

# Digital immigration status may lead to housing discrimination for EU citizens in the UK

October 13 2022

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

EU citizens may be facing discrimination when trying to rent a home in the U.K. following a switch by the government to digital-only proof of immigration status, according to a pilot study by the University of York.

The authors of the report are calling on the government and watchdog, the Independent Monitoring Authority, to urgently review whether the switch to the new digital system, introduced after Brexit, breaches the Withdrawal Agreement by discriminating against EU citizens.

EU citizens who lived in the U.K. before it left the EU had to apply for settled or pre-settled [status](#). These EU citizens have only been given digital proof of their right to live and work in the U.K., rather than physical documentation such as an ID card.

## **Proof**

For the study, the researchers recruited more than 200 landlords to investigate whether only being able to provide digital proof of immigration status leads to tenants missing out on properties in the private rental sector.

The researchers found that ID status held sway over landlord's decisions on who they would prefer to rent to, over and above other factors such as ethnicity, gender, age and profession.

For example, a tenant with a non-British sounding name, aged 20 and working in construction had a 87% probability of being chosen with a British passport. This plummeted to 13% with digital status.

## **Difficulties**

Co-lead author of the study, Professor Joe Tomlinson from York Law School at the University of York, said, "The EU settlement scheme is

heavily digitalized and it immediately occurred to us that this meant it was more likely to discriminate against different types of EU citizens such as the elderly and disabled. After hearing anecdotal evidence of EU citizens experiencing difficulties renting in an extremely competitive housing market, we felt a duty to investigate.

"While our study is a pilot and we are looking to scale up this research, we believe our results indicate the U.K. government is arguably breaching the Withdrawal Agreement. This clear evidence of how our immigration system is negatively impacting people's lives should provide a strong incentive for the Home Office to look again at whether EU citizens are being treated fairly, and for the Independent Monitoring Authority to examine this closely too."

## **Influence**

For the study, the researchers asked landlords to imagine they were renting out their property and presented them with emails from pairs of prospective tenants. They asked them to choose which of the two they would prefer to let their property to.

ID status had the greatest influence on their decisions, with landlords preferring a British passport above all else, followed by a U.K. residence card, a photo of a British passport—and least of all—digital status.

Co-lead author of the report, Dr. Jed Meers from York Law School at the University of York, said, "Landlords showed a clear preference for traditional, paper-based forms of ID. Prospective tenants having a non-British sounding name, did not influence landlord's decisions when they had a British passport, but with a share code those tenants were suddenly at a real disadvantage. This suggests there is something about digital documents which can compound disadvantages in the housing market."

The researchers will be presenting the results of their study at a Public Law Project conference "[Judicial Review Trends and Forecasts 2022: Democracy and the Law](#)" on Thursday, October 13.

Provided by University of York

Citation: Digital immigration status may lead to housing discrimination for EU citizens in the UK (2022, October 13) retrieved 25 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-10-digital-immigration-status-housing-discrimination.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.