

Seema Malhotra MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Migration and Citizenship of the United Kingdom
Home Office

6 August 2025

Dear Minister,

Re. Reinstating the right to work for asylum seeker doctors

I am writing this letter to urgently call for a permanent reinstatement of the right to work for asylum seeker doctors. Since the abolition of the [Shortage Occupation List](#) ('SOL'), asylum seeker doctors have been unable to apply for the right to work after waiting longer than 12 months for a Home Office decision on their asylum application. The [Immigration Salary List](#) ('ISL') replaced the SOL on 4 April 2024 and on the recommendation of the Migration Advisory Committee, doctors were not included on the new list. This decision has had a disproportionate effect on asylum seeker doctors who are now deprived of their right to work at a time when their skills are desperately needed in the NHS.

The lack of the right to work is a [major concern](#) among refugees and asylum seekers. Being unable to work can negatively impact mental health and can hinder a person's ability to rebuild their life in their new communities. It takes huge drive and motivation to become a doctor, and we understand from our own members that medicine can form a fundamental part of their unique identity. Many see caring for patients as a vocation and privilege, and helping asylum seeker and refugee doctors re-enter medicine in the UK goes some way to helping them to reclaim that sense of identity while benefiting our country.

Benefits to recruiting asylum seeker doctors

BMA analysis of [NHS England's Long Term Workforce Plan](#) projects that the gap between the supply and demand for doctors will widen across the NHS unless further action is taken, and that by 2036/37, the NHS will need more than 65,000 additional doctors compared to 2021.

Refugee and asylum seeker doctors make a valuable contribution to the delivery of healthcare services in the UK. They provide unique perspectives in healthcare and are often well placed to serve migrant communities, including displaced people, within the UK because of their previous medical experience outside the UK. Programmes like [REACHE](#) and other refugee training programmes throughout the UK are already carrying out invaluable work supporting these doctors to pass the clinical and language exams so they can start contributing to the NHS. Data provided by REACHE shows they have placed 115 doctors in the North-West region alone and that 53 GPs currently working in the NHS are REACHE alumni.


Co-chief executive officers: Neeta Major & Rachel Podolak

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The BMA is calling for a permanent reinstatement of the right to work for all asylum seeker doctors. These doctors are already in the UK and should be supported and given the opportunity to use their expertise, knowledge and experience within the NHS.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tom Dolphin', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr Tom Dolphin
BMA Council Chair