# Labour government’s ban on overseas care workers risks deepening UK care crisis



Concerns are escalating within the social care sector following the Labour government's reckless decision to end overseas recruitment for care workers by 2028. Industry leaders and campaigners are sounding the alarm that this move could trigger a staffing crisis, worsening an already critical shortfall in care provision. The Health and Social Care Committee has urgently reached out to both Home Secretary Yvette Cooper and Health Secretary Wes Streeting, imploring them for assurances that viable alternative measures will be implemented to fill the gap left by phasing out foreign recruitment—a gap they simply cannot afford to ignore.

Alarm bells have been ringing for a long time, as many care providers, including those from the Diagrama Foundation, heavily rely on international staff to keep their operations afloat. David McGuire, the foundation’s chief, warned that this decision could plunge the sector deeper into crisis. He rightly pointed out that a diverse and skilled workforce is essential for delivering the quality care that the vulnerable deserve, and assuming that local candidates can readily fill the void left by overseas professionals is dangerously naïve. The urgency of this situation cannot be dismissed; with tens of thousands of vacancies, the notion that we can train and retain homegrown carers swiftly is simply unrealistic.

The historical context underscores the pressing need for serious reform in this sector. Sir Andrew Dilnot, a prominent voice in social care, has repeatedly outlined the long-standing malaise that has gripped care policy for over 30 years, marked by reports that have failed to produce tangible results. He emphasized that the structural deficiencies are "blindingly obvious," worsened by a public who remain largely indifferent to the care crisis affecting the elderly and disabled. The lack of outcry often comes from the vulnerability of those impacted, as families are stretched thin trying to care for their loved ones amidst growing challenges.

Baroness Ros Altmann has dubbed the current state of the UK care system the "biggest social policy failure of modern times." With an ageing population, ballooning care costs, and stagnant wages for workers, many are fleeing the care sector for better-paying jobs elsewhere. The comparison is shocking; while care workers are typically paid around £12 an hour, roles at logistics companies like Amazon can offer around £17 an hour—with enticing signing bonuses.

The Labour government’s confidence that the labour shortage could be resolved by those already in the UK is misguided. Many of these individuals face numerous barriers that impede their entry into care roles. Challenges such as inadequate living conditions, stringent driving license requirements, and fear linked to previous exploitation contribute to a dwindling pool of domestic candidates. The anxiety among care executives is palpable; without competitive pay and structural support, the sector risks severe ramifications, including hospital bed shortages due to delayed patient discharges.

Furthermore, the broader immigration policy shift under this Labour government plays a significant role in the ongoing crisis. Their focus on attracting high-skilled graduates at the expense of lower-skilled migrants has prompted criticisms from many sectors reliant on foreign labour. Stakeholders warn that such politically charged changes could degrade the quality of public services, especially in social care and healthcare. The public's shifting attitudes toward immigration reform need to correlate with concrete improvements in the sectors that directly impact their lives.

This ongoing debate lays bare a disconnection between the government's lofty ambitions and the pressing practicalities on the ground. As the government fixes its sights on net migration reduction, public sentiment reveals that dissatisfaction stems not solely from the immigration figures but crucially from the decline in service quality and the burden on local councils. As we approach the 2028 cutoff for overseas recruitment, the pressure intensifies on policymakers to reassess their approach to immigration and care provision dramatically. It is imperative that they do not further burden our society's most vulnerable.

