Home Office

Earned Settlement: Public Consultation analysis

Provided by IFF Research

HOAI
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Analysis and Insight

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Executive Summary

This report outlines findings from the UK Government's public consultation on proposed changes to the current settlement model. The proposed model, referred to as Earned Settlement, is based on the following pillars: character, integration, contribution and residence.

The Earned Settlement consultation received 204,667 responses online and 904 responses over email. Of these, 202,241 responses were submitted by individuals, of which nearly three quarters (73%) were current visa holders and a further 18% were British Citizens, with representation across a range of demographic groups. Of the online responses, 2,426 were submitted on behalf of organisations, with representation across a range of sectors, industries and both visa sponsoring and non-sponsoring organisations.

This consultation included open and closed response questions. Open text response questions were coded and analysed by human researchers, with the assistance of AI-based analysis software.

Overall views on proposed changes

Most respondents disagreed with the proposed changes to the settlement framework (84% of individuals and 79% of organisations). Disagreement was higher among individuals with refugee status or humanitarian protection (89%) and current visa holders (86%) than among British Citizens (77%). Some of the most common themes in open text responses were the perceived unfairness of the proposed changes, particularly for those already on a path to settlement, and broad disagreement with extending baseline qualifying periods.

A majority of respondents (68% of individuals and 73% of organisations) thought there should be transitional arrangements for those already on a path to settlement. This proportion was higher among current visa holders (70%) than British Citizens (64%) and those with settled status (64%). Applying changes to those already on a settlement pathway (i.e. without transitional arrangements) was strongly opposed, with open text responses commonly highlighting disruption and psychological distress for current visa holders, as well as the risk of undermining trust in the UK immigration system.

Around half of individuals (51%) and organisations (45%) felt the proposed changes were clear. However, some individuals (35%) and organisations (42%), felt the proposed changes were unclear. Of those who felt the changes were unclear, the most commonly cited concern was uncertainty around how changes would apply to dependants and children (57% of individuals and 63% of organisations). In addition, around half of individuals (51%) and organisations (58%) felt the overall purpose was unclear, and half said it was unclear which groups would be eligible for exemptions from the standard 10-year qualifying period (50% of individuals, 55% of organisations).

Open text responses highlighted the need to mitigate the impact of the proposed changes on particular groups. Key groups identified included those working in low-paid but socially valuable work (i.e. health and care roles), those with caring responsibilities (i.e. stay-at-home parents and

caregivers), older people, and those with disabilities or long-term health conditions that impacted their ability to volunteer or meet salary-based thresholds.

Character

The character section of the consultation comprised open text responses only. In general, respondents supported the inclusion of character, noting that it is already a feature of the current settlement rules. However, views differed on how it should best be assessed. A commonly raised theme was the need for clear and objective criteria, with related concerns about subjectivity and potential disadvantage for more vulnerable migrants. A smaller group of respondents argued that character should not be linked to income or social standing.

Views on criminal convictions were varied. While respondents frequently supported considering convictions in assessing character, they mostly favoured proportionate assessment rather than a blanket ban on settlement for those with convictions, including leniency for minor, historic, or some overseas convictions (e.g. those relating to political protest, or politically-motivated convictions). Responses also highlighted migrants' positive contributions, particularly those working in care and public sector roles, and argued that these provided evidence of good character.

Integration

Individuals and organisations reported that their preferred means of assessing integration were formal tests (50% and 43%) and gathering ongoing evidence (40% and 44%).

A key theme in open text responses was the need to set out reasonable and clear criteria in assessing integration. There was a strong emphasis on ensuring integration was assessed fairly, in a way that was both transparent and unbiased, while also being sensitive to individuals' personal circumstances.

A relatively common theme in the open text responses stated that consistent employment was already a key indicator of integration and was sufficiently evidenced via individuals' economic and social contribution. However, a smaller group of respondents also mentioned that integration should consider individuals' broader social and cultural connections, established through involvement in community activities. Demonstrating respect for British values, laws and social norms were also specifically cited by a minority of respondents as evidencing integration.

English language ability was also considered in relation to integration. However, around half of respondents felt a proposed 1-year reduction in qualifying period for those with a C1 in English language did not go far enough (50% of individuals and 48% of organisations). A few felt this reduction was about right (19% for individuals and 18% for organisations).

Contribution

Among individual respondents, 41% agreed that those earning above £50,270 should be eligible for a reduction in their time to settlement, while 38% disagreed. Of those individuals who agreed with a reduction for those earning over £50,270, just under half (47%) felt a 5-year reduction for this group was appropriate.

Within open text responses, respondents raised a range of concerns with the salary thresholds. A commonly raised view was that these thresholds were too high, did not account for regional and sector-based differences in salaries, and disadvantaged those in typically lower-paying sectors.

There was mixed opinion around whether there should be penalties for those applying for settlement who had claimed public funds. The largest proportion of both individual (31%) and organisation (41%) respondents felt there should be no penalty.

Open text responses highlighted divided opinions on whether those seeking settlement should face a 5- or 10-year penalty for claiming public funds. A relatively small group of respondents raised concerns that introducing penalties could prevent visa holders claiming necessary benefits and could lead to a rise in poverty. More commonly, respondents also stated that most current visa holders were not eligible to claim public funds in any case.

Around half of individuals (49%) and organisations (46%) agreed that giving back to the local community should be considered as a contribution to reduce the settlement qualifying period. However, open text responses showed concerns about how this could be measured and recorded. A relatively small group of respondents also highlighted how long working hours and caring commitments mean individuals may not have equal opportunities to volunteer.

Residence

In the open text responses, long-term lawful and continuous residence was commonly seen as an appropriate reason to reduce settlement length, with some responses also highlighting the need to take into account personal circumstances.

