Forsters

Major changes are coming to European travel with

The launch of the EU's new Entry/Exit Systems (EES)

The long-awaited digital Entry/Exit System (EES) will track the movements of non-EU nationals entering and leaving the Schengen Area (excluding Ireland and Cyprus), gradually replacing the traditional passport stamping process. It will apply to both visa-exempt travellers and those holding short-stay visas.

Implementation date

The EES will launch on 12 October 2025, followed by a phased rollout across 29 Schengen countries over six months, concluding in April 2026. During this transition, traditional passport checks and manual stamping will continue.

Registration and biometric data

British travellers entering the EU for the first time on or after this date will be required to register at designated self-service kiosks located in airports, ferry terminals, and train stations.

The registration process includes submitting biometric data, including passport information, facial recognition data, and fingerprint scans (note: children under 12 are exempt from fingerprinting). On future trips, travellers must use these kiosks to verify their identity through facial scans and passport checks.

Questions on arrival

Travellers will be required to provide information about their travel plans, including proof of accommodation, sufficient financial means, a return ticket, and valid travel insurance. Although these checks have been there since Brexit, enforcement has been inconsistent. However, starting 12 October 2025, these requirements will be strictly enforced. By automating entry and exit records, the system aims to enhance border security, reduce illegal overstays, and facilitate smoother travel experiences throughout the Schengen Zone.

Data retention

Records are retained for a period of three years following entry or exit. However, if an individual has overstayed beyond the permitted duration, their records will be stored for an extended period of five years to allow for additional monitoring and enforcement measures.

Implications

Longer queues are likely at first, especially at busy airports and ports. However, once registered, future crossings should be quicker. Some concerns have been raised about possible delays during the registration phase, particularly during peak travel times, as travellers adapt to the new system. This is inevitable.

UK departure ports and EU airports

Folkestone

LeShuttle transports nearly ten million passengers annually between Folkestone and Coquelles in northern France, along with approximately 2.2 million passenger vehicles and 1.2 million freight trucks. Approximtely 70% of the travellers in passenger vehicles are British nationals. To accommodate the new EU Entry/Exit System (EES), Eurotunnel has installed 224 automated kiosks at Folkestone, with a similar setup at Coquelles for travellers departing France.

Upon arrival, drivers are directed into designated lanes – those holding EU passports can bypass the EES kiosks entirely. Non-EU travellers proceed to a covered processing area where vehicles are guided into numbered bays, each equipped with two kiosks. At this stage, all occupants must exit the vehicle to complete registration.

At the kiosks, travellers scan their passports and indicate whether they are non-EU citizens and if they require a visa. Individuals holding a European residence permit or long-stay visa are exempt from completing the EES process. Facial recognition and fingerprint scans are then taken (a firm press is recommended for accurate fingerprint capture). Once registration is complete, travellers continue to a French border control officer who verifies the passport and cross-checks the EES data.

St Pancras International

At Eurostar's London terminal, 49 EES kiosks are strategically located in three areas: adjacent to the ticket office in the departure zone, near the Thameslink platforms, and on the upper concourse. Additionally, Gare du Nord in Paris is equipped with 18 kiosks.

Starting 12 October, only business-class passengers and frequent Eurostar travelers will be required to complete the EES registration. The process will be extended to all other passengers beginning 12 January 2026, although Eurostar has indicated that registration will be available for all travellers during quieter periods. To manage congestion, the system can be temporarily disabled as a "fire break" if the St Pancras terminal becomes overcrowded during peak times. Eurostar advises passengers to maintain the current recommendation of arriving 75 minutes prior to departure, with staff available to guide travellers to the kiosks.

The registration procedure at Eurostar mirrors that at Folkestone: passengers scan their passports, confirm their EU status, and submit biometric data. However, Eurostar requires passengers to respond to questions about their accommodation, return travel plans, financial means, and insurance coverage. Respondents can select "Yes," "No," or "Don't know" for each query but are cautioned that their answers are legally binding and that they may be asked to provide supporting documentation.

Passengers who do not answer "Yes" to all questions will be unable to access the automated European border e-gates in the Eurostar departure hall. Instead, they will be directed to a French border officer for additional questioning, though this does not necessarily result in denial of entry. The EU has clarified that medical insurance is not mandatory, as many UK travellers will continue to rely on their UK Global Health Insurance Card for coverage during their stay in Europe.

Dover

The system at Dover will function similarly to the procedures in place at Folkestone and St Pancras. It remains uncertain whether ferry passengers departing from Dover will be required to respond to the four standard questions.

EU airports

At European airports, EES registration typically occurs upon arrival rather than at the point of departure. This process is usually conducted via self-service kiosks; however, at smaller airports, registration may take place at immigration desks where biometric data, including fingerprints and facial scans, can be collected.

Be prepared

▶ Ensure you arrive well in advance for your first journey after 12 October.

▶ Carry all necessary supporting documentation, such as proof of accommodation and return travel arrangements.

▶ Remain informed by consulting official updates from EU and national border authorities.

How we can help

If you need tailored immigration advice, our team of experts is here to help. We work with both employers and individuals across the whole spectrum of immigration needs, taking a pragmatic and sensitive approach to make the process as smooth and swift as possible. Get in touch with one of our team to find out how these latest announcements will impact you or your workforce.

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