



Home Office

Chris Philp MP
Minister for Immigration Compliance
and the Courts

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Iain Stewart MP
House of Commons
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29 June 2021

Dear Iain Stewart MP,

Thank you for your email of 18 June to the Home Office on behalf of a number of your constituents about the control of immigration. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts.

Free movement between the UK and EU has ended. This means that EEA (European Economic Area) citizens require a visa to come to the UK to work and study, bringing them in line with people from the rest of the world.

The new immigration system will allow the UK to take back full control of its border. People coming to the UK as skilled workers will need to have a job offer from a Home Office approved sponsor under the new system. They will need to meet the criteria such as being paid an appropriate salary, and demonstrate that they can speak English to a satisfactory level. There will not be a route for those who do not meet the skills and salary requirements.

We have implemented an unprecedented package of measures to support businesses during the pandemic and our Plan for Jobs is helping people across the country retrain, build new skills and get back into work. General issues around recruitment and availability of skills in the UK labour market should in the first instance be directed to the Department of Work and Pensions as the Department dealing with employment and the labour market, rather than the Home Office.

On the recommendation of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) we abolished the Resident Labour Market Test on 1 December 2020 with the introduction of the Skilled Worker route. In its September 2018 report on the impact of EEA migration in the UK, the MAC advised a robust approach to salary thresholds and the Immigration Skills Charge are better ways to encourage employers to focus on recruiting and investing in domestic workers. The Immigration Skills Charge is designed to encourage employers to consider international recruitment alongside training and development of the resident labour market. Employers are required to pay £1,000 per migrant per year (there is a lower rate for small businesses and charities), unless they qualify for one of the small number of exemptions.

The Government will continue to keep the immigration system under review to ensure it attracts those with the skills which will benefit the UK. Taking back full control of UK borders will allow the Government to apply further controls if necessary, such as higher salary thresholds.

With regards to the people illegally crossing the Channel, this is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world and people should not be making this dangerous journey from a safe EU country. People needing to claim asylum should do so in France or one of the other safe countries which they have passed through. Too many people risk their lives unnecessarily to get to the UK using unseaworthy vessels, putting not only their lives at risk, but those of our Border Force and rescue services. We are determined to make the use of small boats to cross the Channel an unviable option for reaching the UK. The crossings are organised by criminal people smugglers who are charging substantial amounts for this illegal, dangerous and unnecessary service.

We have redoubled efforts with French authorities by increasing beach patrols, intelligence sharing and investment in surveillance as we enter the summer months. As a result we have now seen over 5,000 people being prevented by the French from making the dangerous crossing so far this year. We have secured more than 65 small boat related prosecutions since the start of 2020 totalling over 53 years in custodial sentence. On average, the French have arrested over 100 facilitators each month since the beginning of the year. The French are preventing about 50% of crossing attempts at present. We do not think that this is high enough so we are seeking to ramp up law enforcement activity in France even further in the coming weeks, which the UK Government proposes to fund.

As organised criminal gangs adapt their approach, so will we. But to truly close this lethal route we must fix the broken system through our New Plan for Immigration, which will be firm on those who abuse the system and fair on those in genuine need of protection.

Under the reforms proposed in the New Plan for Immigration, individuals who attempt to enter the UK illegally would be liable for tougher criminal offences, which would increase the penalty from six months' imprisonment. Border Force will also be granted additional powers to stop illegal migration, including powers to stop and redirect vessels at sea. These reforms will break the business model of criminal trafficking networks and deter illegal entry into the UK. In addition, those who enter illegally will be eligible for removal to a safe third country if we can identify one that will receive them. These measures are complex legislative changes that require Parliamentary consideration and necessitate detailed work from across the whole of Government; they will not come into effect until they have received Royal Assent. The Bill will be introduced very shortly.

Your constituents have also expressed concern that there may be up to a million more people from Hong Kong coming to the UK in the next five years. We estimate there are 2.9 million BN(O) status holders eligible to move to the UK, with a further estimated 2.5 million eligible dependants. There remains uncertainty in the numbers of BN(O) status holders we expect to come to the UK. We also do not fully know yet how COVID-19 will affect people's behaviour.

As set out in the published impact assessment, our central estimates of those who will take up this offer range between 123,000 and 153,700 BN(O) status holders and their dependants coming in the first year and between 258,000 and 322,400 over five years.

Details of the impact assessment can be found at:

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2020/70/pdfs/ukia_20200070_en.pdf.

There will be some impact on public services, but the introduction of this visa is estimated to have a net positive impact on the UK, benefiting the economy by between £2.4 and £2.9 billion over five years.

Among other eligibility requirements, BN(O) status holders will need to be able to show that they can support themselves and their dependants for up to six months to be eligible for this visa. Additionally, applicants will pay the Immigration Health Surcharge, with all contributions going directly to the NHS, and a visa fee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Chris Philp MP