69% of individuals and 53% of organisations felt there should be a penalty of at least 5 years for those who had entered the UK illegally. However, a larger proportion of open text responses expressed that those illegally entering the UK due to a lack of safe alternatives should not be penalised than those suggesting there should be blanket penalties for illegal entry.

Slightly lower proportions agreed with penalties of at least 5 years for those who overstay their visa by more than 6 months (61% of individuals and 50% of organisations) or entered the UK on a visitor visa (61% of individuals and 48% of organisations). Some open responses highlighted that this was best considered on a case-by-case basis.

Eligibility and equalities

Overall, over seven-in-ten individuals (74%) and organisations (77%) felt that vulnerable groups should be exempt from proposed changes, particularly children and young adults who grew up in the UK. Broadly, respondents were opposed to dependants being required to earn settlement in their own right. In open text responses, commonly raised themes included concerns about proposed changes leading to a lack of stability and distress for the children of migrants, as well as fears around possible family separation if households are not treated as a unit.

The majority of individuals (78%) and organisations (73%) also agreed with exemptions from salary-based requirements for those on maternity leave or with a long-term illness or disability. There was concern within a smaller proportion of open text responses around how reforms might

disadvantage those with caring responsibilities and stay-at-home partners, which could lead to gender-based inequalities.

Impact on organisations

Organisations were largely negative about the impact of proposed changes. A majority anticipated that the changes would lead to additional administrative burden (73%) and would be detrimental to their ability to attract suitable candidates (71%), undertake workforce planning (71%), and retain existing migrant workers (70%).

A majority also said the changes would make them less likely to sponsor visas in future (62%). Some said the changes would impact their plans to sponsor refugees and displaced people to work in the UK on a visa in the future (35%).

Introduction, background and methodology

The Immigration White Paper, published in May 2025, set out proposed changes to the current settlement model. The current system is based on time in the UK and the 'Life in the UK' test. The revised system is to be based around the four pillars of:

- Character
- Integration (e.g. English proficiency; community engagement)
- Contribution (e.g. NI and tax contributions)
- Residence (e.g. time on specific visa routes, job, partner/parent of a British citizen).

The UK Government ran a public consultation on proposed changes to the current settlement model from late November 2025 to early February 2026. The Earned Settlement consultation received 204,667 online responses. Almost all (202,241) were from individuals, with 2,426 from organisations. 904 submissions were received by email.

This research sought to understand views on the proposed changes to settlement among members of the public and interested organisations. This report explores responses to the consultation in relation to the themes of character, integration, contribution and residence. It will also outline the profile of the individuals and organisations who responded and identify key differences in opinion based on demographic information captured within the consultation.

Methodology

The Earned Settlement consultation survey questionnaire included a mix of closed and open questions on the perceived clarity of and overall agreement with the proposed changes. The consultation also sought views on character, integration, contribution, and residence and how these should be considered as part of the settlement process.

The consultation was designed and hosted by the Home Office, with responses securely transferred to IFF Research for data cleaning and analysis. Data cleaning included checks for duplicate or low-quality responses, such as blank or non-substantive open text entries.

Closed questions were analysed quantitatively, with results presented in data tables broken down by key respondent characteristics (e.g. age, gender and immigration status). Separate analyses were undertaken for organisational responses, including by organisation type and size. Data tables have been produced and have been published alongside this report.

Open text responses were analysed qualitatively to identify key themes. Responses often covered multiple topics and could therefore be coded to more than one category. Findings from open text questions are reported descriptively and should not be interpreted as representative of all respondents.

Further detail on the analytical approach, including coding methodology and quality assurance processes, is provided in Annex A.

IFF's in-house coding team developed an initial codeframe which was quality assured by our coding manager and a member of the research team. Separately, two members of the research team also developed an initial codeframe. As a check, we used: 1) an in-house AI tool to compare the human codeframes, as well as 2) AI-assisted codeframe development in Ascribe[1], for individuals.

IFF's research team met several times to discuss and review the draft codeframes, developing a codeframe per question to use for the full analysis. These codeframes were shared with Home Office Analysis and Insight (HOAI) and we met to discuss the approach and content. The draft codeframes were revised following feedback from Home Office policy and HOAI research teams.

The initial codeframes were run using AI Ascribe, with sequential checking, correcting and quality assurance by our coding and research teams. We then ran the corrected codeframe on the same sample, and the coding was again reviewed and corrected by the research team, with Director checks, to improve accuracy, reliability, and validity of the coding. Following further corrections, the codeframe was then run on the full sample of responses, with a further cycle of review and recoding.

Responses could be coded to more than one topic, and in many cases covered 5 or more topics. Many open text responses covered broader themes and topics. For example, one in ten responses said that extending the baseline settlement qualifying period was unfair in general. Similarly, many responses concerned the need for transitional arrangements for those already on a settlement pathway. Given the frequency with which some topics were raised, some codes were added to all question codeframes. The Home Office accepted responses in alternative formats to support a range of respondent requirements, including accepting responses via email. The email submissions did not follow the same structure as the consultation survey so were analysed separately. Responses that included attachments (often detailed reports) have been analysed by the Home Office policy team. The remaining responses (around 600, or roughly 0.3% of the total consultation responses) have been analysed using an in-house tool developed by IFF Research's AI lead, which identified the top themes. The analysis and coding were then manually reviewed and quality assured by two members of the IFF research team.

Limitations of approach

Due to the high volume of open text responses, it was not possible to manually review every response in full. Coding was therefore supported by AI tools, alongside researcher quality assurance checks. Findings from open text responses are reported descriptively in terms of key themes and commonly expressed views.

A small proportion of responses followed consistent templates (for example, from specific stakeholder groups). These accounted for a small share of total responses and did not materially affect the overall pattern of findings.

[1] Ascribe is a tool which allows coding of open ended and verbatim responses from surveys to themes.

Reading the report
The majority of questions included within the consultation were optional. Therefore, the base varies between questions.

