

NO2ID Public Information: Passports

Advice for British citizens living abroad

The UK government has chosen to link the introduction of ID cards and a National Identity Register to the renewal of passports. This could raise particular issues for British citizens living abroad. Some options are set out below. They are intended to assist you in reaching an individual decision. To the best of our knowledge, all the information is correct at the time of writing. However, the situation may change soon.

The Identity Cards Act 2006 in the UK permits the Home Office to turn passports into a “designated document” for the ID scheme. Interrogation and fingerprinting centres are now being opened across the UK and will soon start processing first-time passport applicants. In the near future, the new United Kingdom Identity & Passport Service (UKIPS) will also refuse to renew existing passports inside the UK unless applicants attend an official interview and agree to be fingerprinted and give a wide range of personal information for a new database, the National Identity Register (NIR). At the same time, they will be offered a national ID card. Whether applicants accept the card or not, their biometrics (including fingerprints) and other details will go on to the NIR and will remain there for as long as it exists.

The biometric ID cards and the register to be introduced in the UK are considerably more intrusive than those used so far in other countries. Records of card use will rapidly build up an “audit trail” on each individual within the NIR. The police, immigration services, security services and other public officials will have full or partial access to the database. Citizens will have no right to information about when their file is consulted, and by whom. The Home Secretary will have the right to cancel an ID card without notice or explanation.

British passports can be renewed at any time, even if there are more than 9 months to run before their expiry date. Hence the **Renew for Freedom** campaign (www.renewforfreedom.org), which is recommending that UK citizens renew their passports **before** the “designated document” provisions start to take effect. This is a perfectly legal option, suggested by the former Home Secretary himself.

An enquiry to a British consular section at the end of April 2006 brought the reply that “we are issuing biometric passports now and photograph requirements are therefore very strict”. This use of the word “biometric” is confusing. Anyone renewing their

passport **now** will not be fingerprinted, nor will their iris be scanned, nor will they be enrolled on the NIR. But the “renewed” passport will in fact be a completely new one, a so-called ePassport with a chip containing the photo, facial measurements and other data. The old passport will be cancelled and returned.

Early renewal does, of course, imply some financial cost if it is assumed that the price of a passport will remain constant in future. However, all the indications are that the price will rise substantially as soon as passports are linked to ID cards and the NIR.

2010 could be the make or break year for the ID scheme, as it is the latest possible date for the next general election in the UK. Labour, under its current leadership, is committed to making the cards and the register compulsory if it wins a further term. All other significant political parties have pledged to abolish the scheme.

Bearing that in mind, here is **NO2ID’s advice to UK citizens living abroad:**

- **If you have less than 5 years left on your passport - renew now.**
- **If you need to visit the United States - renew now and get an ePassport (required from October 2006).**
- **If you don’t need to visit the US and your passport has 8+ years to run, and you don’t want an ePassport – it’s probably not worth renewing now.**
- **If you have 5+ years on your passport and you do not want an ePassport - then there is an argument for not renewing now.**
- **If you have 5+ years on your passport and you don’t mind getting an ePassport - renew now.**

For those who may be entitled to an Irish passport, it is worth noting that the Irish government has decided not to issue ID cards.

NO2ID (www.no2id.net) is the UK campaign against ID cards and the National Identity Register. It is not affiliated to any political party and is funded almost entirely by voluntary donations. Contact for UK citizens living abroad: expats@no2id.net

www.no2id.net <http://no2id-expats.chown.ch>

renew for freedom