



**OUR PLAN FOR  
IMMIGRATION  
AND  
ASYLUM**

## Our Plan for Immigration and Asylum

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The UK's immigration system is broken, and it is hurting everyone.

Employers can't recruit the workers they need, leaving the NHS short of nurses and social care in crisis. People without documents are denied access to healthcare and housing. Far too many people are detained indefinitely, in inhumane conditions and at great expense. Families are separated by unfair, complex visa requirements. **Public confidence in the system has been shattered.**

Decades of hostile policies and rhetoric from Labour and Conservative governments have created a system that no one trusts, and that fails to respect people's dignity.

The Home Office is not fit for purpose. The Conservatives' Hostile Environment turns teachers, doctors, police officers and bank clerks into border guards, and led members of the Windrush Generation to be deprived their rights, detained and even deported. **Both Labour and the Conservatives want to make all this much worse by taking us out of the EU and ending free movement.**

**Liberal Democrats will build a brighter future**, with a fair, effective immigration system that treats everyone with dignity and respect. **We will scrap the Conservatives' Hostile Environment**, replacing their fishing-net approach with targeted, intelligence-led immigration enforcement. We will take immigration powers away from the Home Office so that visa and asylum decisions are made quickly and fairly. We will restore dignity and common sense by ending indefinite detention and allowing asylum seekers to work while their cases are decided. And **we will stop Brexit and save free movement.**

With a Liberal Democrat government, every person will have their dignity respected and UK employers will be able to recruit the workers they need. Those who choose to come to the UK to work, study or join their families will be welcomed for the skills and contributions that they bring. Family unity will be protected; the rule of law will be respected; and we will ensure fairness for taxpayers. **Everyone will be able to have confidence that the immigration system is functioning as it should.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christine Jardine', written in a cursive style.

**Christine Jardine**

Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary

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## **Stop Brexit and save free movement**

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Free movement gives UK citizens the right to live, work, study and retire across the continent, and for EU citizens to do the same in the UK.

EU citizens are our colleagues and our neighbours, our families and our friends. 65,000 staff our NHS, including 20,000 nurses and 10,000 doctors. 84,000 build our homes and 87,000 work in adult social care. They bring enormous benefits to our communities, our public services, our economy and our society.

Yet both Labour and the Conservatives are committed to delivering Brexit and ending free movement.

Ending free movement would take away the rights of UK citizens – especially the 1.3 million currently living elsewhere in the EU. It would also cut off the supply of EU workers that UK employers, including our NHS and other public services, rely on. If free movement ends, services will be cut, government debt will rise and economic growth will suffer – meaning fewer jobs and lower wages.

By taking away the rights of EU citizens in the UK and requiring them to apply for Settled Status, the Conservatives would create a new Windrush-style scandal for EU citizens. Tens or even hundreds of thousands of people would be left effectively undocumented, exposed to the Hostile Environment and at risk of detention and deportation.

We will save free movement and safeguard the rights of UK citizens elsewhere in the EU and EU citizens in the UK by stopping Brexit.

## End the Hostile Environment

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The Windrush Scandal demonstrated how, under the Conservatives' Hostile Environment, people who have every right to live in the UK are wrongly denied access to NHS treatment, housing and other services simply because they don't have the right documents to prove it. Innocent people are made homeless, detained and even deported. The police share personal data with the Home Office, deterring victims and witnesses from coming forward. This has to stop.

We will scrap the Hostile Environment, including by:

- Repealing the Conservatives' discriminatory "Right to Rent" law.
- Ending immigration checks and upfront charging in the NHS.
- Establishing a firewall to prevent public agencies – such as schools, the NHS and the police – from sharing personal information with the Home Office for the purposes of immigration enforcement.
- Removing the immigration exemption in the Data Protection Act.
- Reversing the Immigration Act 2016's introduction of a new criminal offence of "illegal working".
- Lifting the requirement on banks to perform quarterly immigration checks on their customers.

## Fix the broken system

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Scandal after scandal, under Labour and Conservative Home Secretaries, have proved that the Home Office is not fit for purpose. It gets far too many immigration and asylum decisions wrong, with 52% reversed by judges on appeal. Arbitrary and complex rules keep thousands of families apart, separating UK citizens from their loved ones and children from their parents. No one can have confidence that our immigration laws are being properly and fairly enforced.

Fixing the broken immigration system means taking powers away from the Home Office, injecting compassion and common sense into the rules, and investing in an effective, accountable Border Force.

