

Home Office

Strengthening and simplifying the civil penalty scheme to prevent illegal migrant working

The Minister of State for Immigration (Mark Harper): Last week we published proposals to regulate migrant access to health services and prevent access by illegal migrants to privately rented accommodation, with measures to be taken forward in the Immigration Bill. Today we are launching a consultation on proposals to strengthen and simplify the civil penalty scheme to prevent illegal working. The consultation will run for six weeks. Copies are available in the House Library and on the Home Office website at <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/consultations/>.

Illegal working encourages illegal immigration. It also undercuts legitimate businesses through illegal cost-cutting activity by rogue employers, and is often associated with other forms of exploitative behaviour – including harmful working conditions for employees and tax evasion. The Government is committed to taking action to effectively tackle illegal working. The Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have recently proposed that the civil penalty against employers who exploit illegal labour should be doubled.

Employers already have a responsibility to check that their employees have the right to work in the UK and, since 2008, this has been underpinned by a civil penalty scheme. This has been successful in requiring employers to make right to work checks and imposing a sanction on those who do not. We are proposing to further refine these requirements to get tougher on employers who continue to exploit illegal labour and increase the sanction to reflect the harm they cause. We are also conscious of the burdens on legitimate business, so we are also proposing a number of measures to significantly reduce the administrative costs of complying with the requirement to make right to work checks. Legitimate businesses will benefit in two ways: from tougher sanctions against rogue employers and from our intention to make it easier for compliant businesses to fulfil their duties.

The Immigration Bill will make it more difficult for illegal migrants to live and work in the UK. We want to ensure that people come to the UK for the right reasons. As we extend a warm welcome to the many migrants who make such an important contribution to life in the UK, we want to see tough action against those who have no right to be here, and also against the unscrupulous employers who exploit them.