



Home Office

Retention of valuable documents

Version 9.0

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About this guidance

This guidance explains what to do with valuable documents where a person is liable to removal.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email:

- the Enforcement Policy team, for general enquiries
- European migration policy for queries relating to European cases

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **9.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **31 July 2024**

Changes from last version of this guidance

- re-formatted guidance
- CID updates replaced by Atlas
- amended [Voluntary Returns Service \(VRS\) section](#)
- deletion of European Economic Area (EEA) section as redundant
- updated links to other relevant guidance

Related content

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[Examples of valuable documents](#)

Immigration record management guidance

RMS quick reference guide- Valuable Document Envelopes

Power to retain valuable documents

[Section 17 of the Asylum & Immigration \(Treatment of Claimants etc\) Act 2004](#) gives the power to retain documents, such as a passport, where the Secretary of State or an immigration officer suspects a migrant is liable to removal and the retention of the document may facilitate removal.

The 2004 Act does not allow for the indefinite retention of documents. Where a person is later granted leave, in whatever capacity, the document must be returned to the holder unless it is a forgery, in which case it must be sent to the National Document Fraud Unit (NDFU) at Status Park.

Where a valid passport is retained and removal could take place on that passport it is not necessary to retain original copies of other valuable documents, although you must retain photocopies of them. It is necessary to retain original documents however, where they may be needed to effect the removal of a spouse or child of the individual.

This applies if:

- the individual is unlawfully present in the UK, for example, an overstayer or illegal entrant
- the individual has been refused asylum or humanitarian protection and has no other basis of stay in the UK
- the individual has been refused leave to remain whether or not they have a right of appeal in the UK (unless they have an existing period of leave, other than under 3C or 3D of the [Immigration Act 1971](#))
- leave to enter or remain has been cancelled with the result that the individual has no outstanding leave, if you cancel leave to 60 days you must return the valuable documents because the individual still has valid leave to remain

You must [update Atlas](#) to show that documents are held and where they are stored.

Retention of original documents and copies of documents

The following are specific examples of when original documents or copies of documents need to be retained.

Official – sensitive: start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: end of section

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Examples of valuable documents

This page lists examples of valuable documents.

This list is not exhaustive and other identity documents can be retained under the same powers.

Document type
Affidavits
Adoption papers
Biometric residence permit (BRP)
Birth Certificate
Certificate of citizenship
Civil partnership certificates
Death certificates
Entry Clearance Certificate
Educational Certificate
Marriage Certificate
Military discharge certificates
Maritime discharge certificates/books
Medical certificate
Police Registration Certificate
Seaman's Discharge Certificate
Chicago Convention Letter
London Convention Letter
Curriculum Vitae (CV)
1951 Stateless Document
Court or legal document
Divorce documents
Immigration status documents (ISD)
Non-UK Asylum Decision Document
GV3
ID card
Employment ID
Military ID documents
National ID card
Non-UK Asylum ID Document
Student ID
Driving licence
Pilots licence
Laissez Passer
National Insurance Card
Property deeds

Document type
Police reports
Passport
Personal Child Health Record ('Red Book')
Seaman's Book
1951 Convention Travel Document
1954 Convention Travel Document
Carrier's Copy Of Travel Document
Emergency Travel Document
Non 1951 Convention Travel Document
Stateless Travel Document
Vignette
Visa
Work Permit
Wage Slip

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Safeguarding valuable documents that facilitate removal

Transfer of passports and valuable documents

This page tells you how to transfer passports and valuable documents.

When you retain documents, or when an active record is sent to off-site storage (because a decision cannot be made), you must put all relevant valuable documents in a valuable document envelope (VDE) before you track it using the record management system (RMS). Refer to the Safeguarding valuable documents that facilitate removal for details of those documents that must go in a VDE and which must go on file.

You must not transfer a passport or valuable document from one part of the business to another without a full explanation for the move and attaching relevant information so it is clear who the document relates to. This must include full name, file number and date of birth.

You must:

- use a valuable document envelope (VDE) to transport the documents
- record the transfer on the record management system (RMS)
- update the checks on Atlas, CRS or legacy CID

For more information see:

- Immigration record management guidance
- RMS quick reference guide- searching for immigration records
- RMS quick reference guide- Valuable Document Envelopes
- [Updating Atlas](#)

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Updating Atlas

This page tells you how to update Atlas when you retain valuable documents.

If you retain documents, you must complete the 'Identity Documents and other references' section found in the biographic strap on the left-hand side of the Person Summary View (PSV) screen in Atlas.

Under the Identity Document section select 'Add document' and complete the details as appropriate on each of the next screens and then upload a copy of the document. Proceed to complete the further details about the document in the next screens.

When confirming if the document is in the possession of the Home Office, you will be able to say whether it is stored in a Valuable Document Envelope (VDE) or not. VDEs must only be used for the retention of valuable documents that facilitate a removal in accordance with Safeguarding valuable documents that facilitate removal guidance and specifically the documents listed in that guidance. See this guidance for details of how other valuable documents can be stored. If it is in a VDE, then the Record Management System reference (RMS) can be added. There is no need to record the location as RMS should be used to get this information.

If for any reason it is not in a VDE (this should be by exception) then you can record the location from the list presented. When a valuable document is stored in a local passport or document bank you must make sure documents are logged in and out correctly.

