# British travellers face longer waits despite government claims over new EU e-gates



British travellers heading to Europe now find themselves at the centre of a narrative promoted by government officials that asserts their travel experience has significantly improved since the UK’s exit from the European Union. This narrative is largely hinged on the introduction of e-gates at various airports, which are heralded as a technological leap forward that promises to streamline the border crossing process for British citizens. However, the actual experience many holidaymakers have reported suggests a more complex reality.

Since the 2016 Brexit referendum, the UK has effectively transitioned to the status of a “third-country national,” a classification that changes the nature of travel for its citizens within the EU. E-gates are efficient at processing traveller identities by comparing facial recognition data against the information stored in their passports, thereby expediting border checks. Yet the introduction of these systems for British citizens carries both advantages and notable drawbacks, particularly in light of the recent challenges faced during peak travel seasons.

Recent reports have highlighted chaotic scenes at airports, with some families enduring waits of over two hours to clear customs at popular destinations like Tenerife and Faro. This frustration stems partly from the need for British passports to be both stamped upon entry and verified by human border staff, necessitating an extra layer of checks that significantly prolongs the process. In fact, the operational mechanics require that, even with e-gate access, families travelling with children cannot use these gates, and all British passports must ultimately go through a physical check with a border guard.

Government statements have touted the implementation of e-gates in Faro as a boon for approximately 10 million British visitors annually; yet, this figure has been contested. Critiques indicate that this number is inflated, with more realistic estimates suggesting around 2.5 million UK citizens visit Portugal each year, amounting to about 5 million total border crossings when considering arrivals and departures. Political leaders, including Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, are keen to tout these advancements, yet skeptics argue that the UK’s role in the development of e-gates has been overstated. As reported, EU officials assert that no legal barriers were previously in place for the UK’s integration into this e-gate scheme.

Furthermore, the broader context reveals that the advent of e-gates is part of a wider EU initiative known as the Entry/Exit System (EES), set to launch in October 2025. This system, which will include biometric checks, promises to streamline border crossings for all non-EU citizens, including Britons. However, successful adoption hinges significantly on each EU member state's individual implementation, and thus far there have been no guarantees regarding the efficiency or speed of border processes.

In tandem to the introduction of e-gates, the UK government is preparing for the new EES with a financial commitment of £10.5 million to modernise its ports and facilities, aiming to enhance the travel experience for British citizens. This funding focuses on necessary technology upgrades and staff training to facilitate smoother entry into EU nations.

Notably, the travel relationship is reciprocal; with new rules requiring Europeans to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) to enter the UK from April 2025, underscoring the ongoing adjustments both sides are making post-Brexit. The government hopes that improved relations with EU counterparts will enable further concessions, yet the real question remains whether improvements will actually materialise at the airports during busy holiday seasons.

