WINDRUSH SPURS ID CARD CALL

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DEBATE: Critics of the ID card proposal say it would not help migrants who came to Britain decades ago, such as the Windrush generation

THE immigration scandal which led to the resignation last week of Amber Rudd as Britain's home secretary and sparked anger over the treatment of some migrants has reignited another debate – that of national identity cards.

Rudd quit last Sunday (29) after admitting she "inadvertently misled" parliament by denying the government had targets for the number of illegal migrants it deports.

Ministers have struggled for weeks to explain why some descendants of the Windrush generation, who were invited to Britain from former colonial Caribbean nations to plug labour shortfalls between 1948 and 1971, were denied basic rights.

The issue has put a multi-billion pound identity card scheme back into the spotlight and re-ignited a debate over the documentation required to prove one's identity.

"Biometric cards remain the best way to prove and so protect a citizen's identity, which is why most major European countries have them," former home secretaries

They said the policy would help cement the status of thousands of undocumented British citizens and was needed to ensure the rights of EU nationals living in the UK ahead of Brexit next year.

Their proposal had support from a senior Labour politician. Appearing on a BBC programme on Monday (30), Labour MP and shadow international trade minister Barry Gardiner said: "You need to have a system that can establish who is here legally."

Asked by *Newsnight* if he supported ID cards, the MP who represents Brent North in Greater London, said: "It was a policy the Labour Party had in 2009."

He cautioned that some Asian migrants, who had left Gujarat in India and migrated to Africa before arriving in Britain, could also be caught up in the row over having the right paperwork.

Britain scrapped a proposal to introduce identity cards in 2011, but still has a biometric residence permit system for foreign nationals looking to stay over six months, or settle permanently, in Britain.

Yet critics argue the system, only a decade old, is not helpful for migrants who came to Britain before then.

"The Windrush generation issues have shown us sometimes, even when a person does have the legal right to be in the UK, they can struggle to prove it when applying for residence documents," said Madeleine Sumption, director of the Migration Observatory at Oxford University.

"Getting an ID card would be dependent on this too – so ID cards would not necessarily solve the problems some Commonwealth migrants have faced in the UK, like access to (health services)," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Others agree, such as the group NO2ID which has opposed the policy from the start. They said introducing such cards would not resolve the key issue of the amount of

Tetiana Bersheda, founder of online legal advice platform LexSnap, said Britain should consider using resources which are currently available, such as electricity bills, as proof of residence, and less expensive tools such as digital databases.

The biometric residence permit card scheme was one of the world's most ambitious biometric projects when launched. It raised eyebrows for the amount of personal data required, including personal details, fingerprints and a facial image.

Other governments have since introduced similar identity systems, like India's national identity Aadhaar project.

In a bid to crackdown on fraudulent documents, the European Commission proposed earlier in April that identity cards held by EU citizens should include digital images of fingerprints. *(Thomson Reuters Foundation)*

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