

Home Affairs Committee

Earned Settlement: Examining the Government's proposed reforms

Sixth Report of Session 2024–26

HC 1409

Home Affairs Committee

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Summary

Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), also known as settlement, is the right to live and work permanently in the UK, free from restrictions associated with immigration control. Securing ILR is a necessary precursor to becoming naturalised as a British citizen. The Government has proposed a new “Earned Settlement” model, under which the standard qualifying period for immigrants to receive Indefinite Leave to Remain will increase from 5 to 10 years, with qualifying periods for individuals increased or decreased on the basis of criteria that aim to measure individual contribution. The Home Office has developed these proposals in response to the unprecedented levels of immigration to the UK in recent years. The Government is particularly concerned about the impact of a large number of immigrants in lower paid roles—particularly in adult social care—receiving settlement and becoming eligible to apply for benefits and social housing. We recognise the challenge the Government is trying to respond to, and its intention to promote contribution through its changes.

The Home Office recently held a consultation on its proposed changes, which closed on 12 February. With a view to informing the Government’s final policy, we conducted a short inquiry to consider specific aspects of the changes set out in the consultation, with a particular focus on the proposals in relation to medium-skilled workers, children and young people and transitional protections.

The Government has proposed that adult immigrants be required to meet new mandatory minimum income requirements in order to qualify for settlement, although it is consulting on potential exemptions. It is reasonable to expect most people who wish to settle to contribute economically, and entering employment is also likely to foster and support integration, so there is value in encouraging immigrants to work where they are able. However, there will be people who are unable to meet this requirement for good reason, and it is important that there are reasonable exceptions.

These changes will affect hundreds of thousands of care workers and their dependents and could have major consequences for the adult social care sector. The Home Office’s mismanagement of the Health and Care Worker visa between 2022 and 2024 meant that far more care workers and their dependants came to the UK than the Home Office anticipated. Care workers, especially those with children, are more likely to qualify for in-

work benefits—once they have settled status—than other immigrants, as care work is generally low paid, and therefore could present a cost to the public purse. Delaying settlement for this group is therefore likely to provide short-term direct fiscal savings for the Government, but risks increasing exploitation and poverty for these workers. The impact these changes will have on the adult social care sector is unclear, but we have seen no evidence that the Home Office has made efforts to join up its reforms with the Government’s overall strategy for adult social care. It is possible that these changes may increase social care cost pressures which could have an indirect negative fiscal impact. If the Government places workers on long routes to settlement, it should explore flexible visa options that allow workers to move between employers to reduce the risk of exploitation. The Government should also set out clearly how it will support decent pay and conditions for immigrants working in adult social care.

It is currently unclear how these changes will apply to children, especially children who turn 18 before their parents achieve settlement. As a matter of principle, the Government should ensure that all children who arrive at a young age and grow up in the UK are granted settled status by the age of 18. Children who arrive at a later stage—such as those in their mid-teens—should have clear, realistic and accessible pathways to settlement that do not inhibit them from beginning their adult lives. We received evidence that these changes will increase child poverty, especially among the children of care workers, and children in families on the current 10-year family or private life route to settlement. The Government will need to understand and mitigate any increase in child poverty. The 10-year private or family life route is challenging and expensive for those who are on it and can cause genuine hardship for children affected by it. People who under the current system would be on a 10-year family or private life route to settlement should be given a reasonable and achievable route to settlement under the new rules.

The Government plans to apply these changes to people who are already in the UK on a route to settlement. We have received a high volume of representations from immigrants already in the UK, arguing that it would be unfair to apply these changes to people who made the decision to come here on the basis of a 5-year route. It is not unprecedented to apply changes to people who are already in the immigration system. We believe that it is in the interests of the Home Office, and the UK, to be consistent in the application of immigration rules and policy. There is also a public interest in responding to recent high rates of immigration, and the potential direct fiscal impact of a large number of people in lower paid roles gaining settled status and eligibility for benefits. The Government needs to carefully

consider and set out clear mitigations—including suitable transitional arrangements—for people already in the UK who are affected by the changes.

The Home Office has said that these changes will begin to be implemented from April 2026 but has not given a clear timeline of when particular changes will be implemented. The Home Office should learn from previous reforms that it is more important to get changes right than to implement them quickly. In order to deliver workable reforms of the kind set out in its consultation, the department must take adequate time to assess the impact of its final policy and put in place measures to avoid unintended consequences. The Home Office should provide a clear and realistic implementation timeline, so that people can make informed decisions about their future.

1 Introduction

1. Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), or settled status, is the right to live and work permanently in the UK, free from restrictions associated with immigration control. It is also a pre-requisite for qualifying for British citizenship. The precise number of people who have settled status in the UK is unknown. The Oxford Migration Observatory has estimated that it is likely that there were between 620,000 and 820,000 non-EU nationals with ILR at the end of 2024.¹
2. The rate of settlement among immigrants varies depending on the reason they came to the UK. For example, family visa holders are more likely to settle than work visa holders.² Most non-EU citizens who have come to the UK on a work visa have not gone on to obtain settlement. Settlement rates are expected to increase in the future. This is in part because of an increase in the proportion of people arriving on work visas that provide a route to settlement.³
3. Currently, the standard time for most immigrants to qualify for Indefinite Leave to Remain is five years. In order to receive ILR, immigrants must usually spend five years in the UK on a qualifying visa. Some visas—for example, visitor visas and student visas—do not provide a route to settlement. The main two visa types that lead to settlement are work visas, including sponsored work visas that allow immigrants to come to the UK to work in specified roles, and family visas, that allow British citizens and those living permanently in the UK to sponsor immediate family members (usually a spouse or partner) to join them in the UK. Immigrants must meet the requirements of their visa for five years to qualify for ILR. For sponsored work migrants, this requires maintaining sponsored work above specified salary thresholds.⁴ For family migrants, this requires the family to meet the minimum income requirement (currently £29,000 per year).⁵ Switching between different visa routes—such as moving between work and family

1 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Migrant Settlement in the UK](#), 24 February 2026

2 Home Office, [Migrant journey: 2024 report](#), gov.uk (accessed 4 March 2026)

3 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Migrant Settlement in the UK](#), 24 February 2026

4 Home Office, [Indefinite leave to remain if you have a Skilled Worker, Health and Care Worker, T2 or Tier 2 visa: Overview](#), gov.uk (accessed 6 February 2026)

5 Home Office, [Indefinite leave to remain if you have family in the UK: Apply as a partner \(family visa\)](#), gov.uk (accessed 6 February 2026)

visas—can in some cases reset the five year waiting period.⁶ Once eligible to apply for settled status, immigrants will usually need to pay a fee, pass the Life in the UK test, and, if they have not already, demonstrate they meet English language requirements before they are granted ILR. An immigrant who has been granted ILR will usually be eligible to apply for British citizenship one year later.

4. There are exceptions to the current 5-year route. Certain arrivals on the Global Talent visa—for leaders and potential leaders in academia, the arts and digital technology—can qualify after three years.⁷ Immigrants who would not usually meet the immigration rules, but have the right to be in the UK on the basis of their human right to family or private life, have a 10-year route to settlement.⁸

The planned changes

5. The Home Office is planning major changes to eligibility for Indefinite Leave to Remain. The standard baseline for qualifying for ILR will be increased from five years to ten, and the mandatory criteria for qualifying for ILR will be significantly tightened. The Home Office plans to introduce a model of “Earned Settlement”, with routes to settlement for individuals increased or decreased from the 10-year baseline on the basis of criteria that aim to measure individual contribution—including reduced waiting times for higher earners and fluent English speakers, and increased waiting times for immigrants who claim benefits or entered the UK illegally. The Government is also consulting on whether to apply the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition to people who have ILR. Many details of how the system will work in practice have yet to be confirmed, and elements of the reforms are subject to consultation. Under the proposals in the consultation some immigrants could face waits for ILR as long as 30 years, while others will wait as few as three. These changes are wide-ranging, complex, and likely to have a significant impact on the people who are affected. The changes will make the UK an outlier among most high-income countries, where the standard settlement period is usually five years for those who have a path to settlement, although Switzerland and Japan both have 10-year routes to settlement.⁹

6 Home Office, [Indefinite leave to remain if you have family in the UK: Apply as a partner \(family visa\)](#), gov.uk (accessed 6 February 2026)

7 Home Office, [Indefinite leave to remain if you have a business, investor or talent visa: Time in the UK and financial requirements](#), gov.uk (accessed 6 February)

8 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Migrants on ten-year routes to settlement in the UK](#), 21 July 2021

9 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

Overview of Earned Settlement proposals

Baseline eligibility periods

- Standard baseline: 10 years
- Baseline for medium skilled worker visa holders: 15 years
- Baseline for refugees granted asylum: 20 years

Mandatory minimum requirements

- Meet suitability requirements, such as not having a criminal conviction
- Have no outstanding government debt, including tax or debt to the NHS
- Speak English at level B2 level under the Common European Framework of Reference for Language
- Pass the Life in the UK test
- Have annual earnings above £12,570 for a minimum of 3 to 5 years (subject to consultation) or an alternative amount of income

Considerations that will reduce the baseline qualifying period (only the largest applicable reduction applies)

- Speak English at level C1 under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (minus 1 year)
- Earned a taxable income of £125,140 for 3 years immediately prior to applying for settlement (minus 7 years)
- Earned a taxable income of £50,270 for 3 years immediately prior to applying for settlement (minus 5 years)
- Been employed in a specified public service occupation for 5 years in a highly skilled (RQF 6+) role (minus 5 years)
- Worked in the community (e.g. by volunteering) (minus 3–5 years)
- Is in the UK on a family visa as the parent/partner/child of a British citizen and meets core family requirements (minus 5 years)
- Is in the UK on the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) route (minus 5 years)

Considerations that will increase the baseline qualifying period (only the largest applicable increase applies)

- Been in receipt of public funds for less than 12 months during route to settlement (plus five years) or more than 12 months (plus 10 years)
- Arrived in the UK illegally (plus up to 20 years)
- Entered the UK on a visit visa (plus up to 20 years)
- Overstayed a visa for six months or more (plus up to 20 years)

Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025

6. Under the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, EU citizens who were living in the UK before 31 December 2020—the end of the transition period—have rights to remain in the UK, and were able to apply for pre-settled or settled status under the EU settlement scheme.¹⁰ The EU settlement scheme will remain unchanged under the Earned Settlement proposals,¹¹ but the reforms will affect EU citizens living in the UK—or who come to the UK in the future—who are not eligible for the EU settlement scheme.
7. The Home Office is also making major changes to asylum and refugee policy, which were set out in a November 2025 policy statement on reforms to the asylum system.¹² Until 1 March 2026, refugees were granted initial leave to remain in the UK for five years and would qualify for Indefinite Leave to Remain after five years, without needing to pay a fee, demonstrate their English language ability or pass the Life in the UK test. People claiming asylum from 2 March 2026 onwards who have a successful asylum claim will be granted temporary protection status, which they will need to renew every 30 months. Refugees will be expected to return to their country of origin if it later becomes safe.¹³ Under the Government’s proposals, those granted refugee status will only become eligible for settlement after 20 years. Refugees may be able to qualify for settlement in 10 years by moving to a new “work and study” route, the details of which have not been confirmed.¹⁴ For this brief inquiry, we have not examined in depth the proposed changes to asylum and refugee policy, but we will continue to scrutinise the Home Office on this important policy area.

10 House of Commons Library, [UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement: Implementation of citizens’ rights](#), Research Briefing 9657, 28 November 2023, p9

11 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p6

12 Home Office, [Restoring Order and Control: A statement on the government’s asylum and returns policy](#), CP 1418, November 2025, p13

13 [Asylum Changes](#) HCWS1373, 2 March 2026

14 Home Office, [Restoring Order and Control: A statement on the government’s asylum and returns policy](#), CP 1418, November 2025, p13

Our inquiry

8. The Government first announced its intention to make major changes to settlement policy in its May 2025 immigration white paper ‘Restoring control over the immigration system’.¹⁵ We launched this inquiry on 21 October 2025 with the aim of examining the potential impact of the changes, and to consider how any new earned settlement rules should work. On 20 November 2025 the Home Office launched a consultation, which outlined the options currently under consideration. When announcing the consultation, the Home Secretary informed the House of Commons that the Government intends to begin implementing at least some of the changes from April 2026.¹⁶ The Government’s consultation closed on 12 February 2026 and the Home Secretary told us it had received around 130,000 responses as of early February.¹⁷
9. Given the Government’s timetable for consulting on and implementing changes to routes to settlement, we decided to conduct a rapid inquiry, scrutinising the proposals set out in the Earned Settlement consultation, so that we could report on these before the Home Office finalises its policy. It has not been possible to examine all the proposals set out in the Earned Settlement consultation, so we have focused our inquiry on aspects of the proposals where we felt there was a significant risk of unintended consequences, and those that were prominent in the written evidence we had already received. The areas of focus we chose were:
 - a. Potential transitional protections, for people who arrived in the UK before the changes were announced;
 - b. The impact of the changes on children and young people; and
 - c. The proposal to apply a 15-year route to settlement for medium-skilled workers.
10. To inform this report we held two oral evidence sessions—hearing from immigration and legal experts, representatives of charities supporting children and young people, and representatives of employers and trade unions—and questioned the Home Secretary on the proposed reforms.¹⁸

15 Home Office, [Restoring control over the immigration system: white paper](#), CP 1326, May 2025, pp68–70

16 HC Deb, 20 November 2025, [col 893](#)

17 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q14](#)

18 A full list of witnesses who gave oral evidence is included at the end of this report. This inquiry was also informed by oral evidence from Brian Bell, Chair of the Migration Advisory, and Dr Madeleine Sumption, Deputy Chair, in a [one-off session on the Work of the Migration Advisory Committee on Tuesday 4 November 2025](#). We questioned the Home Secretary on the proposed reforms during a [regular accountability session on Wednesday 4 February 2026](#).

We received over 5,700 written submissions in response to our call for evidence.¹⁹ The overwhelming majority of these came from immigrants who already live in the UK and are on a pathway to settlement, and are concerned about what these changes will mean for them and their families. We recognise the strength of feeling and anxiety felt among those who could be affected by these changes and thank everyone who took the time to contribute to our inquiry.

¹⁹ Due to the volume of evidence that the Committee received, only written evidence from organisations and subject specialists has been published. Written evidence submitted by individuals has been read and has informed the Committee's findings.

2 The overall impact of the changes

What is the Government hoping to achieve?

11. These reforms have been designed primarily in response to the unprecedented levels of immigration seen in recent years. Between 2021 and 2023 immigration was unusually high due to a confluence of factors, including a growth in the number of people coming to work in the UK and the lifting of Covid-19 immigration restrictions. According to Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimates, immigration to the UK peaked in the year ending March 2023, when around 1,469,000 people (including British and foreign nationals) came to live in the UK. Immigration has fallen significantly since—in the year ending June 2025, around 898,000 people migrated to the UK. High immigration led to high net migration—the total number of people entering the country to live here for more than a year, minus the total number leaving—and according to the latest ONS estimates, annual net migration stood at 944,000 at the end of March 2023. Net migration fell to 204,000 in the year ending June 2025, a result of a fall in immigration, especially for work and study, and an increase in emigration.²⁰ The Home Office expects there to be an increase in the number of people settling in the UK as a result of recent high levels of immigration and has estimated that between 1.3 million and 2.2 million people will settle between 2026 and 2030, although there is significant uncertainty about the potential rate of settlement.²¹ The Home Office estimates that between 359,000 and 620,000 people will settle in 2028, when it expects settlement to peak. This would be a significant growth in the number of grants of settlement—in 2024, around 163,000 people were granted settlement (not including EU Settled status).²²

20 Office for National Statistics, [Long-term international migration, provisional](#), 27 November 2025

21 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p12

22 Home Office, [Immigration system statistics data tables](#), Settlement detailed datasets, year ending December 2025, Table Se_D02

12. The Home Secretary told us reforms to settlement were precipitated by “the scale of change that the country has seen in recent years”.²³ The Government is particularly concerned by the high number of recent arrivals on care work and medium-skilled visas, and their dependants (spouses and children), and the potential impact on public finances.²⁴ Care work in particular is poorly paid and care workers with children are more likely than other work migrants to be eligible for support from the state through in-work benefits once they have received settled status.²⁵ Immigrants with temporary permission to be in the UK are usually subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition, which means they are not eligible for most benefits. Once an immigrant is granted Indefinite Leave to Remain, they become eligible for accessing benefits on the same terms as British citizens.
13. The Home Secretary has been clear that the aim of these changes is not to reduce net migration by deterring immigrants from coming to the UK, but to address the potential impact of people already in the UK achieving settlement.²⁶ The Government is also aiming to “restore the element of contribution” to settlement and, by doing so, improve cohesion.²⁷ Under the current system, it is relatively straight forward to secure settlement, irrespective of contribution, and most migrants satisfy the requirements at five years. The Earned Settlement consultation describes settlement as “not a right but a privilege” that must be earned.²⁸ The consultation states that the reformed system will reward “sustained and measurable economic contribution to the UK”, based on the principle that a shortened pathway to settlement should be earned through active participation in the economy.²⁹ The Government’s proposals would still mean it is possible for people to reach settlement in most cases, but would increase the requirements and standard timeframe for reaching settlement.

