

By email:

Tim Moss, Chief Executive, Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency

CC:

Aliza Dee, Justice & Home Affairs, EU Relations Secretariat, Cabinet Office

Miranda Biddle, Chief Executive, Independent Monitoring Authority (IMA)

29 May 2026

Dear Mr Moss

Urgent: Destroyal of EU Citizen's driving licence and refusal to issue a new licence

We are writing to raise our extreme concern about Catherine¹, a French citizen whose previous UK driving licence (held for decades) has been destroyed by the DVLA, and who has been told that the DVLA are unable to issue her with a new licence.

We ask you for two outcomes:

1. That DVLA immediately issue Catherine with a replacement driving licence; and
2. That DVLA will agree to meet with us to discuss a more systemic solution to the general problem underlying Catherine's case.

Catherine's case will not be an isolated one, and we anticipate many more identical cases will arise as time goes on. The problem disproportionately impacts older married women of certain nationalities (including French, but also others such as Dutch) who have lived in the UK for a long time, and therefore there is a serious risk of a systemic breach of the Public Sector Quality Duty, as well as breaches of the Withdrawal Agreement under Articles 12 (Non-Discrimination) and 23 (Equal treatment).

The problem fundamentally lies in the combined effects of increased digitisation; and UK Government departments having separate digitisation policies and processes without sufficient cross Government coordination.

Catherine's case illustrates this problem, and we set out her problem below:

- Catherine came to the UK decades ago, under EU Free Movement regulations, not requiring leave to enter or remain as she was exercising treaty rights.
- She has a French passport, which, as per French nationality laws, shows her surname as:
 - [**birth surname**] in the Machine Readable Zone (MRZ)
 - [**birth surname ép married surname**] in the Visual Inspection Zone (VIZ)
- Her previous French passports reflected her birth/married name in the exact same way.
- She has always been known in the UK by her **married surname** - i.e. by HMRC, DWP, the NHS and DVLA.

¹ We provide full identity details separately from this letter

- **DVLA issued her with a paper driving licence in 1999, in her *married surname*.** This was despite the fact that her French passport at the time showed her birth surname in the MRZ, and “birth surname ép married surname” in the VIZ (just as her current passport does now).
- Following the UK’s exit from the EU, Catherine was obliged to apply for an immigration status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). She did so, and was granted settled status in her ***birth surname***. This is because the Home Office’s EUSS uses an identity verification app (EU Exit: ID Document Check) that reads a person’s surname from the MRZ.
- In 2025, Catherine first realised this caused a problem, when she tried to access her HMRC records. HMRC had changed its digitisation policies, closing its Verify system and requiring Government Gateway account holders to have their identity re-verified. This process uses an app (GOV.UK ID Check) which again reads a person’s surname from the MRZ. Because HMRC knew Catherine by her ***married surname***, yet her passport’s MRZ only holds her ***birth surname***, no match was found and Catherine was unable to access her HMRC records.
- HMRC also accepts identity verification by driving licence, and Catherine’s driving licence was in the requisite ***married surname***. However, the app needs to read a photocard driving licence, and Catherine only held the old-style paper driving licence which, while still legally valid, could not be used for the HMRC identify verification app.
- Therefore in early March 2026, Catherine applied for a replacement photocard driving licence. She was unable to do so online, because - just like HMRC - the DVLA application system was unable to match her immigration status in her ***birth surname*** with her DVLA records in her ***married surname***.
- After speaking to a DVLA advisor, she completed a paper application form. This involved sending in her existing paper driving licence, alongside all other requested paperwork and a share code.
- DVLA destroyed her paper application form and refused to issue her with a new licence - because she was unable to provide immigration status that showed only her ***married surname***.
- Catherine asked the Home Office if they would be able to change her eVisa to display just her ***married surname***, however they say that the only two available options for eVisa display are:
 - [***birth surname***] - to match the MRZ of her identity document
 - [***birth surname ép married surname***] to match the VIZ of her identity document
- DVLA on the other hand have insisted they will only issue a driving licence at all if her eVisa display ***married surname*** only - to match the records they have on file.
- When Catherine asked if DVLA could issue a driving licence in the name ***birth surname ép married surname***, they said they would only do so if Catherine changed her surname by unenrolled deed poll to “***birth surname ép married surname***”. This is clearly not an option for Catherine, as that is **not** her surname, and would directly cause a whole range of other problems - both in terms of her French identity documentation, and her name as known by other UK government departments including HMRC.
- the3million has been attempting to obtain a resolution for Catherine, including by contacting the Home Office’s Digital Status Services Stakeholder Forum, who have reached out to DVLA colleagues. DVLA advised the Home Office that these types of cases are not uncommon, particularly where there are

differences between birth and married names due to international naming convention. DLVA stated that such cases can normally be resolved where the applicant can provide sufficient evidence linking the two names, typically by including documentation such as a marriage certificate (or other documentation evidencing a change of name). If this is correct, it is clearly not what happened in Catherine's case, as the only option given to her was to submit an unenrolled deed poll.

We would be very grateful if you could address the following questions as soon as possible:

- Q1. Was Catherine given the wrong information by the DVLA when she was told that the way to resolve the issue was to submit an unenrolled deed poll rather than suggesting sending a copy of her marriage certificate?
- Q2. Presuming that the DVLA was wrong to destroy Catherine's still legally valid driving licence before confirming that a new driving licence would be issued, leaving her unable to drive for almost three months to date, will DLVA compensate Catherine for the inconvenience caused?
- Q3. As a matter of extreme urgency, can someone at the DVLA issue Catherine with a replacement driving licence? They can do so either in the name "**married surname**", or "**birth surname ép married surname**". Catherine has been unable to drive for almost two months now. When she visits her elderly parents living in a remote area in France, she is unable to drive them to urgent medical appointments as driving without a licence constitutes a major offence in France, risking a prison sentence up to 1 year and a fine of up to €15,000².
- Q4. The situation affecting Catherine will affect a large group of people where the DVLA have previously issued them a driving licence without requiring an immigration status, because they were here under EEA Regulations implementing EU free movement law. Since people need to renew their driving licences every 10 years or when reaching age 70, we anticipate more cases like Catherine's to emerge. The impacted group will be disproportionately women from certain nationalities. In light of this, will representatives from DVLA agree to meet with us to have further discussions on a more systemic solution to this issue, including improved training for DVLA staff in order to prevent incorrect advice being issued, and clear guidance being published on the DVLA website to avoid similar situations from happening to other people?

We look forward to receiving your reply at the earliest opportunity, and in any case by Friday 26 June.

Yours sincerely,

Monique Hawkins

Head of Policy and Advocacy and Acting CEO, the3million

² <https://www.service-public.gouv.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F17698?lang=en>