The consultation was open to all members of the public and organisations, but responses reflect only those who chose to participate and should not be interpreted as representative of the wider public.

Responses were not weighted by population data. As a majority of respondents reported as being current visa holders (73%), findings may over-represent their views. Differences in responses by immigration status, notably between current visa holders and British Citizens, are included within the report where findings are statistically significant. Additionally, responses from British Citizens (18%) may include spouses and family members of visa holders and naturalised citizens.

Responses to closed questions are provided in charts as well as in text. In some instances, summary figures presented in charts may differ from those presented in the text, due to rounding.

When describing response patterns to closed questions, the following definitions have been used:

- Almost none – less than 5%
- Few – less than 20%
- Some – between 20 and 40%
- Around half – between 40% and 60%
- A majority – between 60% and 80%
- Most – more than 80%
- Almost all / all – more than 95%.

Open text response patterns are reported descriptively. Individual responses often have multiple codes applied, and any proportions or statements about relative scale apply to the number of coded segments, rather than the number of responses or respondents.

Profile and characteristics of respondents

This chapter highlights the profile and characteristics of respondents to the Earned Settlement consultation, which was open to the general public. Respondents to the consultation were able to submit a response either as an individual or as a representative of an organisation.

Individuals and organisations who responded to the consultation were asked to provide some high-level demographic information, shown below:

Profile of individuals

A majority of responses to the consultation reported being current visa holders (73%), followed by British Citizens (18%). Respondent demographic characteristics varied widely by ethnicity, sex and broad occupation group.

Table 1: Profile of individuals: immigration status

Immigration status	% of total responses	n
Current visa holder	73%	146,655
British Citizen	18%	35,412
Settled status (e.g. ILR or EU settled status)	5%	9,288
Refugee status or humanitarian protection	3%	5,825
Applying for UK immigration status or awaiting decision	1%	2,184
Asylum seeker	1%	1,074

Base: S11, What is your current immigration or citizenship status in the UK? Total individual responses (202,241)

Table 2: Profile of individuals: ethnicity

Ethnicity	% of total responses	n
Asian or Asian British	51%	103,584
White	19%	38,912
Black or Black British	12%	24,352
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	3%	5,538
Other ethnic group	8%	16,758

Base: S14, How would you describe your ethnicity?, Total individual responses (202,241)

Table 3: Profile of individuals: sex

Sex	% of total responses	n
Male	53%	106,978
Female	43%	87,739
Other / prefer not to say	4%	7,120

Base: S13, What is your sex?, Total individual responses (202,241)

Table 4: Profile of individuals: occupation grouping

Occupation group	% of total responses	n
Higher or intermediate managerial and professional roles (A & B)	46%	93,226
Skilled, clerical or junior managerial roles (C1 & C2)	22%	43,668
Casual workers, pensioners or unemployed (E)	11%	22,038
Semi-skilled or unskilled roles (D)	8%	17,009

Base: S16, Which of the following best describes your current or most recent occupation? Total individual responses (202,241)

Table 5: Country (individual respondents)

Region	% of total responses	n
England	86%	173,483
Scotland	7%	15,022
Wales	2%	4,714
Northern Ireland	1%	2,196

Base: S15, Where in the UK do you currently live? Total individual responses (202,241)

Table 6: Region: individual respondents in England

Region of England	% of total responses	n
London	24%	48,120
North West	11%	22,358
South East	11%	21,606
West Midlands	10%	19,545
South West	9%	17,465
East Midlands	7%	13,783
East of England	6%	12,871
Yorkshire and the Humber	5%	11,081
North East	3%	6,654

Base: S15, Where in the UK do you currently live? Total individual responses (202,241)

Profile of organisations

The online consultation received responses from organisations across a range of sectors, industries and sizes. Of these organisations, around half (54%) reported that they currently sponsored employees on visas.

Table 7: Profile of organisations: Sector, industry sector and size (number of employees)

Organisation type	% of total responses	n
Sector		
Private sector	49%	1,188
Third sector / voluntary	23%	560
Public sector	10%	242
Other	16%	378
Industry Sector		
Public services, education and health	34%	814
Professional services	24%	574
Retail services	6%	156
Energy, manufacturing and primary resource extraction	5%	122
Construction and transport	4%	86
Arts and other	25%	611
Size of organisation (number of employees)		
Under 10	25%	612
10-49	25%	611
50-249	17%	414
250+	25%	600

Base: S3, Which of the following best describes your type of organisation?; S7, How many people work for your organisation across the UK as a whole?; and S9, Which of the following best describes the industry sector your organisation operates in? Total organisational responses (2,426)

Table 8: Profile of organisations: whether they have sponsored employees to work in the UK on a visa

Visa sponsorship status	% of total responses	n
Currently sponsor employees	54%	1,312
Previously sponsored employees	6%	137
Has never sponsored employees	28%	670

Base: S5, Has your organisation ever sponsored employees to work in the UK on a visa?, Total organisational responses (2,426)

Table 9: Country of organisational respondents

Region	% of total responses	n
England	79%	1,911
Scotland	7%	164
Wales	2%	60
Northern Ireland	2%	42

Base: S10, In which part of the UK is your organisation mainly based? Total organisational responses (2,426)

Table 10: Region of organisational respondents in England

Region of England	% of total responses	n
London	31%	758
South East	10%	236
North West	8%	192
South West	7%	160
East of England	6%	151
West Midlands	6%	140
Yorkshire and the Humber	5%	115
East Midlands	4%	95
North East	3%	64

Base: S10, In which part of the UK is your organisation mainly based? Total organisational responses (2,426)

Table 11: Number of employees sponsored among organisational respondents

Number of sponsored employees (among sponsoring organisations)	% of total responses	n
Under 10	23%	564
10-49 employees	14%	336
50 or more employees	14%	345