The overall impact of the changes

14. The direct fiscal impact of immigration is determined by looking at the impact on public finances—how much is received in taxes, and how much is spent in public services. The fiscal impacts of changes to settlement policy are difficult to predict and will depend on the final detail of the

23 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q2](#)

24 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q2](#)

25 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

26 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q2](#)

27 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q3](#)

28 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p3

29 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p7

reforms. According to the Migration Advisory Committee, all else being equal, acquiring Indefinite Leave to Remain worsens the direct fiscal impact of migrants who have come to the UK—because they stop paying immigration fees and are able to claim benefits, if eligible. Extending routes to settlement would increase the amount of time immigrants are liable to pay visa fees, and are not permitted to access public funds, creating fiscal gains for the UK. Arrivals on the Skilled Worker visa are generally unlikely to qualify for benefits due to their high income, but lower paid workers on the Health and Care Worker visa—such as care workers—are more likely to qualify.³⁰ Restricting access to benefits for low paid workers who are more likely to qualify for benefits is likely to create a direct fiscal benefit in the short-term, although the impact of this will be limited, as the largest costs are likely to come later in these migrants’ lives.³¹ However, extending routes to settlement could become fiscally negative to the UK, costing the country more than it saves, if the changes deter high earners from coming here, or if the changes limit the job progression and integration of migrants in the UK, leading to worse employment outcomes and lower economic contributions.³² The Home Office is also consulting on whether to apply the NRPF condition to people who have Indefinite Leave to Remain, which is an alternative approach that may address the direct fiscal impact of people acquiring settlement. We did not examine this proposal in detail in the course of our inquiry. It is extremely difficult to predict what impact these changes will have on decision making among migrants, and therefore rates of immigration and emigration. We have heard evidence that while some specific groups may be discouraged from coming to the UK, it seems likely that a significant proportion of recent arrivals will choose to remain in the UK on a longer route to settlement.³³

15. As well as fiscal contribution, the Government’s Earned Settlement consultation highlights the importance of integration, and the Home Secretary told us that she believes the changes will encourage a greater sense of cohesion.³⁴ We received a significant volume of written evidence arguing that the proposed changes would undermine and worsen integration and make it harder for immigrants to make long-term commitments in the UK.³⁵ Immigrants told us that uncertainty associated

30 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

31 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

32 Migration Advisory Committee, [MAC Annual Report](#), December 2025, p25

33 [Q2](#)

34 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q3](#)

35 Dr Ally Shepherd (Researcher in the School of Education at University of Leeds) and Prof Gabriella Alberti (Professor of International Labour Migration at the Business School at University of Leeds) ([RTS4617](#)), Professor Jonathan Portes (Professor of Economics and Public Policy at King’s College London) ([RTS1292](#))

with temporary immigration status undermines feelings of belonging.³⁶ We heard evidence arguing that financial pressures associated with immigration for some immigrants can also act as a barrier to community participation, as immigrants must prioritise earning.³⁷ It is difficult to predict the exact impacts on integration, but there is evidence that permanent status, and citizenship, have a positive impact on economic and social integration, including by enabling people to progress in their careers and earn more.³⁸ While the Home Office may be able to incentivise some behaviours that promote integration through the earned settlement criteria, it appears that the changes as a whole risk harming integration.

16.

CONCLUSION

The Government has developed the proposals in its Earned Settlement consultation to respond to the unprecedented levels of immigration to the country in recent years, particularly of medium-skilled workers. We recognise that the Government is responding to a challenging situation, as a large number of people will soon become eligible for settlement due to the recent spike in immigration, especially in 2022–23. We support the Government’s stated aim to promote contribution and improve the fiscal impact migration has on the UK. It is not possible to be certain of the impacts of the changes, especially in the absence of a finalised policy. There may be direct fiscal benefits from extending routes to settlement for some migrants, especially in the short-term, but there is a risk that the changes will undermine integration, which any changes should seek to promote. It is important that the Home Office thoroughly assesses the impacts of its final policy, before implementation.

36 Written evidence accepted confidentially

37 Dr Natalie Sedacca (Assistant Professor in Employment Law at Durham University) ([RTS4682](#)), para 9

38 Oral evidence taken on 4 November 2025, [Q41](#) [Dr Madeleine Sumption]

3 Assessing contribution

Mandatory minimum income

17. The Government intends to introduce new mandatory minimum requirements which applicants would need to meet in order to qualify for settlement. This would include minimum earnings of £12,570 a year—the minimum threshold for paying income tax and national insurance contributions—for three to five years.³⁹ The Government is consulting on potential exemptions for those on maternity leave and people with long-term illnesses and disabled people and has also asked if any other groups should be exempt from this requirement.⁴⁰
18. The Government has proposed that the mandatory minimum economic requirement be applied to everyone on a route to settlement, except for dependent children. This includes adult dependants accompanying work visa holders, people travelling to the UK on family visas to join their British partners, refugees and people on a Hong Kong British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa. The Home Office is proposing that these mandatory requirements apply at an individual—rather than household level—as part of proposals for dependants to earn settlement in their own right.
19. The mandatory minimum income requirement is set relatively low and should be achievable for working adults, but if this requirement is applied to everyone on a route to settlement it is likely to make hundreds of thousands of people currently on routes to settlement ineligible for settled status, based on their current circumstances.⁴¹ The requirement is likely to disadvantage certain groups. We received evidence that the requirement could disadvantage Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders, who were not subject to income requirements when they came to the UK, and many of whom rely on assets or savings.⁴² The consultation states that the mandatory economic requirement could be met by “an alternative amount of income”—which suggests that the requirement may be met through, for example, pension

39 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p21

40 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p44

41 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

42 Hong Kong Watch ([RTS5627](#))

income or savings, which may address this issue. The requirement is likely to make it harder for parents who have chosen to act as the primary care giver, rather than seeking employment, to secure settled status. This would affect households that are overall directly fiscally positive for the UK, such as arrivals on work visas where the main applicant is a very high earner, and their partner does not work, which we were told could have a deterrent effect on highly skilled workers coming to the UK.⁴³ It would also mean that individuals who are unable to find work—and do not have another source of income—would never be able to achieve settled status, irrespective of how long they have lived in the UK, unless they qualify for an exemption.

20.

CONCLUSION

The Government has proposed requiring all immigrants to earn at least £12,570 a year in order to be able to settle permanently in the UK. This will apply more widely than just to economic migrants—family migrants and arrivals on humanitarian routes will also be affected. It is reasonable to expect most people who wish to settle to contribute economically, and entering employment is also likely to foster and support integration, so there is value in encouraging immigrants to work where they are able. However, there will be people who are unable to meet this requirement for good reason.

21.

RECOMMENDATION

There should be reasonable and clear exceptions to the mandatory minimum economic contribution requirement so that people are not prevented from settling where there are legitimate reasons they cannot meet this requirement. This could include exemptions for disabled people, people over pension age, those who are studying full-time, and those with full-time caring responsibilities.

Income-related reductions

22. The Home Office is consulting on earnings-based reductions to eligibility periods for reaching settlement. The proposed reductions are:
- A 5-year reduction for people who earn a taxable income of £50,270 for 3 years immediately prior to applying for settlement.
 - A 7-year reduction for people who earn a taxable income of £125,140 for 3 years immediately prior to applying for settlement.

The Oxford Migration Observatory estimates that most main applicants on a Skilled Worker visa will qualify for the 5-year reduction, as the median income for Skilled Workers (excluding those on the Health and Care Worker visa) was £56,600 in 2023/24.⁴⁴

23. The reduction thresholds are based on current income tax thresholds, but the Government does not plan to keep these in line with tax thresholds in the future.⁴⁵ The threshold for paying a higher rate of tax, and the threshold for making a positive contribution to public finances—paying more in tax than you use in services—are not the same. Dr Madeleine Sumption described the use of tax thresholds as “a little arbitrary”, telling us that arrivals under the Skilled Worker route, which has a general salary threshold of £41,700, are “already comfortably fiscally positive over the course of their lifetimes”.⁴⁶ Professor Alan Manning—former chair of the Migration Advisory Committee—told us there was little point in the £50,270 threshold, and that this would give an incentive to employers to suppress wages for migrant workers to delay their settlement, as settlement would make it easier for an employee to leave their current job.⁴⁷

24. **CONCLUSION**

The Government’s current proposals would allow shorter routes to settlement based on meeting earning requirements set at current income tax thresholds. This means that people who make a net positive direct fiscal contribution to the UK, but earn below the higher rate tax threshold, could face a 10-year route to settlement. The Government has not been clear about the basis on which the reduction thresholds have been set, nor what outcome they are intended to achieve. Given the Home Office does not intend to keep reduction thresholds in line with tax thresholds in the future, it appears that that current tax thresholds have been used as a convenient, but not yet justified, basis for setting the earnings required to reduce waiting periods for settlement. This also adds a layer of administrative complexity, and therefore potential for abuse, to a system the Home Office already struggles to manage.

44 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

45 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p23

46 [Q53](#)

47 [Q9](#)

25.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Home Office sets out clear objectives for the basis on which fiscal contributions qualify immigrants for a reduction to their wait for settlement. The Home Office should then commission the Migration Advisory Committee to advise on appropriate thresholds based on these objectives.

Assessing contribution at an individual level

26. The Earned Settlement consultation proposes that immigrants living in the UK as adult dependants should earn settlement in their own right, with their route to settlement “separately determined according to their own attributes and circumstances”. This means that the dependant partners of an economic migrants “will not necessarily enjoy the same qualifying period for settlement as their partner” and may have a longer or shorter wait for settlement.⁴⁸
27. We received evidence that odd or undesirable outcomes would occur from applying income-related reductions separately to individuals in the same household. Matthew Percival—Director (Future of Work and Skills) at the Confederation of British Industry—told us that the changes could lead to differing outcomes for households that, as a whole, have the same income.⁴⁹ As an example, in a family in which both parents earn £52,000 a year, both parents would be on a 5-year route to settlement. In a household where one parent works part-time to care for children, and earns £30,000, while their partner earns £74,000, the parent working part-time will be on a 10-year route to settlement, while their partner will be on a 5-year route, even though this household overall has the same income as the former household—and pays more in taxes. This risks deterring high earners with lower earning spouses from coming to the UK, and penalising households that make a greater direct economic contribution to public finances. Dr Madeleine Sumption told us that, if the Government is concerned with the fiscal or economic impact of work migrants and their dependants, it makes sense to consider the household as unit, as it does not matter from an economic point view if you have household with two medium earners, or a household with one very high earner and one non-earner.⁵⁰

48 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p26

49 [Q117](#)

50 [Q45](#)

28. Average wages of dependants of Skilled Workers migrants are significantly lower than average wages of main applicants. The median earnings of employed Skilled Worker dependants—excluding Health and Care—in 2023/24 were £30,200, and the median earnings of employed Health and Care dependants was £22,100.⁵¹ This means that most dependants of Skilled Workers would not receive the 5-year reduction and would be on a 10-year route to settlement, unless they can qualify for a reduction in another way. This may have a gendered impact, given the different proportions of male and female main applicants on different routes. For example, on average women made up 73% of dependants on the Skilled Worker visa—excluding Health and Care—between 2021 and 2024, while men made up 72% of dependants on the Health and Care Worker visa.⁵²
29. Dependant partners will remain reliant on their partner for their immigration status, until they are able to achieve settled status. The Immigration Law Practitioner’s Association (ILPA) told us that decoupling routes to settlement for couples could increase risks of abuse. If a woman, and, by extension, any of her children, is on a longer route to settlement than her husband, ILPA told us that “coercive control and power will be shifted from the current equal position of families settling together, to one where the husband holds all the cards, as he is a British citizen already settled, and his wife is in a precarious situation.”⁵³
30. **CONCLUSION**
Applying income-based reductions to qualifying periods for settlement at an individual, rather than a household level, could lead to perverse outcomes, and obscure the contribution of immigrants who take on a greater proportion of caregiving, whose care may enable their partners to take on more demanding and higher earning careers. These changes may also deter high earning immigrants that we want to come to the UK, if their partners are on much longer routes to settlement than them. However, we recognise that assessing income at a household level also could lead to inconsistent outcomes, such as two colleagues on an identical income having different paths to settlement based on how well-off the person they married is.

51 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

52 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Migration and gender in the UK](#), 17 October 2025

53 Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association ([RTS5788](#)) para 54

31.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Home Office applies reductions to qualifying periods for settlement for direct fiscal contribution at a household level, not at an individual level, to recognise that generally households make financial decisions as units.

4 Workers

32. While most immigrants will have a 10-year baseline route to settlement, the Government is consulting on whether workers classed as “medium-skilled” and below should have a baseline waiting period of 15 years. This includes most care workers, but will affect a wide range of professions, such as chefs, welders and various administrative and business roles. The Government has significantly restricted the number of occupations where medium-skilled workers can be recruited from abroad, and banned medium-skilled workers from bringing dependants to the UK, so this change is most likely to affect people already in the country.⁵⁴ This change would affect a large cohort of people—at least 325,000 visas have been granted to workers in medium-skilled jobs since 2021, not including dependants.⁵⁵ We asked the Home Office on 5 February 2026 to provide the number of medium-skilled workers currently in the UK who would be in scope for a 15-year route to settlement. The Home Office did not provide this information in time for inclusion in this report. It is disappointing and concerning that the Home Office has not been able to provide this information, which is essential for assessing the scale of the impact of its proposed reforms.

Classifying medium-skilled workers

33. The Home Office classifies occupations according to their skill level using the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), which categorises the level of regulated educational qualifications. Roles that are RQF level 6 and above (roughly speaking, graduate level) are considered to be highly skilled. Roles that are classed at RQF level 3 to 5 (roughly speaking, from A Level to foundation level) are considered to be medium skilled.⁵⁶ The Government has proposed applying the 15-year route to settlement to all immigrants who have arrived via the Skilled Worker or Health and Care Worker route and are working in roles below RQF 6.⁵⁷

54 Home Office, [Explanatory Memorandum to the statement of changes to the Immigration Rules: HC 997, 1 July 2025](#)

55 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

56 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p15

57 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p6

34. The Home Office has said the 15-year route for medium-skilled workers is necessary because of the potential fiscal impact of granting low-wage migrants settlement after five years, after which they would be entitled to access public funds.⁵⁸ The Government has said that migrants working in RQF 3 to 5 roles have a median salary around £12,000 lower than the overall median for Skilled Worker and Health and Care Worker visa holders—excluding care workers.⁵⁹ While medium-skilled roles are, on average, lower paid, it is not necessarily the case that a worker in a role that is classified as below RQF 6 will be poorly paid. Nicolas Rollason, Head of Immigration Law at Kingsley Napley, shared an example of a worker who would be affected by the 15-year route despite being a high earner: a general manager of a luxury hotel, who is very well paid and managing hundreds of staff, but comes under the “Hotel and accommodation managers and proprietors” code, which is classed as medium skilled.⁶⁰ Dr Madeleine Sumption told us that if the goal of these changes is fiscal, “it is not clear why we would care about the RQF level of the occupation”.⁶¹

35. **CONCLUSION**

It appears that the main purpose of putting medium-skilled workers on a 15-year route to settlement is fiscal, because medium-skilled workers are, on average, lower earners. It is odd and unnecessary to use RQF skill levels as a proxy for income when making decisions about settlement, rather than assessing income directly. Making decisions in this way will lead to high earners in skilled roles being put on longer routes for a reason that is fundamentally arbitrary.

