EU citizens must register, carry ID cards, in post-Brexit Britain

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The UK's Home Office has announced that European Union (EU) citizens currently living in Britain and intent on remaining will be required to register with the Home Office during the "transition" phase of Britain's exit from the EU.

As many as 3.8 million people are likely to be impacted. Those registering will be allocated a number. Failure to register will mean, post-Brexit, EU citizens, many of whom have lived in Britain for years and decades, face losing access to healthcare, schools, public funds and pensions.

Arrangements across the EU's remaining 27 countries for the 900,000 or so British citizens living in the EU are not yet clear. That makes a total of 4.7 million people in Europe whose citizenship rights are cynically being used as bargaining chips in the bitter and intractable disputes between the EU and the British government over Brexit. Irish citizens in Britain are not affected.

According to a Home Office document "EU Settlement Scheme: Statement of Intent," EU citizens and family members resident in Britain for five years or more on December 31, 2020, will be eligible to register for "settled status." Those resident for a shorter period will be granted "pre-settled status." The government says that EU citizens falling into either category during the short transitional phase of Brexit will be granted access to social services and be able to work.

Recently appointed Home Secretary Sajid Javid introduced the scheme as based on an agreement with the "EU guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and of UK nationals living in the EU."

The scheme, announced June 21, will require a complex and intrusive additional layer of Home Office immigration bureaucracy to administer. To this end, 1,500 staff are being recruited. Presented by Javid as being "as simple as possible for the great majority of EU citizens," the new scheme, even if it remains in its current form, threatens to pitch millions into a bureaucratic quagmire of instability and uncertainty overseen by the Home Office.

British citizens in Europe will surely face similar pressures, refracted through the peculiarities of their country of residence, every one of which is seeking one way or another to further witch-hunt immigrants.

In addition, the current proposal is based on what is only a draft "Withdrawal Agreement" between the EU and the British government and is therefore subject to the turmoil caused by the vicious faction fight within the British ruling class over Brexit and foreign policy. The document makes no mention of the fate of either EU citizens in Britain or British citizens in the EU in the event of a "hard" or "no deal" Brexit. Neither does it consider the immigration barriers being erected in both directions after the transition period.

Most disturbing is that, even as the Home Office scheme currently stands, EU citizens will be required to carry identity cards, which have never been enforced in Britain.

While online processes are supposed to be in place by next year, large numbers of applicants will be required to send their EU member state passports to the British Home Office. Even if operated smoothly, this will create vast amounts of stress. Inevitably, passports will be lost, threatening a devastating loss of rights and status, with employers, landlords and even hospitals increasingly demanding proof of immigration status.

Despite the growth of Internet and smart phone use, a significant number of people, particularly older people, do not have easy or regular Internet access or any familiarity with its use. Inevitably, the most vulnerable people will suffer the greatest disruption.

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A study by think tank Transition Advice Fund on similar mass registration processes worldwide suggested that anything between 1 and 50 percent of the target group might not register at all. The report noted that if a mere 5 percent of EU citizens in Britain fail to register, some 170,000 people, again likely to be the most vulnerable, will be "left without status."

Secondly, the government will attempt to verify individuals' residency records by scrutinising their tax and social security records.

Presented as a smooth and automated process, this will be nothing of the sort, as anyone with experience of both Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department of Work and Pensions will testify. While processing might, assuming no major IT failures or data corruptions, be straightforward for those with consistent and unbroken records, for a great many EU workers in Britain, particularly those from Eastern Europe, dependent on casual, temporary or cash in hand work, all sorts of queries, gaps and anomalies will be thrown up.

Others may have no tax records at all. In these cases, the Home Office will require further documentary proof to be provided to verify consistent residence. Thus, the Home Office document suggests the scheme's administrators might accept, "A dated and signed letter from a registered care home confirming the period of residence in the home" or "an addressed invoice from an accredited organisation for school, college or university fees for education requiring physical attendance in the UK, which includes the name of the student, and accompanying evidence of payment," *might* also be acceptable.

Decisions on the fate of individuals will be left to the discretion of a Home Office case worker.

Thirdly, the Home Office will run criminal checks on the millions of applicants. Anyone guilty of a serious crime, defined merely as carrying a jail sentence of 12 months or more or deemed a security threat, can be denied "settled" or "pre-settled" status and will face deportation.

Cost of registration will be £65 per adult and £32 for children. The *Guardian* reported that under the "hostile environment" created by successive British governments against immigrants, the Home Office can charge £3,250 for someone seeking indefinite leave for an adult dependent relative to remain in Britain and £1,330 for an adult seeking naturalisation. But even £65 per person in a large family on low income amounts to an additional and entirely unnecessary burden.

The creation of two new categories of residents also makes future discrimination and threats to residency rights inevitable.

Earlier this year, the British authorities were exposed as having targeted members of the "Windrush" generation, mostly West Indian workers encouraged to move to Britain in the 1950s to make up for labour shortages. Many were denied free healthcare and benefits, lost jobs and suffered arrest and deportation as a result of the same "hostile environment." Tens of thousands of former migrants from other Commonwealth countries are also thought to have been threatened with deportation. In 2016, nearly 40,000 people were removed from the UK or recorded as "departing voluntarily."

The same Home Office now hoping to establish systems to trawl through the tax, employment and criminal records of millions of European citizens was exposed this April as having deliberately destroyed thousands of embarkation cards for Windrush generation migrants. This was despite staff members warning that these cards were frequently the only available record of an individual's entirely legal arrival in Britain.

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