

SETTLED

NOT SECURE

The needs of EU citizens in the UK

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Settled

www.settled.org.uk

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Introduction

Settled is an independent charity set up in 2019 by EU citizens living in the UK, to provide free and trustworthy information, advice and support to others in the same position. Settled is accredited by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner to provide immigration advice at OISC level 3. Settled's small staff team coordinate a UK-wide network of 100+ peer-to-peer volunteer advisers who speak more than 20 languages. Settled is committed to reaching those who most need help.

An unknown number of EU citizens – several million - have made their home in the UK, ranging from those who arrived after the upheavals of World War 2, to recently arrived students and workers as a result of free movement across the European Union.

Under the terms of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement 2019, EU citizens that were resident in the UK before 31 December 2020 could retain their rights in the UK. But unless they hold British citizenship this would not be automatic – instead EU citizens needed to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme administered by the UK Home Office, before the deadline of 30 June 2021. Even those with Indefinite Leave to Remain were advised to apply to the scheme in order to retain full rights.

Successful applicants receive settled status or (if they do not have evidence of being in the UK for five years) pre-settled status. Settled/pre-settled status gives the right to live, work, study, access services including healthcare, claim benefits and travel in and out of the UK freely. The grant of settled/pre-settled status is not accompanied by a physical document such as a residence permit. Instead, whenever EU citizens need to prove their right to be in the UK and exercise their rights, they complete an online process called 'View and Prove'. Pre-settled status is temporary and recipients need to re-apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to request settled status.

For two years the charity Settled was focussed on helping to reach and assist the most vulnerable EU citizens so that as many as possible made applications before the deadline. Since the deadline, Settled has continued to respond to around 300 enquiries a week. Most of these are firstly, from people who have not secured status because their applications were refused or they missed the deadline. Secondly from people who are struggling to prove their rights in the UK to employment, healthcare etc., including those who travel outside the UK and cannot prove their right to re-enter. And thirdly from EU citizens who wish to exercise their rights for family members to join them here. Settled is also responding to other related problems, for example where EU citizens are anxious, isolated, impoverished or exploited.

Settled has a strong understanding of the current problems and needs of EU citizens in the UK.

Settled has a strong understanding of the current problems and needs of EU citizens in the UK. As Settled is committed to ensuring that its services remain relevant in future, the purpose of this survey is to provide information to help predict what the problems and needs of EU citizens might be in 5 years time, to assist with longer term planning. We wanted to find out more about whether Settled will be needed by a wide range of EU citizens or just the most isolated and vulnerable, whether the types of issues they raise will stay the same or change, and whether the needs presented are ones that Settled is best placed to meet.

The survey has been successful in providing Settled with relevant information on how it might respond. The picture presented about the predicted needs of EU citizens has wider relevance and so we are publishing this summary of key survey results to inform others developing policies and providing services to EU citizens, especially the Home Office.

Survey method

The survey was kept as short as possible. There were 27 questions, with mostly closed-ended questions to encourage replies and make it easy for us to translate the survey and collate the responses. There were opportunities for open-ended comments and some open-ended questions. Google Forms was the format used for the survey so that it was easy to disseminate the questions and easy to collate and analyse answers. The survey ran between 15th of December of 2021 and the 31st of January 2022. Translations of the open-ended responses were carried out by Settled's multi-lingual staff and volunteers.

Participant audience

Settled has a large client base, with 40,000 members on its multilingual Facebook groups. The survey was posted on Settled's English Facebook page and on seven Facebook groups in other languages (Italian, Spanish, Polish, Bulgarian, Czech/Slovak, French and Romanian). It was also shared with other organisations working with EU citizens who encouraged their audiences to participate. Therefore, participants are mainly but not wholly people who already use Settled's services.

Limitations

The main limitation of our approach is that it draws a self-selected convenience sample, not fully representative of Settled's client population. People who are most in need, and particularly those digitally excluded, are unlikely to respond to an online survey. Settled takes account of this in our conclusions. In addition, the survey can only capture respondent's perceived future needs, of course, it cannot forecast their actual future needs.

Survey results

Settled received 619 individual responses to the survey.
Not all respondents answered every question.

Information received in the responses is presented here as follows:

- 1 Demographic information about the people who completed the survey
- 2 Their immigration status and ability to prove their status
- 3 Their assessment of future concerns for themselves and their families:
 - in the results of closed questions
 - in open responses
- 4 Comments on what help they need from Settled in future



Demographics

Summary of findings

Replies were received from nationals of 21 out of 27 EU countries, plus there were a small minority (9 replies) from nationals of other countries who are family members of EU citizens in the UK.

The survey is a representation of views from across the EU, although in varied amounts. Italian, Polish and Bulgarian were the most common nationalities among those who replied.

The survey could be answered in English or in 8 other languages. The majority of people (80%) percent who replied chose to use a language other than English to respond.

The survey asked: *'How easy or difficult do you find it to understand English?'* 57% (354 of 619 replies) said they can understand English without difficulty. But 33% said they sometimes have difficulty and 8% said they often have difficulty. This suggests that in order to ensure that EU citizens can exercise their rights in the UK and understand and comply with requirements, support is needed to improve English ability and to provide own-language advice and assistance.

