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[Home](#) > [News and opinion](#) >

Navigating visa concerns as an IMG coming to work as a GP in the UK

by Binish Mehar

Securing visa extensions while focusing on succeeding at work is a challenge for doctors

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Becoming a GP in the UK offers IMGs (international medical graduates) a unique opportunity to work in a renowned healthcare system, provide comprehensive primary care to diverse patient populations, and collaborate with fellow healthcare professionals at the forefront of medical advancements.

The role of a GP in the UK is pivotal in promoting preventive care, managing chronic conditions, and offering personalised medical services. However, navigating the visa process can be a complex and daunting task.

To become a fully qualified GP in the UK, IMGs must complete their GP training, gaining practical experience, passing assessments, and fulfilling all requirements set by the Royal College of General Practitioners.

We also face an uphill battle overcoming the additional hurdles of securing visa extensions and employer sponsorship. These come with time-consuming additional paperwork and documentation to be sorted, and strict eligibility criteria and short deadlines to be met, all while we are trying to focus on completing our training. The limited number of sponsorship opportunities and competition for vacancies can make it difficult to secure a position, and many newly qualified IMG GPs face uncertainty and delays transitioning into work.

These delays can be frustrating for IMGs eager to contribute their skills to the UK's healthcare system. Some also encounter financial challenges while covering the costs associated with visa applications, healthcare surcharges, and other immigration-related expenses.

Even when we secure an employment offer, the additional tasks continue. After working in the UK for a certain period on a Tier 2 visa, IMG GPs may become eligible to apply for ILR (indefinite leave to remain) granting permanent residency. However, navigating the ILR application process can also be complex and time-consuming.

There are a number of ways in which the processes involved could be simplified and streamlined, giving IMGs back valuable time that could be better focused on caring for our patients. The UK Government could work with healthcare institutions and organisations to increase the number of Tier 2 visa sponsorships available for IMG GPs and increase the time covered by the visa.

This would allow more IMGs to secure employment and training positions in the UK. The Government could also collaborate with healthcare employers to encourage them to support IMG GPs in obtaining the necessary visa sponsorship and help them navigate the visa process effectively.



Implementing a streamlined and expedited visa application process specifically tailored to healthcare professionals, including IMG GPs, would reduce processing times and minimise delays in commencing their training or practising as GPs.

Reviewing the ILR criteria and ensuring that it aligns with the contributions of IMG GPs to the UK healthcare system can provide a clearer path to permanent residency for these professionals. There also needs to be more dedicated support available to offer personalised assistance and guidance to IMG GPs and to employers throughout the visa application and extension process.

Crucially, more needs to be done to promote a culture of inclusion and diversity in the healthcare sector and foster a more welcoming environment for IMG GPs and encourage their integration into the UK healthcare workforce.

By implementing such solutions, the UK Government could demonstrate commitment to supporting IMG GPs and ensuring their valuable skills and contributions enrich the country's healthcare system. These measures can also help address shortages of healthcare professionals in certain regions and specialties, ultimately benefiting patients and the broader healthcare community.

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