Base: S8, How many employees are currently sponsored via a UK visa at your organisation? Total organisational responses (2,426) from those who sponsor employees

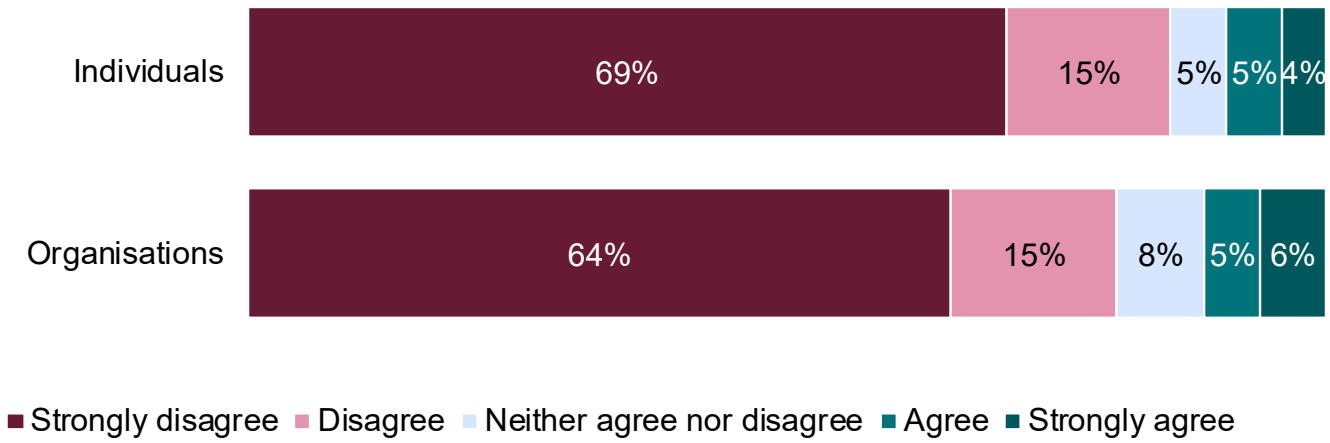
Chapter 1: Overall views on proposed changes

This chapter explores respondents' views on the proposed changes to the Earned Settlement framework, including differences across key subgroups for both individuals and organisations. It also includes views on the clarity of the proposed changes, and which elements respondents found unclear.

Views on the proposed changes

Most respondents disagreed with the proposed changes to the settlement framework (84% of individuals and 79% of organisations), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Agreement with the proposed changes to the settlement framework



Base: A3, Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes to the settlement framework? Total responses received from individuals (201,869) and organisations (2,407) who responded to this question.

Disagreement was higher among individuals with refugee status or humanitarian protection (89%) and current visa holders (86%) than among British Citizens (77%). Younger respondents were more likely to disagree, with 87% of those under 18 and aged 18–34 expressing opposition, compared with 81% of respondents aged over 65.

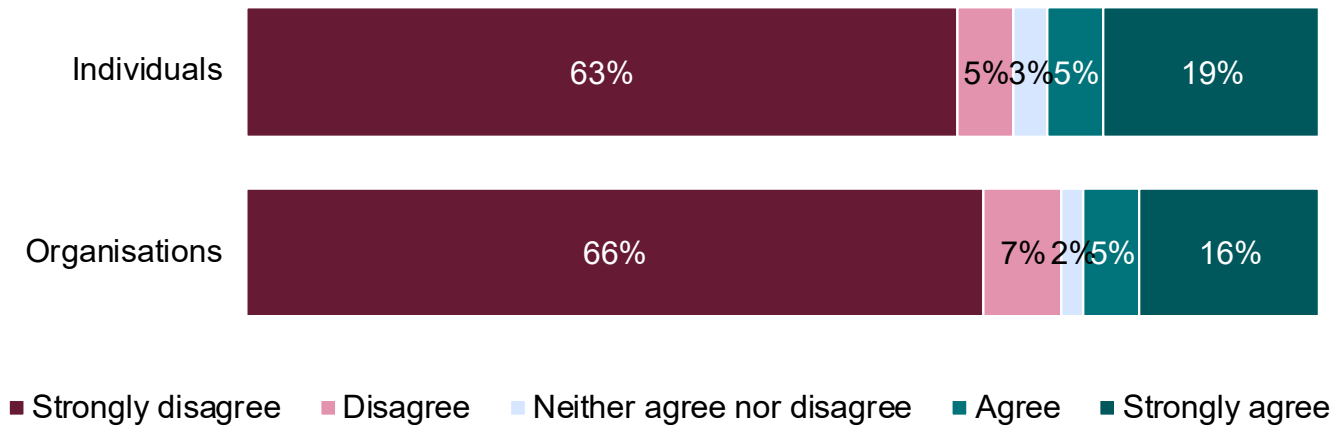
Third sector and voluntary organisations were most likely to disagree with the proposed changes (85%), compared with private sector (78%) and public sector organisations (71%). Organisations who had never sponsored employees were more likely to disagree with the changes (84%) compared with those who currently or previously sponsored employees (77%). Organisations providing immigration advice and support were also more likely to disagree with the proposed changes when compared to those that did not provide such services (84% compared to 77%).

Across all open text questions, most respondents felt that extending the baseline settlement period was unfair, and that it would cause significant disruption to the lives of applicants.

Open text responses commonly reflected personal experiences and focused on how the proposed changes would affect respondents' own circumstances. Topics raised included financial impacts, such as impacts on mortgages and long-term financial investments in the UK, and social impacts, for example on ties to their local community. These findings were a particular concern among respondents with children, who expressed concern that their children (including those born in the UK) would have to wait longer to apply for settlement. Others noted that many visa holders are partners of British Citizens, and that extending the settlement qualifying period meant longer periods of uncertainty and increased costs for their families. A smaller group of respondents expressed concerns about the wider impact of the proposed changes on the UK, suggesting they could damage the country's ability to attract and retain global talent. A minority of respondents were more positive towards the scheme, expressing agreement with the proposed criteria for determining length of time to qualify for settlement.

