

SETTLED PLANS, UNCERTAIN FUTURES

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

Prepared by Justice for Carers
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Purpose of this Briefing

This executive briefing summarises the principal findings, evidence base, policy implications, and recommendations arising from the wider report *Settled Plans, Uncertain Futures*, prepared by Justice for Carers. The briefing is intended to support evidence-informed discussion regarding proposed settlement reforms affecting migrant care workers and families in the United Kingdom.

The findings are based on a structured anonymous survey conducted between 2 April and 12 April 2026 involving migrant care workers, senior carers, NHS support staff, dependants, and related respondents residing in the UK.

This document is intended for Members of Parliament, parliamentary committees, NGOs and policy organisations, workforce and safeguarding bodies, journalists, researchers, and stakeholders involved in immigration, labour, health, and social care policy.

Strategic Context

The adult social care sector continues to experience long-standing workforce shortages, elevated turnover, and significant reliance on international recruitment. Evidence from Skills for Care and independent policy organisations indicates that overseas recruitment has become a major stabilising factor within the care workforce.

At the same time, proposals relating to “earned settlement” and changes to settlement qualifying periods have generated substantial uncertainty among migrant workers and families already lawfully residing and working in the UK.

The evidence indicates that uncertainty surrounding settlement pathways is being

experienced not merely as an immigration issue, but as a broader issue affecting workforce retention, safeguarding confidence, labour mobility, family stability, children's wellbeing, long-term integration, and confidence in the UK immigration system.

While the survey is not statistically representative of all migrant workers in the UK, the scale, consistency, and convergence of responses provide an important evidence signal regarding the reported impact of settlement uncertainty on affected households.

Evidence Base and Methodology

The assessment is based on 2,338 total survey responses, including a UK-resident analytical sample of 2,202 respondents and 1,388 open-text responses collected during the fieldwork period between 2 April and 12 April 2026.

The respondent profile was heavily composed of frontline care-sector workers, including carers, senior carers, NHS support staff, and dependants of sponsored workers. The majority of respondents had lived in the UK between three and five years.

The report explicitly recognises limitations including self-selection bias, non-random sampling, reliance on self-reported responses, and the absence of detailed demographic variables. The findings therefore represent reported experiences and perceptions rather than causal or nationally representative conclusions.

Principal Findings

- 96.2% of respondents were aware of the five-year ILR pathway before migrating to the UK.
- 95.7% stated that the five-year settlement pathway strongly influenced their decision to migrate.
- 98.3% reported making major life commitments based on expectations of settlement after five years.
- 94.1% reported severe impacts on mental wellbeing.
- 91.0% reported severe financial impacts.
- 95.2% reported severe impacts on family stability.
- 92.5% reported significant financial strain linked to repeated visa renewals and prolonged temporary status.



- Among responding parents, 93.9% reported educational disruption affecting children and 93.8% reported impacts on children's sense of belonging.
- 87.2% reported feeling tied to a single employer long-term due to sponsorship dependency.
- 95.8% believed that prolonged uncertainty may increase exploitation risk.
- 41.0% reported considering leaving the UK, while 38.4% remained uncertain regarding their long-term future in the country.

The responses indicate that settlement uncertainty may have implications extending beyond immigration administration alone, affecting workforce retention, safeguarding confidence, family stability, children's educational continuity, labour mobility, and long-term integration outcomes.

Policy and Legal Considerations

The report identifies several areas of potential policy relevance, including workforce sustainability within adult social care, safeguarding concerns associated with sponsorship dependency, and the impact of immigration uncertainty on children and families.

The report recommends that any proposed settlement reforms should be assessed against Article 8 ECHR obligations, Section 55 child welfare duties, and Public Sector Equality Duty considerations. It also highlights the importance of safeguarding-focused implementation and safe reporting mechanisms for sponsored workers.

Principal Recommendations

1. Existing lawful residents should not have settlement qualifying periods retrospectively altered after major life commitments have already been made under previous frameworks.
2. A formal adult social care impact assessment should be conducted before implementing settlement reforms affecting sponsored workers.
3. A formal Human Rights Impact Assessment should be undertaken prior to implementation.
4. A structured Child Impact Assessment should evaluate educational, psychosocial, and long-term integration impacts affecting children.

5. Workers should be able to report exploitation and unsafe practices without disproportionate fear of immediate immigration consequences.
6. Settlement policy should incorporate clear implementation timelines, transitional protections, and transparent communication to reduce uncertainty affecting households and workforce retention.

Concluding Assessment

The findings presented in this assessment indicate that uncertainty surrounding proposed settlement reforms is being experienced by many migrant care workers and families as a broader issue of long-term security, stability, and integration rather than solely an immigration policy matter.

While the report does not claim national representativeness or predictive certainty, the scale, consistency, and convergence of responses indicate that these concerns warrant serious policy consideration and structured impact assessment before implementation of significant settlement reforms.

The report therefore calls for evidence-led policy development, transparent transitional arrangements, safeguarding-focused implementation, child and family impact consideration, and careful assessment of workforce implications within the adult social care sector.

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For further information, supporting evidence, or engagement regarding this briefing and the wider report, please contact Justice for Carers directly.