

# Inspection Report Published: An inspection of ePassport gates

I welcome the publication of this report, which explores the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office ePassport gate operation. This inspection examined the identification of vulnerable passengers at the gates, resourcing, training, the use of data in the operation of the gates, and the impact of the extension of use to B5JSSK nationals.

Border Force has upgraded the gates' operating platform to enable it to connect to Border Crossing, its new watchlist system. A National Audit Office report in December 2020 highlighted issues with the rollout of Border Crossing and noted the risk of disruption at the border should it be unavailable. There have been several outages of the system in the seven months since this report was sent to the Home Secretary and I hope that the root causes have been identified and resolved.

The pressure to process increasing numbers of passengers more quickly means Border Force must balance the risk to the immigration control while delivering its duty to identify and safeguard vulnerable passengers. Training for Border Force staff on how to perform their roles at the gates is limited. Implementation of the recommendations from Border Force's own review of the role designed to identify vulnerable passengers at the gates (roving officers), and the other roles carried out at the gates, was delayed and the opportunity was missed to introduce the recommendations during the period of lower passenger volumes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I made 15 recommendations in this report. I am pleased that the Home Office has accepted or partially accepted 14 of them. I am encouraged to hear that work is already under way to tackle the issues raised and that several recommendations have already been implemented.

The COVID-19 pandemic required Border Force to manage the health measures at the border, which were often introduced at short notice. Border Force has a difficult job to ensure the wellbeing of its staff while maintaining the integrity of the immigration control. I am pleased to note that changes to border systems to automate some health measure border checks at the ePassport gates have been implemented since this inspection was completed.

In common with the EUSS report, I am particularly disappointed that, whilst this report was sent to the Home Secretary in June of last year, it has not been published until today. My predecessor highlighted how this delay challenged his independence and I am similarly concerned, and it is a matter that stakeholders raise with me frequently. In her Windrush Lessons Learned Review, at Recommendation 10, Wendy Williams recommends that the government should review the remit and role of the ICIBI, to include consideration of giving the ICIBI more powers with regard to publishing reports. I look forward to this review.