

## **Royal College of Nursing Parliamentary Briefing: Mass lobby of Parliament on “earned settlement” proposals, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

*With a membership of over half a million registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the United Kingdom and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world.*

### **Proposed changes to Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)**

International health and care staff make vital contributions to the UK’s health and social care sector each day. There are more than **200,000 internationally educated nursing staff** across the UK, making up **25.8% of the UK’s total registered nursing workforce** (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2025).

**The RCN is strongly opposed to the current proposals** which fail to recognise the enormous value of international nursing staff in the UK who work tirelessly and make a valuable contribution every day. While the government has said that NHS nurses will be exempt, this does not cover those working in other areas of the health and social care sector. Current proposals mean that nursing support worker staff may be forced to wait up to fifteen years before they can apply for ILR. Crucially, current proposals are for any changes to apply retrospectively to those already resident in the UK.

We are also extremely concerned that under current proposals dependents could face longer waiting periods than main applicant. Requiring dependants to ‘earn’ settlement in their own right will increase family separation and undermine retention. Additionally, UK Government has suggested a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition may be applied to ILR, this is directly at odds with government’s ambitions to reduce child poverty.

### **Impact on the nursing profession**

In a recent survey of over 5,000 nursing staff trained outside the UK, 97% of respondents without ILR did not agree with these proposals.

60% of those currently without ILR said it was “very likely” that extending the qualifying period would affect their decision to remain in the UK. This equates to approximately **46,000 nursing staff at risk of leaving the UK.**

Extending the qualifying period risks making the UK an unattractive destination for global nursing talent. **Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents said it was likely that they would not have come to the UK had the qualifying period been 10 years.**

Increasing the time that staff must wait for ILR also makes them **more vulnerable to labour exploitation**, this is a particular risk for staff in the care sector where labour abuse is more prevalent.

### **Policy recommendations**

- The guarantee that registered nurses working in the NHS will have a five-year route to settlement should be extended to all nursing staff, across all settings. This is vital to retain safety-critical staff.
- Any rules changes should not be applied retrospectively. Moving the goal posts for staff already resident in the UK risks an exodus of international nursing staff and is an insult to the staff who worked tirelessly through the COVID-19 pandemic.

- To ensure workforce stability, health and care workers, and their dependents must continue to be eligible for ILR after five years continuous employment and residency. While there is a need for a robust and sustainable domestic pipeline, the UK must remain an attractive destination for nursing professionals who bring unique skills and experience.
- UK Government has suggested they are considering adding a no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition to indefinite leave to remain. The RCN is extremely concerned by this proposal, and we have repeatedly raised concerns regarding the impact of NRPF conditions on the financial safety of nursing staff.

### **Suggested actions**

We ask MPs to support migrant nursing staff, and the wider international health and social care workforce by raising this vital issue with Ministers and in Parliament.

- Write to the Home Secretary regarding the impact of the government's proposed reforms on the UK nursing workforce and ask that the 5-year exemption currently set out for NHS nurses, is extended to all registered nurses and nursing support worker staff, across all settings. The RCN is calling for all health and care staff to continue to have a 5-year route to settlement.
- Submit oral and written questions to the Home Secretary challenging the government on its failure so far to assess the impact of these reforms on the existing crises of recruitment, retention and exploitation in the care sector.
- Show your support for the UK nursing profession by citing the results of our ILR survey in your contributions and communications on this issue: You can find out more in our report [\*Unsettled: How the proposed changes Indefinite Leave to Remain could affect the retention of internationally educated nursing staff\*](#)

*For a bespoke briefing or further information please contact the RCN's Public Affairs team at [publicaffairs@rcn.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@rcn.org.uk)*