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# Global Immigration alert

March 2026

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## United Kingdom

### Significant amendments to immigration rules

#### Executive summary

On 5 March 2026, the UK Home Office submitted a substantial package of amendments to the Immigration Rules to parliament through a Statement of Changes. Many of these changes will impact employers, corporate sponsors and HR compliance teams.

#### Key developments

Key changes outlined in the amendments include:

- **Skilled Worker route:** Skilled Workers' salary must meet the applicable minimum salary threshold in every pay period, rather than on an annualized average basis. This enables UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) officials to take action at an earlier stage where underpayment is suspected.
- **Prison officers:** Temporary transition arrangements will apply for prison officers (i.e., foreign nationals requiring sponsorship) who switch into the Skilled Worker route. These include:
  - Applying a Regulated Qualifications Framework ("RQF") Level 3 skill threshold for in-country switchers until 31 December 2026. Those already in the Skilled Worker route can extend their stay under existing transitional arrangements.
  - A lower, transitional salary threshold of GBP 31,300 and the standard rate applicable to prison officers (SOC 3314), including those who do not meet the transitional criteria, until 31 December 2027.
  - No new dependents are permitted to join them in the UK, while existing dependents in the country may extend their permission to remain.
- **Global Business Mobility (GBM) - Secondment route:** Qualifying overseas employment requirements are reduced from 12 months to six months. This shall take effect on 26 March 2026.
- **Service supplier route - India commitments:** Changes implement UK-India treaty obligations, permitting Indian service suppliers to enter the UK for up to 12 months at a time under the Contractual Service Supplier or

Independent Professional categories. This shall take effect on 26 March 2026.

- **Identity reuse:** Applicants who previously provided biometrics under controlled conditions (e.g., at Visa and Citizenship Application Services) may reuse their identity using the Generic Identity Verification application by submitting a live facial image. Eligibility for identity reuse will be set out in due course by the UKVI guidance and on the online application.
- **English language requirement:** From 26 March 2027, settlement applications across various work routes, including Skilled Worker and Global Talent, will require B2 English score, replacing the existing B1 level requirement.
- **Criminality rules:** Applications must now be refused, and existing permission may be canceled, if an individual has received a suspended prison sentence of 12 months or more, in line with the Sentencing Act 2026. This shall take effect on 26 March 2026.
- **Seasonal Worker route:** The minimum hourly pay rate for Seasonal Workers will be updated to reflect increases to the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage effective April 2026 (this will be increased from GBP 12.21 to GBP 12.71).

Other changes include:

- **Visa brake - effective 26 March 2026:** The 18-month visa brake is estimated to prevent 4,300 Student visas being issued. This impact is compared to the total 440,000 student visas issued in year ending September 2025 across all nationalities. The brake is also estimated to prevent 90 Skilled Worker visas being issued.
- Student visas will not be issued to nationals of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan.
- Skilled Worker visas will not be issued to nationals of Afghanistan.

- *Refugee and Asylum seekers:*
  - Refugee and humanitarian protection is reduced from five years to 30 months for claims made on or after 2 March 2026.
  - Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children remain eligible for a five-year stay.
  - Asylum seekers who are permitted to work may only take up employment in occupations classified at RQF level 6 or above.
- *New visa requirement:*
  - Nationals of Nicaragua and St Lucia now require a visit visa; these countries are removed from the UK Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) list. This change went into effect on 5 March 2026, with a six-week transition period.
  - For transiting the UK, nationals of both countries now require a Direct Airside Transit Visa.
- *EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) changes:*
  - New suitability refusal ground for assisting fraudulent applications.
  - Pre-settled status holders may make a further application to the EUSS at any point where they hold pre-settled status granted under it.
  - Expired biometric cards are accepted if they are no more than 60 months old.
  - For family permit changes applicants must provide evidence of sponsor's EUSS status and proof of the qualifying family relationship.
- *Child settlement clarification:*
  - Settlement is permitted only where:
    - Both parents are settled in the UK or are British; or
    - One parent is settled in the UK with sole responsibility, or under compelling circumstances.
  - A child may join only a "close relative," as newly defined.
- *Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE):*
  - A person in the UK who holds, or has previously held, permission under the UPE may qualify for permission to stay in the UK under the Scheme. This will usually comprise an initial grant of up to 18 months permission to stay, now followed by a further grant of up to 24 months permission. This takes the total permission under UPE to three and a half years. Application window is increased from 28 days to 90 days before visa expiry date. The 90-day window will apply for first time UPE applications from 8 April and second UPE applications once open, for those seeking an extension.
- *British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) route:*
  - Eligibility is extended to adult children who were under the age of 18 on 1 July 1997. This shall take effect on 8 April 2026.
  - Identity verification is permitted via the UK Immigration ID Check app. This shall take effect on 8 April 2026.
- *Global Talent route:*
  - A new fast-track pathway is introduced for academic and research appointments. This shall take effect on 1 July 2026.
- *Seasonal Worker administration:*
  - Pay calculations must be based on the sponsor-stated start date.

### **Impact on employers**

Employers may consider taking the following actions to maintain compliance, streamline processes, and avoid delays or business disruptions arising from the upcoming changes:

- Review salary-compliance processes to ensure that there are no pay-period dips below the required Skilled Worker thresholds.
- Update HR and onboarding materials to reflect new criminality rules and identity-reuse processes.
- Identify sponsored workers approaching settlement who may be impacted by the B2 English language requirement.
- Reassess global mobility strategy, especially for secondees and Indian service suppliers under GBM changes.
- Update pay rates for Seasonal Workers in line with the upcoming wage increases in April 2026.
- Monitor visa eligibility for impacted nationalities under the visa brake and revised visit visa rules.

### **Key steps**

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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