Most prominently, in response to each of the open text questions, a commonly raised view was that there should be transitional arrangements for those currently on pathways to settlement. Respondents viewed it as unfair to alter settlement conditions after migrants had followed the originally agreed rules, especially where they were expecting to qualify in the near term. These respondents felt the proposed changes had already led to psychological stress and anxiety, and a lack of transitional arrangements would damage the wellbeing of migrants currently in the UK as well as undermine trust in the UK immigration system. This viewpoint was particularly commonly expressed by British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa holders, who argued that they had come to the UK with the intention of long-term settlement.

Figure 2: Agreement with applying the proposed settlement changes without transitional arrangements



Base: F2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that there should not be transitional arrangements for those already on a pathway to settlement?[2] Total responses received from individuals (199,841) and organisations (2,369) who responded to this question.

[2] Additional guidance was included in the survey to support interpretation of the agree/disagree scale.

As shown in Figure 2, 68% of individuals and 73% of organisations thought there should be transitional arrangements for those already on a pathway to settlement.

Support for transitional arrangements was higher among current visa holders (70%) compared with those with settled status or British Citizens (both 64%). Those who agreed with the proposed changes overall were far less likely to support transitional arrangements (48%) than those who disagreed with the proposed changes (70%). Third sector/voluntary organisations were most likely to support transitional arrangements (79%) compared with 73% of private sector and 66% of public sector organisations.

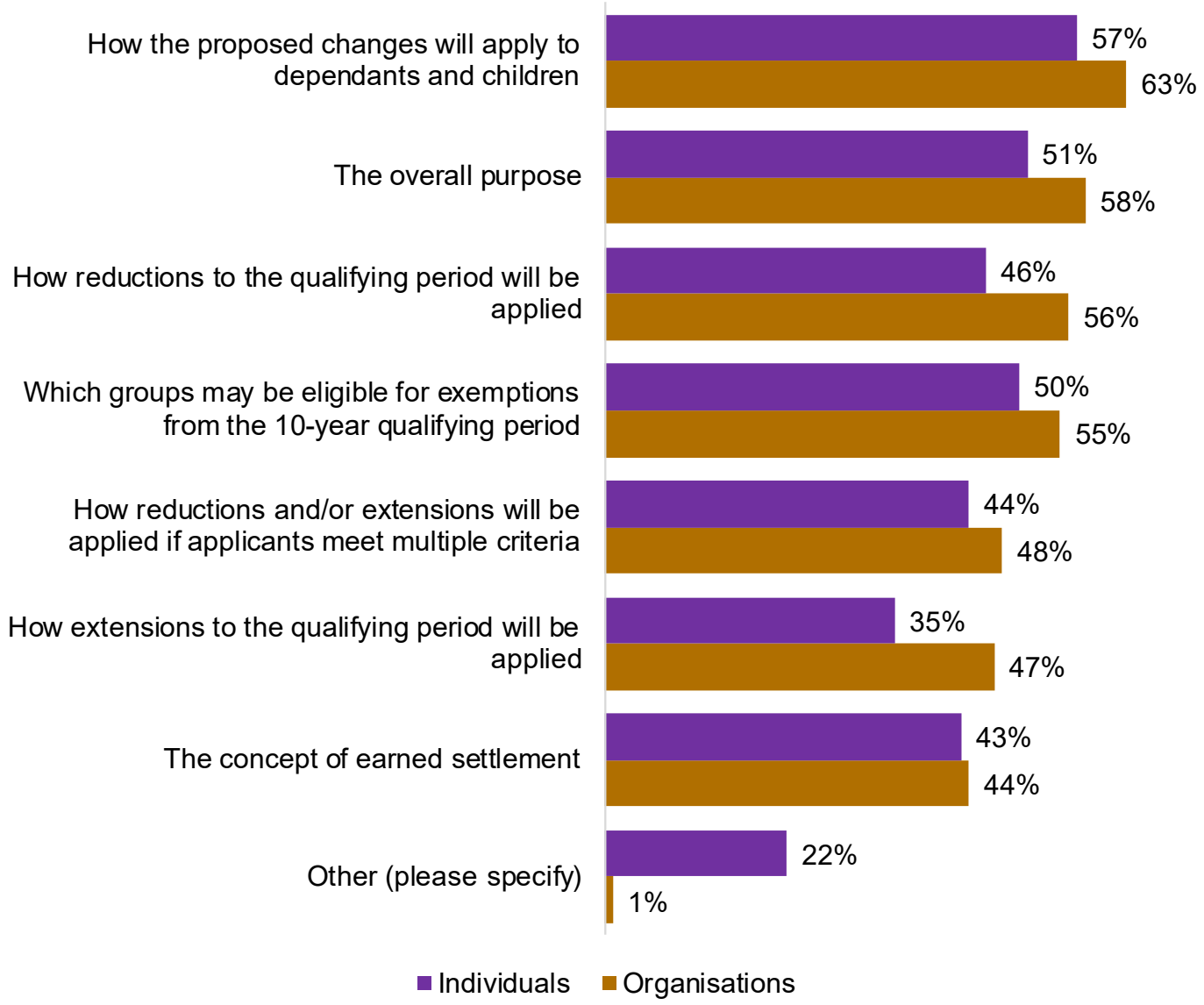
Throughout the consultation, a relatively common theme in open text responses was that particular groups (such as those with caring responsibilities, children or older people) should have special consideration when determining the length of their qualifying period for settlement. For example, parents looking after children with significant disabilities were unlikely to be able to work outside the home, and so could not meet income requirements in their own right. A smaller group of responses noted that where specific groups could not otherwise meet some settlement requirements, they should not be penalised as a result. Responses from BN(O) visa holders generally argued that they should receive special consideration given the historic context behind their visa route. A smaller group of respondents also highlighted the specific contributions of those working in health and social care and disagreed with the proposed 15-year qualifying period for care workers, given their vital role in the UK economy.