As the travel industry braces for the summer crowds, it remains unclear whether e-gates alone will ease the burden on British holidaymakers. With criticism from both sides of the Channel over the practical implications of these changes, it appears there is still much to address in the ongoing evolution of cross-border travel for UK citizens in a post-Brexit world.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/egates-travel-europe-uk-government-passport-b2765092.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/84273450-b30b-406d-b0eb-fb267a165656)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/egates-travel-europe-uk-government-passport-b2765092.html), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-spend-105-million-pounds-prepare-ports-new-eu-border-checks-2024-08-27/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/84273450-b30b-406d-b0eb-fb267a165656), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/04/25/rishi-sunak-deal-eu-passport-e-gates-british-tourists/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk/european-entry-exit-scheme/), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/apr/25/rishi-sunak-eyes-deal-to-allow-uk-passport-holders-to-use-e-gates-at-eu-airports)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/egates-travel-europe-uk-government-passport-b2765092.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/84273450-b30b-406d-b0eb-fb267a165656> - The UK government's recent claim of a major post-Brexit travel breakthrough, allowing Britons to use electronic passport gates (e-gates) in the EU, has been downplayed as this development was already part of a broader EU border reform. The Entry/Exit System (EES), a long-planned EU initiative set to launch in October 2025, will permit all non-EU nationals, including UK citizens, to use e-gates at participating airports, provided they are registered with biometric data. While Downing Street promoted the e-gate access as a result of their new agreement with the EU, officials confirmed that there were never any legal barriers to UK participation. The agreement also includes provisions for easing food exports and extends EU fishing rights in UK waters by 12 years. However, the use of e-gates will depend on each EU member state’s implementation, and some within the EU cautioned against overstating the UK's role in the development. Critics have suggested the UK government is overstating its achievements, while EU officials affirm that the real progress will depend on how individual member states adopt the new border systems.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-spend-105-million-pounds-prepare-ports-new-eu-border-checks-2024-08-27/> - Britain will invest 10.5 million pounds ($13.9 million) to prepare its ports for the European Union’s (EU) new post-Brexit security checks for UK nationals entering the EU, aiming to minimize queuing and disruptions. The funding will help ports adopt necessary technology, install kiosks, and train staff for the upcoming entry and exit system (EES), which requires biometric checks like face scans and fingerprints linking travel documents to individuals. This system will go live in the autumn, digitally recording the identity of travellers from non-EU countries. The UK government acknowledged earlier this year that the country was not sufficiently prepared for these changes and funding is being directed to key entry points including Dover, Eurotunnel at Folkestone, and Eurostar at St Pancras station.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-imposes-new-travel-permit-requirement-europeans-2025-04-01/> - Starting Wednesday, European visitors to Britain must purchase an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) online, priced at 10 pounds (12 euros), increasing to 16 pounds from April 9. Irish citizens are exempt from this rule. The ETA scheme, initially introduced for non-European nationals such as Americans, Canadians, and Australians, aims to enhance immigration security by pre-screening travelers before they enter the UK. Applications are processed via the UK ETA app, with most receiving an automatic decision swiftly. An approved ETA, linked digitally to the passport, permits multiple UK visits of up to six months over two years. Transportation companies will verify travelers' ETA status before boarding. Despite this new requirement, budget airline easyJet expects demand for UK travel to remain steady. This change follows similar post-Brexit EU measures, including the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the upcoming European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS).
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/04/25/rishi-sunak-deal-eu-passport-e-gates-british-tourists/> - Downing Street is set to urge European Union countries to open passport e-gates to British tourists to avoid further scenes of chaos at European ports. Sources said the Government would encourage other member states to follow Spain and Portugal in allowing UK holidaymakers to use e-gates when travelling to the bloc. Rishi Sunak is understood to be keen to build on the success of the Windsor Framework and the improved relations with Brussels to secure less burdensome travel to Europe for Britons. “We always want to look at ways to minimise unnecessary waiting times, whether it is coming into the UK or travelling overseas,” the Prime Minister’s official spokesman said. Mr Sunak could raise the plan with Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission’s president, when they meet at the G7 summit in Japan next month.
6. <https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk/european-entry-exit-scheme/> - The European Entry/Exit System (EES) is a new system that will make border checks in the Schengen area more secure. EES is expected to start in October 2025. It is currently not in operation. The European Union will inform about the specific start date of the EES prior to its launch. If you are travelling to a country in the Schengen area using a UK passport, you will be required to register your biometric details, such as fingerprints or a photo, when you arrive. EES registration will replace the current system of manually stamping passports when visitors arrive in the EU. When EES is introduced, you will need to create a digital record on your first visit to the Schengen area at the port or airport on arrival. You will be required to submit your fingerprints and have your photo taken at dedicated kiosks. You will not need to provide any information before travelling to a Schengen area country. Your digital record is valid for 3 years. If you enter the Schengen area again during this time, you will only need to provide a fingerprint or photo at the border, when you enter and exit.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/apr/25/rishi-sunak-eyes-deal-to-allow-uk-passport-holders-to-use-e-gates-at-eu-airports> - Rishi Sunak is seeking to capitalise on his improved relations with the EU with hopes of an agreement to allow British passport holders to use e-gates when travelling in the bloc. Bloomberg News reported on Tuesday that British diplomats had raised the issue informally. A potential discussion was foreseen on the sidelines of a meeting in Japan the prime minister and the European Commission chief, Ursula von der Leyen, will attend in June. Rishi Sunak’s official spokesperson said later: “We are working closely with the European Commission and member states to understand the impacts of the introduction of the entry exit system for British citizens, and our priority is always to minimise unnecessary delays for British passengers.” Such a deal would help ease passport queues at airports but do little to speed up border crossing checks at Dover or Folkestone, where travellers have endured long delays to catch ferries.