



Home Office

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Future Borders and Immigration

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www.gov.uk/home-office

TO: All Members of Parliament
By email

26 March 2020

COVID-19: In-country visa extensions

Dear Colleague,

I am writing further to my letter of 17 February, in which I explained the actions the Home Office was taking as a result of what was then a developing situation limited to China in relation to coronavirus. Since then the situation has evolved considerably.

Due to widespread travel restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic, people from many different nations may now be facing uncertainty in relation to the expiry of their visa or leave to remain in the United Kingdom. The Home Office understands in many cases this is because of circumstances outside of their control. We wish to continue with the proportionate approach we adopted in February and avoid penalising any individual in these circumstances. In response, the Home Office has taken several exceptional steps.

All foreign nationals in the UK whose leave to enter or remain has recently expired or is coming to expiry

New measures will extend visas, under the same immigration conditions, for foreign nationals already in the UK and who are unable to return home, until at least **31 May 2020**.

Visa nationals who cannot leave the UK before the expiry of their leave due to travel restrictions or self-isolation, **must contact our Coronavirus Immigration Team (CIT) by email** to advise of their situation. The email address is: CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk

The requirement to contact the Coronavirus Immigration Team applies to individuals of any nationality whose leave has expired on or after 24 January 2020 or will expire by 31 May 2020.

This approach protects all individuals who find themselves in this position, preventing them from becoming an overstayer and from any future immigration penalty during this period. Individuals will continue to have the same status as their previous visa or leave to remain. They will not, as a matter of course, receive a new visa or Biometric Residence Permit card. If proof of status is needed, the CIT can assist with this.

This requirement will also apply to relevant Chinese nationals still in the UK who had their visas automatically extended to 31 March.

Switching categories in the UK

The current rules require people in certain categories to return to their home country to apply for a new visa if they wish to remain in the UK for a different purpose (e.g. student or skilled worker). In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Home Office is waiving the requirement that such applications are made overseas and will allow switching into these routes to be made from within the UK.

Those switching routes in-country still need to pay the relevant fees, meet the requirements of the rules for the route they are applying and will remain subject to immigration control, including criminality checks. The Home Office will endeavour to process applications as quickly as possible, but in the current circumstances some applications may take longer than normal to process, including those wishing to switch category.

Face-to-Face requirements for Tier 2,4 or 5 sponsor organisations

Additionally, taking into consideration the current Government advice on self-isolation and social distancing, the Home Office is also relaxing some of the requirements on visa sponsors which includes allowing non-EU nationals here under work or study routes to undertake such activities from home.

Maintaining lawful immigration controls

Whilst we recognise the exceptionality of the situation, it is an essential responsibility of government to promote compliance with our laws and individuals' conditions of entry to the UK, and secure return, where appropriate, based on the latest country situation in the relevant country and any related travel and health advice. These cases will continue to be managed on a case by case basis.

As before, I hope this letter is helpful in setting out our approach, ensuring the provision of support for those who need it, and to provide a proportionate response in line with the current health and travel advice. We will continue to keep our handling of this issue under review as the situation develops.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Foster', with a large flourish at the end.

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Future Borders and Immigration