

John Williams

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FOI Reference: 60363

29 October 2020

Dear Mr. Williams,

Thank you for your enquiry of 15 September in which you requested information on biometrics for ILR applications either through the IDV App or a UKVCAS centre. Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Information Requested

This FOI request has following scope

- ILR Applications
- Made within UK
- Biometric or facial image submitted in August 2020.

1 - Do you hold information whether biometrics / facial image were submitted through IDV App or through UKVCAS service centres appointment?

2 - Can you give details on how many biometrics (Facial Image) submissions were made through IDV App and how many were made through appointment at UKVCAS service centres.

3 - For biometrics submitted through UKVCAS service centre appointment (within above scope), how many of these have had a decision granted by end of business day 14-Sep-2020? Also what was average turnaround time since biometric submission.

4 - For facial image submitted through IDV App (within above scope), how many of these have had a decision granted by end of business day 14-Sep-2020? Also what was average turnaround time since facial image submission.

Response

In relation to your first question, the answer is yes, information is held.

For your second question; up to the date of 6 October 2020 there have been c101,000 facial images submitted through the IDV App. However this is subject to change on a daily basis.

Concerning biometric submissions made through an appointment at a UKVCAS service centre in your second question and also your final two questions; I can confirm the Home Office holds the information you have requested. However, after careful consideration we have concluded that this information for the date you have requested is exempt from disclosure under section 36(2)(c) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This allows for information to be exempt if disclosure would or would likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs. Our arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest test can be found in the below annex.

If you are dissatisfied with this response you may request an independent internal review of our handling of your request by submitting a complaint within two months to foirequests@homeoffice.gov.uk, quoting reference 60363. If you ask for an internal review, it would be helpful if you could say why you are dissatisfied with the response.

As part of any internal review the Department's handling of your information request will be reassessed by staff not involved in providing you with this response. If you remain dissatisfied after this internal review, you would have a right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Yours sincerely

K Wells
Central Operations

We value your feedback, please use the link below to access a brief anonymous survey to help us improve our service to you:
<http://www.homeofficesurveys.homeoffice.gov.uk/s/108105TAZNG>

Annex – Public Interest Test

Some of the exemptions in the FOI Act, referred to as ‘qualified exemptions’, are subject to a public interest test (PIT). This test is used to balance the public interest in disclosure against the public interest in favour of withholding the information, or the considerations for and against the requirement to say whether the information requested is held or not. We must carry out a PIT where we are considering using any of the qualified exemptions in response to a request for information.

The ‘public interest’ is not the same as what interests the public. In carrying out a PIT we consider the greater good or benefit to the community as a whole if the information is released or not. The ‘right to know’ must be balanced against the need to enable effective government and to serve the best interests of the public.

The FOI Act is ‘applicant blind’. This means that we cannot, and do not, ask about the motives of anyone who asks for information. In providing a response to one person, we are expressing a willingness to provide the same response to anyone, including those who might represent a threat to the UK.

Considerations in favour of disclosing the information

It is important that the public have access to immigration statistics. Home Office staff are required to handle requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, not least to assure them that this legislation is being fully implemented.

Considerations in favour of withholding the information

The Department publishes migration statistics quarterly and intends to publish migration statistics for July – September in November of this year. Although the exact breakdown of the information requested will not be published, it will form part of the overall figures. Premature release of the subset of data requested could form part of a series of requests which together could build up a picture of the overall data due to be published. Although it is accepted that you may not necessarily be interested in making subsequent requests, information released to one person under the FOI Act is, in effect, released to the public at large. This would provide an opportunity for others to submit additional requests ahead of the planned publication date in order to obtain the information prematurely.

Conclusions

Premature disclosure of statistics without adhering to established pre-publication procedures (which include internal consultation about the final statistics being published) would undermine the Department’s ability to use its staff resources effectively in a planned way, so that reasonable publication timetables are not affected. We conclude that the overall balance of the public interest lies in favour of withholding the information to ensure that the Home Office is able to publish migration statistics in a managed and coherent way.