# Ministers face Commons showdown after petitions force debate on doubling settlement wait to ten years



MPs will debate plans to double the minimum residency requirement for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) from five to ten years after widespread public backlash and two high‑profile petitions that together attracted more than a quarter of a million signatures. Campaigners argue the change would be retroactive for many migrants already in the UK on established routes, with both petitions — one calling to preserve the five‑year pathway for existing skilled worker visa holders and another pressing for an exemption for British National (Overseas) visa holders from Hong Kong — having met the 100,000‑signature threshold required for a parliamentary debate on 8 September 2025.

The proposals form part of the Home Office’s white paper, Restoring Control over the Immigration System, published in May 2025. According to the document, ministers want to increase the standard qualifying period for settlement to ten years while introducing an “earned settlement” model that would allow people to shorten that route by demonstrating additional contributions. The white paper also sets out a package of linked measures intended to reduce reliance on overseas labour and steer migration towards higher domestic skills: raising the skilled worker salary and qualification thresholds to degree level (RQF6), increasing the Immigration Skills Charge, tightening student and dependant routes, ending direct overseas recruitment for social care with a transition to 2028, and proposing stronger enforcement and deportation powers.

Humanitarian and education groups have warned the changes would disproportionately harm those who moved to the UK under specific, time‑limited promises. Benedict Rogers, co‑founder of Hong Kong Watch, told the Evening Standard that “now is not the time for the UK to back away from its promises to Hongkongers. Extending the waiting time for ILR to ten years would pull the rug from under those who have sacrificed so much to build a new life here.” He added that the proposals risk leaving BN(O) migrants unprotected by British consulates when travelling, unable to withdraw retirement savings in Hong Kong, and ineligible for home fee status at UK universities — potentially pricing many students out of higher education.

The government has defended the reforms as part of a broader effort to ensure settlement is earned and that migration better supports domestic skills and public services. A government spokesman told the Evening Standard that settlement is “a privilege and not a right” and argued existing length‑of‑residence criteria and a knowledge test do not sufficiently reflect contributions to the economy or integration. The white paper itself sets out a consultation and technical annex, signalling the proposals are not yet law and are open to debate and refinement.

Critics from think‑tanks, unions and sector bodies say the package risks unintended consequences for industries already reporting skills shortages — notably social care, health and parts of hospitality and construction — and could exacerbate labour pressures unless matched by urgent domestic training and recruitment drives. Commentators have pointed to recent migration data to explain the government’s stated urgency: Office for National Statistics provisional figures show net migration rose sharply in the early post‑pandemic period, peaking at about 906,000 for the year to June 2023 before easing to around 728,000 for the year to June 2024, with changes in student dependants and special schemes such as Ukraine and Hong Kong among the drivers cited by statisticians.

The white paper’s earned‑settlement concept and other technical elements will be the focus of the consultation period. Petition organisers and campaign groups argue that, whether or not the long‑term aim is a ten‑year route to settlement, any change must not be applied retrospectively to those who relocated on the basis of the existing five‑year expectation. Both parliamentary petitions secured official government responses and have been scheduled for debate in Westminster on 8 September 2025, offering MPs an early opportunity to test public and cross‑party sentiment ahead of any legislative steps.

