

UK Electronic Travel Authorization - The BizAv Guide

PnrGo & The OPSGROUP Team

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Key Points

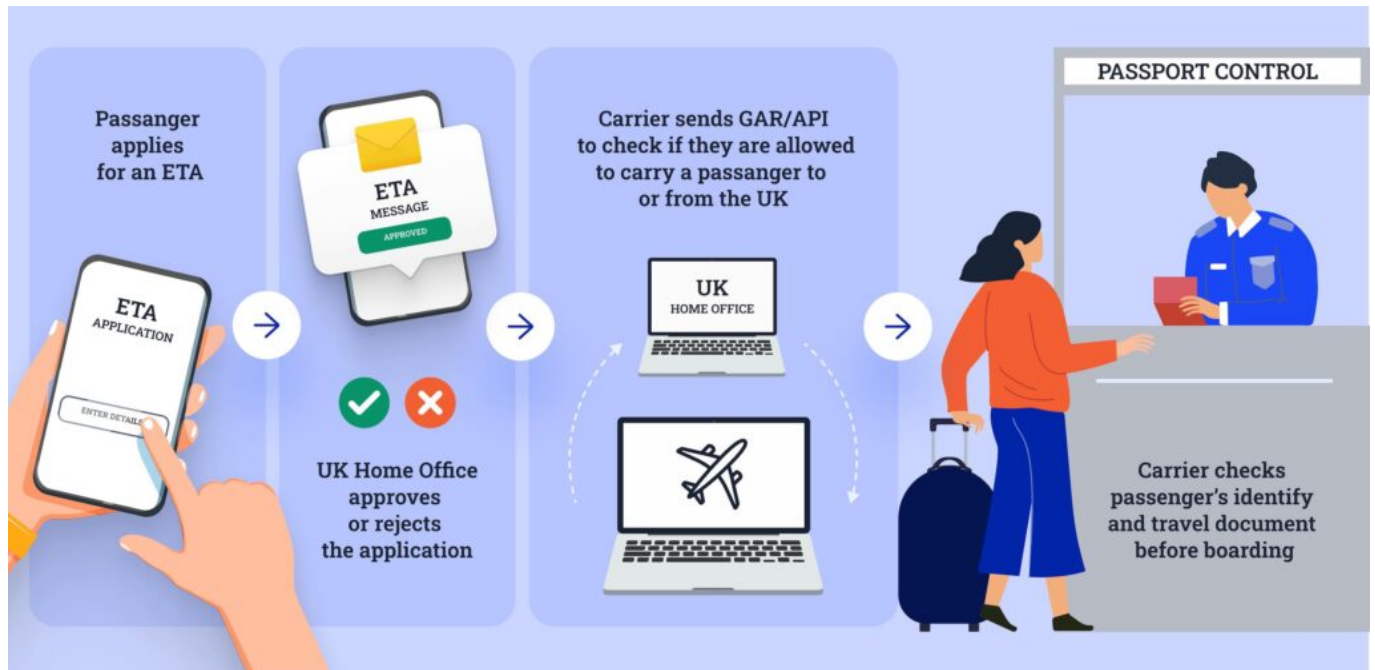
- **The UK is bringing in an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme for passengers, much like the US ESTA.**
- **It started in Nov 2023 for travellers from Qatar. It then applied to travellers from more Gulf states from Feb 2024. Nationals from a long list of countries (includes the US) will be able to use this from 8 Jan 2025. Then there's another list (pretty much everywhere in Europe) who can use this from 2 April 2025 (can apply from March 5).**

The UK will be implementing its Universal Permission to Travel (UPT) scheme in 2025. Under a new Carrier Liability Scheme, operators will be obliged to check immigration permissions for non-visa nationals (in addition to visa nationals). This will affect both GAR and API submissions.

With ESTA in the States, eTA in Canada, and ETIAS coming soon in the European Union, the introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisation in the United Kingdom comes as no surprise. What does ETA mean and how can operators prepare for the upcoming changes?

