVisa is correct before you travel](#)'⁴ webpage:

"If you are unable to demonstrate your permission to travel to your carrier, you can call the passenger support helpline on 0800 876 6921:

- *lines are open Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm UK time*
- *lines are closed at weekends and on bank holidays*
- *calls are free of charge*

If you cannot call UK 0800 numbers, use +44 203 337 0927. You may have to pay - check with your phone provider.

¹ A redacted copy of the notification is contained in Annex 2.

² A redacted copy of the response of the3million is enclosed in Annex 3.

³ June 2024 - ILPA open letter to the Home Office: <https://the3million.org.uk/publication/2024061101>

July 2024 - Home Office Briefing 10 Urgent Fixes - page 18: <https://the3million.org.uk/publication/2024071502>

December 2024 - Letter to Minister: <https://the3million.org.uk/publication/2024120501>

March 2024 - Letter to HO and FCDO, Q11(c): <https://the3million.org.uk/publication/2024032801>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-sure-your-evisa-is-correct-before-you-travel>

This service cannot help with general visa advice or technical issues.”

Upon attempting to call the Helpline we have heard the following automated message: *“This service is no longer available...”*.

Publicity of the Helpline

The notification we received from FBISengagement indicated that the primary reason for closing the Helpline was “extremely low levels of contact”. However, this assessment does not accurately reflect the need for the Helpline. As detailed in the3million's response, knowledge of the Helpline was limited and locating the telephone number for the Helpline proved to be challenging. Neither the main [eVisa guidance](#)⁵ webpage nor the UKVI [‘Contact for Help’](#)⁶ webpage ever mentioned the availability of the Helpline.

Nevertheless, passengers continue to experience issues⁷ travelling back to the UK using expired BRPs or BRCs, despite the Government’s policy that carriers should accept these, and individuals are repeatedly wrongly denied boarding due to some carriers' refusal to accept electronic-only evidence of UK status and confusion regarding ETAs.

Reinstatement of the Passenger Support Helpline

Given the extent of these ongoing issues experienced by UK visa holders, it is unconscionable and disproportionate to remove the only method of assistance that can assist such individuals on an immediate basis when time is of the essence for international travel.

This is particularly heightened during a period when expired BRPs and BRCs are intended to be acceptable for the purposes of such travel, and where carriers are not under any legal obligation to – and do not – accept them.

The closure of the Helpline coincided with the final roll-out of the ETA scheme on 2 April 2025, when millions of EU citizens with status under the EU Settlement Scheme or other immigration routes would for the first time become dependent on their eVisa to be able to board a carrier.

the3million is continuing to field emails from people stressed about their travel situation.⁸ These are all queries that should have been addressed to a Passenger Support Helpline with an adequately advertised telephone number.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-inside-outside-uk>

⁷ See, for example, Annex 3; the3million, ‘eVisa problems: Interim snapshot’ (13 January 2025) <<https://the3million.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/t3m-report-evisa-problems-13Jan2025-v2.pdf>> accessed 15 April 2025; Holly Bancroft, ‘Woman stranded in Brazil after airline ‘refuses to allow her to board flight home to UK with eVisa’ *Independent* (19 January 2025) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/evisa-home-office-flight-immigration-b2681491.html>> accessed 15 April 2025.

⁸ Redacted examples are contained in Annex 1.

Furthermore, the discontinuation of accepting BRP/BRCs for international travel from 1 June 2025 is likely to cause additional and increased issues.

Our Recommendations

Accordingly, we strongly recommend that:

1. The Passenger Support Helpline be reinstated with immediate effect;
2. Communication, of the Helpline's existence and telephone numbers, is improved in places where passengers are most likely to look;⁹
3. The Helpline remains in place for a minimum of six months after 1 June 2025, the last date when expired BRPs and BRCs can be accepted for international travel;
4. Thereafter, sufficient time be allowed to assess the necessity of the Helpline on an ongoing basis; and
5. There is meaningful engagement with the3million, ILPA, and other stakeholders, on the future of a passenger Helpline.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns and recommendations. We hope for a positive response and engagement regarding the continuation of this service.

Yours sincerely,

Zoe Bantleman, Legal Director, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)

Monique Hawkins, Policy and Research Officer, the3million

⁹ We recommend that the Helpline's telephone numbers be included on the following GOV.UK pages:

- a. <https://www.gov.uk/report-error-evisa> (under "Get help");
- b. <https://www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-inside-outside-uk> (as an additional quick access information on the landing page);
- c. <https://www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status> (under "Get help"); and
- d. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa> (under "If you need help").

Annex 1: Redacted examples of recent emails sent to the3million

- 12 April 2024:

“On the 9th of April 2025, I had problems flying from Germany to LHR.