In summary, the decision to phase out overseas recruitment presents a looming threat to the stability of the UK’s social care sector—an issue that has long been overlooked in political discussions. Immediate and effective reform is paramount to avert a deeper crisis, recognizing the vital role that international workers play in the care landscape of Britain.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2055494/Labour-care-homes-social-care> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/f0ee262c-eb95-4d29-9c1d-fc416191acec> - The UK government's decision to end overseas recruitment for care workers has sparked serious concerns among care providers, who warn of an impending staffing crisis. Since the introduction of a care worker visa route in 2022, international staff have become vital to the sector, which struggles with chronic underfunding and local recruitment challenges. Many care providers, like Stella Shaw and Grosvenor Health and Social Care Group, relied heavily on foreign workers to stabilize operations, as domestic applicants remained scarce. While the government aims to combat exploitation and believes up to 2028 staff shortages can be addressed using migrants already in the UK, care executives argue that logistical barriers—such as lack of driving licenses, housing instability, or unsuitability for roles—limit this pool's effectiveness. Additionally, employers are hesitant to rehire workers mistreated by previous agencies. Without adequate reforms including increased wages and structured funding, care leaders predict dire consequences by year's end, including hospital bed shortages due to delayed patient discharges.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/9b916a14-95b3-435f-a79e-de1331153297> - Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's government has introduced significant reforms to the UK’s post-Brexit immigration system, aiming to reduce migration and pivot towards attracting high-skilled graduate workers. The proposed changes, detailed in a government white paper, restrict work visas to graduate-level roles and significantly limit lower-skilled worker visas to temporary exceptions where labor shortages exist. Settlement pathways have also been extended, requiring migrants to prove societal contribution, while higher fees and salary thresholds will make the UK’s immigration process among the most expensive globally. The Home Office estimates a reduction of about 100,000 arrivals annually, although the net migration impact remains uncertain. Critics warn of negative effects on sectors dependent on foreign labor, particularly in social care, due to policy shifts including the closure of care visas and restrictions on family accompaniment. The higher education sector faces a contentious 6% levy on income from international students. Economists expect minimal GDP per capita impact, though public finances may benefit from a shift toward higher-earning migrants. Political observers have raised concerns that Starmer's messaging, particularly the phrase 'island of strangers,' might alienate voters and echo right-wing narratives rather than offering a balanced discussion on immigration’s benefits and challenges.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/92070e36-921a-458d-ab37-6c682b9da645> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has unveiled a stricter immigration policy in response to growing public concern and the surging popularity of Nigel Farage's Reform UK party. While aiming to control net legal migration—which peaked at 906,000 in the year to June 2023—Starmer's rhetoric and proposed measures closely mirror populist narratives, reflecting pressure from both public sentiment and his own MPs. Labour's plan includes reducing net arrivals by 100,000 annually, promoting English proficiency among migrants, and closing abused visa routes such as those for care workers. However, critics warn that these measures may impair key sectors like healthcare and academia and fail to address the politically sensitive issue of small boat crossings. The strategy also shifts focus towards attracting high-skilled migrants while delaying settlement and citizenship opportunities, potentially deterring talent. Analysts argue that to truly reduce immigration, the government must tackle underlying issues such as skills shortages and economic inactivity among the UK workforce. Without substantial investment in education and training, the reforms may hinder Labour’s goals of revitalizing public services and economic growth.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/ee91cad6-c5f2-4a95-8fee-937e1ec10df6> - The UK Labour government's recent white paper on immigration proposes significant curbs, particularly affecting the care sector. By eliminating the existing social care visa without introducing a viable alternative, the country risks exacerbating its growing care-dependency crisis due to an aging population. Though the original visa route was flawed, the UK still faces genuine labour shortages in the care industry. Without foreign workers or substantial tax hikes to fund social care, public services may deteriorate, increasing the burden on local governments and potentially diminishing the quality of public life. Past attempts to reform social care financing, such as the 'death tax' and 'dementia tax,' failed due to public resistance. While the government’s anti-immigration stance may appeal rhetorically, it risks political backlash if service standards fall and taxes rise. Meanwhile, Labour's broader strategy of imposing more burdens on businesses could further complicate economic recovery and public service reliability. Public dissatisfaction is growing not over net immigration numbers, but due to declining service quality and under-resourced local councils, as highlighted in recent surveys. This disconnect could prove politically costly if not adequately addressed.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/55bcac8b-6430-4040-b005-6cc24325dc71> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has announced significant curbs on legal migration, prompting backlash from businesses, care providers, and universities. The reforms include requiring migrants to wait ten years before applying for settlement unless they contribute substantially to the economy or society, abolishing the social care visa route, reducing post-study visa durations for international students, and imposing a 6% fee levy on universities’ international tuition income. These changes aim to reduce net migration by 98,000 annually, bringing it down to 240,000 by 2029-30 from its peak of 906,000 in 2023. Critics, including business leaders and Labour MPs, warn the measures will exacerbate labor shortages, particularly in healthcare and education, and damage the UK’s economic growth and global appeal. Despite the criticism, Starmer insists the measures are necessary and fair, distancing the reforms from political motivations. He has not set a migration cap but promises significant reductions. Economists dispute Starmer’s claim that migration has not contributed to growth, highlighting other factors like Brexit and energy costs as impediments to economic performance. The reforms reflect a broader political shift in response to gains by the anti-immigration Reform UK party in local elections.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/703f6e77-27c7-4ad2-952a-6e3bfbc0016e> - Despite efforts by the UK government to address labor abuses in the care sector, many migrant care workers continue to face underpayment and poor treatment, as reported by Unison, the largest union in Britain. A survey involving 3,000 workers found that over a quarter of migrant care staff receive less than the minimum hourly wage, and more than half are not compensated for travel time between visits. Workers are also threatened with dismissal if they voice concerns, risking deportation unless they secure a new employer sponsor. The visa system's design has left many vulnerable to exploitation, despite the government's recent measures and support funds. Unison, along with other organizations, calls for an overhaul of the sector to prevent further mistreatment of care workers.