

INFORMATION SHEET

Biometric Residence Permits for Foreign Nationals – November 2011



Secure Borders and Secure Documents - Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs)

The UK Border Agency is committed to streamlining the documents we issue to evidence a foreign national's immigration status in the UK. Biometric residence permits are secure and robust against forgery and tampering.

These credit card sized immigration documents contain a highly secure embedded chip and incorporate sophisticated security safeguards to combat tampering. The visual and physical security features on BRPs make them easier to check than older immigration documents which are more vulnerable to abuse as they:

- contain the holder's unique biometric identifiers (fingerprints, digital photograph) within the chip; and
- display a photo and biographical information on the face of the document and details of entitlements, such as right to work and/or access public funds.

Completing the rollout in the UK

Biometric residence permits have been issued since 25 November 2008 and are being rolled out on an incremental basis to foreign nationals from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland who are subject to immigration control and given permission to be in the UK for more than six months. To date we have issued just under 600,000 biometric residence permits. Most have been issued to applicants extending their stay in the UK under the points-based system for migration (PBS) as students (PBS Tier 4) or skilled workers (PBS Tier 2).

Subject to Parliamentary approval of draft regulations, the next rollout will incorporate all remaining applicants applying from the UK for permission to stay for more than six months from 29 February 2012. Anyone applying on or after this date in the following categories (in addition to those already rolled out) will need to simultaneously apply for a biometric residence permit and will enrol their fingerprints and digital facial image. This includes:

- those applying for refugee status, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave
- settlement or indefinite leave to remain (ILR)
- temporary leave to remain (LTR) (not already incorporated by earlier phases of the rollout)
- 'No Time Limit' applicants (this is for settled migrants who require evidence of settled status to be re-issued because their vignette is in a lost, stolen or expired passport or they wish to upgrade to a more secure format of document)
- applicants for a Home Office Travel Document (if they do not already hold a valid biometric residence permit)

In addition, anyone given permission to stay in the UK for more than six months on or after 1st December 2012 will be required to obtain a biometric residence permit (if they have not already applied for one). This will ensure that from this date there will only be one type of document issued by the UK Border Agency to those from outside the EEA or Switzerland who are already in the UK and applying to stay for more than six months, making it simpler for employers and others required to check them.

Benefits of biometric residence permits and biometrics

Biometric residence permits assist in the fight against illegal immigration and abuse of the immigration system. Enrolling biometrics enables us to check a person against our records and police fingerprint records before deciding whether to grant their application to be in the UK and to link a person's biographical details to their unique biometric identifiers.

Biometric residence permits:

- help strengthen our borders
- help tackle illegal working and misuse of public funds
- replace older and less secure UK immigration status documents which have been subject to fraud in the past.

For employers and foreign nationals, biometric residence permits:

- make it more straightforward for employers to identify a non-EEA national's right to work in the UK;
- make it easier for non-EEA national workers to demonstrate they are here legally and allowed to take employment or access other entitlements in the UK;
- are easier for migrants to carry around and avoid having to produce other less convenient documents such as passports etc.

The biometric residence permit is not a travel document on its own and therefore will need to be shown alongside a passport at the border. However, the document is acceptable as a standalone document when demonstrating immigration status, identity, right to work and access to public benefits.

Employers

The UK Border Agency recognises obligations placed on employers and the need to support them in meeting these obligations. The multiplicity of documents in circulation has led to confusion. Biometric residence permits lend themselves to a one-stop check of identity, immigration status and 'Right to Work' (RTW) and provide the opportunity for a fast, simple check.

Many employers are concerned about the threat of fraud posed by some employees. The introduction of biometric residence permits, which conform to a secure format that meets very high technical standards to safeguard against counterfeiting and falsification, means an employer can have more confidence in the document presented than other more easily abused formats.

Along with general guidance for employers on preventing illegal working, guidance on checking the security features of the BRP is available to download from the UK Border Agency's website on this page:

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/business-sponsors/preventing-illegal-working/checking-brp.

We recommend that employers and others checking biometric residence permits familiarise themselves with the guidance. By calling the sponsorship and employers helpline on 0300 123 4699, employers can check the validity of a biometric residence permit to ensure it has not been cancelled. However, from spring 2012 we plan to launch a new online checking service to ensure employers and public service providers are able to make quick and easy real time checks on the validity of the permit and the holder's identity and right to work, making it harder for those who wish to work or live here illegally. In time, chip checking services will also be available to provide even greater confidence.

How does a foreign national apply for a biometric residence permit?

When a foreign national makes an immigration application in a category that is covered by the biometric registration regulations, the immigration application form and instructions make it clear they need to apply for a biometric residence permit as part of that process.

Currently, customers can make an appointment to visit one of several Home Office Public Enquiry Offices for us to record their biometrics or they can visit one of 17 Post Office Ltd. pilot enrolment sites. From spring 2012 only premium (same day decision) customers paying the premium fee will be able to use Home Office Public Enquiry Offices. However, the Post Office Ltd. will offer a network of approximately 100 enrolment locations across the UK having won the contract to deliver biometric enrolment services.

Further information

Further information will be communicated to our partners and is available on the UK Border Agency's website at www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk, where updates can be found as our plans develop over the following months.