*The airline Eurowings was confused about a German Passport and no ETA as I have settled status. They did not accept the digital proof of the settled status and advised me that I need a different proof (card, paper) to board a flight from now on. I managed to fly but was advised that next time I had to stay in Germany. I have to fly frequently and **I'm stressed as even the home office could not give me a proper answer. Who to ask? What to do?**”*

- 12 April 2024:

“My daughter has British and Spanish passports, we are flying to Spain, I checked-in the outbound flight with her Spanish passport and I tried to check-in the return flight with her British passport, but the Ryanair app doesn't provide the option to add again the passports and automatically took the Spanish passport.

*So I have contacted Ryanair. They confirmed that she will not be allowed to board on the return flight without ETA as she is checked-in with a Spanish passport. They will not accept her British passport as the check-in is on a EU passport. **Please could you advise what to do? Thank you**”*

- 9 April 2024:

“I was initially refused bag drop at [EU] airport this morning for the first time (I fly here every year with no problem), as I did not have an ETA or physical proof of my settled status in my [EU] passport.

Eventually I was able to log into the government portal and show them my ILR and they eventually accepted it. While writing this I have now been refused boarding at the gate for the same reason, eventually after showing them the government portal they let me through.

Before I write a letter of complaint, can I please have some clarity about this situation? Do we now have to have our ILR page on the gov portal open as we make our way through every airport in the world? It is embarrassing being told to step aside while you hope there is internet signal so you can sign in and hope that they'll accept it. I travel numerous times a year for work and I do not want to go through this stress and anxiety every single time I try to return to my home country of 25 years.

*I really need this resolving, categorically. I have to leave the country for work every few months and do not want to do so until I know I will have no issues boarding a plane! **What can I do for further clarity/confirmation?**”*



Annex 2: Copy of FBISEngagement email dated 6 March 2025

From: FBISEngagement
Date: Thu, Mar 6, 2025, 10:16
Subject: Passenger Support Helpline

We wanted to inform you about changes we are making to the Passenger Support Helpline.

The Passenger support helpline was set up as a temporary measure to support people from 1st January 2025 who are in the process of travelling to the UK and have experienced issues with showing their digital status at the port with the carrier. This service was intended to be in place for 3 months.

We have been closely monitoring use of this helpline since it went live, along with assessing the wider feedback on how the transition to eVisas has gone. The helpline has seen extremely low levels of contact from people who have stated they have been unable to demonstrate their permission to travel with the carrier. Furthermore, most of the contact has been between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday. We have existing contact points for passengers with queries about their eVisa where an agent can provide more detailed support during these hours. The initial risk about the lack of support for people travelling to the UK with an eVisa has not materialised.

We have therefore taken the decision to gradually close the helpline. The service will move to the new opening hours 08:00 – 18:00 Monday to Friday from 10 March, followed by full line closure on 31 March at 18:00, at which point people will be directed to existing contact channels. A message for where passengers can get information will remain in place until expired BRP usage has been revoked. We will update our Gov.uk pages accordingly.

If a subsequent need should arise we can stand the helpline back up at short notice. The carrier support hub will continue to be available 24/7 for carriers.

Thanks

FBIS Engagement

Annex 3: Copy of the3million email dated 10 March 2025

From: Monique Hawkins
Sent: 10 March 2025 10:34
To: FBISEngagement
Cc: Digitalisation
Subject: Re: Passenger Support Helpline

Dear FBIS Engagement team,

Thank you for letting us know.

Obviously we are disappointed that the 24/7 open hours of the helpline is now removed. However, could I please make a strong plea to keep the telephone number alive even beyond 31 March 2025, even if behind the scenes it is redirected to the standard contact channels? I say this for two reasons:

Firstly, I think one of the reasons that the volume of calls has been low, is because of low awareness of the telephone number. We have been publicising it, but despite our reach we obviously will only ever reach a very small proportion of the six million or so EUSS status holders, or the ten million or so eVisa holders. If I google the telephone number 0800 876 6921, the only [GOV.UK](#) pages I see this listed on are:

- a media factsheet <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/12/04/media-factsheet-evisas-2/>
- 'Check your eVisa is correct before you travel' <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-sure-your-evisa-is-correct-before-you-travel>

Other than that, it is only listed on third party sites such as lawyers' websites, university websites, embassy websites. Awareness of such a number can take a long time to take effect.

Crucially, it is not listed on the more obvious [GOV.UK](#) websites that people might actually go to if they find themselves in trouble at an airport, such as <https://www.gov.uk/report-error-evisa>, <https://www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-inside-outside-uk>.

Secondly, you would be closing the helpline exactly at the point at which the need may go up, namely when ETAs for European citizens will start to be enforced from 2 April.

It would be extremely disappointing to close a helpline, just as awareness of a helpline existing at all is gradually building. Surely a telephony redirection - invisible to callers - would cost you nothing at all?

Kind regards,

Monique

Monique Hawkins

Policy and Research, [the3million](#)