36. **RECOMMENDATION**

If the Home Office proceeds with putting lower-paid workers on a 15-year route to settlement, it should do so on the basis of income, and not the RQF classification of their role, as this will not necessarily reflect their direct economic contribution, which appears to be the Government’s justification for this reform. If the Government has other reasons for using RQF classifications to determine the length of routes to settlement, it should explain these to demonstrate the rationale for this choice.

58 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p4

59 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025 p17

60 [Q29](#)

61 [Q31](#)

Worker pay, progression and exploitation

- 37.** Immigrants in the UK on the Skilled Worker and Health and Care Worker visas need to be sponsored to work in a qualifying job by a licenced employer. This enables the Home Office to ensure that work visas are only issued for qualifying jobs. Extending routes to settlement will extend the amount of time that workers need to maintain sponsored employment.
- 38.** Extending the amount of time a worker needs to be in sponsored employment can reduce their job mobility, and so inhibit their progression, as it is harder for people to switch roles when they need a licenced sponsoring employer. In relation to care, which we discuss later in more detail, Professor Alan Manning told us that this change was likely to leave workers “stuck” in their current roles for longer.⁶² Dr Madeleine Sumption told us that there could be particular challenges for medium-skilled workers on a 15-year route. As the Government has significantly limited new overseas recruitment of medium skilled workers, there may over time be diminishing incentives for employers in these sectors to maintain sponsorship licences. This means that as time goes on, workers in medium-skilled occupations are likely to find it increasingly difficult to switch jobs.⁶³ Dr Sumption told us that because one of the main reasons people switch jobs is to increase their wages, delaying access to settlement could have the negative impact of keeping medium-skilled workers in their current jobs. This would prevent these workers from moving to better paid work which would increase both their own income and their contribution to the public purse through taxation.⁶⁴
- 39.** Workers on sponsored visas can be at increased risk of exploitation. Peter Wieltschnig, Policy Lead at Trades Union Congress, told us that “high levels of power disparity” result from sponsorship based systems, as employees are reliant on their employer for their immigration status.⁶⁵ Professor Brian Bell, Chair of the Migration Advisory Committee, told us that an advantage of receiving settled status is that it gives people more power in employment relationships, as they are able to freely move between employers.⁶⁶ Issues of exploitation are often more prevalent in lower paid sectors such as adult social care, as we discuss later in this Chapter, so it is likely that the 15-year route will affect those who are already at greater risk of exploitation. Longer routes to settlement for workers on employee-sponsored visas can also increase the risk of workers losing their immigration status, should they lose their job. Peter Wieltschnig told us that these individuals would be

62 [Q16](#)

63 [Q18](#)

64 [Q34](#)

65 [Q110](#)

66 Oral evidence taken on 4 November 2025, [Q40](#)

“at incredibly high risk of exploitation”.⁶⁷ The Government has legislated to introduce the Fair Work Agency, which will be established on 7 April 2026, to address issues of enforcement relating to worker’s rights and exploitation.⁶⁸

40. There are different ways to deliver the outcome of enabling worker mobility while achieving the Government’s goal of limiting the direct fiscal impacts of lower earning immigrants settling. Allowing settlement for these workers while applying the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition to Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) would have this outcome, and Professor Bell argued that there is no principled reason why freedom from immigration control should be given at the same time as access to benefits.⁶⁹ However, there are questions about the legality of applying NRPF to people with ILR as it would restrict access to benefits based on citizenship (which is covered by the protected characteristic of nationality in the Equality Act 2010), rather than immigration status. Chrisann Jarrett—CEO at We Belong, a charity that supports young people with insecure immigration status—told us that applying NRPF to people with ILR would be problematic as it would undermine the permanence meant to be created by settlement.⁷⁰ We also received evidence that extending NRPF to more people would deepen child poverty.⁷¹ Anna Skehan, Solicitor at Islington Law Centre, argued that applying NRPF to people with ILR would be unfair given the fees that immigrants pay to gain settlement, and told us that it would disadvantage children whose future is in the UK.⁷² We consider the potential impact on children of the Government’s proposed reforms in Chapter Five.
41. Delaying settlement for medium-skilled workers but granting them freedom to move between employers is another option that could help protect workers while mitigating the direct fiscal impacts of immediate settlement. Peter Wieltschnig, Trades Union Congress, told us that the provision of a sector-wide adult social care visa—where migrant workers are not sponsored by a specific employer—would “go some way towards making sure that workers could move freely.”⁷³ However, this new approach would raise challenges of its own. Professor Martin Green, CEO of Care England, told us that a sector-wide visa would need to be funded, as there would not be an incentive for employers to pay for a visa that does not guarantee them workers.⁷⁴ Matthew Percival—Director (Future of Work and Skills) at the Confederation of British Industry—told us that a work visa system that

67 [Q129](#)

68 Department for Business and Trade, [Factsheet: The Fair Work Agency](#), gov.uk (accessed 10 March 2026)

69 Oral evidence taken on 4 November 2025, [Q53](#)

70 [Q90](#)

71 For example: Helen Bamber Foundation ([RTS4357](#)), Barnardo’s ([RTS5793](#)) paras 13–14

72 [Q90](#)

73 [Q127](#)

74 [Q128](#)

was not reliant on particular employers would require the Home Office to design new enforcement mechanisms, as under the current system the Home Office is able to shift compliance requirements onto employers.⁷⁵ Dr Madeleine Sumption told us that the trade-off for removing sponsorship requirements would be that the Home Office would lose control and oversight over employment and pay.⁷⁶

42. CONCLUSION

There is a benefit to having a sponsored work visa system in that it supports oversight and makes it easier for the Home Office to confirm immigrants are coming to work in genuine roles. However, sponsorship-based visa systems increase the amount of power that employers have over their workers and limit the ability of workers to progress and increase their earnings. Requiring workers to stay on sponsored worker visas for up to 15 years is likely to exacerbate these power dynamics and increase risks of exploitation.

43. RECOMMENDATION

The Home Office should explore more flexible visa arrangements for workers it is planning to place on long routes to settlement, so they are not reliant on a particular employer to maintain their immigration status. Workers granted sponsored visas could transition to a more flexible visa after a set amount of time. Workers granted freedom to move employers in this way could still be subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition. Any flexible visa arrangements should provide a clear route to settlement for these workers. The Government should also consider what role the Fair Work Agency should have in tackling exploitation for this group.

Health and social care

- 44.** The large number of arrivals of immigrant care workers in recent years is one of the key drivers of the Government's planned reforms, although the proposed 15-year eligibility period will also affect people in other medium-skilled roles. Due to acute staff shortages in the social care sector, in February 2022 social care roles were added to the Health and Care Worker visa and the Shortage Occupation List, which enabled the expanded overseas recruitment of care workers.⁷⁷ Skills for Care estimates that between March 2022 and March 2025, 230,000 recent overseas arrivals

⁷⁵ [Q129](#)

⁷⁶ [Q36](#)

⁷⁷ House of Commons Library, [Visas for social care workers](#), Insight, 3 October 2023

entered care roles in the independent care sector.⁷⁸ In contrast, Skills for Care estimates that the number of British people working in the care sector has fallen by 85,000 since 2020/21.⁷⁹ The Government closed the care work visa route to new entrants from outside the UK in July 2025, due to concern about abuse and exploitation and in order to move the UK away from dependence on overseas workers.⁸⁰

45. The Home Secretary told us that the Home Office has seen “particular issues in relation to some types of work visas, in particular the Health and Care visa for social care workers, where there was an intention to fill a gap of between 6,000 and 40,000 work places but, in fact, 616,000 people arrived.”⁸¹ We understand that the estimates of 6,000 to 40,000 were of expected arrivals per year, rather than an estimate of the total number of arrivals under the route.⁸² The Home Office press release accompanying the launch of the Earned Settlement consultation likewise referred to “Low-paid workers, such as the 616,000 people and their dependants who came on health and social care visas between 2022 and 2024”.⁸³ This significantly overstates the scale of arrival of low-paid social care workers on Health and Care Worker visas. A total of 616,000 people arrived on a Health and Care Worker visa between 2022 and 2024.⁸⁴ This includes doctors (around 25,000 workers), nurses (around 55,000 workers) and therapists (around 3,000 workers),⁸⁵ and also the dependants of these workers.⁸⁶
46. Nonetheless, it is true that a high number of people arrived on a Health and Care Worker visa to work in social care jobs between 2022 and 2025, and that this was greater than the demand anticipated by the Home Office. 157,490 entry visas for social care workers were issued between the start of 2021 and September 2025. The majority of these—105,432—were issued in

78 Skills for Care, [The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England - 2025](#), 29 July 2025 (updated 10 October 2025), p13

79 Skills for Care, [The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England - 2025](#), 29 July 2025 (Updated 10 October 2025), p14

80 Home Office, [Restoring control over the immigration system: white paper](#), CP 1326, May 2025, p 27

81 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q1](#)

82 Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, [An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector August 2023 – November 2023](#), March 2024, para 3.23

83 Home Office, [Biggest overhaul of legal migration model in 50 years announced](#), gov.uk, 20 November 2025

84 Home Office, [Immigration system statistics data tables](#), Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2025, Table Vis_D02

85 Home Office, [Immigration system statistics data tables](#), Sponsored work entry clearance visas by occupation and industry (SOC 2020), year ending December 2025, Table Occ_D02

86 It is not possible to match dependants to particular occupations based on current Home Office data, so we cannot say exactly how many dependants came with care workers, rather than workers in other occupations.

2023. Workers also switched from other routes to care work after arriving in the UK—between 2021 and 2025, there were 48,328 in-country switches from study visas to social care jobs.⁸⁷ Under current rules the earliest of these arrivals would start to be eligible to apply for settled status from 2026. The Home Office has estimated that around 117,000 care workers and 79,000 adult dependants of care workers will settle between 2026 and 2030.⁸⁸ It is important to note that while more people arrived on care worker visas than the Home Office’s higher estimate of 40,000 workers a year, this does not mean that arrivals over and above the Home Office’s figure of 40,000 were not coming to work in genuine care roles. The Home Office did not conduct an impact assessment prior to opening the care route,⁸⁹ and appears to have had limited understanding of the care sector, which likely contributed to the underestimation of demand.

47. The Earned Settlement consultation states that fraud was “rife” on the care work route.⁹⁰ The Home Secretary told us that it is not fair to workers that are “legitimately working” to ignore “the many thousands that were unexpected or the dodgy practices in this part of the labour market.”⁹¹ It is true that the care route was very poorly managed, and lack of oversight allowed fraud and exploitation to take place. The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) inspected the workings of the immigration system in relation to social care in 2023 and found “numerous examples” of organisations being granted sponsor licences in “questionable circumstances”, including cases of immigrants arriving in the UK to find no work available.⁹² Workers who were genuinely working in care have also experienced mistreatment and exploitation. There are now substantial numbers of immigrant care workers who have lost their jobs as a result of employers having their sponsor licences revoked for non-compliance; as of June 2025, the Home Office estimated that more than 40,000 care workers had been affected.⁹³ We asked the Home Office for an updated number of displaced care workers on 5 February 2026, but the department has not yet provided this information. It is important to note that while the

87 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

88 Home Office, [Estimated lifetime net fiscal costs for care workers and their adult dependants](#), gov.uk, 5 March 2026

89 National Audit Office, [Immigration: Skilled Worker visas](#), Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC (2024–25) 745, 17 March 2025, para 7

90 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p3

91 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q32](#)

92 Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, [An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector August 2023 – November 2023](#), March 2024, para 1.10

93 Letter from the Home Secretary on the work of the Home Office following the evidence session on Tuesday 3 June, [22 July 2025](#)

Home Secretary has highlighted “dodgy practices”, the Home Office plans to extend settlement routes for all care workers, including those who have filled genuine vacancies and fully complied with the immigration rules, and those who have entered the care sector in good faith but been exploited by their employers.

48. **CONCLUSION**

There were fundamental failures in the implementation and oversight of the care worker visa route when it was expanded in 2022, which led to unexpectedly high numbers of arrivals in a short space of time. The Home Office significantly underestimated the level of demand for the route and was slow to respond when the number of arrivals outstripped its highest estimates. Inadequate oversight also meant that, while many workers did come to fill genuine vacancies, there was also fraud and exploitation, which the Home Office was slow address. The Home Office should look urgently at reforming its processes to learn lessons and ensure this failure is not repeated.

Potential impacts of the changes

49. Care work is one of the most poorly paid occupations in the UK, and there are limited opportunities for career progression.⁹⁴ Arrivals on the Health and Care Worker visa—of which care workers formed a high proportion in 2022 and 2023—were more likely to bring dependants when this was permitted; 27% of children arriving in the UK on visas between 2021 and 2024 were dependants of health and care workers.⁹⁵ As result, this group of migrants are more likely to be eligible for in-work benefits should they receive Indefinite Leave to Remain. Lower paid workers will pay less in tax and are more likely to have a negative direct fiscal impact on public finances over the course of their lives. Based on the Migration Advisory Committee’s estimates of the fiscal impact of immigrants on the care route, the Home Office has estimated that the net lifetime costs of care workers and adult dependants who arrived in the UK between 2021 and 2025 is £9.5 billion.⁹⁶ These costs are estimates, and the greatest direct fiscal costs of immigrants—as with British citizens—come later in life, limiting the savings of increasing the qualifying period of settlement. It should be noted that this calculation does not reflect the impact that immigrant care workers have on the wider economy and government finances by filling care roles that would otherwise be vacant. While it is difficult to predict the overall fiscal

94 House of Commons Library, [Adult social care workforce in England](#), Research Briefing 9615, 10 October 2024, p5

95 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Children of migrants in the UK](#), 7 November 2025

96 Home Office, [Estimated lifetime net fiscal costs for care workers and their adult dependants](#), gov.uk, 5 March 2026

impact of the proposed changes to settlement, and there may be negative fiscal impacts stemming from reduced labour mobility, it appears likely that delaying settlement for this cohort will provide short-term direct fiscal savings for the Government.

50. The proposed 15-year route is likely to increase in-work poverty for care workers—and as a result their children—by delaying their ability to access public funds. Immigrant care workers would also have extremely limited options for moving into better paid work, as they could only take on roles in Home Office approved occupations, offered by a licenced employer. Professor Alan Manning told us that as a consequence of these changes the children of care workers “would be growing up in probably some of the poorest households in the UK”.⁹⁷ We discuss in Chapter Five the potential impacts of these changes on child poverty in more detail.
51. As we discussed earlier in this Chapter, sponsored work visas can increase risks of exploitation and mistreatment by creating a power imbalance between employers and their workers. Adult social care is a high-risk sector for exploitation.⁹⁸ It appears likely that extended routes to settlement for social care workers will exacerbate these risks.
52. Professor Martin Green, the CEO of Care England, argued that the changes would have a major negative effect on the adult social care sector. He told us that the changes were likely to make it harder to recruit and retain staff, which could lead to “care deserts” in some areas, as the UK becomes a less attractive place for care workers to work. Professor Green also told us that the changes would significantly increase costs for social care providers, as they will be liable to pay sponsorship fees for longer.⁹⁹ Conversely, Professor Alan Manning told us that delaying Indefinite Leave to Remain could increase the retention of immigrant care workers in the sector, as once immigrant care workers are granted Indefinite Leave to Remain, they would have the freedom to move into other jobs. Professor Manning said extending routes to settlement would leave workers “stuck” in care.¹⁰⁰
53. The Government intends to address the workforce challenges stemming from low pay in the adult social care workforce through the introduction of fair pay agreements for the adult social care sector in England. The Government has said the first fair pay agreement will be in place in 2028, well after the Home Office plans to introduce these changes to settlement, and three years after the suspension of international recruitment for care

97 [Q16](#)

98 Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, [An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector August 2023 – November 2023](#), March 2024, para 3.19

99 [Q104](#)

100 [Q16](#)

workers.¹⁰¹ The Government has also commissioned Baroness Casey to chair an independent commission into adult social care, with the final phase reporting in 2028.¹⁰² The Home Office does not set out in the Earned Settlement consultation what impact it expects changes to eligibility for settlement to have on the social care sector or how these reforms align with the Government’s overall strategic vision for the sector and the timeline for reforms to social care. We have seen no evidence that there has been genuine join up with the Department of Health and Social Care—or the social care sector—to ensure that the Home Office’s reforms are designed with an understanding of their impact on the adult social care workforce. If the reforms lead to workforce shortages in the adult social care sector, it is possible that this could lead to increased costs to Government, both to fund adult social care, and to address knock-on impacts on the NHS.