74% of respondents are women – a marked gender imbalance – the reason for this was not explained.

Respondents are spread across all age groups but most are middle aged (over half were 35-49). 26% percent are between 18 and 34; 20% are 50 to 64 and only 3% were 65+.

It is possible that the elderly are under-represented in this survey as a result of it being online. This echoes concerns in HO data that not as many elderly have applied as predicted to be in the UK (81% of Home Office applications came from 18-64 year olds).

The vast majority of the people responding are in the UK already (91%). A further 6% confirmed that *'I am not currently in the UK but in the past I lived in the UK for more than five continuous years and wish to return'*. Almost all of those completing the survey therefore are people who have made a home in the UK and so are the intended beneficiaries of the EU Settlement Scheme.

The survey allowed participants to write their locality as free text – replies were a mixture of towns, cities, counties and regions. Chart number seven is a summary of the replies received, highlighting the most common answers. It demonstrates that participants in the survey are widely spread across all parts of the UK. 33% are in Greater London (168 of 507 replies).

CHART 1

Nationality of respondents

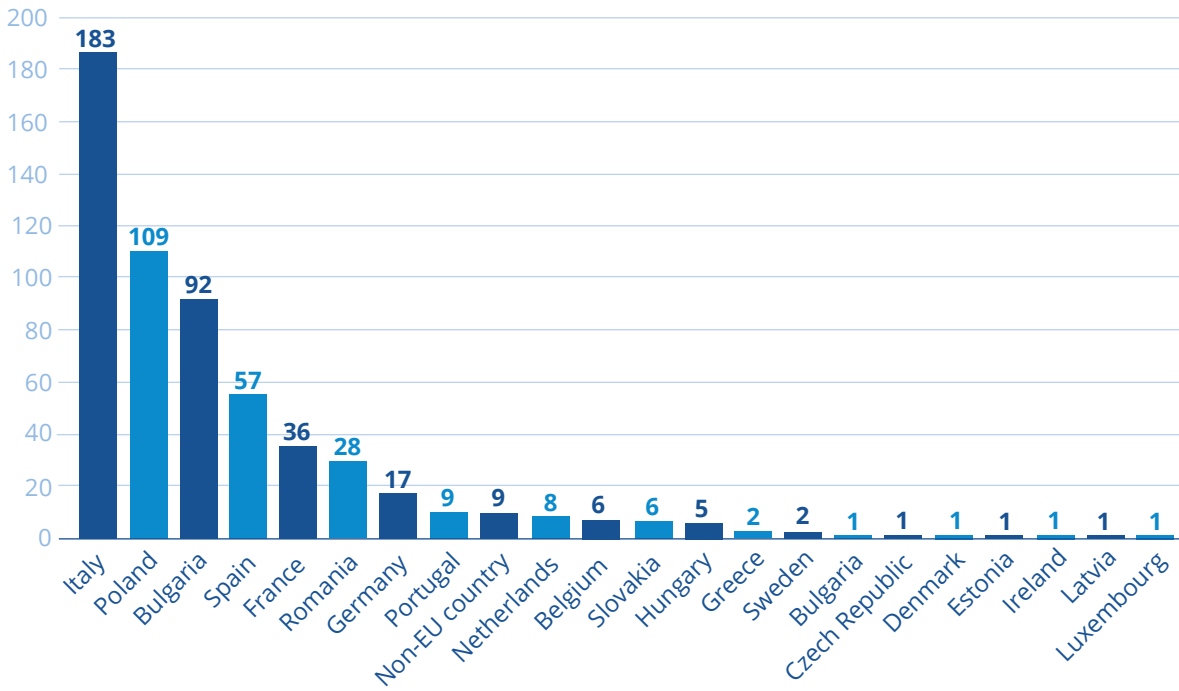


CHART 2

Language used to complete the survey

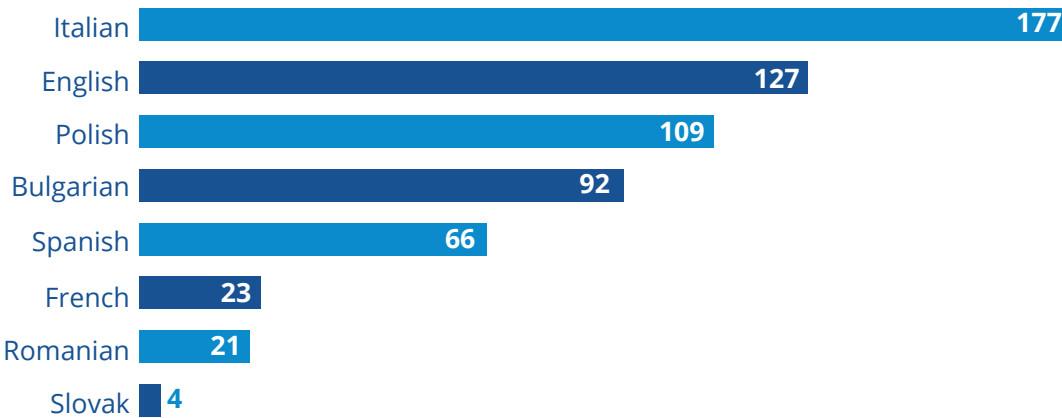


CHART 3

Competence in English

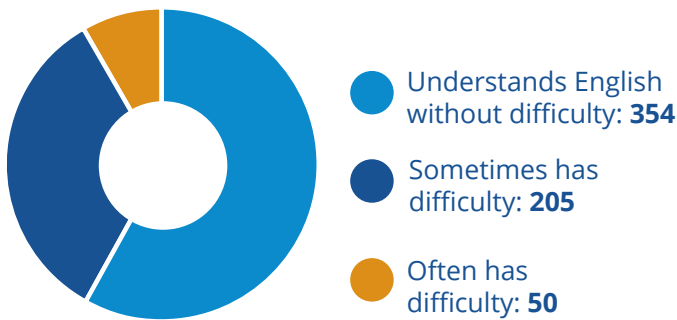


CHART 4

Connection to the UK

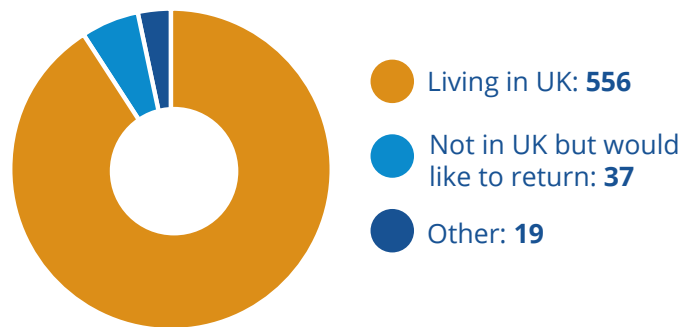


CHART 5

Age

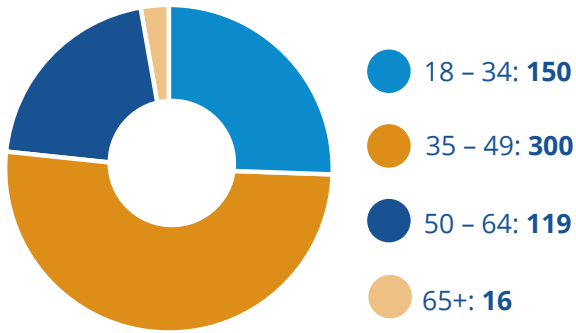


CHART 6

Gender

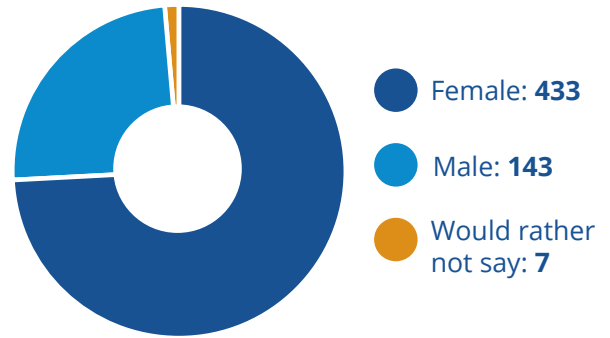


CHART 7

Locality in the UK (self-described)



ENGLAND

- Greater London: **168**
- Greater Manchester: **22**
- Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex: **18**
- Kent: **21**
- Coventry, Warwickshire, Staffordshire: **15**
- Bristol: **14**
- Birmingham: **13**
- Hampshire, Sussex: **13**
- Berkshire, Wiltshire: **13**
- Leeds, Bradford: **12**
- Merseyside: **11**
- Luton, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire: **10**
- Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire: **10**
- Lancashire: **10**
- Surrey: **10**
- Buckinghamshire: **8**
- Brighton: **8**
- Yorkshire: **7**
- Somerset, Devon, Cornwall: **7**
- Milton Keynes: **7**
- Other parts of England: **49**

SCOTLAND

- Glasgow: **10**
- Edinburgh: **6**
- Other parts of Scotland: **18**

NORTHERN IRELAND

- Northern Ireland: **8**

WALES

- Cardiff, Newport: **7**
- Other towns in Wales: **12**



Immigration status

Summary of findings

Only 5% of respondents (31 of 593 replies) have acquired British citizenship. To qualify for British citizenship an EU citizen would need to have settled status or Indefinite Leave to Remain, wait for a year after acquiring settled status (unless married to a British citizen), prove 10 years of lawful residence in the UK, pass English language and Life in the UK tests and pay a fee of £1,330 plus other associated costs.

In answer to the question: 'What is your current immigration status?' 49% (280 of 569 replies) have settled status and 44% (249 of 569 replies) have pre-settled status. This is in line with the proportions reported by the Home Office for outcomes of EU Settlement Scheme applications, they report 51% of applications have been granted settled status and 41% pre-settled status.*

Those granted pre-settled status will not have been in the UK for five years and therefore are not yet eligible to apply for British citizenship.

As later results of the survey show, there is a common aspiration to acquire British Citizenship as 'the end of the line' in terms of being settled in the UK. Although, many respondents question the costs and their ability to qualify.

It is a concern that 7% of respondents do not have either settled or pre-settled status. They are either; waiting for the result of their application, have not applied, have had their application rejected, or they do not know what their immigration status is. The Home Office reports that in total 5.3 million have been granted a status – so if our results were a reflection of the national picture then a further 7% beyond that without status is a concern.

