

Leader of the official opposition
The Labour Party, Labour Central
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Sent via email to: leader@labour.org.uk

RE: OVER 50 SECTOR-LEADING ORGANISATIONS CALL ON LABOUR TO SUPPORT OUR DEMANDS TO CAP ROUTES TO SETTLEMENT AT 5 YEARS AND REDUCE VISA FEES

Dear Sir Keir,

This Christmas, as families across the UK struggle to heat their homes and make ends meet, we know that thousands of people who call the UK their home will face even more hardship and instability – because of this country's complex, expensive and restrictive immigration rules.

People who move to the UK, like everyone else, form permanent relationships and put down roots. They want to provide for themselves and their families, and thrive as part of our communities. But the UK's current immigration system denies people these basic needs. Instead, it creates hostility, precarity and uncertainty through long, expensive and complex routes to settlement, including the little known 10-year route.

While most people with the right to stay in the UK are eligible for settlement after 5 years, an estimated 170,000 people with visas must wait a gruelling 10 years before they can settle permanently. These people, who have family or strong community ties to the UK, have told us how difficult it is to survive and live in a country for 10 years under a hostile environment, and how the system is unfair, degrading and inhumane.

We know all too well that the 10-year route traps people and their families in a cycle of poverty and precarity. As one person described, it leads to 'destitution, extortion, [and] anxiety'. It disproportionately applies to people on low incomes, who then have to pay eye-watering fees of over £2,500 every two and a half years; forced to pay a total of just under £13,000 simply to remain with their friends, family and community. The majority of people on this route are also subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds condition, which indirectly discriminates against women, disabled people and Black, Brown and racialised communities, and pushes thousands of people into poverty and insecure housing each year.

So as the cost of living rises, marginalised migrants are barred from accessing the state safety net and unable to make ends meet as the Home Office charges people visa fees which are more than cost-price, and subsequently profits off their suffering.

Crucially, the impact of this long, expensive, restrictive route on people's physical and mental health is immeasurable. Research by the Children's Commissioner highlights that children subject to immigration control experience immense trauma and stress due to 'living in a state of limbo'. People subject to the 10-year route have described finding the waiting and uncertainty extremely challenging, making it nigh on impossible to get on with their lives.

People directly impacted by the current system have told the charity Migrant Voice how saving for expensive visa fees every few years means they are unable to feed their children properly, with some parents forced to miss meals, many more forced to access food banks, that they are forced into unsafe and overcrowded

housing, face homelessness, the risk of exploitation at work, and overwhelming debt. As a result of these horrific pressures, people have said they are in a 'living hell', in 'constant fear' and that this dehumanising system is destroying their 'ambition and dreams'.

We also know that the 10-year route creates instability and pushes people out of status. Because of the huge costs and complex legal hoops people have to jump through every few years, the system makes it more likely that they will end up undocumented, and then criminalises them for working to support themselves and their families.

The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, responsible for providing independent scrutiny of state border and immigration functions, has long called for the 10-year route to be reviewed with a view to scrapping it, due to its impact on families, potential discrimination and the role it plays in making people undocumented.

And we know that progress is possible. Earlier this year, after years of tireless campaigning by young activists and We Belong, a shorter 5-year route to settlement for people who came to the UK as children was introduced, with potential to transform the lives of thousands of children and young people. We'd like to see Labour commit to ensuring *all* migrants can access permanent settlement after 5 years residence, to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who call the UK their home.

We invite the Labour Party to join calls from campaigners and politicians to scrap the 10-year route, and cap all routes to settlement at 5 years, so people can begin to live full and fulfilling lives. The Labour Party must listen to the experiences of people forced through this cruel, racist system, and commit to ending the cycle of poverty and precarity faced by so many migrant families.

As Labour leader, you've said you want to 're-energise our communities' and be the party of 'working people.' But unless humanity, dignity and compassion are centred in your immigration policies, and people who have moved to the UK are enabled to settle and to thrive, this will be impossible to achieve.

That's why we are calling on you to make a public commitment to abolish the 10-year route to settlement and cap all routes to 5 years residence, with visa fees set no higher than the administrative cost. This would be a vital, first step towards ending the cycle of poverty and precarity that continues to harm so many migrant families and communities this winter.

SIGNED:

1. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
2. Praxis
3. Migrant Voice
4. Regularise
5. Doctors of the World UK
6. Trust for London
7. Refugee Action
8. Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)
9. Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB)
10. Just for Kids Law
11. City of Sanctuary UK
12. Rights of Women

13. Helen Bamber Foundation
14. Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)
15. Latin American Women's Rights Service
16. Anti Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit
17. African Rainbow Family
18. Da'aro Youth Project
19. Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL)
20. Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit
21. Southeast and East Asian Centre CIC
22. Reunite Families
23. Rainbow Migration
24. Right to Remain
25. South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice
26. West London Welcome
27. Migrant Action
28. Seraphus
29. Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (CARAS)
30. Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre
31. City of Sanctuary Sheffield
32. Friends of the Drop In (FODI) Sunderland
33. Big Leaf Foundation
34. iMix
35. Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers
36. Nanny Solidarity Network
37. Birmingham City of Sanctuary
38. Voices in Exile
39. Together with Migrant Children
40. Govan Community Project
41. Refugee Education UK
42. Waging Peace
43. The Jewish Council for Racial Equality
44. The3million
45. Samphire
46. Refugee Support Group
47. Asylum Welcome
48. René Cassin
49. Albanian Scottish Association
50. Choose Love
51. St. Augustine's Centre Halifax
52. Calderdale Valley of Sanctuary
53. Outdoors For You
54. Good Chance Theatre
55. Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign
56. Refugees & Mentors CIC
57. The Boabab Centre for Young Survivors in Exile
58. The William Gomes Podcast