

By email: Kevin Foster MP, Minister for Future Borders and Immigration
Home Office SUG team

13 December 2021

Dear Kevin Foster MP,

Performance of EU Settlement Resolution Centre

We are writing to express our concern over the performance of the telephone helpline provided by the EU Settlement Resolution Centre (EUSRC), following data released by FOIA Request 65241.

Until now, we had only anecdotal evidence of the struggle people face to get through to the EUSRC. This evidence came from multiple submissions via our Report-It tool, frequent mentions on social media including our Facebook forum, direct emails to the3million and communicating with various organisations supporting EU citizens.

For many months we have raised this with the Home Office, both through meetings and letters.

- In one meeting we were told that waiting times are now down to an average of 14 minutes. However, when we queried about those who were not able to get through, we were told that demand was managed so as to maintain an acceptable ratio of callers to agents.

This gave us no information to explain why so many people are telling us they cannot get through.

- In [our letter to you of 16th July](#), we asked in Q5 what monitoring is being undertaken of the ability for people to access the telephone line, and in Q6 we requested data on waiting times since FOI Request 56732, submitted in December 2019, was refused.

Your [reply from 9th August](#) to Q5 states *“More than 1.5 million callers have been helped by the Settlement Resolution Centre agents and the Centre has responded to over 500,000 on-line contact requests. We continue to review the resource providing support to customers and recently increased the number of agents in response to demand. At certain points of the day telephone lines are busy and customers are encouraged to ring outside of peak times.”*

However, information about the number of callers who have been helped says nothing about the number of callers who have not been helped. We fully appreciate that the EUSRC helps many people every day, but we remain seriously concerned about those who are not being supported as they cannot get through. This is especially important given the central role of the EUSRC for ensuring access to the EUSS for digitally excluded users and other vulnerable cohorts.

The reply to Q6 states that you do not routinely publish call waiting data.

We remain seriously concerned about those who experience significant delays and report them to us.

Although the 2019 FOI Request 56743 for call centre performance metrics was eventually refused on the grounds that this data was planned for publication, no such publication took place.

Therefore, a new FOI Request 65241 was submitted in July 2021. A response was finally received on 1 December 2021, following repeated chasing requests, an internal review and a referral to the ICO.

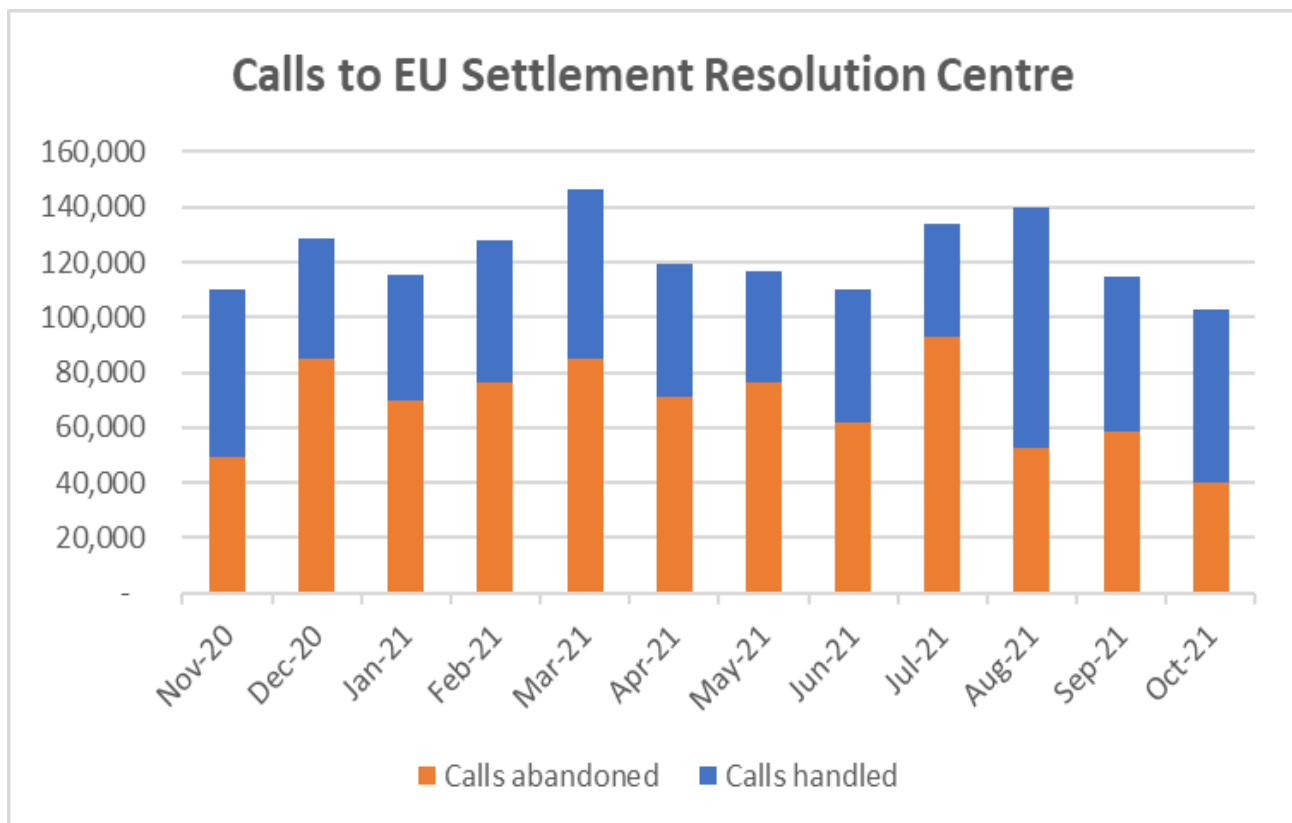
These data show that over the 12 months of November 2020 to October 2021, only 44% of the calls to the EU Settlement Resolution Centre were successfully connected.