We asked: 'If you have pre-settled or settled status, how easy or difficult do you find it to 'view and prove' your online immigration status?'

Respondents had reasonable levels computer literacy, still over 20% related having some level of difficulty to prove their status. As it is shown later in this report, difficulty proving status is a big worry for EU citizens.

*Source: gov.uk EU Settlement Scheme Statistics, February 2022

CHART 8

Dual British nationality

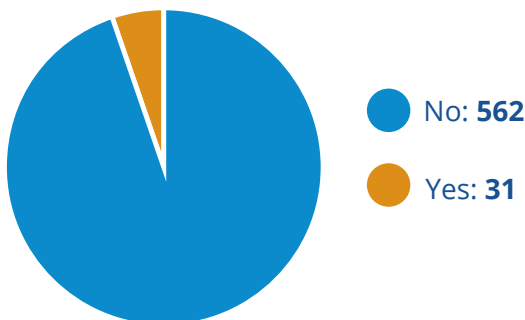
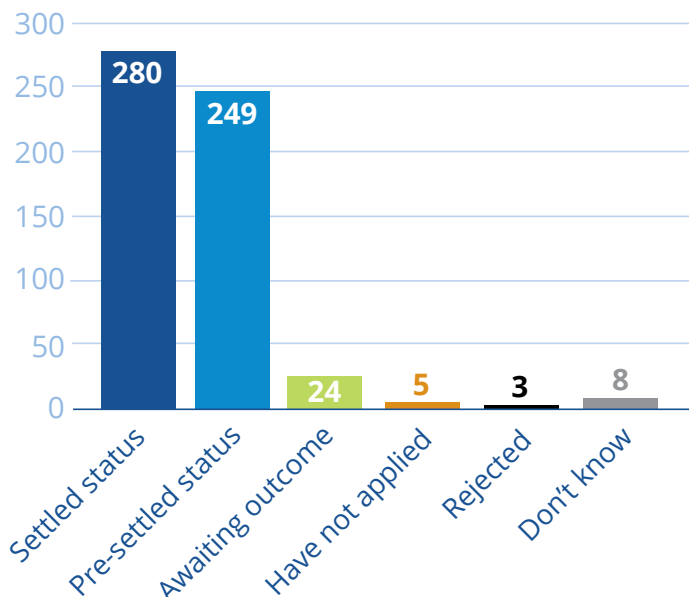
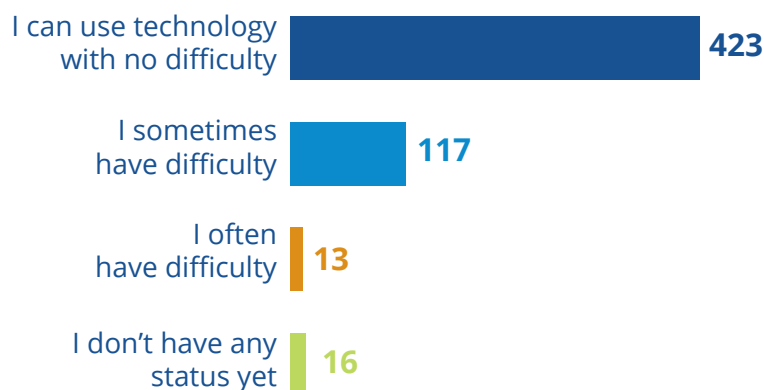


CHART 9

Immigration status



Ability to use 'View and Prove' technology



Future concerns

Summary of findings from the closed questions

The survey asked *"Thinking ahead to 2026 – are you confident that by then your life in the UK will be fully settled and secure, or are you worried that there will still be some problems securing your rights and livelihood and taking care of your family?"*

The respondents were evenly split: 29% are moderately worried, 13% very worried, 28% moderately confident, 14% very confident, the rest having no strong view.

We compared the confident/worried answers against the types of immigration status held by participants. Although it might be expected that those with settled status felt more confident than those with pre-settled, this was not the case.

The survey asked people to name their likely future concerns from a suggested list of 12 options. They could tick as few or as many as they wished. The results show that all of the suggested concerns were ticked by well over 100 people with some concerns being ticked over 200 times. So while some concerns are more common than others, it is fairer to conclude that all of the suggested issues are common concerns.

The top three concerns were bringing family members to the UK, being allowed back in at the UK border after travelling abroad, and proving one's immigration status.

EU citizens were asked to say which family members they would like to bring to join them in the UK – the overwhelming answer was their parents.

When asked *"Thinking about your family – which of these do you think might be problems for members of your family in five years' time?"* it is interesting that a somewhat different picture emerged. A smaller range of concerns were chosen (from the same list as previously) and they were ticked less often than when people were asked about their own situation. Concerns for family members tended to be about acquiring status, housing and financial security and travelling across borders.

CHART 11

Feeling confident or worried?

