

Statement to parliament: Windrush Compensation Scheme

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Windrush Compensation Scheme.

Copies of the response to the consultation on the Windrush Compensation Scheme are available from the Vote Office.

The United Kingdom has a proud history of welcoming arrivals from around the world.

We have long held open the door to those who want to come and help build a better country – including, my parents for example or indeed the parents of the shadow Home Secretary.

And we have all benefited as a result, with the UK emerging as a stronger, broader, more vibrant and successful nation.

We would not be the country that we are today without the men and the women who crossed oceans to come here legally, to make their homes, to work hard, to pay taxes, to raise their families.

And we all know it.

Which is why the whole country was shocked by the unacceptable treatment experienced by some members of the Windrush generation.

People who have built their lives in this country, people who have done so much for this country, people who have every right to be in this country they were told that they were not welcome.

It was a terrible mistake and it should never have happened.

And that it did is a matter of profound regret to myself, to my department, to the government.

That's why, just under a year ago, one of my first acts as Home Secretary was to stand at this dispatch box and to say sorry on behalf of successive governments.

Sorry to the parents and the grandparents who suffered the trauma of being incorrectly ordered to leave the country they love.

Sorry to those who had paid taxes here for decades, only to be denied NHS care to which they were perfectly entitled.

Sorry to hard-working men and women who were unfairly refused the right to work – and even refused the dignity of a roof over their head.

But I know that words alone are not enough which is why, 11 months ago, I didn't just say sorry to members of the Windrush generation – I also vowed to right the wrongs that had been done to them.

I sincerely hope that this compensation scheme being unveiled today goes some way into doing that.

It has taken longer than I would have liked but if we are to deliver justice for the Windrush generation and their families, it is vital that we get this right.

Today's scheme is the product of many months of work with affected individuals and their representatives, including well over 2,000 responses to our call for evidence and the consultation.

We are also indebted to Martin Forde QC, who has provided us with invaluable independent advice and met with a great many of the individuals that were directly affected.

His findings have contributed hugely to the final design of the scheme, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Martin for his work.

As a result of this meticulous approach, I am confident that the proposals for the scheme are closely aligned with what affected communities wanted to see.

Namely that it is simple, it is accessible and, above all, it is fair.

Full information is now available online and via a free telephone hotline number.

Guidance is being provided to help people understand what compensation they might be entitled to and how to submit a claim.

And the application process itself is as simple and clear as possible.

It has also been important to note that the scheme is not only open to those of Caribbean origin.

The government proposes broadly to align eligibility with the Commonwealth Citizens Taskforce.

This means that Commonwealth citizens settled in the UK before 1973, along with certain children and grandchildren of theirs, are eligible to apply if they have losses to claim for.

Other eligible groups include those of any nationality who have a right of abode, or settled status, or are now British citizens, who arrived to live in the UK before 31 December 1988.

Of course, Mr Speaker, the historical nature of the wrongs done mean that some of those who have been affected throughout the years are sadly not alive to see justice being done.

Where this is the case we propose to accept claims from the estates of individuals who would themselves have been eligible had they not passed away and from close family members of an eligible person.

But justice will not be done if people don't know about the scheme, or for any reason they are afraid to engage with it.

So in addition to today's media coverage we will launch an extensive programme of events with key stakeholders, community groups, and faith organisations so that people across the country and overseas know about the compensation that they can apply for.

On 22 of June we will be marking the second annual Windrush Day – a celebration of everything that the Windrush generation and their descendants have contributed to in the UK.

And later this evening, I will be welcoming community group leaders to Parliament, alongside some of those who have suffered, and their families.

It will be an opportunity to reflect not only on the mistakes of successive governments brought to this point but also on what we as a country can do to ensure that mistakes like this are not repeated.

Wendy Williams' review will explore how members of the Windrush generation came to be treated like illegal migrants, and I look forward to receiving her recommendations.

But there is no doubt that the roots lie in a historical policy that saw people given settled status without also being given the ability to prove it.

Nothing we say or do will ever wipe away the hurt, trauma and loss that should never have been suffered by the men and women of the Windrush generation.

But together, we can begin to right the wrongs of Windrush.

We can begin to turn the page on this sad chapter in our history.

And we can do justice by people who have contributed immeasurably to our country.

When the UK called out for help, thousands of people from the Caribbean and across the Commonwealth stepped up to help get us back on our feet.

Now it's time for us to step up and do what's right by those that we have failed.

I commend this statement to the House.