Part of the bigger picture: Universal Permission to Travel

ETA is a digital record linked to a person's passport (valid for 2 years, or less if the passport expires). It is being introduced as part of a broader scheme called Universal Permission to Travel. The general aim of UPT is to strengthen the UK border security by ensuring that **all travellers have a valid travel permission in advance**. The plan is for the majority of these permissions to become **digital-only** in the future (e.g. e-visas). This way, operators will be able to check and confirm a passenger's permission prior to travel. This will reduce the number of people denied entry at the border, and the associated detention and removal costs (which operators need to bear).



Who and when: The scope of the UK ETA

In general, the UK ETA applies to **visa-exempt passengers and those who do not have a UK immigration status**. There will be some limited exceptions for those who cannot be required to hold a permission, e.g. diplomats.

ETA will not be required for people with either:

- a British or Irish passport;
- permission to live, work, or study in the UK;
- a visa to enter the UK.

People living in Ireland who are not Irish citizens will only be exempt if: they are legally resident in Ireland, do not need a visa to enter the UK, AND they are entering the UK via the Common Travel Area. All three conditions must be met.

It's worth noting that **ETA is also required for passengers transiting through the UK**.

The launch of ETA will happen in phases:

1. **From 15 Nov 2023:** the nationals of Qatar.
2. **From 22 Feb 2024:** the nationals of Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.
3. **8 Jan 2025:** loads more nationalities – basically all of the world except Europe.
4. **2 April 2025 (can apply from March 5):** pretty much all of Europe.

You can see the full lists of nationalities here.

Travellers can apply for the ETA here. Expect a confirmation within 3 working days, often quicker. The cost is £10. The ETA is valid for two years, and can be used for multiple visits, but if you get a new passport within that time then you'll need to apply for a new ETA.

There are some nationalities who won't be able to apply for the ETA. The ETA scheme is broadly for visitors who do not need a visa for short stays to the UK. Travellers who currently need a visa will most likely continue to need one when the scheme goes live.

New ETA: What does it mean for operators?

The introduction of ETA has affected the Authority to Carry regulations, which constitute the UK's "no fly" scheme. **Travellers who are refused an ETA, as well as those whose ETA gets cancelled, are now included on the list of people whom operators cannot carry to or from the UK.**

An operators may get fined (up to a max of £50,000!) when:

- they do not check if they can carry a person;
- they carry a person who has no valid permission to travel.

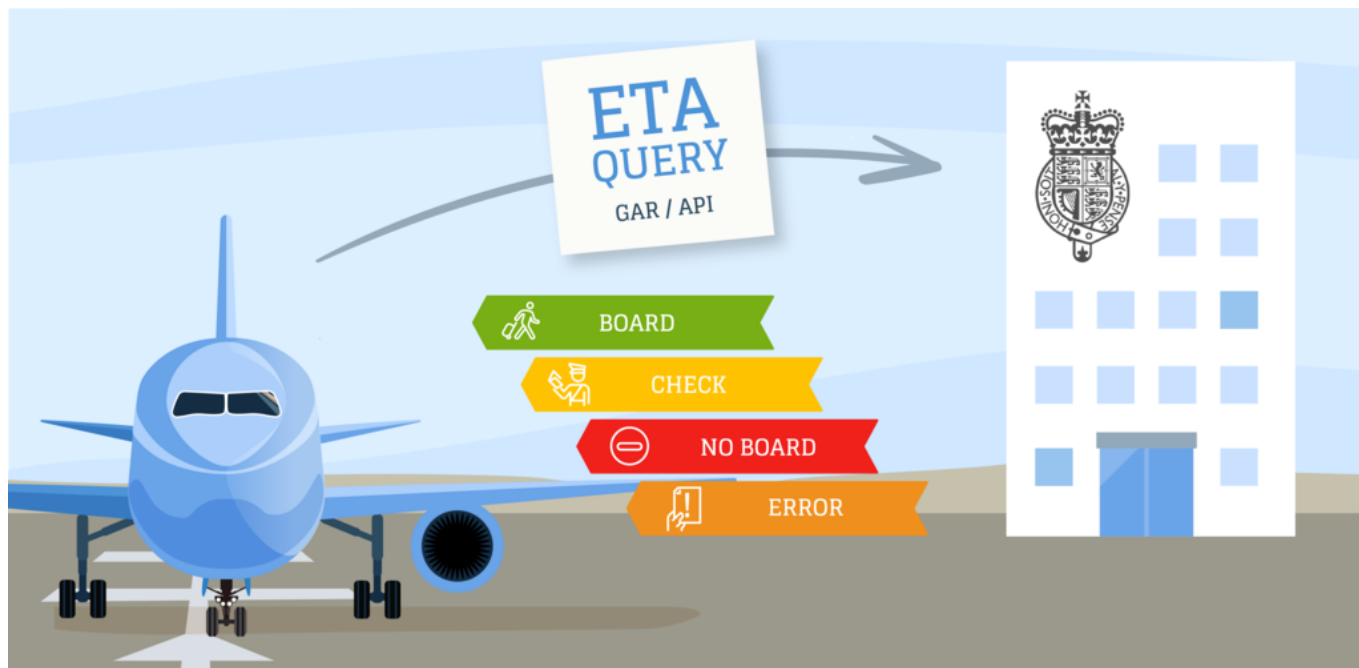
This means that operators will need to send their API data in an 'interactive' way in order to check the ETA status (the submissions will trigger a response from the Home Office). There are different ways to meet this requirement (depending on the type of operation and terminal type):

