

SETTLED PLANS, UNCERTAIN FUTURES

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING NOTE

Impact Assessment of Proposed Changes to UK Earned Settlement (ILR) Pathways for Migrant Care Workers and Their Families

Prepared by Justice for Carers | May 2026

WHY THIS BRIEFING MATTERS

Adult social care remains heavily dependent on internationally recruited workers. At the same time, uncertainty surrounding the Government's proposed Earned Settlement reforms has generated significant concern among migrant care workers and their families. This briefing presents evidence from 2,202 UK-resident respondents, including 1,388 qualitative testimonies, examining how settlement uncertainty is affecting workforce retention, family stability, safeguarding confidence, children's wellbeing, and long-term integration.

The findings suggest that uncertainty surrounding settlement pathways is being experienced not merely as an immigration issue, but as a workforce, safeguarding, family, and child wellbeing issue affecting a sector that continues to face substantial recruitment and retention challenges.

EVIDENCE AT A GLANCE

- Survey responses received: 2,338
- UK-resident analytical sample: 2,202
- Qualitative testimonies analysed: 1,388
- Fieldwork period: 2 April 2026 –12 April 2026

Respondents primarily included frontline carers, senior carers, NHS support staff, dependants, and other care-sector workers residing in the UK.

KEY FINDINGS

Settlement Expectations and Long-Term Planning

- 96.2% were aware of the five-year ILR pathway before coming to the UK.
- 95.7% stated that the five-year pathway strongly influenced their decision to migrate.
- 98.3% reported making major life commitments based on expectations of settlement after five years.
- 96.5% reported significant impacts on long-term life planning due to uncertainty surrounding settlement pathways.

Mental Wellbeing, Family Stability and Financial Strain

- 94.1% reported severe impacts on mental wellbeing.
- 95.2% reported severe impacts on family stability.
- 92.5% reported significant financial strain linked to repeated visa renewals and prolonged temporary status.
- 86.8% reported severe impacts on trust and confidence in the immigration system.

Children and Education

Among responding parents:

- 93.9% reported educational disruption affecting children.
- 93.6% reported emotional stress affecting children.
- 94.0% believed their children's future higher education opportunities were at risk.
- 93.8% reported significant impacts on children's sense of belonging within the UK.

Sponsorship Dependency and Safeguarding

- 87.2% reported feeling tied to one employer due to immigration status.
- 89.2% feared losing sponsorship or visa status if reporting workplace concerns.
- 95.8% believed prolonged temporary status increases exploitation risk.

Workforce Retention

- 41.0% reported considering leaving the UK.
- 38.4% reported uncertainty about remaining in the UK long term.

WHY PARLIAMENT SHOULD PAY ATTENTION

The findings raise important questions regarding:

- Workforce retention and sustainability within adult social care.
- Sponsorship dependency, labour mobility, and safeguarding.
- Children's wellbeing, educational outcomes, and long-term integration.
- Family stability and confidence in long-term settlement pathways.
- The potential impact of prolonged uncertainty on recruitment, retention, and continuity of care.

KEY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The report recommends:

- Non-retrospective implementation of any settlement reforms.
- Clear transitional protections for existing lawful residents.
- A dedicated adult social care impact assessment.
- Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessments.
- Child Impact Assessments examining educational and wellbeing outcomes.
- Stronger safeguarding and safe reporting mechanisms for sponsored workers.

OVERALL MESSAGE

The evidence indicates that uncertainty surrounding settlement pathways is being experienced not only by migrant workers themselves, but also by spouses, children, and wider households contributing to essential public services across the United Kingdom.

The findings suggest that the proposed reforms should be assessed not solely through an immigration lens, but also in terms of their implications for workforce sustainability, safeguarding, family stability, children's wellbeing, integration outcomes, and the long-term resilience of the social care sector.

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About us – Justice for Carers

Justice for Carers is a grassroot, community-led initiative representing migrant care workers and their families across the United Kingdom. Formed in response to growing concerns around immigration policy changes—particularly those affecting Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). The group aims to provide an evidence-based, collective voice for a workforce that plays a critical role in the UK's health and social care system.

The initiative brings together frontline care workers to document lived experiences, highlight systemic challenges, and assess the real-world impact of policy proposals on individuals, families, and the wider care sector. Through structured surveys, data analysis, and policy-oriented reporting, Justice for Carers seeks to inform policymakers, parliamentary committees, think tanks, and the media with credible, ground-level insights.

Justice for Carers operates on principles of accuracy, neutrality, and constructive engagement, with the objective of contributing meaningfully to policy discussions and ensuring that the perspectives of care workers are adequately represented in decision-making processes.