It is not clear what the reasons are for calls not being successfully connected. The picture would be least bad if “calls attempted” comprised all the following groups:

1. People whose call is answered, and who get into the queue for an agent, but then hang up voluntarily before their call is answered;
2. People whose call is answered, but are disconnected by the EUSRC (see Appendix A of our [November 2021 report to the IMA](#), which contains a transcript of a call where all options lead to the caller being automatically disconnected);
3. People who get a busy tone, so their call is not answered at all (of which we have also had many individual reports).

However, the picture would be even more serious if group 3 is not included in the “calls attempted” figures, and very much worse if group 2 is not included.

A graphical representation of these data is shown below:



July 2021 saw both the greatest **number** (92,982) and **percentage** (69%) of unhandled calls. It was foreseeable that there would be a high demand for the EUSRC after the deadline, for people:

- anxious about progress on pending applications given the legal landscape changed on 1 July
- enquiring about late applications
- needing help with View & Prove given that from 1 July all EU citizens must prove their status via a digital-only portal

Since the FOI Response indicates that the average handling time remains relatively constant at an average of 11 minutes per call, our reading of the above chart, and the below table, is that extra capacity was belatedly provided in August 2021. However, this is clearly still not sufficient to meet demand.

This extra capacity appears to be short-lived, as September's figures are much reduced again.

You will note that the transcript in Appendix A of our [November 2021 report to the IMA](#) (where the caller is automatically disconnected whatever option is chosen) was from a call placed on 12 November.

	Attempted calls	Handled calls	Abandoned calls	% calls handled	% calls abandoned	Average wait time (h:m:s)	Average handling time (h:m:s)
Nov-20	109,766	60,436	49,330	55%	45%	00:16:18	00:10:27
Dec-20	128,291	43,285	85,006	34%	66%	00:46:12	00:11:38
Jan-21	115,152	45,555	69,597	40%	60%	00:43:35	00:11:53
Feb-21	128,035	51,649	76,386	40%	60%	00:31:32	00:10:10
Mar-21	146,246	61,564	84,682	42%	58%	00:25:02	00:10:31
Apr-21	119,310	48,093	71,217	40%	60%	00:31:38	00:11:15
May-21	116,918	40,503	76,415	35%	65%	00:40:33	00:11:41
Jun-21	109,750	47,759	61,991	44%	56%	00:26:26	00:11:09
Jul-21	133,849	40,867	92,982	31%	69%	00:14:56	00:10:53
Aug-21	139,611	86,997	52,614	62%	38%	00:08:06	00:09:37
Sep-21	114,652	55,827	58,825	49%	51%	00:12:52	00:12:46
Oct-21	102,812	62,704	40,108	61%	39%	00:11:12	00:12:02
Total	1,464,392	645,239	819,153	44%	56%	00:25:41	00:11:04

We therefore ask the following questions:

Q1. Do these data cover just the public facing telephone number of the EU Settlement Resolution Centre (0300 123 7379 and +44 (0)203 080 0010), or do they also cover:

- Calls routed from the UKVI Resolution Centre (0300 790 6268 and +44 (0)203 875 4669)?
- Calls to the EU Settlement Resolution Centre via Grant-Funded Organisations and other organisations who have alternative or priority telephone numbers?

Q2. Does the "calls attempted" figure include the following groups:

- People whose call is answered, and who get into the queue for an agent, but then hang up voluntarily before their call is answered?
- People whose call is answered, but are then automatically disconnected by the EUSRC?

- c. People who get a busy tone, so their call is not answered at all?

Q3. Does the “average wait time” apply only to calls which have successfully connected, or does it also apply to calls where the caller was placed in a queue for connection and then abandoned the call?

Q4. In nine of the twelve months of the data provided, less than 50% of attempted calls were handled. In the crucial months leading up to the 30 June 2021 deadline, on average only 40% of attempted calls were handled.

- a. What processes were in place to monitor and review the number of unhandled calls?
- b. Were there any targets of % of handled calls and if so, what were these targets?
- c. Why was capacity not increased leading up to the 30 June 2021 EUSS deadline?
- d. Was capacity increased in August 2021, and if so - why?
- e. Was capacity reduced after August 2021, and if so - why?
- f. What lessons have been learned from this period and what strategies have been implemented?

Q5. These data also show high average wait times in certain months - for example December 2020 (46 minutes), January 2021 (43 minutes) and May 2021 (40 minutes).

- a. What processes were in place to monitor and review the average wait time?
- b. Were there any targets of average wait time and if so, what were these targets?
- c. Given the above times, what lessons have been learned and what strategies have been implemented to address the call length times?
- d. Is the number of agents dealing with calls kept consistent from month to month and at various times of day?
- e. Do agents work in teams on shifts and if so, what are the shift times?
- f. Is there an overflow system where calls which are unanswered by the core team can be diverted to another team?

Kind regards,

Monique Hawkins

Policy and Research Officer, **the3million**