54. The Government has acknowledged the contribution of immigrants who work in public services—such as the NHS—and is proposing that eligible public sector workers qualify for a 5-year reduction to their waiting period for Indefinite Leave to Remain. This reduction will only apply to people in graduate level—or highly skilled—public sector roles, so adult social care workers will not benefit. Other health and care roles that are medium skilled or below—such as nursing associates—will also not be eligible for the proposed reduction. The consultation document states that applicants who have been “employed in a specified public service occupation” for five years would qualify for this reduction.¹⁰³ The policy is aimed at workers whose earnings are based on national pay scales—such as health and education roles—but it is unclear whether the Government intends for this reduction to apply only to people working directly in public sector services, or whether it would apply to people delivering public services in the private or charitable sectors.
55. There is a direct link between capacity within the social care sector and pressures faced by the NHS. NHS Employers told us that the interdependencies between social care and the NHS mean that “parity between NHS and care sector workers is crucial”.¹⁰⁴ Care England told us that, if the 5-year reduction only applied to public sector employers such as the NHS, nurses and other highly skilled workers in adult social care would be incentivised to leave the sector to join the NHS.¹⁰⁵

101 Department of Health and Social Care, [Fair pay agreement process in adult social care - consultation document](#), gov.uk, updated 20 October 2025

102 Department of Health and Social Care, [Independent commission into adult social care: terms of reference](#), gov.uk, updated 11 July 2025

103 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p24

104 NHS Employers ([RTS4240](#))

105 Care England ([RTS5785](#))

56.

CONCLUSION

The Home Office is facing an extremely difficult choice. If no changes are made to eligibility for settled status, hundreds of thousands of care workers and their dependants will become eligible for settled status in the next few years—gaining access to public funds and likely drawing on the public purse. If the Government proceeds with plans for a 15-year route for care workers this will likely lead to one of two outcomes for affected workers: they will leave the sector and return to their countries of origin, increasing vacancies in the social care sector, reducing the availability of care and increasing cost pressures which the Government may need to cover, or they will remain in the UK care sector, at prolonged risk of poverty and exploitation. This dilemma emanates from the long-standing issue of low pay and poor conditions in the care sector, and the Home Office’s mismanagement of the Health and Care Worker visa. It is important to acknowledge that migrants who work in our care sector make a genuine and valuable contribution to our country. There is also a legitimate public interest in responding to the recent high levels of migration through the care route, and addressing the direct fiscal impacts associated with this group reaching settlement after five years. Extending routes to settlement for care workers will have unintended consequences, and the Government will need to be prepared to identify these and mitigate them where necessary.

57.

RECOMMENDATION

If the Government implements a 15-year qualifying period for adult social care workers, we recommend that it takes urgent action to support decent pay and conditions for this group. The Home Office should set out in response to this report the steps it will be taking to support migrant care workers. We have previously recommended that the Home Office explore flexible visa arrangements for workers placed on long routes to settlement, so they are not reliant on their employer for their immigration status.

58.

CONCLUSION

It is extremely hard to predict what impact these changes will have on the social care workforce. Given the level of overseas recruitment that has taken place, decisions about routes to settlement for social care workers are likely to affect a significant proportion of the care workforce, which could have a major effect on the social care sector and the essential care delivered to vulnerable people in this country. It is not clear what impact the Government expects these changes to have on the social care workforce and we have seen no evidence that the Home Office has made efforts to integrate these reforms with the Government's overall strategy for adult social care. Outcomes in the NHS and the social care sector are inextricably linked and changes that affect social care will have a knock-on effect on the NHS. If the Government applies reductions to waits for settlement for employment in public services to the NHS but does not apply equivalent reductions for workers in social care, this could contribute to staff shortages in social care that ultimately harm the whole system.

59.

RECOMMENDATION

The Home Office should—in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care—conduct a full assessment of the potential impact of its planned changes to routes to settlement on the adult social care workforce, and on the stability of the sector. The Home Office should not rush to make changes before fully understanding their implications. Whatever changes the Government proceeds with, there should be parity between workers in the NHS and workers in adult social care for any reductions to qualifying periods for settlement.

5 Children and young people

- 60.** Children occupy a unique place in the immigration system and it is important that they are given special consideration.¹⁰⁶ Children do not have control over their immigration status and are reliant on the responsible adults in their lives to make decisions in their best interests. Childhood and young adulthood are formative periods of life where identity is developed and so a child's experience of immigration to the UK will be fundamentally different to that of an adult. The law explicitly recognises the importance of protecting children in the immigration system—section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 requires that the Home Office discharges its functions with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in the UK.¹⁰⁷
- 61.** Children's routes to settlement are usually linked to their parents. For example, the child of a skilled worker can come to the UK as a dependant on their parent's visa and will receive settlement at the same time as their parents. Likewise, the child of an asylum seeker will be a dependant on their parent's claim, and will be granted leave to remain in line with their parents, should their refugee claim be granted.¹⁰⁸ A young adult can remain on their parent's visa and qualify for settlement as a dependant after they have turned 18, as long as they were a child when they first arrived in the UK and they do not lead an independent life.¹⁰⁹ In certain circumstances children and young people can qualify for settlement independently of their parents, such as on the basis of their private life, which we discuss in more detail later in this Chapter. There are different rules for children born in the UK to immigrant parents, which we also discuss later in this Chapter.
- 62.** The current immigration rules in relation to children are extremely complex and the proposed changes to settlement will increase that complexity. The Earned Settlement consultation states that the Home Office intends to take full account of appropriate pathways for children and the needs of

106 In the UK a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18.

107 [Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009](#), section 55

108 Under the Government's proposals, children in refugee families may need to wait up to 20 years in order to receive settled status, under the "Core Protection" route. This inquiry has not examined in depth the proposed changes to asylum and refugee policy and so does not comment on the specific impacts of the proposed 20-year route.

109 Home Office, [Appendix Children: caseworker guidance](#), gov.uk, 11 October 2024, pp7–8

vulnerable children and families,¹¹⁰ but it is currently very unclear exactly how the proposals will apply to children and young people and so we cannot say with certainty what the actual impact will be. The consultation accepts that many of the requirements in the earned settlement model cannot be met by those who may still be children at the point that their parents become eligible for settlement, but suggests that some of those arriving as children could be required to qualify for settlement in their own right at some point after turning 18. The Home Office has said this could involve specifying an age limit below which some mandatory requirements, such as the minimum income requirement, are waived.¹¹¹ The lack of clarity about how the Government intends to reform routes to settlement for children has made it challenging to scrutinise the potential impact of the Government's reforms on children before they are finalised and implemented. This lack of clarity will also have made it difficult for those who may be affected by the reforms to give detailed feedback to the Government's consultation.

63. Based on the proposals set out in the Earned Settlement consultation, there are some reasonable conclusions that can be drawn about likely outcomes:

- At least some children who immigrate to the UK—or have already done so—will be subject to longer routes to settlement.
- Children are likely to face different routes to settlement, depending on the contributions of their parents, as child dependants usually receive settlement at the same time as both their parents.
- At least some immigrants who arrived in the UK as children will be expected to meet new mandatory requirements before being granted settled status, if they reach adulthood before becoming eligible for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

How these changes work in practice will be highly dependent on whether the Home Office makes any changes to existing settlement provisions specifically tailored for children, and how any such changes operate. According to the Oxford Migration Observatory, there were roughly 430,000 to 520,000 children on a potential pathway to settlement at the end of 2024, so changes to settlement policy could potentially affect hundreds of thousands of children.¹¹²

110 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p7

111 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p26

112 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Changes to settlement: what do they mean?](#), 10 February 2026

64. It appears that, under the proposed system, a child’s pathway to settlement will be determined by the contributions of their parents. Children in lower income households will therefore face a longer wait to settlement. Children of care workers, and other medium-skilled workers, may need to wait 15 years for settlement—or even longer if their parents are subject to any penalties or are unable to meet new mandatory requirements. The Home Office has proposed that adult dependants be required to earn settlement in their own right, which could put couples on routes to settlement with very different lengths. Under current rules, both parents must usually have settled status for a child to be granted settlement.¹¹³ If the Home Office maintains the rule that both parents must obtain settlement before a child can settle, children in households where one parent is not earning, or earns much less, would face longer routes to settlement, or be unable to settle at all, while they are dependants.¹¹⁴

65. We have heard arguments that it is not fair for the immigration outcomes of children to be based on an assessment of the contributions of their parents.¹¹⁵ Professor Alan Manning told us:

to hold children responsible for the acts of their parents is fundamentally unfair. You need something to say that children who have spent basically their entire life in the UK, and who know nothing else, are British for all intents and purposes.¹¹⁶

The Home Secretary emphasised to us that the first choice to bring children to the UK is made by their parents, and that parents are responsible for the life choices that their children have to navigate.¹¹⁷

66. Longer routes to settlement will increase the number of children who turn 18 before their parents reach settlement. Under the current system, young adults can settle in line with their parents as long as they arrived as child dependants. These young adults cannot forge an independent life—getting married or moving out of their parents’ homes—without jeopardising their immigration status.¹¹⁸ Longer routes to settlement would mean that people who came to the UK as children could be well into adulthood—potentially in their 30s—before their parents achieve settlement. Without proper mitigation, this runs the risk of requiring these young people to delay their independence in order to maintain their immigration status—despite having potentially grown up and spent much of their life in the UK—or to

113 UK Visas and Immigration, [Guidance: Dependent family members in work routes](#), gov.uk, 11 November 2025

114 [Q41](#)

115 Refugee and Migrant Children’s Consortium, Coram Children’s Legal Centre ([RTS4937](#)), section 7

116 [Q48](#)

117 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q22](#)

118 [Q41](#)

return to their country of origin without their parents. The Home Office is consulting on how the principle of dependants qualifying in their own right could be applied to these young adults and will develop proposals for how young adults may, after a certain age, transition to their own immigration pathway.¹¹⁹

- 67.** Anna Skehan—Solicitor at Islington Law Centre—argued that flexibility is essential for young people entering adulthood and said the Government needs to account for the specific needs of young people, including children with disabilities. She made the case that “allowing children and young people to take steps towards the form of leave to remain that best allows them to fulfil their potential is in everyone’s interests.”¹²⁰ The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) argued that it would be unjustified to immediately expect young immigrants to meet the income criteria associated with the earned settlement model, as this would be “inappropriate for the first few years of their adult life.”¹²¹
- 68.** The proposed changes are likely to mean that many children spend most of their childhood with temporary status. We received extensive evidence that immigration status can have a significant impact on children and young people’s sense of integration and belonging. Chrisann Jarrett—CEO of We Belong—told us that long routes to settlement for young people who have lived in the UK most of their lives create a sense of “state-imposed unwantedness” for many young people, leaving them feeling shame, and that there is something wrong with them.¹²² We also received evidence that long periods with temporary status can damage employment outcomes for young people.¹²³ The Refugee and Migrant Children Consortium told us that children who have grown up in the UK and gone through the British education system are “de facto” British. For children without settled status, their immigration status is out of line with their everyday reality.¹²⁴

119 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p26

120 [Q93](#)

121 Institute for Public Policy Research ([RTS5639](#))

122 [Q79](#)

123 Professor Nando Sigona (Professor of International Migration and Forced Displacement at University of Birmingham) ([RTS4197](#))

124 Refugee and Migrant Children’s Consortium, Coram Children’s Legal Centre ([RTS4937](#))

69.

CONCLUSION

The planned changes to settlement routes will see some children who arrive in the UK at a young age spending most, if not all, of their childhood with temporary immigration status. The changes will also see some young people who came to the UK as children entering their late twenties or even early thirties before their parents are able to apply for settlement. If dependent children continue to achieve settlement at the same time as their parents, this would almost certainly lead to negative outcomes for young people—where they cannot begin to forge independent lives as they must remain dependant on their parents to maintain their immigration status. It is currently unclear the age at which young people would need to qualify for settlement in their own right, and how they would be expected to do so. If young people are required to meet minimum economic requirements to achieve settled status, this could place unreasonable expectations on young people who are beginning their careers or lead them to prioritise low-paid work over education and training. Without robust protections for young people, there is a risk of settlement policy being incoherent and leading to unfair outcomes, based on factors entirely out of the control of the young people affected.

70.

RECOMMENDATION

Children who arrive at a young age and grow up in the UK should be granted settled status by the age of 18 without needing to fulfil the requirements of the ‘Earned Settlement’ model, in recognition of the fact that Britain is their home. Children who arrive at a later stage—such as those in their mid-teens—should have clear, fair and accessible pathways to settlement that do not inhibit them from beginning their adult lives. Young adults should not be subject to the same economic requirements as their parents. The Home Office should also recognise the specific needs of disabled young people, who may reach independence later than their peers.

71.

RECOMMENDATION

Under the proposed reforms parents may settle at very different times from each other. In cases where parents are placed on different routes to settlement, children should achieve settlement with whichever parent settles first.

Access to university

72.

We received evidence from immigrants on routes to settlement who were particularly concerned about the impact of the changes on their children’s ability to access a university education. Generally speaking, individuals are

required to have settled status or citizenship in order to qualify for ‘home fee’ status—where tuition fees are subject to a Government cap—or to be able to access student loans.¹²⁵ The difference between home fees and fees for international students can be tens of thousands of pounds a year. Nicolas Rollason told us that extending routes to settlement would increase the number of young people who are not able to access university in the UK.¹²⁶ This could potentially affect children who have spent a long time in the UK, such as children of people on the proposed 15-year route.

73. CONCLUSION

Extending routes to settlement will increase the number of children and young people in the UK who are not eligible for home fee status. This is likely to lead to some young people delaying or missing out on going to university. Access to education promotes integration and enables greater contribution to society by boosting employment prospects, so it would be counter to the overall aims of the Earned Settlement proposals to restrict access to the university for young people who are resident in the UK.