We will:

- Move policymaking on work permits and student visas out of the Home Office and into the Departments for Business and Education respectively.
- Establish a new arms-length, non-political agency to take over processing visa applications and make decisions quickly and fairly.
- Invest in officers, training and technology to prevent illegal entry at Britain's borders, assist seekers of sanctuary and combat human trafficking and the smuggling of people, weapons, drugs and wildlife.
- Tackle human trafficking and modern slavery through proactive, intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards, with a powerful new Worker Protection Enforcement Authority to protect people in precarious work.
- Reduce the fee for registering a child as a British citizen from £1,012 to the cost of administration.
- Abolish the arbitrary, complex "minimum income requirement" for spouse and partner visas.
- Waive application fees for indefinite leave for members of the Armed Forces on discharge and their families.
- Enable people who came here as children to apply for resident status.

## Migration that works for the UK

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The Conservatives' bureaucratic and inefficient system of work visas, including the arbitrary cap of 20,700 Tier 2 visas a year, is causing increasing damage to the UK's public services and businesses. It makes it difficult and expensive for them to find people, particularly in sectors where there are serious skill shortages: especially health & social care, hospitality, tourism and agriculture.

This hurts everyone. It hits growth and reduces the taxes government has to spend on our NHS, schools and other public services. Both Labour and the Conservatives want to make this much worse by taking us out of the EU and ending free movement – subjecting far more workers and employers to this broken system. Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage's "Australian-style points-system" is nothing more than a meaningless slogan, not a solution.

We will:

- Replace Tier 2 work visas with a more flexible merit-based system.
- Create a new two-year visa for students to work after graduation.
- Introduce a 'Training up Britain' programme to make the most of migrants' skills.



## **Detention as an absolute last resort**

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The UK is the only country in Europe that locks people up indefinitely for immigration purposes. Detaining people for months on end – without giving them any idea how long they'll be there – is clearly inhumane. It's also expensive and unnecessary.

More than 24,000 people are put into detention centres each year, at a cost to the taxpayer of £90 million a year. On top of this, the Home Office had to pay out £8 million last year in compensation for 312 cases of wrongful detention.

By reducing detention to an absolute last resort, the Liberal Democrats will save both misery and money.

We will:

- Introduce a 28-day time limit on detention, with judicial approval required to detain someone for more than 72 hours.
- End the detention of vulnerable people, including survivors of torture, victims of trafficking and modern slavery, and people who are pregnant.
- Close seven of the UK's nine detention centres.

## **Compassion and dignity for seekers of sanctuary**

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We must do all we can to protect people forced to flee their homes to escape war and persecution. The UK has a proud history of providing sanctuary to those in need, but Labour and Conservative governments have introduced a harsh system that fails to respect people's dignity.

Thousands of asylum seekers are forced to wait many months for a decision, unable to work, rent a home or support their families. Too many people are wrongly denied asylum, with 40% of refusals overturned on appeal. LGBT+ applicants face particular hostility, with far too many denied asylum because officials assume that they are lying about who they are.

We will:

- Give asylum seekers the right to work three months after they have applied, enabling them to work in any role so that they can support themselves, integrate in their communities and contribute through taxation.
- Resettle 10,000 vulnerable refugees each year and a further 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children from elsewhere in Europe over the next ten years.
- Expand refugee family reunion rights.
- Fund community-sponsorship projects for refugees, and reward community groups who develop innovative and successful ways of promoting social cohesion.
- Offer asylum to people fleeing the risk of violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identification, end the culture of disbelief for LGBT+ asylum seekers and never refuse an LGBT+ applicant on the basis that they could be discreet.
- Move asylum policymaking from the Home Office to the Department for International Development.
- Establish a dedicated unit to improve the speed and quality of asylum decision-making.
- Provide free basic English lessons to refugees and asylum seekers and scrap the 16 hours- per-week rule with respect to financial support for those unable to work due to insufficient English.
- Provide public health services, including maternity services, to people from the moment they arrive in the UK.
- Increase the "move-on period" for refugees from 28 days to 60 days.



This plan sets out Liberal Democrat policies and priorities for the United Kingdom. The Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats set their own policy on devolved matters, and for those policy areas, the proposals here apply to England only. Our sister party, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, makes its own policy on devolved issues in Northern Ireland. Published and promoted by Mike Dixon on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, both at 8-10 Great George Street, London SW1P 3AE.