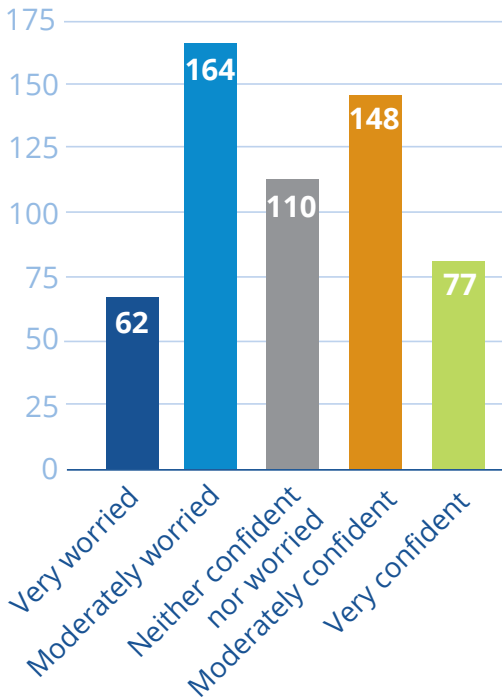


CHART 12

Comparison between status and feeling of security

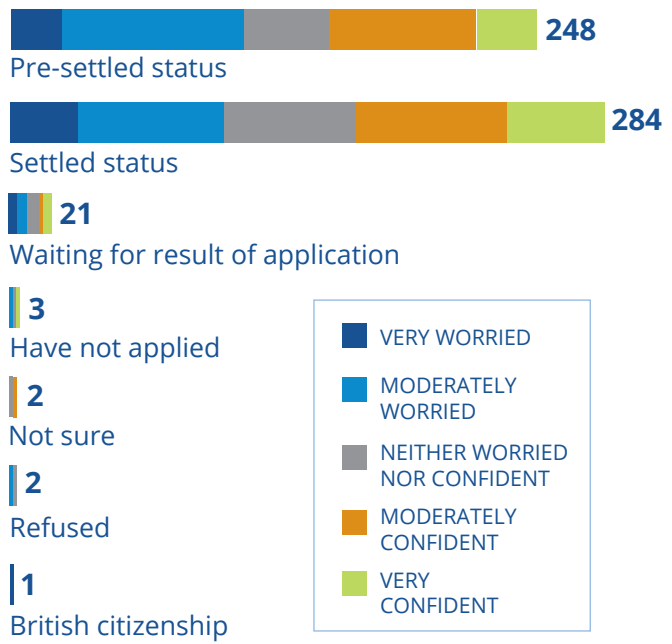


CHART 13

Main concerns for the next five years

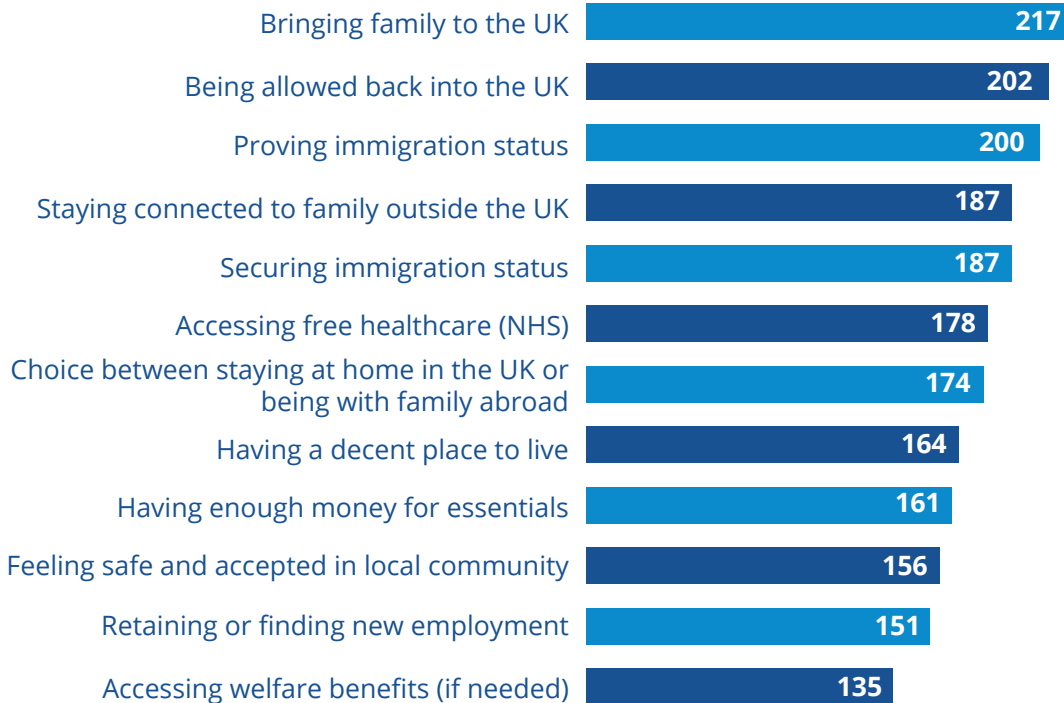


CHART 14

Potential joining family members

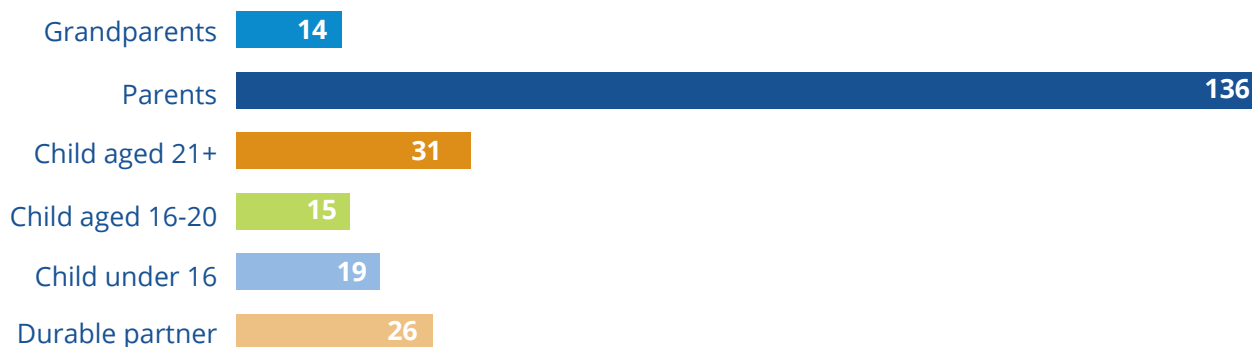
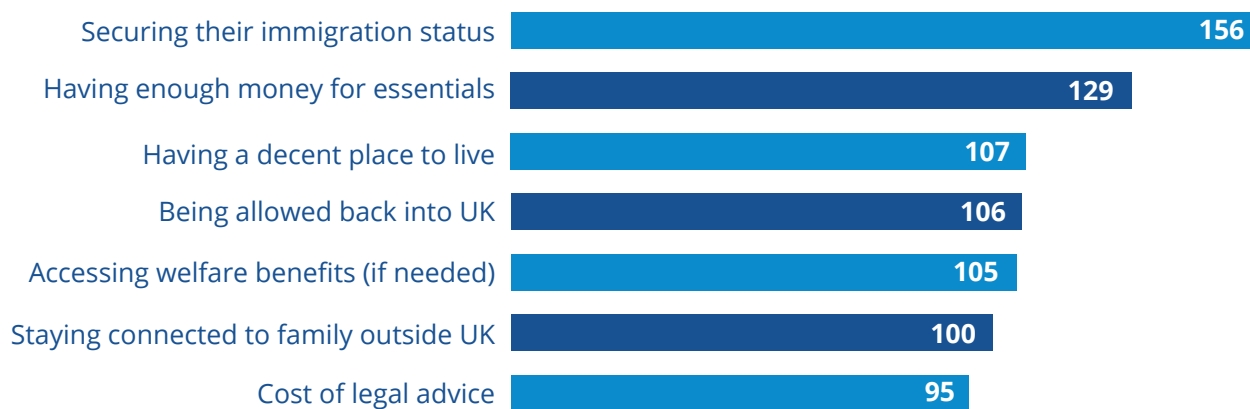


CHART 15

Concerns for family members



Summary of findings from the open questions

In addition to ticking the closed questions, the survey asked EU citizens to write down their comments about their concerns. This summary gives examples of their answers, some of which have been translated into English having first been written in other languages. They are listed in order of prevalence. Only a few representative examples are given for each topic, from many comments received. The comments reveal high levels of anxiety about substantial issues that are outside the control of EU citizens.

Difficulty bringing family members to the UK

"That my mother will not be able to join me in a few years, when she decides that she prefers to live with me, but she will not qualify."

"Not being able to bring my father when old and frail and needing care."

"The fact that adult children cannot be reunited with family members."

The risk of not being allowed back in at the UK border

"The uncertainty of not being able to prove my immigration status at the border when travelling with my son who has a British passport."

"Returning home to the UK from holiday travel."

"Providing my immigration status at the border upon return to the UK."

Inability to prove immigration status

"That my [online] status disappears suddenly in a situation of necessity and I can't prove it."