74. RECOMMENDATION

Eligibility for home fee status should be reviewed in light of the changes to routes to settlement, to ensure that children and young people who have lived in the UK for a significant period of time are not prevented from going to university due to lack of home fee status. Home fee status could, for example, be granted on the basis of a minimum period of UK residence in childhood, such as five years. As education is a devolved matter, the Home Office and Department for Education should engage with the devolved administrations on the impact of the changes, and implications for access to home fee status in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Child poverty

- 75.** While there is considerable uncertainty about how the Government’s policy will apply to children, it appears likely that no matter how the policy is applied it will lead to more child poverty. We received evidence arguing that extending settlement routes will increase and deepen child poverty, by leaving more children in households that are subject to the No Recourse to

¹²⁵ There is an existing exemption for some children and young people who have spent most of their lives in the UK. Children and young people who meet the 5-year private life route requirements (discussed later in this Chapter) and have been lawfully resident in the UK for three years can qualify for home fee status. Source: UK Council for International Student Affairs, [Long Residence](#) (accessed 17 February 2026)

¹²⁶ [Q12](#)

Public Funds (NRPF) condition.¹²⁷ Project 17—a charity that provides support to children in households subject to NRPF—told us about children in families currently subject to NRPF who are living “in situations of deep poverty for extended periods of time”, with their basic needs going unmet.¹²⁸ Michelle Lee-Izu—Chief Operating Officer at Barnardo’s—told the Committee that families with NRPF come to Barnardo’s for basics that they cannot provide for their children, such as coats, shoes and beds.¹²⁹ Michelle told us that Barnardo’s is seeing children in poverty experiencing malnutrition and stunted growth.¹³⁰ Eligibility for public funds is usually based on the parent’s, not the child’s, immigration status, so these changes will affect British and settled children.¹³¹

76. Children of lower paid workers, who are likely to have longer routes to settlement than those on higher incomes, are more likely to be living in poorer households as a result of the changes. As we discussed in Chapter Four, a cohort particularly vulnerable to poverty will be the children of adult social care workers, who will not be able to access public funds, and will be required to remain working in a low-paid sector for 15 years to maintain their immigration status. Professor Alan Manning highlighted this group and told us that he would expect child poverty to go up as result of the changes, although some of this impact will be mitigated by local authority support.¹³²
77. Local authorities have a legal obligation to safeguard the wellbeing of children, regardless of their immigration status, and so will provide accommodation and subsistence support to immigrant families where necessary to safeguard the welfare of a child—even if they are subject to the NRPF condition.¹³³ The bar for accessing this support is higher than the bar for accessing benefits, so not all children in families with NRPF that are in poverty will be able to access local authority support. We have received

127 For example: Barnardo’s ([RTS5793](#)), Institute for Research into International Migration and Superdiversity (IRIS) ([RTS4453](#)), Project 17 ([RTS5787](#)), Refugee and Migrant Children’s Consortium, Coram Children’s Legal Centre ([RTS4937](#))

128 Project 17 ([RTS5787](#))

129 [Q77](#)

130 [Q89](#)

131 Home Office, [Public Funds](#), gov.uk, 9 April 2025, p11

132 [Q50](#)

133 Under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, local authority social services may provide accommodation and financial support to households with NRPF when a child in that household has been assessed as being “in need”. According to the NRPF Network, it is highly likely that a child would be found to be in need if they are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, or when their parents are not able to meet their basic living needs. This provision applies in England. There are equivalent legal obligations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Source: NRPF Network, [Social services support for families: When will a family be eligible](#) (accessed 9 February 2026)

evidence that children and families already face significant barriers to accessing local authority support, and that this support often does not actually meet their needs.¹³⁴

- 78.** The proposed reforms are likely to increase financial pressures on local authorities, which do not receive additional central government funding for support provided to families with NRPF. In 2024/25, the 91 local authorities that provided data to the NRPF Network spent £94 million on support to NRPF households.¹³⁵ As we discussed earlier in this report, the Home Office is concerned about the potential fiscal impact of a large number of people, particularly low paid workers with children, gaining settlement and access to public funds in the next few years, and reducing this expenditure is a key goal of the Government’s changes. The additional costs to local authorities of supporting families who cannot access mainstream benefits will need to be included in any calculation of the fiscal impact of the Government’s plans.
- 79.** The Government’s child poverty strategy—which was presented as the “first step on our road to ending child poverty”—outlines the economic costs of child poverty. Children who grow up in poorer households earn less at 30 years old than their peers, and are more likely to be out of work, education or training in early adulthood. Child poverty also worsens health outcomes, increasing costs to the NHS.¹³⁶ The Home Office will also need to consider these costs when conducting their analysis of the fiscal impact of the changes.
- 80.** The Government’s child poverty strategy states that the Government is committed to ensuring that vulnerable migrant children receive the support that they require, regardless of their immigration status.¹³⁷ When we asked the Home Secretary what the Home Office’s assessment of the impact of the changes on child poverty was, she told us:

This is a system of economic migration. It is right for the state to expect people who are coming here to work to be able to support themselves and, if they choose to bring their families with them, that they will be able to support their families as well.¹³⁸

The Government’s reforms will apply in some form to almost everyone currently on a route to settlement—including family members of British citizens and people with settled status, and people in the UK on the basis

134 Project 17 ([RTS5787](#))

135 NRPF Network ([RTS2501](#)) para 10

136 Cabinet Office, [Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty](#), CP 1449, December 2025, p5

137 Cabinet office, [Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty](#), CP 1449, December 2025, p98

138 [Q28](#)

of their right to family or private life—and not just economic migrants. We discuss later in this Chapter the potential impact on people in the UK on the current 10-year family or private life route, who are at particular risk of poverty.

81. The Government has conducted an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the earned settlement model set out in its consultation,¹³⁹ which might give some indication of the expected impact of the Government's reforms on children but has declined to publish or share this with the Committee. The Home Secretary has said that the Government will publish a final EIA alongside the Government's formal response to the consultation.¹⁴⁰

82. **CONCLUSION**

The changes set out in the Earned Settlement consultation will place lower earning families on longer routes to settlement. This will very likely increase child poverty, and the harms resulting from child poverty. The children of care workers, who are poorly paid and would face a 15-year route to settlement, are a group that would be particularly vulnerable. Increasing poverty in immigrant families is likely to increase costs for local authorities and increase the indirect costs that arise from children growing up in poverty. We heard evidence that very often supporting destitute families with No Recourse to Public Funds where there is a statutory child protection duty leads to significant costs for local councils. We agree with the Home Secretary that it is generally reasonable to expect economic migrants to be able to support themselves and their families. However, if the Government proceeds with these reforms it must be prepared for the eventuality that immigrants will stay in country despite experiencing poverty and take action to mitigate the impact this will have on children.

83. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Government conducts and publishes an assessment of the impact on child poverty of its planned changes to routes to settlement, before finalising and implementing these changes. To mitigate the impact of the changes, the Home Office should make it easier for parents who are subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition to access financial support where this is essential for supporting the welfare of a child. The Government should also adequately fund local authorities to cover the costs of supporting households who are subject to the NRPF condition.

139 [Immigration](#) PQ 93724, 27 November 2025

140 Letter from the Home Secretary to the Chair regarding the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed changes set out in the consultation 'A Fairer Pathway to Settlement', [2 February 2026](#)

Penalties for accessing public funds

- 84.** The Government has proposed that immigrants who access public funds face an extended route to settlement. Immigrants who claim public funds for less than a year would have an additional five year wait for settlement, while immigrants who claim public funds for more than a year would face an additional 10 year wait. When explaining the proposals, the Home Secretary told us that the system of reductions and penalties is “about showing that contribution, staying in work, making a contribution to the taxpayer and your good character all count towards earning settled status.”¹⁴¹
- 85.** The largest cohort of immigrants that are eligible to access public funds are refugees. The Home Office plans to address the issue of refugee settlement through its new ‘core protection’ model. It is not fully clear whether refugees would be covered by the time adjustment-based model set out in the Earned Settlement consultation, although it appears the intent of the policy is to deal with them separately. If refugees were subject to the penalties set out in the Earned Settlement consultation, this would put them on very long routes to settlement. Subjecting refugees to these penalties would also risk breaching the UK’s obligations under the Refugee Convention, which requires refugees to be given the same access to “public relief and assistance” and to social security as is accorded to British citizens.¹⁴²
- 86.** Aside from refugees, immigrants are generally not allowed to access public funds. Those who have been granted leave on the basis of their human right to family or private life, and those on Hong Kong BN(O) visas, are eligible to apply for a change in conditions to allow them to access benefits in special circumstances.¹⁴³ The Home Office also has discretion to allow access to public funds for other immigrants. Eligible immigrants can apply for a change of conditions to access public funds if one of the following is true:
- they are destitute or are at imminent risk of destitution;
 - there are reasons relating to a child’s welfare which means they need access to public funds, or
 - they are facing exceptional circumstances affecting their income or expenditure.

Anna Skehan, solicitor at Islington Law Centre, told us that circumstances that might lead to an application to access public funds might include an injury or illness, a mental health crisis, or a relationship breaking down due to domestic abuse.¹⁴⁴ Grants of access to public funds are not very

141 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q4](#)

142 UNHCR, [1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#), Article 23 and Article 24(1)(b)

143 Home Office, [Permitting access to public funds](#), gov.uk (accessed 19 February 2026)

144 [Q87](#)

common when considering the number of immigrants in the UK; in 2024, approximately 2,000 applications for a change of conditions were granted by the Home Office.¹⁴⁵

87. The NRPF Network—an organisation that provides advice to local authorities on NRPF issues—told us that applying for access to benefits through a change of conditions is typically “a last resort”. The NRPF Network argued that penalising people for accessing public funds would increase risks of poverty, abuse and exploitation.¹⁴⁶ The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) told us that applying this penalty would deter people from applying for a change of conditions and shift costs to local authorities social care teams, “where support is intensive and more costly than mainstream provision.”¹⁴⁷ COSLA told us that applying the penalty to people who have already claimed benefits would penalise individuals who were following immigration advice that was correct at the time of application and who were assured by immigration advisers that their application for public funds would not affect their eligibility for settlement.¹⁴⁸

88. **CONCLUSION**

Most immigrants can only access benefits in rare circumstances and must be granted permission to do so by the Home Office. We are concerned that penalising people in difficult circumstances who urgently need support will deepen poverty and increase pressures on local authorities. It would be deeply unfair to apply the penalty to people who have already been granted access to public funds and would not have known that this could extend their route to settlement. Doing so would also make implementation more practically difficult.

89. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Home Office does not apply any penalties for accessing public funds on the basis of benefit claims that preceded the Government’s new policy. There should be discretion for reasonable and fair exemptions to this penalty, where the applicant can demonstrate that they have only accessed public funds due to particularly challenging circumstances.

145 Home Office, [Migration Transparency Data](#), Immigration and protection data: July to September 2025, Table CoC_01

146 NRPF Network ([RTS2501](#)) paras 21, 27

147 Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) ([RTS5782](#))

148 Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) ([RTS5782](#))

The 10-year family or private life route

90. The 10-year family or private life route is currently the longest route to settlement for immigrants in the UK. People are placed on the 10-year route when they would not otherwise qualify for permission under the immigration rules but have a right to stay in the country on the basis of their human right to private or family life. The Oxford Migration Observatory estimated that in 2021 there were around 170,000 people on the 10-year route.¹⁴⁹ The 10-year route provides a pathway to settled status for those who previously did not have a lawful basis to be in the UK, but where it would not be reasonable to remove them, for example because of family ties—such as having a British child—or the establishment of private life on the basis of very long residence in the UK.¹⁵⁰ This can provide a route to settlement for people who have previously broken immigration rules, for example by overstaying a visa. It also provides a route for people who would qualify for a family visa, but cannot meet the financial requirements, where there are exceptional circumstances.¹⁵¹ People on this route have often been living in the UK for a long time,¹⁵² and are unlikely to leave the UK. There is a shorter, 5-year route to settlement for children and young people who have spent most of their lives in the UK, which is discussed below.
91. Leave to remain on the 10-year route is granted for no longer than 2.5 years. Applicants must renew their leave at least three times following their initial application before they become eligible to apply for settlement. Each in-country application for 2.5 years of leave costs £1,321 per person. Applicants are also required to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge at the point of renewal—£2,587.50 per adult and £1,940 per child.¹⁵³ People granted leave on the 10-year route do not usually have access to public funds but may be eligible to apply for a change of conditions, as discussed above.

149 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Migrants on ten-year routes to settlement in the UK](#), 21 July 2021

150 Oxford Migration Observatory, [Migrants on ten-year routes to settlement in the UK](#), 21 July 2021

151 Home Office, [Family Policy: Family life \(as a partner or parent\) and exceptional circumstances](#), gov.uk, 30 December 2025, p26

152 IPPR, GMIAU and Praxis, [‘A punishing process’: Experiences of people on the 10-year route to settlement](#), 2 March 2023, p19

153 Home Office, [Family visas: apply, extend or switch](#), gov.uk (accessed 13 February 2026)

Immigration fees generate substantial income for the Home Office,¹⁵⁴ and are higher than the cost of administration, in some cases by a significant margin.¹⁵⁵

92. We received evidence that the combination of high visa fees, No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and instability can cause significant hardship to families. Chrisann Jarrett—CEO of We Belong—told us that paying visa fees has left families unable to afford the basics, such as food, electricity and their children’s school uniform.¹⁵⁶ We heard that this can affect British or settled children whose parents are on the 10-year route.¹⁵⁷ People applying for leave on the basis of their family or private life can apply for a fee waiver if they cannot afford to pay the fee. However, we heard that in practice fee waivers are difficult to access. Islington Law Centre described applying for these waivers as “complex, intrusive and time-consuming”. If a fee waiver application is rejected, all fees must be paid within 10 days, or the applicants will lose their immigration status.¹⁵⁸ Chrisann Jarrett told us that families who were able to save up for some, but not all, of the fees ended up being penalised, because they are considered too rich to be eligible for the fee waiver, but do not actually have enough money to pay the fees.¹⁵⁹
93. It can be very difficult for individuals and families on the 10-year route to achieve settled status, due to the costs and complexity of applications.¹⁶⁰ Anna Skehan, Solicitor at Islington Law Centre, described maintaining lawful presence on a 10-year route as a “feat of endurance and will and, to an extent, luck”.¹⁶¹ The number of people achieving settled status at the end of the 10-year route is much smaller than the number who entered it 10 years ago, suggesting that people are falling off the route,¹⁶² likely at least in part because of the challenges of maintaining status via this route. We heard that children are particularly at risk of losing their immigration status: Anna Skehan told us that some families cannot afford to pay the visa fees for all members of their household, and in these cases they usually prioritise renewing the status of the adult earners in the household, as this enables the main earner to keep working to feed and house the family.¹⁶³ Islington

154 In 2024/25 UK Visas and Immigration had an overall income of around £3 billion and a surplus of £1.8 billion once the cost of delivery is taken into account. The cost recovery rate for visa fees was 256%. Source: Home Office, [Home Office annual report and accounts: 2024 to 2025](#), HC 1133, 17 July 2025, p192

155 House of Commons library, [Immigration Fees](#), Research Briefing 9859, 13 February 2026, pp9–11

156 [Q86](#)

157 [Q77](#)

158 Islington Law Centre ([RTS5741](#)) para 16

159 [Q86](#)

160 [Q64](#) [Anna Skehan]

161 [Q81](#)

162 [Q15](#) [Dr Madeleine Sumption]

163 [Q77](#)

Law Centre also told us that for cultural and economic reasons, families who cannot pay all the fees will often prioritise securing leave for men, meaning women in the household are more likely to lose their immigration status.¹⁶⁴

- 94.** Families experience significant barriers to accessing immigration and legal advice. There are areas of the country where it is extremely difficult to access immigration advice due to a lack of advisers and ongoing challenges in the legal aid sector.¹⁶⁵ Legal aid is currently only available for asylum cases and a small set of immigration cases, such as immigration bail.¹⁶⁶ People with cases outside the scope of legal aid, including family or private life applications, can only access legal aid if they qualify for exceptional case funding.¹⁶⁷ Islington Law Centre told us that the plans proposed in the Earned Settlement consultation will require a significant increase in capacity in the legal aid sector, given the additional applications that will be required.¹⁶⁸ The NRPF Network told us the proposals risk an increase in the number of people who fail to maintain lawful immigration status, in part because of the shortage of immigration advice.¹⁶⁹
- 95.** The proposed earned settlement reforms will not alter the baseline for settlement for these families, which will remain at 10 years. However, proposed “non-compliance and negative contribution” penalties are likely to affect at least some people on the 10-year route. These proposed penalties are:
- An additional 5-year wait for people who have been in receipt of public funds for less than 12 months
 - An additional 10-year wait for people who have been in receipt of public funds for more than 12 months
 - Up to an additional 20-year wait for people who arrive in the UK illegally
 - Up to an additional 20-year wait for people who entered the UK on a visit visa

164 Islington Law Centre ([RTS5741](#)) para 47

165 Citizens Advice ([RTS3118](#)), Dr Jo Wilding, [No Access to Justice 2](#), 9 June 2025

166 NRPF Network, [Legal aid: Immigration and asylum cases](#) (accessed 13 February 2026)

167 Exceptional Case Funding can be granted in cases that would not usually be eligible if the applicant’s human rights are at risk. Source: [Legal aid: Funding for exceptional cases](#), gov.uk (accessed 13 February 2026)

168 Islington Law Centre ([RTS5741](#)) para 18

169 NRPF Network ([RTS2501](#))

- Up to an additional 20-year wait for people who have overstayed permission for six months or more.¹⁷⁰

Only one of these penalties would apply to an individual case—if more than one condition is applicable then the largest increase is applied. The Earned Settlement consultation states that the Government “believes it is right that those who do not comply with immigration laws should expect this to impact on their pathway to settlement”.¹⁷¹

- 96.** The above penalties are more likely to affect people on the 10-year route than other immigrants because the route provides a way for people who do not otherwise have permission to regularise their status, although not everyone on the route will be affected. This would include, for example, people who have overstayed their visa. As we have discussed, there are challenges to maintaining lawful status on the route, which can lead to individuals overstaying—this could lead to people on the current 10-year route having to wait 30 years to achieve settlement. People on the 10-year route are one of the few groups of immigrants who are generally permitted to apply for permission to access public funds, meaning this group is also one of the ones most likely to have their route extended by the penalty for accessing public funds, which could place them on a 20-year route to settlement.
- 97.** We received evidence that extending routes to settlement for families by up to 20 years would cause significant harm to children and young people affected. We discussed earlier in this report the evidence we received that extending NRPf is likely to increase poverty among children who are affected. Anna Skehan emphasised to us that even if only the parents face an extended route, this will still create harm and instability for the children as family resources “are diverted away from what is best for those children and what will bring them most safely to adulthood, and into managing an increasingly unmanageable route to settlement”.¹⁷² Anna told us that, given the challenges families currently face completing the 10-year route, she expects that a 30-year route to settlement would significantly increase the number of people who do not manage to reach settlement, and become undocumented.¹⁷³

170 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p23

171 Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p25

172 [Q85](#)

173 [Q81](#)

98.

CONCLUSION

The current 10-year family or private life pathway is a challenging route to settlement for families who are on it. The route is expensive, and it is easy for people who are trying to comply with the rules to fall off the route. The 10-year route can cause genuine hardship for children affected by it. The changes set out in the Earned Settlement consultation could lead to some people on the current 10-year route having to wait 30 years for settlement. A 30-year route is too long, and the costs of the route would mean that in practice, many people would never achieve settlement.

99.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that people who under the current system would be on a 10-year family or private life route to settlement be given a route under the new rules that is reasonable and achievable. People should not be placed on a 30-year route to settlement. To reduce the financial pressures associated with repeat applications, and the risk of people losing status, the Home Office should increase the duration of leave to remain on the family or private life route from 2.5 to 5 years, and set visa fees for people granted leave on the basis of their family and private life at no higher than the cost of administration.

Children who have spent most of their life in the UK

100. There are special provisions in the immigration rules for children and young people who were brought to this country at a young age and grew up here, but do not have valid immigration permission. This is in recognition of the fact that these children had no control over their immigration status and that the UK has a duty “to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child when carrying out immigration functions”. Home Office guidance notes that children brought to the UK and raised here are likely to have been educated in the UK, have strong English language skills, and be well integrated into British society.¹⁷⁴
101. Until 2022, children and young people in this cohort could apply for leave to remain under the 10-year route to settlement discussed above. In 2022, changes were made to the immigration rules, creating a 5-year route to settlement, which children and young people can apply for if:
- They are under the age of 18, have lived in the UK for seven years, and it would not be reasonable for them to leave, or

174 Home Office, [Private life](#), gov.uk, 30 December 2025, p9

- They are aged 18 to 24 and have spent at least half their life in the UK.¹⁷⁵

In order to qualify for this route a child will need to have arrived in the UK by the age of 12 years and 6 months. There are separate provisions for children born in the UK to immigrant parents—a child who was born in the UK and has lived here for the first seven years of their life can apply for immediate Indefinite Leave to Remain.¹⁷⁶

- 102.** We Belong told us that it is common for young people without valid immigration status to only discover this when they turn 18 and find that they are unable to progress to university along with their peers. We Belong told us that these young people, having lived in the UK for most of their lives, consider the UK to be their home, but can experience hardship as result of the current settlement process, including the loss of educational and employment opportunities.¹⁷⁷ Chrisann Jarrett, the CEO of We Belong, told us that the immigration system harms the wellbeing and sense of identity of children and young people.¹⁷⁸
- 103.** Chrisann Jarrett told us that the introduction of the 5-year route has been “transformative” for young people who have benefited, by providing security and permanence, and allowing them to pursue opportunities that they previously could not. However, Chrisann told us that the impact of the 5-year route has been limited due to the costs involved—it would cost a young adult at least £6,496 to be granted leave on the 5-year route and it costs £3,029 to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). Chrisann told us We Belong sees young people falling off the route as they are unable to pay visa fees, or becoming trapped on the route as they are unable to pay the fee for ILR.¹⁷⁹ Chrisann told us longer routes as a whole are likely to increase the number of young people growing up in the UK with precarious status, and that retaining the 5-year route would not, alone, address the potential impacts on children and young people.¹⁸⁰
- 104.** The Home Secretary assured us that the Home Office will “protect the position of those are already here” in this cohort but did not rule out making changes to this route in the future.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Home Office, [Private life](#), gov.uk, 30 December 2025, p9

¹⁷⁶ Home Office, [Indefinite leave to remain \(private life\): Eligibility](#), gov.uk (accessed 17 February 2026)

¹⁷⁷ We Belong ([RTS2965](#))

¹⁷⁸ [Q79](#)

¹⁷⁹ [Q65](#)

¹⁸⁰ [Q86](#)

¹⁸¹ Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q26](#)

105. CONCLUSION

Children who are brought to the UK at a young age and grow up here are, for all intents and purposes, British. These children and young people should not be required to “earn” their right to remain in the UK. The rights of these children and young people should be protected regardless of any changes made to settlement policy. The introduction of the 5-year private life route for children and young people has been a positive step. However, the cost of the route means that its impact has been limited, and there are children and young people who have spent most of their life in the UK who are unable to access a realistic route to settlement.

106. RECOMMENDATION

As we previously recommended, the Government should ensure that all children who come to the UK at a young age and grow up in the UK are granted settled status by the age of 18. The Government should also maintain the 5-year private life route for children and young people who have lived in the UK for most of their lives, as a backstop and for where this would be a faster route to settlement than granting it at 18. The Home Office should ensure that the Earned Settlement changes do not in any way disadvantage this group. Fees applied to these children and young people should be set at a level no higher than the administrative cost of processing the applications.

Citizenship

- 107.** The proposed changes to eligibility for settled status would have a direct impact on entitlements to British citizenship for those born in the UK to immigrant parents. A child who is born in the UK will automatically be a British citizen if one of their parents is a British citizen or has settled status. If a child is born in the UK to a foreign national who does not have ILR, but their parent secures settled status before they turn 18, they have a statutory right to register as a British citizen. A child born in the UK who has lived in the UK for the first 10 years of their life, with no absences from the country of more than 90 days, also has the right to register as a citizen, regardless of the immigration status of their parents.¹⁸²
- 108.** Extending routes to settlement is likely to increase the number of children born in the UK while their parents are still on a visa, which will mean more children born and raised in the UK without automatic citizenship. This will mean more children will need to register in order to become British citizens. It will also delay eligibility for registration as a British citizen for many children and young people.

182 [British Nationality Act 1981](#), section 1

109. The Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens (PRCBC) told us that people with the right to register as a British citizen face barriers to registration. PRCBC highlighted a lack of awareness among young people that they are not citizens, and that they need to register.¹⁸³ People who's right to register is reliant upon a parent receiving settled status must apply for registration before they turn 18 in order to gain citizenship. PRCBC told us that people face practical barriers to exercising their right to register, which can make it harder for some people to access their citizenship rights. These include the cost of fees¹⁸⁴—it costs £1,214 for a child to register as British, and £1,576 for an adult¹⁸⁵—and difficulties securing evidence that they qualify, especially for those that need to prove they have lived in the UK continuously for the first 10 years of their life.¹⁸⁶ The PRCBC told us that the lack of legal aid for citizenship cases is a barrier to children and young people registering as British Citizens.¹⁸⁷ We heard that lack of citizenship can be a barrier to education, employment and travel, and result in children feeling “not fully assimilated into the fabric and social culture of the UK”.¹⁸⁸

110. CONCLUSION

A child who is born in the UK to someone who has settled status will automatically be British. Extending the waiting period for settlement will therefore increase the number of children born in the UK who are not automatically British citizens and will need to register at a future date in order to become citizens. Under the current system, people with the right to register face barriers that mean they can lose out on their citizenship rights.

111. RECOMMENDATION

The Home Office should review barriers to the registration of children and young adults as British citizens in light of the proposed changes to routes to settlement and take action to improve access to citizenship for children and young adults who are entitled to register as British citizens. This could include only charging applicants for registration the administrative cost of processing their application and running an awareness campaign to promote registration.

183 Amnesty International UK, Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens ([RTS4685](#)) para 21

184 A fee waiver is available for eligible children to apply to register, but not adults.

185 Home Office, [Fees for citizenship applications and the right of abode from 9 April 2025](#), gov.uk, 29 July 2025

186 Amnesty International UK, Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens ([RTS4685](#)) para 25

187 Amnesty International UK, Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens ([RTS4685](#)) paras 28–29

188 [Q70](#)

Divergent family routes

- 112.** These changes as a whole are likely to lead to increasing numbers of children who grow up in the UK and view Britain as their home, but whose parents have limited leave to remain in the UK. Some of these children will be British citizens, having been granted the right to register under the 10-year provision. Some of these children will not be citizens but will have a right to live in the UK on the basis of their private life. It is important that there are protections in place for children and young people who have grown up in the UK and consider it home, which is why we have recommended that the Government ensures these children are granted settlement by the age of 18. However, a side effect of these provisions would be that more young people are achieving settlement or citizenship faster than their parents. This could lead to unintended consequences—especially in cases where the parent of a British or settled child loses their own immigration status before reaching settlement—that the Home Office will need to address.

113.

CONCLUSION

There is a significant risk that extending routes to settlement will increase the number of families who are deeply rooted in the UK but have precarious immigration status. This is obviously not an intended goal of the Home Office and would increase administrative pressures on the immigration system, as well as having adverse consequences for the families affected.

6 Transitional protections

- 114.** The Home Office is planning to apply the changes set out in the Earned Settlement consultation to people who are already in the UK, with the potential for some transitional protections. This means the changes would apply to immigrants who made the decision to come to the UK before the Earned Settlement changes were announced and were expecting to qualify under a 5-year route. It is common for the Home Office to apply transitional protections when making changes to the Immigration Rules—so that immigrants are covered by the rules that were in place at the time they received their visa, with regards to both settlement and other aspects of immigration policy¹⁸⁹—but there is also precedent for changes to Immigration Rules being applied to people already in the UK.¹⁹⁰
- 115.** We have received a very high volume of representations from immigrants in the UK calling for the changes not to be applied to people who are already in the country. Immigrants have told us that they made major life decisions—moving their families, selling properties or closing businesses in their home country, turning down other opportunities, and in some cases, delaying having children—on the expectation that they would be able to secure settled status after five years. It is clear from the evidence we have received that some immigrants would have made different choices had they been aware that their route to settlement might change in the way proposed by the Government.
- 116.** The Law Society told that us that applying these changes to immigrants who have already arrived in the UK would undermine “fundamental principles of fairness and expectation”.¹⁹¹ Concerns about fairness were reflected in much of the evidence we received, including from employers,¹⁹² unions¹⁹³ and charities.¹⁹⁴ We Belong argued that applying these changes to people

189 For example: Home Office, [Statement of Intent: Family Migration](#), June 2012, para 132

190 For example: Home Office, [Explanatory Memorandum to the statement of Changes in Immigration Rules laid on 30 March 2006 \(HC 1016\)](#), 30 March 2006, para 7

191 The Law Society ([RTS5775](#)) para 13

192 NHS Employers ([RTS4240](#)), Forvis Mazars LLP ([RTS4710](#)), Care England ([RTS5785](#))

193 Trades Union Congress (TUC) ([RTS4512](#)), Unite the Union ([RTS5780](#)), Royal College of Nursing ([RTS4705](#))

194 Citizens Advice ([RTS3118](#)), We Belong ([RTS2965](#)), Mencap ([RTS4769](#)), Citizens UK ([RTS5276](#))

already in the UK undermines the principle that residents and citizens know where they stand in relation to the law and “makes the law appear as a bad-faith actor”.¹⁹⁵

- 117.** We also received evidence arguing that applying the rules to those already in the UK would create uncertainty about the stability of UK immigration arrangements and make the UK less attractive as a destination. Jonathan Portes, Professor of Economics and Public Policy at King’s College London, argued that applying the proposed changes retrospectively would damage the attractiveness of the UK to highly skilled migrants, by increasing uncertainty about what is, for high earners, akin to an investment decision.¹⁹⁶
- 118.** A key goal of the changes is to respond to recent high levels of immigration, particularly in 2022 and 2023, and the potential direct fiscal impact of lower paid workers, such as those in the care sector, receiving settlement. For the Government to achieve its stated goal of addressing the impact of these arrivals, it is necessary that the changes apply to at least some people who are already in the country. When we asked the Home Secretary about the fairness of these proposals, she told us that the changes are a fair response to the recent high levels of immigration:

What you are trading off is a set of potential obligations to people who have come to the country, versus your obligations to your citizens and your own long-term residents in the country. There is a choice—and a trade-off—here, and we are trying to find a balanced way through what is a very difficult problem.¹⁹⁷

- 119.** Applying the changes to people already in the UK will inevitably have more significant consequences for some people than others. It would be especially difficult for people who are close to achieving settlement under the current rules and have planned on that basis but would now miss out. It would also be particularly challenging for people on existing 10-year routes—the private or family life route and the 10-year long residency route. We discussed earlier in this report the significant obstacles people on the current 10-year family or private life route experience in trying to achieve settlement. The long residency route allows immigrants who have been lawfully in the UK for 10 years to qualify for settlement, including counting time spent on visas that would otherwise not qualify—for example, time spent on a student or graduate visa.¹⁹⁸ Individuals could have spent as long as nine years on a route, planning on the basis of settlement after 10 years.

195 We Belong ([RTS2965](#))

196 Professor Jonathan Portes (Professor of Economics and Public Policy at King’s College London) ([RTS1292](#))

197 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q18](#)

198 Home Office, [Long residence](#), 24 November 2025, p4

The Government plans to abolish the continuous residence route as part of its changes, which means individuals who had been relying on this route would be either prevented or significantly delayed from settling.¹⁹⁹ As the Government is principally concerned with the impact of arrivals after 2021, applying these changes to people who arrived prior to this date does not appear to meet the key objectives the Government has set out as the basis for these changes.

120. CONCLUSION

We are concerned about the plans to apply the proposed Earned Settlement model to people who are already in the country. It is in the interests of the Home Office, and the UK's reputation, to be consistent in the application of immigration rules and policy. We agree that the Government needs to weigh and consider the broader impacts of settlement policy on the UK—including what is fair to British people and people already settled here—and understand that extending routes to settlement for at least some people already in the UK is essential for the Government to be able to meet its objective of reducing the impact of the large number of immigrants who arrived to the UK in recent years. It is not clear that applying these changes to people who arrived prior to introduction of new immigration rules in 2021—after the UK's exit from the EU—is necessary for the Government to achieve its stated policy aims, and so it is difficult to see a justification for applying the changes to this cohort.

121. RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government carefully consider and set out clear mitigations—including suitable transitional arrangements—for people already in the UK who are affected by changes to routes to settlement. There should be specific protections for vulnerable people who may struggle to meet the criteria of the new system. The changes should not be applied to people in the UK who arrived before 2021 and would under the current rules be on track to settle in the UK through a 10-year route.

¹⁹⁹ Home Office, [A Fairer Pathway to Settlement: A statement and accompanying consultation on earned settlement](#), CP 1448, November 2025, p23

7 Implementation

- 122.** The Home Secretary has said she intends to begin implementing these changes from April 2026. However, it appears likely that a fully-fledged contribution-based system will not be introduced immediately. The Home Secretary told us:

Once we have finalised the policy, then we will be able to do the full impact assessments, specifically on equalities, and at that point we will have to design the system to make sure that it can cope with those new changes, but I am confident that that can be done.²⁰⁰

Assessing the impact of the finalised policy, designing a system, and then implementing it will inevitably take time. The Home Secretary told us that she expects some elements that are not under consultation to be implemented more quickly.²⁰¹ Changes to English language requirements for settlement, which were not under consultation, were introduced through changes to the immigration rules on 5 March 2026 and will come into force on 26 March 2027.²⁰²

- 123.** Some of the proposals set out in the Earned Settlement consultation are unclear or not fully developed. As we previously discussed, the Home Office has not set out how the new proposals will apply to children and young people. As noted in Chapter Four, the Government has not yet fully considered the impact of the changes for the adult social care system, which will be essential to complete prior to implementation if the Government is to avoid the risk of disrupting the provision of adult social care. We have received evidence that uncertainty about the changes, and about how and when they will be applied, is already causing distress for people in the UK who are unclear about their future.²⁰³
- 124.** The Home Office will face a number of practical challenges in implementing the proposed changes. It will require the department to implement a much more complex system to assess settlement applications: assessing applicant's earnings, employment, past compliance with immigration rules, history of claiming benefits, and potentially volunteering history. Dr Madeleine Sumption told us that the current process for demonstrating that

200 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q35](#)

201 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2026, [Q35](#)

202 Home Office, [Explanatory memorandum to the statement of changes in the Immigration Rules: HC 1691, 5 March 2026](#), paras 5.60–5.62

203 Project 17 ([RTS5787](#))

one meets the income requirements for a family visa is “overwhelmingly complicated”. Dr Sumption told us that while many aspects of the changes are feasible to implement, if everyone applying for settlement is required to demonstrate their income, without changes to simplify the process, there is a risk that this could create a significant operational burden for the Home Office.²⁰⁴ Extended routes to settlement will mean that immigrants will also need to apply for visa renewals more times before reaching settlement, which will increase the volume of case work the Home Office needs to process. The Home Office has previously struggled with implementing large-scale system changes, especially where these require new IT systems. For example, the implementation of eVisas has led to technical problems, leaving some individuals struggling to prove their immigration status.²⁰⁵ The Home Office also has a history of moving large numbers of staff around to meet emerging pressures, meaning that the need to increase casework capacity could lead to a loss of capacity in other areas.

125. CONCLUSION

The Home Office has said that changes to eligibility for settlement will begin to be implemented from April 2026 but has not given a clear timeline of when specific changes will be implemented. Key elements of the proposals that could have unintended consequences remain unclear and under-developed. The Home Office will need to implement significant changes to its systems, processes and staffing to deliver its new system of settlement. It is obvious that the Home Office is not in a position to fully implement changes of the scale proposed in its consultation from April 2026. Indicating that this is when the changes would be implemented has no doubt caused unnecessary distress among immigrants close to qualifying for settlement.

126. RECOMMENDATION

The Home Office should learn from previous reforms that it is more important to get changes right than to implement them quickly. In order to deliver workable reforms of the kind set out in its Earned Settlement consultation, the department must take adequate time to assess the impact of its final policy and put in place measures to avoid unintended consequences. Ministers should ensure that the Home Office is prepared to effectively administer what will be a much more complicated system. The Home Office should provide a clear and realistic implementation timeline, so that people can make informed decisions about their future.

204 [Q56](#)

205 Oral evidence taken on 28 January 2026, [Q95](#) [Monique Hawkins, Head of Policy and Advocacy, the3million]

Conclusions and recommendations

The overall impact of the changes

1. The Government has developed the proposals in its Earned Settlement consultation to respond to the unprecedented levels of immigration to the country in recent years, particularly of medium-skilled workers. We recognise that the Government is responding to a challenging situation, as a large number of people will soon become eligible for settlement due to the recent spike in immigration, especially in 2022–23. We support the Government’s stated aim to promote contribution and improve the fiscal impact migration has on the UK. It is not possible to be certain of the impacts of the changes, especially in the absence of a finalised policy. There may be direct fiscal benefits for extending routes to settlement for some migrants, especially in the short-term, but there is a risk that the changes will undermine integration, which any changes should seek to promote. It is important that the Home Office thoroughly assesses the impacts of its final policy, before implementation. (Conclusion, Paragraph 16)

Assessing contribution

Mandatory minimum income

2. The Government has proposed requiring all immigrants to earn at least £12,570 a year in order to be able to settle permanently in the UK. This will apply more widely than just to economic migrants—family migrants and arrivals on humanitarian routes will also be affected. It is reasonable to expect most people who wish to settle to contribute economically, and entering employment is also likely to foster and support integration, so there is value in encouraging immigrants to work where they are able. However, there will be people who are unable to meet this requirement for good reason. (Conclusion, Paragraph 20)
3. There should be reasonable and clear exceptions to the mandatory minimum economic contribution requirement so that people are not prevented from settling where there are legitimate reasons they cannot

meet this requirement. This could include exemptions for disabled people, people over pension age, those who are studying full-time, and those with full-time caring responsibilities. (Recommendation, Paragraph 21)

Income-related reductions

4. The Government's current proposals would allow shorter routes to settlement based on meeting earning requirements set at current income tax thresholds. This means that people who make a net positive direct fiscal contribution to the UK, but earn below the higher rate tax threshold, could face a 10-year route to settlement. The Government has not been clear about the basis on which the reduction thresholds have been set, nor what outcome they are intended to achieve. Given the Home Office does not intend to keep reduction thresholds in line with tax thresholds in the future, it appears that that current tax thresholds have been used as a convenient, but not yet justified, basis for setting the earnings required to reduce waiting periods for settlement. This also adds a layer of administrative complexity, and therefore potential for abuse, to a system the Home Office already struggles to manage. (Conclusion, Paragraph 24)
5. We recommend that the Home Office set out clear objectives for the basis on which fiscal contributions qualify immigrants for a reduction to their wait for settlement. The Home Office should then commission the Migration Advisory Committee to advise on appropriate thresholds based on these objectives. (Recommendation, Paragraph 25)

Assessing contribution at an individual level

6. Applying income-based reductions to qualifying periods for settlement at an individual, rather than a household level, could lead to perverse outcomes, and obscure the contribution of immigrants who take on a greater proportion of caregiving, whose care may enable their partners to take on more demanding and higher earning careers. These changes may also deter high earning immigrants that we want to come to the UK, if their partners are on much longer routes to settlement than them. However, we recognise that assessing income at a household level also could lead to inconsistent outcomes, such as two colleagues on an identical income having different paths to settlement based on how well-off the person they married is. (Conclusion, Paragraph 30)
7. We recommend that the Home Office applies reductions to qualifying periods for settlement for direct fiscal contribution at a household level, not at an individual level, to recognise that generally households make financial decisions as units. (Recommendation, Paragraph 31)

Workers

Classifying medium-skilled workers

8. It appears that the main purpose of putting medium-skilled workers on a 15-year route to settlement is fiscal, because medium-skilled workers are, on average, lower earners. It is odd and unnecessary to use RQF skill levels as a proxy for income when making decisions about settlement, rather than assessing income directly. Making decisions in this way will lead to high earners in skilled roles being put on longer routes for a reason that is fundamentally arbitrary. (Conclusion, Paragraph 35)
9. If the Home Office proceeds with putting lower-paid workers on a 15-year route to settlement, it should do so on the basis of income, and not the RQF classification of their role, as this will not necessarily reflect their direct economic contribution, which appears to be the Government's justification for this reform. If the Government has other reasons for using RQF classifications to determine the length of routes to settlement, it should explain these to demonstrate the rationale for this choice. (Recommendation, Paragraph 36)

Worker pay, progression and exploitation

10. There is a benefit to having a sponsored work visa system in that it supports oversight and makes it easier for the Home Office to confirm immigrants are coming to work in genuine roles. However, sponsorship-based visa systems increase the amount of power that employers have over their workers and limit the ability of workers to progress and increase their earnings. Requiring workers to stay on sponsored worker visas for up to 15 years is likely to exacerbate these power dynamics and increase risks of exploitation. (Conclusion, Paragraph 42)
11. The Home Office should explore more flexible visa arrangements for workers it is planning to place on long routes to settlement, so they are not reliant on a particular employer to maintain their immigration status. Workers granted sponsored visas could transition to a more flexible visa after a set amount of time. Workers granted freedom to move employers in this way could still be subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition. Any flexible visa arrangements should provide a clear route to settlement for these workers. The Government should also consider what role the Fair Work Agency should have in tackling exploitation for this group. (Recommendation, Paragraph 43)

Health and social care

12. There were fundamental failures in the implementation and oversight of the care worker visa route when it was expanded in 2022, which led to unexpectedly high numbers of arrivals in a short space of time. The Home Office significantly underestimated the level of demand for the route and was slow to respond when the number of arrivals outstripped its highest estimates. Inadequate oversight also meant that, while many workers did come to fill genuine vacancies, there was also fraud and exploitation, which the Home Office was slow to address. The Home Office should look urgently at reforming its processes to learn lessons and ensure this failure is not repeated. (Conclusion, Paragraph 48)
13. The Home Office is facing an extremely difficult choice. If no changes are made to eligibility for settled status, hundreds of thousands of care workers and their dependants will become eligible for settled status in the next few years—gaining access to public funds and likely drawing on the public purse. If the Government proceeds with plans for a 15-year route for care workers this will likely lead to one of two outcomes for affected workers: they will leave the sector and return to their countries of origin, increasing vacancies in the social care sector, reducing the availability of care and increasing cost pressures which the Government may need to cover, or they will remain in the UK care sector, at prolonged risk of poverty and exploitation. This dilemma emanates from the long-standing issue of low pay and poor conditions in the care sector, and the Home Office's mismanagement of the Health and Care Worker visa. It is important to acknowledge that migrants who work in our care sector make a genuine and valuable contribution to our country. There is also a legitimate public interest in responding to the recent high levels of migration through the care route, and addressing the direct fiscal impacts associated with this group reaching settlement after five years. Extending routes to settlement for care workers will have unintended consequences, and the Government will need to be prepared to identify these and mitigate them where necessary. (Conclusion, Paragraph 56)
14. If the Government implements a 15-year qualifying period for adult social care workers, we recommend that it takes urgent action to support decent pay and conditions for this group. The Home Office should set out in response to this report the steps it will be taking to support migrant care workers. We have previously recommended that the Home Office explore flexible visa arrangements for workers placed on long routes to settlement, so they are not reliant on their employer for their immigration status. (Recommendation, Paragraph 57)

15. It is extremely hard to predict what impact these changes will have on the social care workforce. Given the level of overseas recruitment that has taken place, decisions about routes to settlement for social care workers are likely to affect a significant proportion of the care workforce, which could have a major effect on the social care sector and the essential care delivered to vulnerable people in this country. It is not clear what impact the Government expects these changes to have on the social care workforce and we have seen no evidence that the Home Office has made efforts to integrate these reforms with the Government's overall strategy for adult social care. Outcomes in the NHS and the social care sector are inextricably linked and changes that affect social care will have a knock-on effect on the NHS. If the Government applies reductions to waits for settlement for employment in public services to the NHS but does not apply equivalent reductions for workers in social care, this could contribute to staff shortages in social care that ultimately harm the whole system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 58)
16. The Home Office should—in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care—conduct a full assessment of the potential impact of its planned changes to routes to settlement on the adult social care workforce, and on the stability of the sector. The Home Office should not rush to make changes before fully understanding their implications. Whatever changes the Government proceeds with, there should be parity between workers in the NHS and workers in adult social care for any reductions to qualifying periods for settlement. (Recommendation, Paragraph 59)

Children and young people

17. The planned changes to settlement routes will see some children who arrive in the UK at a young age spending most, if not all, of their childhood with temporary immigration status. The changes will also see some young people who came to the UK as children entering their late twenties or even early thirties before their parents are able to apply for settlement. If dependent children continue to achieve settlement at the same time as their parents, this would almost certainly lead to negative outcomes for young people—where they cannot begin to forge independent lives as they must remain dependant on their parents to maintain their immigration status. It is currently unclear the age at which young people would need to qualify for settlement in their own right, and how they would be expected to do so. If young people are required to meet minimum economic requirements to achieve settled status, this could place unreasonable expectations on young people who are beginning their careers or lead them to prioritise low-paid work over education and training. Without robust protections for young people, there is a risk of settlement policy being incoherent and leading to unfair outcomes, based on factors entirely out of the control of the young people affected. (Conclusion, Paragraph 69)

18. Children who arrive at a young age and grow up in the UK should be granted settled status by the age of 18 without needing to fulfil the requirements of the ‘Earned Settlement’ model, in recognition of the fact that Britain is their home. Children who arrive at a later stage—such as those in their mid-teens—should have clear, fair and accessible pathways to settlement that do not inhibit them from beginning their adult lives. Young adults should not be subject to the same economic requirements as their parents. The Home Office should also recognise the specific needs of disabled young people, who may reach independence later than their peers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 70)
19. Under the proposed reforms parents may settle at very different times from each other. In cases where parents are placed on different routes to settlement, children should achieve settlement with whichever parent settles first. (Recommendation, Paragraph 71)

Access to university

20. Extending routes to settlement will increase the number of children and young people in the UK who are not eligible for home fee status. This is likely to lead to some young people delaying or missing out on going to university. Access to education promotes integration and enables greater contribution to society by boosting employment prospects, so it would be counter to the overall aims of the Earned Settlement proposals to restrict access to the university for young people who are resident in the UK. (Conclusion, Paragraph 73)
21. Eligibility for home fee status should be reviewed in light of the changes to routes to settlement, to ensure that children and young people who have lived in the UK for a significant period of time are not prevented from going to university due to lack of home fee status. Home fee status could, for example, be granted on the basis of a minimum period of UK residence in childhood, such as five years. As education is a devolved matter, the Home Office and Department for Education should engage with the devolved administrations on the impact of the changes, and implications for access to home fee status in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. (Recommendation, Paragraph 74)

Child poverty

22. The changes set out in the Earned Settlement consultation will place lower earning families on longer routes to settlement. This will very likely increase child poverty, and the harms resulting from child poverty. The children of care workers, who are poorly paid and would face a 15-year route to settlement, are a group that would be particularly vulnerable. Increasing

poverty in immigrant families is likely to increase costs for local authorities and increase the indirect costs that arise from children growing up in poverty. We heard evidence that very often supporting destitute families with No Recourse to Public Funds where there is a statutory child protection duty leads to significant costs for local councils. We agree with the Home Secretary that it is generally reasonable to expect economic migrants to be able to support themselves and their families. However, if the Government proceeds with these reforms it must be prepared for the eventuality that immigrants will stay in country despite experiencing poverty and take action to mitigate the impact this will have on children. (Conclusion, Paragraph 82)

23. We recommend that the Government conducts and publishes an assessment of the impact on child poverty of its planned changes to routes to settlement, before finalising and implementing these changes. To mitigate the impact of the changes, the Home Office should make it easier for parents who are subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition to access financial support where this is essential for supporting the welfare of a child. The Government should also adequately fund local authorities to cover the costs of supporting households who are subject to the NRPF condition. (Recommendation, Paragraph 83)
24. Most immigrants can only access benefits in rare circumstances and must be granted permission to do so by the Home Office. We are concerned that penalising people in difficult circumstances who urgently need support will deepen poverty and increase pressures on local authorities. It would be deeply unfair to apply the penalty to people who have already been granted access to public funds and would not have known that this could extend their route to settlement. Doing so would also make implementation more practically difficult. (Conclusion, Paragraph 88)
25. We recommend that the Home Office does not apply any penalties for accessing public funds on the basis of benefit claims that preceded the Government's new policy. There should be discretion for reasonable and fair exemptions to this penalty, where the applicant can demonstrate that they have only accessed public funds due to particularly challenging circumstances. (Recommendation, Paragraph 89)

The 10-year family or private life route

26. The current 10-year family or private life pathway is a challenging route to settlement for families who are on it. The route is expensive, and it is easy for people who are trying to comply with the rules to fall off the route. The 10-year route can cause genuine hardship for children affected by it. The changes set out in the Earned Settlement consultation could lead to some people on the current 10-year route having to wait 30 years for settlement.

A 30-year route is too long, and the costs of the route would mean that in practice, many people would never achieve settlement. (Conclusion, Paragraph 98)

27. We recommend that people who under the current system would be on a 10-year family or private life route to settlement be given a route under the new rules that is reasonable and achievable. People should not be placed on a 30-year route to settlement. To reduce the financial pressures associated with repeat applications, and the risk of people losing status, the Home Office should increase the duration of leave to remain on the family or private life route from 2.5 to 5 years, and set visa fees for people granted leave on the basis of their family and private life at no higher than the cost of administration. (Recommendation, Paragraph 99)

Children who have spent most of their life in the UK

28. Children who are brought to the UK at a young age and grow up here are, for all intents and purposes, British. These children and young people should not be required to “earn” their right to remain in the UK. The rights of these children and young people should be protected regardless of any changes made to settlement policy. The introduction of the 5-year private life route for children and young people has been a positive step. However, the cost of the route means that its impact has been limited, and there are children and young people who have spent most of their life in the UK who are unable to access a realistic route to settlement. (Conclusion, Paragraph 105)
29. As we previously recommended, the Government should ensure that all children who come to the UK at a young age and grow up in the UK are granted settled status by the age of 18. The Government should also maintain the 5-year private life route for children and young people who have lived in the UK for most of their lives, as a backstop and for where this would be a faster route to settlement than granting it at 18. The Home Office should ensure that the Earned Settlement changes do not in any way disadvantage this group. Fees applied to these children and young people should be set at a level no higher than the administrative cost of processing the applications. (Recommendation, Paragraph 106)

Citizenship

30. A child who is born in the UK to someone who has settled status will automatically be British. Extending the waiting period for settlement will therefore increase the number of children born in the UK who are not automatically British citizens and will need to register at a future date in

order to become citizens. Under the current system, people with the right to register face barriers that mean they can lose out on their citizenship rights. (Conclusion, Paragraph 110)

31. The Home Office should review barriers to the registration of children and young adults as British citizens in light of the proposed changes to routes to settlement and take action to improve access to citizenship for children and young adults who are entitled to register as British citizens. This could include only charging applicants for registration the administrative cost of processing their application and running an awareness campaign to promote registration. (Recommendation, Paragraph 111)

Divergent family routes

32. There is a significant risk that extending routes to settlement will increase the number of families who are deeply rooted in the UK but have precarious immigration status. This is obviously not an intended goal of the Home Office and would increase administrative pressures on the immigration system, as well as having adverse consequences for the families affected. (Conclusion, Paragraph 113)

Transitional protections

33. We are concerned about the plans to apply the proposed Earned Settlement model to people who are already in the country. It is in the interests of the Home Office, and the UK's reputation, to be consistent in the application of immigration rules and policy. We agree that the Government needs to weigh and consider the broader impacts of settlement policy on the UK—including what is fair to British people and people already settled here—and understand that extending routes to settlement for at least some people already in the UK is essential for the Government to be able to meet its objective of reducing the impact of the large number of immigrants who arrived to the UK in recent years. It is not clear that applying these changes to people who arrived prior to introduction of new immigration rules in 2021—after the UK's exit from the EU—is necessary for the Government to achieve its stated policy aims, and so it is difficult to see a justification for applying the changes to this cohort. (Conclusion, Paragraph 120)
34. We recommend that the Government carefully consider and set out clear mitigations—including suitable transitional arrangements—for people already in the UK who are affected by changes to routes to settlement. There should be specific protections for vulnerable people who may struggle to meet the criteria of the new system. The changes should not be applied to

people in the UK who arrived before 2021 and would under the current rules be on track to settle in the UK through a 10-year route. (Recommendation, Paragraph 121)

Implementation

35. The Home Office has said that changes to eligibility for settlement will begin to be implemented from April 2026 but has not given a clear timeline of when specific changes will be implemented. Key elements of the proposals that could have unintended consequences remain unclear and under-developed. The Home Office will need to implement significant changes to its systems, processes and staffing to deliver its new system of settlement. It is obvious that the Home Office is not in a position to fully implement changes of the scale proposed in its consultation from April 2026. Indicating that this is when the changes would be implemented has no doubt caused unnecessary distress among immigrants close to qualifying for settlement. (Conclusion, Paragraph 125)
36. The Home Office should learn from previous reforms that it is more important to get changes right than to implement them quickly. In order to deliver workable reforms of the kind set out in its Earned Settlement consultation, the department must take adequate time to assess the impact of its final policy and put in place measures to avoid unintended consequences. Ministers should ensure that the Home Office is prepared to effectively administer what will be a much more complicated system. The Home Office should provide a clear and realistic implementation timeline, so that people can make informed decisions about their future. (Recommendation, Paragraph 126)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 10 March 2026

Members present

Dame Karen Bradley, in the Chair

Lewis Atkinson

Paul Kohler

Robbie Moore

Margaret Mullane

Chris Murray

Peter Prinsley

Jo White

Earned Settlement: Examining the Government's proposed reforms

Draft report (*Earned Settlement: Examining the Government's proposed reforms*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 15 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 16 read.

Amendment proposed, after “fiscal impact migration has on the UK” to insert “; however these aims should not come at the expense of reneging on commitments made to those already on pathways to settlement, who have complied with their visa requirements and acted in good faith on the basis of the rules that applied when they made life changing decisions to contribute to the UK and its economy.”—(Paul Kohler)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2	Noes, 4
Paul Kohler	Lewis Atkinson
Margaret Mullane	Robbie Moore
	Chris Murray
	Jo White

Question accordingly disagreed to.

Paragraph 16 agreed to.

Paragraphs 17 to 119 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 120 read.

Amendment proposed, after “people already settled here” to leave out remaining words and insert “but believe that balance can be achieved by the Home Office vigorously applying existing visa requirements to those already on pathways to settlement, rather than introducing retrospective changes that undermine the UK’s reputation as a reliable good faith actor whose word is its bond.”—(Paul Kohler)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2	Noes, 4
Paul Kohler	Lewis Atkinson
Margaret Mullane	Robbie Moore
	Chris Murray
	Jo White

Question accordingly disagreed to.

Paragraph 120 agreed to.

Paragraph 121 read.

Amendment proposed, after “Government carefully consider” to leave out remaining words and insert “the consequences of retrospectively changing the rules applicable to those already on pathways to settlement which, as the evidence has clearly shown, is based on problematic fiscal assumptions

and will cause injustice, unintended consequences and risks undermining current and future initiatives to grow the economy by damaging the UK's reputation in the international labour market as a country that can be relied upon to honour its commitments. As such an approach is not required to effectively address any abuses that did, and still are occurring, under the existing rules—often cited as a reason for making these changes retrospective—we call upon the Government to actively enforce current visa requirements and only make those changes, with which it decides to proceed, applicable to those not already embarked on a pathway to settlement.”—(Paul Kohler)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2	Noes, 4
Paul Kohler	Lewis Atkinson
Margaret Mullane	Robbie Moore
	Chris Murray
	Jo White

Question accordingly disagreed to.

Paragraph 121 agreed to.

Paragraphs 122 to 126 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 17 March 2026

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 21 January 2026

Dr Madeleine Sumption MBE, Director, Oxford Migration Observatory; **Alan Manning**, Professor of Economics, London School of Economics; **Nicolas Rollason**, Partner and Head of Immigration, Kingsley Napley LLP [Q1-61](#)

Tuesday 3 February 2026

Solange Valdez-Symonds, CEO, Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens; **Chrisann Jarrett MBE**, CEO, We Belong; **Anna Skehan**, Legal Practice Lead, Migration and Refugee Children's Legal Unit, Islington Law Centre; **Michelle Lee-Izu**, Chief Operating Officer, (Children's Services) Barnardo's [Q62-100](#)

Peter Wieltschnig, Policy Lead - Employment Rights & Labour Markets, Trades Union Congress; **Professor Martin Green OBE**, CEO, Care England; **Matthew Percival**, Director - Future of Work and Skills, Confederation of British Industry [Q101-130](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

RTS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Adage Digital Ltd	RTS0513
2	Amnesty International UK; and Migrant Voice	RTS4678
3	Amnesty International UK; and Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens	RTS4685
4	Andromeda-Sim	RTS0514
5	Anonymised	RTS4659
6	Anonymised	RTS4656
7	Association of Pakistani Physicians of Northern Europe; Punjab Medical College Alumni; and Rawalpindi Medical College Alumni	RTS4499
8	Asylum Matters	RTS4677
9	BMA (British Medical Association)	RTS4689
10	Baobab Womens Project CIC	RTS5091
11	Barbulescu, Dr Roxana (Associate Professor, University of Leeds)	RTS5669
12	Barnardo's	RTS5793
13	Belong - The Cohesion and Integration Network	RTS3185
14	Brexit Couples Project	RTS4516
15	British Malayali Charity Foundation	RTS5100
16	British Red Cross	RTS4597
17	Brooks, Professor Thom (Principal of Collingwood College & Professor of Law, Ethics and Government, Durham University)	RTS5700
18	Brushstrokes Community Centre	RTS0102
19	Burley in Wharfedale Community Managed Library	RTS1977
20	Business Science Corporation	RTS4623

21	Cambridge Cameroon Community (CCC)	RTS3200
22	Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE)	RTS3125
23	Care England	RTS5785
24	Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales	RTS4169
25	Centre for Migration, Diaspora, Identity and Citizenship at University of the West of Scotland	RTS4536
26	Centre for Policy Studies	RTS4708
27	Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)	RTS5781
28	Cheshire, Halton & Warrington Race & Equality Centre	RTS3569
29	Citizens Advice	RTS3118
30	Citizens UK	RTS5276
31	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)	RTS5782
32	Crisis	RTS3289
33	Dance Base; Shotput; Fleur Darkin Presence Projects; Scottish Dance Theatre; The Work Room; City Moves Dance; Dance North Scotland; Curious Seed; All or Nothing Aerial Dance Theatre; and Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland	RTS5584
34	Dilek Fidler, Dr Setenay (Senior Lecturer, University of Westminster-Westminster Business School); Prof Linda Clarke (Prof, University of Westminster/Westminster Business School); and Dr Rebecca Yi Wang (Assistant Head of School of School of Organisations, Economy and Society, University of Westminster/Westminster Business School)	RTS1942
35	Dorset Local Medical Committee	RTS3592
36	English National Ballet	RTS4766
37	Exriz Ltd	RTS0042
38	Focus on Labour Exploitation	RTS3066
39	Forvis Mazars LLP	RTS4710
40	Goodwin, Robin (Professor, University of Warwick); Olena Orlova (Research assistant, University of Warwick); and Tarandeep Kang (Doctoral researcher, University of Warwick)	RTS3209
41	Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit	RTS4555
42	Haggar, Tianne (Research Associate, The Policy Institute, King's College London); Marypaz Ventura-Arrieta (Research Assistant, The Policy Institute, King's College London); Kirstie Hewlett (Senior Research Fellow, The	

	Policy Institute, King's College London); Suzanne Hall (Director of Research, The Policy Institute, King's College London); and Heather Rolfe (Director of Research and Relationships, British Future)	RTS3420
43	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Medical Committee	RTS3581
44	Haringey Migrant Support Center (HMSC)	RTS4307
45	Helen Bamber Foundation	RTS4357
46	Hibiscus Initiatives	RTS4616
47	Home Office	RTS5789
48	Hong Kong Aid Services CIC	RTS4626
49	Hong Kong Watch	RTS5627
50	Human Rights Solidarity	RTS4697
51	Immigration Law Practitioners' Association	RTS5788
52	Immigration Law and Policy Clinic, Goldsmiths University of London	RTS4473
53	India Labour Solidarity; and Brighton Ambedkar Reading Circle	RTS5701
54	Indian Overseas Congress-UK Kerala Chapter	RTS0872
55	Institute for Public Policy Research	RTS5639
56	Institute for Research into International Migration and Superdiversity (IRIS)	RTS4453
57	Islington Law Centre	RTS5741
58	Jithus Ltd	RTS3454
59	John Gilbert Architects	RTS4750
60	Justice For Sponsored Workers	RTS4153
61	Kingsley Napley LLP	RTS5294
62	L'Arche	RTS3204
63	Labour Friends of Hong Kong	RTS4743
64	Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)	RTS5319
65	Laura Devine Immigration	RTS5783
66	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	RTS4161
67	Lewis Silkin LLP	RTS5784
68	Loughborough University and College Union Branch Committee	RTS3333

69	Malayali Association Of Dudley	RTS2520
70	Matchingham Games Limited	RTS4638
71	Mencap	RTS4769
72	Migrant Help	RTS4727
73	Migrants' Rights Network; and Not a Stranger Campaign	RTS3296
74	Migrate UK	RTS4187
75	Migration Yorkshire	RTS4664
76	Mirza, Mr Salman (Immigration Asylum Advisor, Brushstrokes Community Project & The Children's Society)	RTS2519
77	NHS Employers	RTS4240
78	NRPF Network	RTS2501
79	New Arrivals Voice	RTS3412
80	Nigerian Doctors in the UK	RTS4070
81	Nigerian Lawyers in the UK; Midpoint Career and Business Training; and Nigerian Lawyers in Scotland	RTS3907
82	No Recourse North East	RTS4593
83	Northern Ballet	RTS5135
84	Peace Haven Foundation	RTS4633
85	Pinter, Dr Ilona (Research Associate, University of Glasgow)	RTS5791
86	Policy Exchange; and Policy Exchange	RTS4842
87	Portes, Professor Jonathan (Professor of Economics and Public Policy, King's College London)	RTS1292
88	Professional Alliance of Indian Radiographers, UK	RTS4627
89	Project 17	RTS5787
90	Project X Dance CIC; Theiya Arts; We Are Here Scotland CIC; Scottish Contemporary Arts Network (SCAN); Scottish BPOC Writers Network; Exhale.GroupCIC; and ID.Y CIC	RTS5535
91	Re-Water CIC	RTS4469
92	Reading Hongkongers CIC	RTS3743
93	Refugee Council	RTS5073
94	Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium; and Coram Children's Legal Centre	RTS4937
95	Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL)	RTS3358
96	Refugee, Asylum Seeker & Migrant Action	RTS5239

97	Reunite Families Uk	RTS4553
98	Ricardo Plc	RTS1729
99	Royal British Legion; and Army Families Federation	RTS3300
100	Royal College of General Practitioners	RTS4483
101	Royal College of Nursing	RTS4705
102	Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS)	RTS5652
103	Sameeksha UK	RTS5526
104	Salisbury World Refugee Centre	RTS5790
105	Scottish BPOC Writers Network	RTS5017
106	Scottish Government	RTS4398
107	Scottish Refugee Council	RTS2451
108	Sedacca, Dr Natalie (Assistant Professor in Employment Law, Durham University)	RTS4682
109	Seraphus	RTS3096
110	Shepherd, Dr Ally (Researcher in the School of Education, University of Leeds); and Prof Gabriella Alberti (Professor of International Labour Migration at the Business School, University of Leeds)	RTS4617
111	Sigona, Professor Nando (Professor of International Migration and Forced Displacement, University of Birmingham)	RTS4197
112	Skyscanner	RTS3270
113	Southall Black Sisters	RTS5786
114	Sutton Hong Kong Cultural & Arts Society	RTS5041
115	TKO Group	RTS1748
116	The Law Society	RTS5775
117	The Royal Society	RTS3301
118	The Runnymede Trust; and Praxis	RTS5792
119	The Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders Limited	RTS4611
120	The UK-EU Committee of Assembly of Citizens' Representatives, Hong Kong (ACRHK)	RTS4087
121	The Unity Project	RTS5737
122	Theiya Arts	RTS3501
123	Together HK CIC	RTS2264

124	Trades Union Congress (TUC)	RTS4512
125	Tuckett, Dr Anna (Senior Lecturer, Brunel University of London)	RTS4569
126	UK Welcomes Refugees	RTS4477
127	UNISON	RTS2377
128	Ukraine Policy Network, University of Birmingham	RTS4148
129	Unite the Union	RTS5780
130	Universities and Colleges Employers Association; and Universities UK	RTS4243
131	University and College Union	RTS2513
132	University of Cambridge	RTS3058
133	Volunteering Matters	RTS3234
134	W Legal Limited	RTS0006
135	We Belong	RTS2965
136	Welsh Refugee Council	RTS3522
137	Work Rights Centre	RTS2510
138	Zhang, Dr Chi (Assistant Professor, University of Warwick)	RTS2007
139	iProtectU Limited	RTS1686

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

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Number	Title	Reference
5th	Maccabi Tel Aviv fan ban	HC 1553
4th	The Home Office's management of asylum accommodation	HC 580
3rd	Tackling violence against women and girls: funding	HC 741
2nd	Police response to the 2024 summer disorder	HC 381
1st	Appointment of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration	HC 713
3rd Special	The Home Office's management of asylum accommodation: Government Response	HC 1642
2nd Special	Tackling violence against women and girls: Funding: Government Response	HC 1352
1st Special	Police response to the 2024 summer disorder: Government Response	HC 1099