



Home Office

Home Secretary

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Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
Chair, Home Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

15 June 2020

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letters of 12 and 22 May 2020 regarding frontline health and social care workers, general visa extensions due to international travel restrictions and the ONS figures published last month.

As you note, the initial broader visa extension was introduced on 24 March and was in place until 31 May. Since then, due to reduced travel capacity across the globe, we recognised it was unlikely that people would be able to leave the UK by 31 May, even if they intended to do so. As such, we have extended this offer until the end of July and over 15,000 individuals have benefitted from its implementation so far.

We are hopeful that, by the end of July, the majority of our visa immigration routes will have re-opened and those in the UK on temporary visas, including those with visitor visas, should leave the UK before the end of July, where it is possible and safe to do so.

Regarding health and care workers, we recognise the tireless dedication and selflessness of those on the frontline and we owe them a great deal of gratitude. This is why the Government is proactively supporting these heroes with a number of unprecedented initiatives, including offering immediate indefinite leave to remain, without a requirement to pay a fee, to families and dependants of all NHS workers, independent health workers and social care workers, who sadly pass away due to contracting the Covid-19 virus.

To identify family members and dependants in this position, we are asking NHS trusts and Independent Health and Care Providers, across the whole of the UK, to liaise directly with UK Visas and Immigration to minimise intrusion and ensure indefinite leave to remain is granted smoothly.

As set out in my earlier correspondence to the Committee, we hope the number of people who find themselves in this position is very small and our thoughts go out to the families and friends of all health professionals who have passed away while fighting to keep us safe.

As recently announced by the Prime Minister, all NHS workers, health and social care staff will be exempted from the Immigration Health Surcharge. The purpose of the Health Surcharge is to benefit the NHS, help to care for the sick and save lives. We recognise that NHS, wider health and social care workers from abroad who are granted visas are doing this already through the fantastic contribution they make.

Turning to the automatic visa extension offer, we were guided by the Department for Health and Social Care as to which occupations should benefit from this offer. This is just one part of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and we are continuing to work at pace to consider how best we can support all frontline workers in the health and care sector.

The social care sector is disparate in nature, which makes specific immigration offers a unique challenge. Migrant social care workers may have come to the UK on a variety of visas that give a general right to work. Where they have a general right to work, migrants do not have to inform the Home Office about their employment. As such, we do not have details of the immigration status of the 131 care workers who have died. However, I can assure you we are working hand in hand with the Department of Health and Social Care on how to implement the extension of the Covid-19 bereavement scheme and exemption from the Immigration Health Surcharge for social care workers and full details will be announced shortly.

We want to avoid overcomplicated arrangements to try to identify who might be affected, which is why the Government is also showing its support and gratitude to this sector in a number of other ways. The Department for Health and Social Care is working alongside employers to ensure the workforce has the right number of people to meet increasing demands and has recently launched a national recruitment campaign. It is also providing councils with access to an additional £1.5 billion for adults and children's social care in 2020-21. We continue to work closely with Public Health England to monitor the impact on care homes and have published extensive guidance for care homes on admitting and caring for people during the outbreak and have announced £2.9 billion to help local authorities respond to pressures in key services, such as adult social care.

I trust this provides the reassurance you were seeking.

Yours sincerely,

With all good wishes


Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary