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21 November 2022

Dear Monique Hawkins and Alex Mak,

Thank you for your letter of 12 May 2022 to Kevin Foster MP, former Minister for Safe and Legal Migration, about individuals whose digital immigration status profile appears to be corrupted. Your letter has been passed to me to reply. I apologise for the delay in responding.

We appreciate your interest in this matter. We have shared your queries with the appropriate technical team. Please find below our responses:

Q1. Is this (“*corrupted profile*”) a known and recognised problem with the digital status under the EU Settlement Scheme, the British National (Overseas) status, and other UK digital immigration statuses?

Yes. The Home Office is aware of issues where users of our online services (View and Prove, Right to Rent and Right to Work) may experience poor quality or absent facial images presented on the services. We are aware of the issues because they are reported to us by users of the services, but also because some issues are the result of deliberate design choices made during the launch of the EU Settlement Scheme (see below).

Q2. Is there an understanding of the cause of this problem? If so, what event causes a digital status to change from the state of displaying a photograph and being able to generate share codes, to the state of ‘Photo not available’ and the inability to generate a share code?

Known issues with poor quality or absent facial images in the View and Prove service fall into two categories. Some facial images are of a low standard for historical reasons – during the early days of the EU Settlement Scheme, the quality threshold for facial images supplied by applicants was deliberately low, to avoid rejecting the initial cohort of applicants. As a result, many images were accepted that would not pass current quality thresholds and may not be usable for the purpose of identifying the applicant. We encourage users of our services to self-report any such images and provide replacement images using our “Update My Details” service.

Other problems with the facial images may have a technical root cause linked to connectivity problems between View and Prove and the Home Office Immigration and Asylum Biometric Store (IABS). We are constantly working to mitigate the impact of these connectivity issues and a project is underway to put in place a better system for image retrieval that will address the root cause.

It is possible for users with a poor-quality facial image on their profile to generate a share code. However, when the connectivity issues mentioned above occur, there tends to be overall degradation of the performance of our online services, which can prevent the user from generating share codes. When we become aware that the performance of our online services renders them unusable, we typically take them offline for maintenance. We plan maintenance outside of normal daytime work hours wherever possible, and now have banners so that we can let users know of planned maintenance ahead of it happening.

Q3. Is the Home Office able to run a programmatic audit to identify all affected records and contact the individuals?

(a) If so, has the Home Office run such an audit, has it contacted individuals, and if so, when?

(b) If not, why is this not possible?

a) No, we have not run an audit. We rely on users of our services (whether people who hold an eVisa, or people required to check the eVisas of others) reporting any facial image quality issues they experience. When reported, we log the reports as “incidents” following industry standard management processes. In addition to recording and remedying incidents, we also link them together by theme to trace the root cause and fix that to prevent future, similar incidents.

b) An audit of face images stored in our database is currently not viable. It would require a mix of automated and manual checks of over six million face images. The database is in constant use, 24 hours every day, by immigration, border and law enforcement operations and the audit would have a disruptive effect. In addition, while the audit might identify face images that don't meet the required quality standards, it would not be able to identify faces that did not belong to the Status holder.

Q4. Has a fix been identified to correct the digital status of affected individuals? If so:

(a) When was this fix identified and when was it implemented?

- (b) Does the fix have to be manually applied for every individual who reports their corrupted status to the Home Office, or is a system-wide fix available which can repair all such affected digital statuses?**
- (c) Why are people still reporting that their record has not been repaired? Our most recent report last week said this problem had been ongoing since July 2021, reported to UKVI but still not fixed.**

The issues with image retrieval were not permanent and have been fixed. Any applicants who contacted us about the issue have been notified that it has been rectified.

If you have any information about people who are still experiencing these issues, please ask them to report these to the UKVI Resolution Centre so that we can investigate.

Q5. What is the process for identifying systemic issues amongst individual problems with digital status reported to the Home Office by status holders?

The Home Office follows industry standard management processes for dealing with reported issues with our services. Reports of issues are recorded as 'incidents' if they appear to be caused by a technological fault rather than, for example, a user needing additional guidance to use the service, and the cause of such incidents as 'technical problems'. We monitor incidents which are reported and identify technical problems with our services in two ways.

Firstly, our own internal live service management teams constantly monitor the performance of our services. They use software tools to check the services are operating within set parameters, and which generate alerts if those parameters are being breached. Any such incidents are logged and investigated by technical teams to find the technical problem and fix the root cause.

Secondly, the users of our services can themselves report issues they are experiencing to the UKVI Resolution Centre. These reports undergo triage to establish whether the issues being reported have arisen from a technical problem, or some other cause (e.g. the user misunderstanding how to use the services). If there is an issue which appears to relate to a technical problem rather than user misunderstanding, again, it is logged as an incident and investigated by technical teams to find and fix the root cause.

To ensure incidents affecting the View and Prove service are investigated and diagnosed effectively, we have a dedicated Problem Manager assigned to incidents affecting the View and Prove service. They work across all technology services which integrate to View and Prove to ensure the root cause is identified and resolved, no matter which technology service is the cause.

The detail of the logging is as follows:

- If a customer experiences an issue with the service, they should contact the UKVI Resolution Centre (RC).

- The RC then help resolve the issue for the customer. If the contact centre agent determines the problem is a technical fault, the agent will raise this as an incident in our ServiceNow tooling and it will be triaged to our Shared Application Support team. If they are unable to resolve the problem, a Jira incident is raised and escalated to the relevant development team for resolution.
- We use tooling called ServiceNow and Jira, where incidents are logged and triaged. This tooling collates statistics and detailed trends which can be tracked down to product level (e.g. Access UK, Atlas, Status). Incidents raised to us via customers or our technical teams are monitored, triaged, and analysed. These are then used to determine technical problems with the service and where we may have faults.
- For example, five incidents may be raised but could all be caused by one underlying technical problem.

Please let us know if you have any further questions about issues with eVisa profiles.

Yours sincerely

Simon Tomlinson

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