

Visas extended for those currently unable to return home due to COVID-19

Visa nationals who cannot return home due to the COVID-19 pandemic will be able to extend their visa.

The extension, announced today (24 March) by the Home Secretary Priti Patel, will apply to anyone whose leave expired after the 24 January and who cannot leave the country because of travel restrictions or self-isolation.

This will last until 31 May but will be kept under regular review in case further extensions are needed.

A dedicated COVID-19 immigration team has been set up within UKVI to make the process as straightforward as possible. Anyone in this situation just needs to contact this team, via this email address CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk, to let them know their visa has expired and they will be issued with an extension.

To help those who want to apply for visas to stay in the UK long-term, the Home Office is also temporarily expanding the in-country switching provisions.

This will mean people can apply to switch routes, such as from Tier 4 (student) to Tier 2 (General Worker), whilst remaining in the UK. UKVI will continue to process applications as quickly as possible, however some applications may take longer than usual due to COVID-19 related operational pressures.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The UK continues to put the health and wellbeing of people first and nobody will be punished for circumstances outside of their control.

By extending people's visas, we are giving people peace of mind and also ensuring that those in vital services can continue their work.

Many foreign nationals have found themselves unable to return home since the outbreak of COVID-19 due to flight cancellations and border restrictions.

The extension has been put in place to give these individuals peace of mind that they will not be penalised for overstaying their visa when the situation is out of their control due to COVID-19.

Those who contact the Home Office for these visa extensions will be expected to return to their home countries as soon as possible once flight and border restrictions are lifted. No immigration enforcement action will be undertaken during this time for those who email the Home Office as outlined above.

In light of the current advice on self-isolation and social distancing, the Home Office is also waiving a number of requirements on visa sponsors, such as allowing non-EU nationals here under work or study routes to undertake their work or study from home.