



The Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Sent by email to the Minister's Private Office

20<sup>TH</sup> December 2023

Dear secretary of state,

### **Treatment of the migrant workers in social care**

We write with serious concerns about the potentially catastrophic effect of immigration rule changes on the social care sector, its workforce and on the millions of families who rely on support.

UNISON is the largest union for care workers in the UK and the National Care Forum is the leading membership body for not-for-profit organisations providing care and support. As such, we urge you to rethink these policies which will have a devastating impact on migrant care staff and the ability to maintain essential services.

These announcements appear to have been made without proper planning, consultation, or information, resulting in ministers giving contradictory and confusing explanations.

The home secretary, James Cleverly, has said overseas care workers are causing 'displacement' of UK workers from taking care jobs. This attempt to justify the visa policy is patently untrue.

Adult social care continues to face an ongoing staffing crisis. There are 152,000 unfilled posts in England alone, the highest vacancy rate of any sector in the economy.

Low wages remain a major factor. But it is nonsense for government minister Chris Philp to say that a rise in the minimum wage would ease the situation. Raising the lowest rate across all jobs does nothing to help the care sector attract the people it needs, when other jobs pay the same or far better.

A significant boost to wages, a career path with training and reform of the sector are what will make the difference in social care.

What's also concerning is the absence of any clear plan for what will happen to care workers with dependents already here. **Migrant care workers face Christmas in limbo**

worrying about what will happen to their families when they renew their visas or change employers. Many are already expressing regret about coming to the UK and making plans to move to more welcoming parts of the world.

The social care sector simply couldn't function without overseas staff. Its workforce has always contained a sizeable proportion of people from beyond the UK. Recruiting from other countries has been actively encouraged by the government too.

The government has had 13 years to develop effective, targeted policies to properly support, recognise, reward and value the domestic social care workforce, with little to show for it.

A sudden, major U-turn like this will cause unnecessary concern to those who need vital support and their families, as well as huge costs to organisations providing care.

The government has produced no evidence to support its claim that migrant workers without dependents will still come to the UK. If ministers are wrong, thousands of people across the UK will be unable to access social care they desperately need.

There has also been no confirmation of the new salary thresholds for social care, nor any more detail about the fate of overseas care workers and their families who are already here. This underlines the lack of regard paid to social care. Decisions are being made about an essential service by those who do not understand what's at stake.

This is skilled work that can only be delivered by skilled workers from the UK and overseas, working side by side.

The care sector is a lifeline for so many people and, with an ageing population, demand is only ever going to increase. Meeting that need won't happen by penalising migrant care staff.

It's a long-term funding and workforce plan that will solve the crisis in social care. Without that, the consequences will be calamitous.

Yours sincerely



**Christina McAnea**  
**UNISON general secretary**



**Professor Vic Rayner OBE, CEO,**  
**National Care Forum**