"Long before the end of the transition period, I was already receiving "urgent" requests from the local authority and other places asking me to provide a 'Home Office letter' proving my immigration status. Putting aside the stress of it all and the unlawfulness at the time of said requests, having to educate powerful LAs and organisations on EUSS – namely it's a digital process with no Home Office letter – is truly frightening. Rights and processes no longer matter as anyone can make up requirements."

"Discrimination against access to credit (e.g. mortgages) and other services (NHS, education) due to the requirement of the settled status and difficulty in demonstrating this (long process, website sometimes does not work, lack of physical proof)."

"European Union citizens living in the UK are in a similar situation to the victims of the Windrush crisis, as they will not be able to document their immigration status due to errors in the computer system."

Lack of understanding among authorities

"Lack of understanding about the rights of EU citizens in the UK."

"Misconceptions by employees offering these services can lead to negative decisions against EU citizens due to misinformation or lack of understanding about the rights of EU citizens in the UK."

Anxiety that EU settled status is insecure and might be withdrawn

"My fear is that settled status could be revoked one day, for no reason."

"This is our home. If the rules change, and EUSS is withdrawn, I am frightened of what may happen."

"That the UK government may make a U-turn on settled status."

"In my opinion, the rights of Poles to live and work in the UK are not secured by permanent status alone. So all the time you live in fear that further political changes will once again be introduced and permanent status will be annihilated."