Views on the clarity of the proposed changes

There were mixed views on the clarity of the proposed changes. 51% of individuals and 45% of organisations stated the proposed changes were clear. 35% of individuals thought the proposed changes were unclear, as did 42% of organisations. 10% of both organisations and individuals thought the changes were neither clear nor unclear.

British Citizens were more likely to find the proposed changes clear (57%) compared with current visa holders (51%) and those with refugee status or humanitarian protection (31%). Among organisations, private sector companies were more likely to find the proposed changes clear (53%) than public sector (44%) or third sector/voluntary organisations (34%). Organisations who provide immigration advice and support were less likely to believe the proposed changes were clear (38%) than those who do not provide advice/support (49%). In addition, organisations who had never sponsored employees were less likely to say the proposed changes were clear than organisations who had currently or previously sponsored employees (39% compared to 51%).

Figure 3: Elements of the proposed changes to settlement that are unclear (Individuals and Organisations)



Base: A2, Which aspects of the proposed changes to settlement are not clear? Total responses received from individuals unclear about the changes (71,230) and organisations unclear about the changes (999) who responded to this question. Responses below 20% not shown. Organisational 'other' specify codes have been backcoded.

As shown in Figure 3, respondents most commonly reported a lack of clarity around how the proposed changes would apply to dependants and children (57% of individuals and 63% of organisations).

British Citizens were more likely to report that the overall purpose of the proposed changes to settlement was unclear (64%) compared with those with settled status (60%) and current visa holders (47%). They were also more likely to report that it was unclear how reductions to the qualifying period would be applied (55%), compared with those with settled status (52%) and current visa holders (44%).

In contrast, respondents with refugee status or humanitarian protection were more likely to report that it was unclear which groups would be eligible for exemptions or reductions to the standard 10-year qualifying period (55%), compared with those with settled status (53%) and British Citizens (48%).

Summary

Overall, most respondents disagreed with the proposed changes, although levels of disagreement varied by subgroup. There was also strong support for transitional arrangements for those already on a pathway to settlement.

Chapter 2: Character

This chapter explores respondents' views on how character should be considered in relation to settlement. The analysis draws on the open text question on character in the consultation.

Views on consideration of character

Respondents generally agreed that character should be considered, or that it was an important settlement requirement. A smaller group noted that character was already considered as part of the current approach to settlement. Respondents disagreed on how best to assess character. Most commonly, responses noted that any assessments needed to be based on clear and objective criteria, or raised concerns around potential subjectivity in how character would be assessed. In particular, there were some concerns that migrants with weaker social networks might find it more difficult to meet this criterion. There was also a view that assessment of character should not be tied to social standing, the ability to secure references from people working in professional roles, or income.

Views on criminal convictions were nuanced, with the most common view being that criminal convictions should be taken into account when considering eligibility for settlement. However, while some respondents felt criminal convictions were grounds for settlement refusal, a larger group argued that they should be assessed proportionately, with leniency for those convicted of minor crimes, historic convictions, and some overseas convictions (e.g. for political protest).

Respondents commonly noted that compliance with immigration law and rules, as well as UK laws more generally, was essential to meet character requirements. While a minority of responses mentioned that tax payment was an indicator of good character, a smaller group noted that income and character assessments should be separated.

One of the most common themes was that migrants make a positive contribution to UK society – particularly those working in care and in the NHS, as well as many Skilled Worker visa holders. Care workers and others working in the public sector, often in relatively low-waged roles, noted that their jobs provided evidence of good character and contribution to UK society.

Respondents also noted concerns around fairness and vulnerable migrant groups (these responses were not generally focused on the character pillar specifically). This included fair consideration for asylum seekers and refugees, BN(O) visa holders, as well as other vulnerable groups such as older people or those with disabilities.

Less commonly, respondents also felt that the proposed penalties for claiming public funds were unfair, particularly if these were backdated, with responses also noting that visa holders generally had no access to public funds and that any penalties would have a limited impact. A minority of respondents suggested that extending restrictions on access to public funds post-settlement, while maintaining the standard qualifying period of 5 years, would be a more appropriate approach; and a minority of responses specifically mentioned that changes should not be applied to specific groups (such as BN(O) visa holders).

Summary

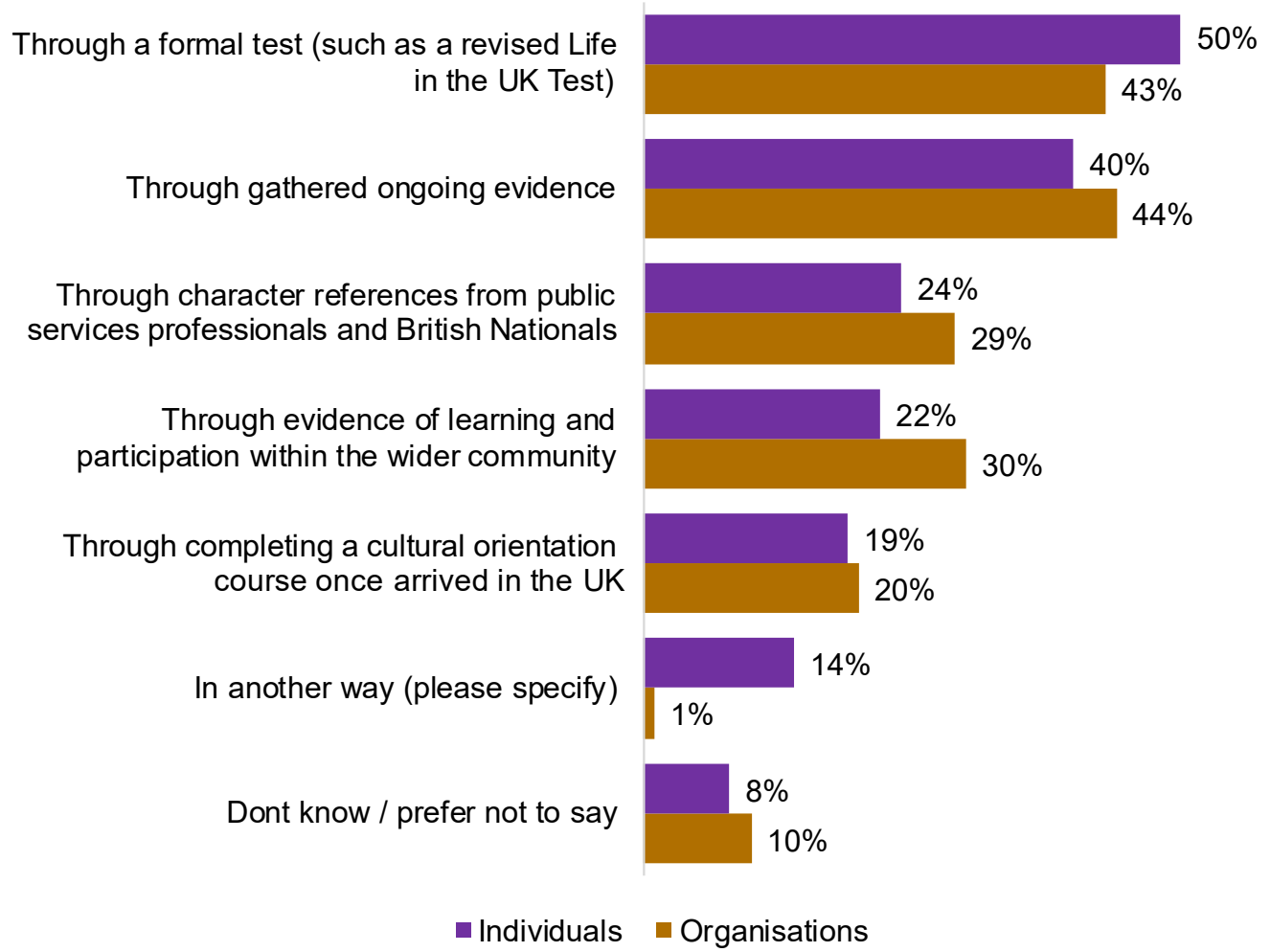
Respondents generally felt that character was an important consideration for determining the length of the qualifying period for settlement, but there were mixed views on what constituted ‘character’, and how it should be assessed.

Chapter 3: Integration

This chapter covers respondents' views on whether integration should be considered as part of the Earned Settlement framework and how this should be assessed. It also covers views on changes to language requirements as part of the proposed changes to settlement.

Assessing integration

Figure 4: Methods of assessing integration (Individuals and Organisations)



Base: C2, How do you think integration should be assessed? Total responses received from individuals (199,351) and organisations (2,360) who responded to this question. Responses below 10% not included. Organisational 'other' specify codes have been backcoded.

Individuals and organisations were asked their views on how integration should be assessed (Figure 4). Among individuals, the most common response was through a formal test (50%) followed by gathering ongoing evidence (40%). In contrast, among organisations, the most

common response was through gathering ongoing evidence (44%) followed by a formal test (43%).

54% of current visa holders thought integration should be assessed using a formal test compared with 36% of British Citizens. In contrast, British Citizens were more likely to think that character references from public service professionals and British Nationals should be used to measure integration (33%) than those with settled status or current visa holders (both 22%).

Private sector organisations were more likely to believe integration should be assessed through a formal test (58%) compared with public sector organisations and third sector/voluntary organisations (43% and 15% respectively). In comparison, public sector and third sector/voluntary organisations were more likely to think that integration should be assessed through evidence of learning and participation within the wider community (including testimonies from relevant organisations and groups) (37% and 35% respectively) than private sector organisations (28%).

In the open text responses, the most commonly expressed concern was the need to assess integration in a flexible, fair and inclusive way. Respondents felt integration could not be captured through a small number of fixed criteria or formal tests but instead should reflect how people actually live their lives in the UK and take account of different personal circumstances, such as caring or work commitments, ability to take part in community events or join local organisations, personal and cultural interests, and any health issues which might limit participation.

Clear and reasonable requirements were seen as very important. Respondents felt that any integration criteria should be transparent and clearly explained, so individuals understood what was expected of them. There were also (less commonly) concerns about fairness, particularly the risk that rigid rules could disadvantage certain groups while favouring others (for example, on the grounds of language ability, or common cultural interests), even when all are integrating in meaningful ways.

A minority of respondents mentioned employment participation as an appropriate indication of integration. They commented that working, paying taxes and contributing to the economy clearly showed that migrants were an integral part of UK society. Skilled Worker visa holders were specifically mentioned, with respondents arguing that they are already proving integration through their roles, skills, and economic contributions. A few respondents also highlighted the importance of care workers, and the need to recognise their contribution to the UK as a demonstration of integration. Payment of National Insurance and income tax was also viewed by a smaller group of respondents as clear evidence of integration into the UK.

Less commonly, respondents felt that respect for British values, following the law and understanding social norms were also relevant to assessing integration. However, opinions on the Life in the UK test were divided. Some respondents felt the test was not a good measure of real integration. They commented that people born and raised in the UK would struggle to pass it, questioning its relevance and fairness. Others felt the current test was adequate and that the requirements should not be changed.