When a new person is created in Atlas, you must add any documentation and its location onto the system immediately.

If this document confirms a change of personal details for the individual, then you can replace the main personal details when recording this document by selecting 'Yes' when the question is asked. This means the name on the biographic strap will be updated and the previous details listed as an alias on the personal details screen.

You will then be able to review all the information before completing the recording of this document.

Moving documents

When a document in a VDE is moved nothing needs to be recorded in Atlas as RMS does this using barcode tracking. Refer to the specific guidance and instructions on the transit of VDEs and the use of RMS in the Safeguarding valuable documents that facilitate removal guidance.

If it is not in a VDE, you must update the document on Atlas when the location changes. You should view the document within the 'Identity Documents and other references' service and select 'Update' and then 'Possession and location of document'.

Returning documents

If a document needs to be returned to the holder or their representative because they have been granted leave or wish to make a voluntary departure you must do so in line with local instructions.

You must update the possession and location of the Atlas document previously recorded completing each screen appropriately using 'Identity documents and reference numbers,' view it and then 'Update' where you will choose the option to update 'Possession and location of document.'

Where an individual requires their documentation to return voluntarily and they do not hold extant leave, you must refer the applicant to the Voluntary Returns Service (VRS) (please see [VRS section](#), which has specific instructions relating to the VRS service).

If there are exceptional reasons to process a voluntary return without referring to VRS, the following applies. Where there are no reasons to doubt the individual genuinely intends to travel and the individual has produced proof that travel tickets have been purchased for a specific date of travel, you must send the passport to the port of departure and notify the migrant of the contact details and arrangements for collecting their passport at the point of departure. Documents will not normally be returned to the individual or their representative in other circumstances unless the individual clearly demonstrates all of the following:

- they require the documentation to return voluntarily:
 - there are no reasons to doubt that the individual genuinely intends to travel
 - the individual has produced proof that travel tickets have been purchased for a specific date of travel
 - there is not enough time to arrange to send the passport to the relevant port to oversee the departure
- there are other exceptional reasons why the documentation should be returned

Where documents are returned, either to port or directly to the migrant or their representative, you must take a copy of the passport and place this on the migrant's file/ensure it is uploaded to Atlas.

If you receive a request for a document to be returned for any other reason, you must tell the holder this is not possible, but the Home Office can provide them with a certified copy. There is no agreed standard wording for this certification, but it is advised it should include the fact the Home Office is holding the document and contact details in case a third party such as a bank wishes to confirm this fact.

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Voluntary Returns Service: returning documents

This page tells you about the process to follow when a person liable to removal advises the Home Office that they wish to leave the UK via Voluntary Returns Service (VRS).

It is important to carefully manage and monitor the departure of people who indicate they wish to leave the UK voluntarily to make sure the:

- individual is liable to removal
- individual is not making the request to gain possession of documents held by the Home Office (possibly to destroy them) that could eventually facilitate their removal, should it be decided to enforce their departure from the UK
- departure is properly recorded so can be counted towards published migration statistics
- resources are not wasted on support costs, considering applications and appeals and progressing removal action for people who are no longer in the UK

If an individual does not choose to leave the UK voluntarily, their case will be managed by the relevant case working unit, who will consider tasking for enforcement action.

Where the individual has an outstanding application or appeal lodged you must get a disclaimer signed by the person withdrawing all outstanding applications and appeals. If the applicant has an outstanding appeal or judicial review you must tell them to contact the relevant department this is lodged with and withdraw the claim before leaving the UK. This is done by form IS.101 or via submitting an online VRS application form. A 101 must be signed by every 18 or over individual, the online form will only count for the main applicant.

Required documentation

A voluntary return cannot take place without a valid travel document. If the person's passport is held by the Home Office or by the applicant, you must make every effort to effect return on this document. Initial checks should be made on RMS for a document. If nothing can be located checks must be made on Atlas, CRS or legacy CID and any Home Office or port file for a travel document or evidence to support an application for a document or that is required as supporting evidence with an UK Letter (UKL).

The Voluntary Returns Service will process all voluntary returns, if you are contacted by an individual refer them to this team who will action the return.

If there is a valid travel document, or the nationality of the person is such that they can be removed on a UKL, arrangements can be made for their return. If not, the

applicant must be advised to apply for a travel document at their high commission or embassy if they are able to, or VRS can provide support.

If the individual has no valid travel document, cannot be removed on a UKL and says they cannot make an application themselves to their embassy or high commission, the Voluntary Returns Service will try to support them, or look at other options which may include enforced return if they are not engaging with the process.

Returning documents

Since COVID, VRS have been returning documents directly to applicants unless there are reasons to suggest the individual will not depart the UK (Self-funded and public expense). VRS will ask port to return the document airside in the following circumstances:

- due to time factors, it is quicker to return the document via port
- the applicant does not have a secure address where to send the document, and this is therefore returned at port
- after a risk assessment, it is decided the document should be returned to port due to criminality or doubt over the genuineness of the return

VRS may also return a document to a migrant so they can obtain a visa to return to another country, a copy of the document must be confirmed as held by the Home Office prior to doing so (such as CRS copy, C&E card)

If an applicant requires their original passport to apply for an emergency travel document, a copy and VRS letter to take to the embassy should be provided to the applicant where possible. On request of the embassy or high commission, the original can be directly returned to them in order to issue a travel document.

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