The risk of not converting pre-settled to settled status

"The possibility that something goes wrong in converting to pre-settled to settled."

"That I will not be allowed to work in the UK after 2024, when my pre-settlement status expires."

"Securing settled status after absences from the UK."

"Worried about having the right evidence when applying for settled status."

Negative attitudes and discrimination

"I worry about the divisions in British society and the negative attitude towards Eastern Europeans".

"Being a second-class citizen in the UK."

"Twice I had to pay the rent six months in advance – the agency told me it was because of my self-employment, but in the same house, several others (UK citizens) were also self-employed, and they didn't have to pay in advance."

Impact of loss of freedom of movement on families

"Having to choose between staying at home in the UK or going abroad with family members."

"Having to leave the UK if I cannot bring my family."

"The fact that my British spouse has lost freedom of movement."

Barriers to getting British citizenship

"My two eldest daughters will have to pay over £1,000 each to become British citizens when they were born and raised here. When my two youngest could have British citizenship just because they were born on the right side of 2006."

"The requirements for English nationality continue to change (for example that now the Home Office looks at 10 years of your stay in the UK) and the increase in costs."



Help needed from Settled

The survey asked EU citizens *'In the future, what help do you think you will need from Settled?'* Answers covered the following issues:

Provide free and expert information and advice services on securing immigration status under the EU Settlement Scheme

"Assistance in obtaining settled status."

"Supervision of issues related to the process of application of settled."

Most often mentioned was advice on transferring from pre-settled to settled status

"Help to convert my pre-settled into settled status."

"I'd need to make sure people converting their pre-settled to settled status have guarantees."

"Information and tailored advice to my switch from pre- to settled status."

"Helping everyone with keeping their paperwork right in order to not make mistakes that could lead to denial of the settled status further down the line."

Family reunion

"Assistance with visa for my husband."

"Advice to bring my wife."

Provide accurate, updated information about the EU Settlement Scheme and other issues affecting EU citizens

"Advice and information about the EUSS and any possible changes."

"Keep us updated if things change, and it is important to know."

"Providing the very basic information and help that the Government should be providing!"

Provide legal advice to obtain British Citizenship

This was suggested by several people. For example:

"To prove my continued commitment to my British partner and son and obtain British citizenship."

Provide responsive advice and support to exercise rights granted under the EU Settlement Scheme

Proving and exercising rights

"I think it will be necessary for everything. Without going any further, my nearest hospital asked me to prove my status when I had never needed to go to it or have any treatment by the NHS. They also asked me in my job where I have been working for four years, etc..."

"Fight for the rights of all those who have settled status to rent to buy housing, find work, have health coverage, etc."

"Help for people over retirement age."

Re-entering at the border

"Help with problems arising during changes in regulations. At the border, when I returned from Poland, I was allowed to use an ID card or passport interchangeably. Nevertheless, I was required to have a passport even though it was incompatible with the applicable law. The official at the border demanded to see my passport but I had applied to the EUSS using my ID card. The treatment of foreigners by them is scandalous – breaking the law. It is good that I had such the additional document."

"Hotline for emergency calls, e.g. not able to fly back as the airline can't prove my status."

Advocate to retain rights granted to EU citizens

"Help to maintain our freedom and rights."

"Continuing to campaign to ensure our immigration status remains secure."

"Make sure settled status works as promised."

Advocate to obtain physical proof of status

This was mentioned by numerous people. For example:

"Continuing to campaign for physical proof of immigration status, e.g. (biometric) residency card."

"Lobbying the government to obtain a physical document about my settled status."

"Provide us with a document."



Conclusions

This survey captures how more than 600 EU citizens feel about their future in the UK. It is a reflection of the views of those who have made the UK their home (97% of respondents were either living in the UK or had previously lived here for 5 years and intend to return). These are the people to whom commitments were made that their lives would not be disrupted by Brexit.

The simplicity of the survey, its availability in numerous languages and Settled's community connections mean participants were engaged in localities across the UK, including nationals from 21 of the 27 EU member states. However, the most disadvantaged are unlikely to have participated and further research with those groups will be needed.

The responses to the survey show that despite the majority having complied with the requirement to make an application to the EU Settlement Scheme, and despite the good news that 93% of those that have applied have acquired settled or pre-settled status, EU citizens are still not at ease with their situation in the UK.

A clear example of this unease is in how they responded to a list of 12 possible concerns based on Settled's current assessment of the needs of EU citizens. For each item on the list more than 100 people and in some cases more than 200 agreed that it was relevant to their situation. While some issues dominate and they are covered in detail in the report, it is important to recognise the breadth of concerns. All of the issues raised deserve attention from policy-makers and service-providers.

The concerns of EU citizens are not just broad, they are deeply felt. In the free text sections of the survey, comments reveal high levels of anxiety about substantial issues that EU citizens feel are outside their control. They need reassurance but also practical assistance and improvements in policy.

Despite having been granted settled or pre-settled status, the experience of needing to apply to ensure rights once taken for granted, means insecurity about immigration status is intense.

The majority do not find it difficult to use the 'view and prove' online system for proving immigration status. Bearing in mind that all the participants were people who had the ability to complete an online survey, there may be wider difficulties in using 'view and prove' that are not captured by this survey.

