

Responding to the Immigration White Paper and its potential impact on Hong Kong BNO visa holders

A toolkit for action, August 2025



1. Introduction

In recent years, thousands of Hongkongers have made the UK their home under the British National (Overseas) visa scheme. Many have found welcome, friendship, and belonging within our church communities.

However, proposals in the recent Immigration White Paper may affect Hongkongers who have already arrived, as well as those yet to come. While the government has framed the changes as part of a wider immigration policy review, some proposals risk undermining the stability, security, and family unity that have been so important in helping Hongkongers settle and thrive in the UK.

2. What the Churches have said

Senior representatives of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, have written jointly to the Home Secretary to raise urgent concerns about the impact of the Immigration White Paper on BNO visa holders.

The letter emphasised that:

- When the BNO visa scheme was launched in 2021, Hongkongers arriving in the UK did so with the clear expectation that after **five years** of residence, they could apply for *settled status* (Indefinite Leave to Remain), and after one further year, for British citizenship.
- Many uprooted their lives, made financial and family plans, and looked forward to the stability and security that settled status and citizenship would bring — including eligibility for home university fees, access to student finance, the ability to travel internationally without jeopardising their immigration status, and in some cases, the release of pension funds held in Hong Kong.

However, the White Paper proposes extending the residency requirement for settlement from **five years to ten years**, with citizenship only available after a further year. Applying this change to those already in the UK would mean:

- Families whose children are about to start university could face paying international student fees and lose access to student loans.
- Many would face an enormous financial burden provoked by five further years of visa extensions.
- Some would be unable to access savings or pensions in Hong Kong for many more years.
- International travel to visit family – often elderly or in poor health – could be severely limited due to visa conditions.

The Churches argue that making such a change **retrospectively** would undermine trust and cause unnecessary hardship. They call on the government to:

- Maintain the original “5+1 pathway” to citizenship for all who are already in the UK under the BNO scheme.
- Clarify quickly whether the proposed changes will affect current BNO visa holders, to end the uncertainty.
- Ensure clear communication and accessible information for affected communities.

3. Parliamentary Debate – 8th September

On **Monday 8th September**, MPs will debate these issues in the House of Commons in response to a petition calling for the protection of Hongkongers under the BNO scheme.

There is more information on the background to this debate and the petition that triggered it in this [Parliamentary Research Briefing Pack](#).

This debate is a vital opportunity for MPs to hear examples of how Hongkonger may be affected by the changes outlined in the white paper, and the concerns held by the communities standing alongside them.

4. Call to action: BNO visa holders

If you are a Hongkonger who has come to the UK on the BNO scheme, you may like to:

1. Write to your MP

- Introduce yourself. Tell your own story — why you came, what life has been like in the UK (and especially in the area in which you live and the MP represents), outline your hopes for the future.
- Share your anxieties about how the proposed changes could affect you and your family. This is vitally important. Make it as personal as possible, but feel free to mention wider concerns you are aware of too.
- Reference the fact that representatives of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church have written to the Home Secretary with similar concerns.

2. Ask your MP

- To attend the 8th September debate and speak up for BNO visa holders. Ask them to let you know if they intend to attend and if they would like any more details of your story and concerns in advance.
- If you feel confident, ask them to meet with you to discuss the issue in person – you could always ask someone from your church to support you if such a meeting is offered.

3. Be personal, not just political – MPs are more likely to act when they hear genuine, individual experiences.

5. Call to action: Churches

If you are part of a church that has welcomed Hongkonger members, you may like to:

1. Write to your MP

- Share the positive impact Hongkongers have had in your church and community.
- Express concern that the proposed changes risk undermining stability and inclusion.
- Mention that your denomination (alongside others) has written to the Home Secretary with these concerns.

2. Ask your MP

- To attend the 8th September debate and represent the concerns of both Hongkongers and the communities that support them.
- To meet with you and members of your church – where possible include the Hongkonger members themselves so the MP can hear directly from those affected.

3. Speak with unity — your advocacy alongside Hongkonger friends shows solidarity and amplifies their voices.

6. Practical tips for writing to your MP

- [Find your MP's contact details here](https://members.parliament.uk) [members.parliament.uk] Emailing is usually the most straightforward way of making contact, though you could also telephone their office or send a letter in the post.
- Keep your email/letter clear and concise, limit it to 1 page (around 500 words) if possible.
- Be clear about what you are asking:
 1. **Attend the debate**
 2. **meet with you**
 3. **speak up for BNO visa holders.**
- Follow up — if you don't get a reply within a week, send a polite reminder.

This toolkit was produced by the Joint Public Issues Team
of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches

www.jpit.uk 020 7916 8632 enquiries@jpit.uk