- submitting GAR data manually via the sGAR web-portal;
- submitting API data from DCS via the UK iAPI system;
- requesting a third-party (e.g. your Ground Handler / FBO / Data Provider) to submit the data on your behalf.

ETA status check: Four possible outcomes

Regardless of the submission method, there will be four basic results (board / check / no board / error), with additional codes or descriptions for operators to know what needs to be done:

- **BOARD:** A valid permission to travel has been found. Once the identity and passport / travel document check is completed, the passenger can board the plane.
- **CHECK:** There is no record of a valid permission to travel. The operator has to conduct a manual check of immigration or exemption documents as well as identity checks. If the check is satisfactory, the passenger may board.
- **NO BOARD:** The permission to carry is refused. The person must not board the plane. Carrying such a passenger entails a risk of a civil penalty.
- **ERROR:** The permission to travel cannot be confirmed due to some missing data. The operator should correct the data, resend it, and wait for the check result.



What are operators expected to do now?

Passenger scenario	Action for the operator
Passenger has a Visa or Biometric Resident's Permit	Verify the visa or check the validity of the Biometric Resident's Permit (a valid visa or Biometric Resident's Permit is still recognized as a travel permission, just like ETA)
Passenger has an ETA	OK to board
Passenger is still waiting for their ETA application to be approved	OK to board
Passenger did not apply for an ETA	Ask them to apply before boarding
Passenger/UK confirms that the ETA has been rejected or cancelled	Do NOT board

It is also important to know that operators **must continue to check the passenger's identity and travel document** (ETA changes do not affect these checks in any way).

Does this all apply to Private Flights too?

Yes. The scheme applies to all operators – including General Aviation.

Do flight crew need an ETA?

No, not for most flights. We asked the UK authorities this question, and they said:

- Crew who arrive and depart by aircraft as operational crew within seven days of arrival will not require an ETA.
- Crew who are arriving in the UK as deadheading or positioning crew do not qualify for this exemption – they will need an ETA. However, the UK does operate a concession for deadhead and positioning visa national crew leaving by 23:59 the day after their arrival.

Another thing to watch out for if flying to the UK with ground crew or engineers on board who are intending

to work airside. These staff are **not allowed to enter as crew on a gendec** – you must get a work permit for them 48hrs in advance. The only alternative is to apply to the UK Border Force to make an exception, in which case you need to fill out this form and email it to them.

What about the UK GAR rules?

Effective 6 April 2024, there were some big changes to the UK's General Aviation Report (GAR) submission for international GA flights:

- The GAR form is now **required for departures** (not just arrivals).
- If you get it wrong, **you can now get fined** up to £10,000 (there were no fines before).
- You have to submit it via an **online portal**, or through your handler, (no longer directly to UK Border Force via email).
- And after you submit it, you will get a response telling you whether that crew/pax is allowed to travel (you will still need to check their passport/visa/travel docs etc).

More info on these new GAR rules can be found [here](#).

Thanks to PnrGO for help with this article! If you're flying to the UK and are impacted by these changes, you can contact PnrGO if you'd like to save yourself some UPT/ETA/GAR/API related misery – they have some tech that lets you do all of this automatically. [Click here](#) for more info.