It is a common worry that they system might not work when needed, or that they will be discriminated against due to lack of understanding of how this works among employers, landlords, banks, government departments and other service providers. EU citizens feel uncomfortable about having to prove their status repeatedly and at every stage for years to come and worry that everyday matters will become more difficult. This is compounded by the lack of a physical proof of status and lack of easy redress when things go wrong.

The EU Settlement Scheme is 'unfinished business'. More effort is needed to make the rights of EU citizens more secure and accessible, and to address their current feelings of insecurity

Where this is felt most acutely is using the online system to prove immigration status when re-entering UK borders. Being turned away when the UK is your home is a frightening prospect and many made comparisons with the Windrush scandal. Some asked if Settled could set up a hotline to resolve problems for those refused re-entry at UK borders, which begs the question whether it should be the Home Office that provides such a remedy.

EU citizens place a high value on family ties and on bringing joining family members to the UK, especially elderly parents. They worry that this may be difficult in future and about financial implications and access to services. Family bonds and the ability to travel are linked issues – loss of free movement is contributing to plans to bring older relatives to the UK.

There is fear that the transition from the temporary pre-settled status to the preferable settled status will disadvantage those who cannot prove sufficient continuous residence or meet other requirements. It is vital that robust policies and support are in place for people making this transition, so that they do not lose rights. But such are the levels of alienation that it is a widely held fear that in the future (perhaps responding to negative public attitudes) the government might revoke the settled status of EU citizens, leaving them and their families without rights in the UK. None offered evidence that this is being considered but many talked of the mood in political discussions about immigration. More effort is needed to alleviate these fears and convince EU citizens that the UK still wants them to consider this their home.

Many of the respondents would like British citizenship. This would go a long way to resolving several of their concerns: it is permanent, it provides a physical document, it increases a sense of belonging, it is more easily recognised by employers, officials etc. At present only 5% of the EU citizens surveyed have it, and they worry that they will not be able to afford the fees and fulfil other requirements. Making access to citizenship simpler would alleviate anxiety and make people more settled, but it is not a complete solution. Some EU countries, for example, do not allow dual nationality and so their nationals could not apply for British citizenship without giving up their current nationality. Citizenship alone cannot resolve the feeling that EU citizens are not fully accepted in the UK.

In a nutshell, the EU Settlement Scheme is ‘unfinished business’. More effort is needed to make the rights of EU citizens more secure and accessible, and to address their current feelings of insecurity.

Lessons for Settled

This survey asked EU citizens to think about their needs in five years time. It is clear from their answers that there will be an ongoing need for expert information, advice and support during the next five years and perhaps beyond, to address insecurities related to immigration status for EU citizens in the UK and for the family members who they wish to join them in the UK.

Furthermore the survey indicates varied competence in English and reliance on own-language options to understand and comply with written processes. EU citizens are looking to the charity Settled to provide such expert and multi-lingual services and to champion their rights. Settled will reflect the findings of this survey when planning its future work and will continue to listen and respond to EU citizens for as long as it is needed.

Recommendations for the Home Office

Settled asks the Home Office to recognise and act upon the wide-ranging concerns expressed by EU citizens, in particular:

1 Provide reliable, easy-to-use and indisputable proof of status and certain access to rights and services

- Simplify the view and prove online system so that it is suitable for all EU citizens whatever their circumstances and ensure that it works without glitches.
- Substantially increase the effectiveness of targeted public communications about the validity of EU settled and pre-settled status, the rights conferred and the need to prove online, so that EU citizens and their families do not face barriers.
- Provide prompt redress for EU citizens in situations where they are experiencing such difficulties. Take action to correct recurrent problems in specific organisations or sectors.
- Provide physical proof of immigration status as a back-up to be used when the online system is insufficient.

2 Make acquiring status easier and smooth the path to citizenship

- Seek positive outcomes wherever possible for all outstanding EU Settlement applications and provide clear guidance for anyone refused to maximise their opportunities to regularise their status in the UK
- Ensure that the millions who were awarded pre-settled status are able to transition to settled status simply and successfully in all but exceptional cases. Provide safeguards to remove the risk that people will lose their rights in this transition.
- Enable EU citizens to acquire citizenship through a simple process with achievable requirements and at little or no cost.

3 Acknowledge and repair the anxiety and mistrust prevalent among EU citizens

- Make public commitments reassuring EU citizens that rights granted by the EU Settlement Scheme will not be removed in years to come.
- Emphasise in public statements the intention for EU citizens to feel welcome and at home in the UK and dispel negative narratives.

4 Ensure that support is available

- Provide easy-access, own-language information, advice and support within the Home Office and empower specialist organisations like Settled to continue to do so.
- Understand that the most disadvantaged and isolated (including but not only the elderly and digitally excluded) are impacted most heavily and reflect their needs in policy and service design.

How you can support



Settled is an independent charity set up in 2019 by EU citizens living in the UK, to provide free and trustworthy information, advice and support to others in the same position. Settled is committed to reaching those who most need help. We are very grateful for donations to support the continuation of our work. Thank you.

For more information on how to donate:

www.settled.org.uk/donate



www.settled.org.uk

Settled registered charity 1184580