Politically, the proposals expose a fault line between the government’s pledge to curb net migration and obligations framed as moral or contractual by advocates for particular groups. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has warned of the need to act on high migration levels in public remarks about national cohesion, and ministers say the white paper is part of delivering that mandate. Opponents counter that the harms to families, students and elderly or vulnerable arrivals — and the practical impact on sectors dependent on overseas labour — require clearer exemptions, firm assurances against retrospective application, and a detailed plan to raise domestic skills in tandem with any tightening of settlement routes.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/skilled-worker-visa-residency-requirement-backlash-new-immigration-rules-b1243117.html), [[3]](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/727360), [[4]](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/727356)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/12/whats-in-uk-immigration-white-paper-visa-rules-deportations-fees)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/skilled-worker-visa-residency-requirement-backlash-new-immigration-rules-b1243117.html), [[5]](https://www.hongkongwatch.org/all-posts/2025/5/15/now-is-not-the-time-to-abandon-hong-kongers-benedict-rogers)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/skilled-worker-visa-residency-requirement-backlash-new-immigration-rules-b1243117.html), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/12/whats-in-uk-immigration-white-paper-visa-rules-deportations-fees), [[6]](https://www.beta.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingjune2024)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper), [[3]](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/727360), [[4]](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/727356)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/skilled-worker-visa-residency-requirement-backlash-new-immigration-rules-b1243117.html), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/12/whats-in-uk-immigration-white-paper-visa-rules-deportations-fees)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/skilled-worker-visa-residency-requirement-backlash-new-immigration-rules-b1243117.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper> - Published on 12 May 2025, the Home Office white paper Restoring Control over the Immigration System sets out comprehensive reforms to reduce net migration and link migration to domestic skills. It proposes raising the standard qualifying period for indefinite leave to remain to ten years while introducing an ‘earned settlement’ model allowing contributions to shorten the route. The paper raises skilled worker thresholds to RQF6, increases the Immigration Skills Charge, restricts overseas recruitment for social care with a transition to 2028, tightens student and dependant routes, and proposes enhanced enforcement and deportation powers. Consultation and technical annexes accompany the proposals.
3. <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/727360> - The parliamentary petition Keep the 5‑Year ILR pathway for existing Skilled Worker visa holders called on government not to apply the proposed ten‑year settlement rule retrospectively. Launched in May 2025, it argued that current skilled workers moved to the UK relying on a five‑year route and that changing rules mid‑journey would be unfair and damaging to families and key sectors. The petition reached over 155,000 signatures and qualified for debate. The page records a government response referencing the Immigration White Paper and confirms the petition will be debated in Westminster on 8 September 2025, providing the official response and details.
4. <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/727356> - The parliamentary petition Keep 5‑year ILR terms to Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visas urges the government to exempt BN(O) visa holders from the proposed Immigration White Paper changes. It argues that BNO migrants relied on a five‑year settlement pathway with defined English and civic requirements, and that extending the qualifying period would break promises and harm elderly and vulnerable arrivals. Launched in 2025, the petition surpassed 107,000 signatures and qualified for debate. The petition page records a government response and confirms the petition will be debated in Parliament on 8 September 2025, offering transparency about the consultation and timelines.
5. <https://www.hongkongwatch.org/all-posts/2025/5/15/now-is-not-the-time-to-abandon-hong-kongers-benedict-rogers> - Published on 15 May 2025 by Hong Kong Watch, Benedict Rogers warns that the Immigration White Paper’s proposal to double the qualifying period for settlement would betray Hongkongers admitted under the BNO scheme. He outlines harms: delayed access to retirement savings, loss of consular protection when travelling, and ineligibility for home fee status at UK universities, which could bar many students from higher education. Rogers describes escalating repression in Hong Kong and says the UK must clarify whether BNO holders will be exempt, urging ministers publicly to urgently honour the original 5+1 commitment and fairly protect those who resettled here.
6. <https://www.beta.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingjune2024> - The Office for National Statistics provisional bulletin for year ending June 2024 presents long‑term international migration estimates and methodological notes. It reports about 1.2 million long‑term immigrants in YE June 2024 and outlines revisions that raised net migration for YE June 2023 to 906,000 and placed net migration at 728,000 for the year to June 2024. The bulletin explains drivers such as changes in student dependants, Ukraine and Hong Kong schemes, and updates to administrative data. It highlights uncertainty intervals, provides detailed datasets and tables, and notes that figures remain provisional while further methodological improvements proceed and remain under review.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/12/whats-in-uk-immigration-white-paper-visa-rules-deportations-fees> - The Guardian’s May 12, 2025 analysis summarises the Immigration White Paper’s main measures. It highlights proposals to lengthen the route to settlement to ten years, raise the skilled worker threshold to degree level (RQF6), cut the post‑study graduate visa, tighten student dependant rules, end direct recruitment of social care from overseas with a transition period to 2028, increase fees and the Immigration Skills Charge, and expand deportation powers. The piece contextualises these changes against record net migration figures and sets out criticism from thinktanks, labour market groups and campaigners concerned about integration, workforce shortages and retroactive impacts on existing migrants.