Respondents commonly felt that integration was not only about work, but also about being part of a community. Social connections, everyday interactions and a sense of belonging were all seen as important. Examples of integration included taking part in community activities, playing sports, volunteering, having good relationships with neighbours and colleagues, forming friendships, and

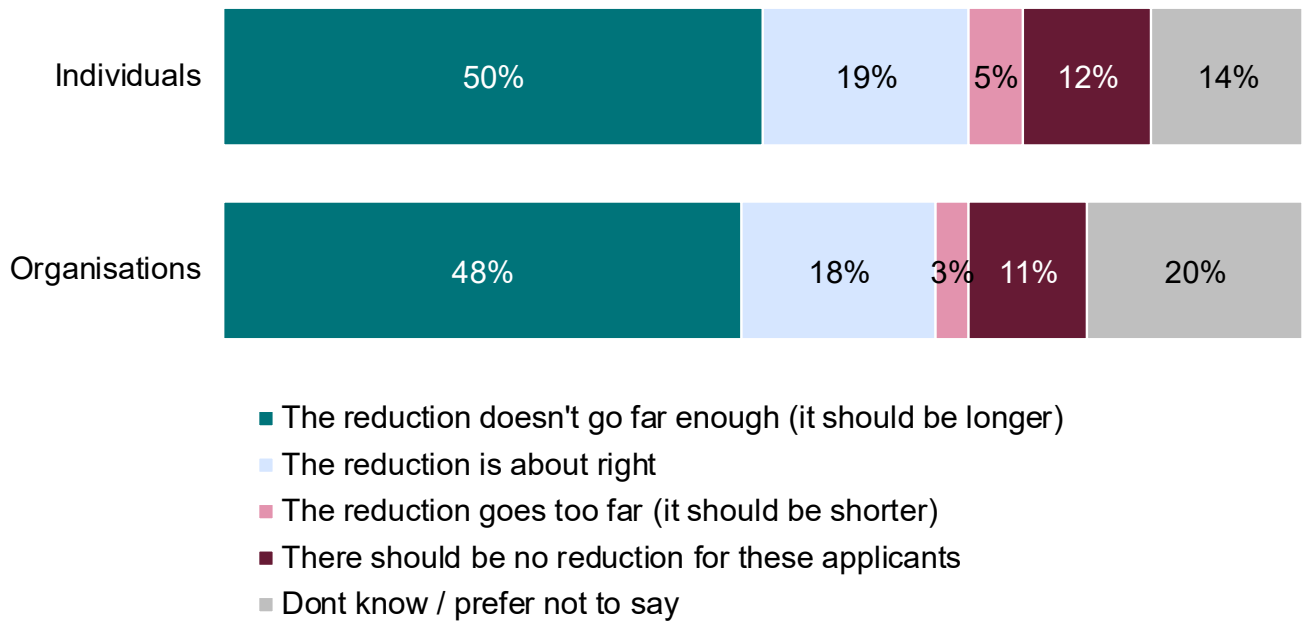
being involved in religious or cultural groups. For migrants, feeling accepted within local communities was seen as strong evidence that they are already integrated. Views on considering volunteering as part of integration were mixed (this is explored further in the contribution section).

A smaller proportion of respondents felt that education should also be considered as an indicator of integration when determining settlement length. For most, this referred to education completed in the UK, but a minority also advocated for higher-level education in English completed abroad to be considered. Having children educated in the UK was highlighted as a strong indicator of long-term commitment and integration.

Respondents also mentioned the need to consider individual circumstances. They highlighted that integration differed depending on people's age, health, family responsibilities and backgrounds. Caring responsibilities, particularly for children, were seen as limiting people's time and ability to meet additional requirements. A smaller proportion of respondents felt assessments should consider families as a whole, especially where children were attending school in the UK and helping families integrate. There were also concerns about older and more vulnerable migrants who may struggle to meet requirements due to age, health or past disadvantage. For example, there were concerns that these groups would not be able to demonstrate active involvement in their local community because of physical limitations, and those with barriers to learning may struggle to pass formal tests. Respondents supported exemptions or flexibility for these more vulnerable groups.

Language requirements

Figure 5: Views on the proposed reduction for advanced English language speakers



Base: C1, What do you think about a 1-year reduction for applicants who can demonstrate advanced English language ability (at C1 standard)? Total responses received from individuals (200,775) and organisations (2,378), who responded to this question.

As shown in Figure 5, respondents were also asked their views on the 1-year reduction for applicants who can demonstrate advanced English skills (at C1 standard). 50% of individuals felt the reduction does not go far enough, followed by 19% who thought the reduction was about right, and 12% who thought there should be no reduction for this group. Similarly, 48% of organisations felt the 1-year reduction for advanced English language skills should be longer, followed by 18% who thought the reduction was about right. C1 level under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages means the user is proficient and able to perform complex tasks related to social, academic, and professional situations.

Those with settled status and current visa holders were more likely to think the C1 English language reduction does not go far enough (51% and 50% respectively) compared with British Citizens (46%). In contrast, British Citizens were more likely to think that there should be no reduction for this group (23%) compared to current visa holders (9%), as were respondents over 65 (21%). Those in higher or intermediate managerial and professional roles were more likely to think the reduction for advanced English skills should be longer (56%) than those in semi-skilled or unskilled roles (38%).

Private sector organisations were more likely to believe the reduction should be longer (57%) compared with third sector/voluntary organisations (32%), although a large proportion of third sector/voluntary organisations responded don't know or prefer not to say for this question (43%). As with individuals, those who agreed with the proposed changes were more likely to believe there should be no reduction for C1 holders (21%) compared with those who disagreed with the proposed changes (10%).

In the open text responses, respondents agreed that English language ability was an important part of integration as it was essential for daily life, work and taking part in society. However, there were strong views (albeit mentioned by a minority of respondents) about what level of English is reasonable and how it should be assessed. The most common view was that B1 level English is sufficient to live and work in the UK and that this requirement should remain. Respondents felt that raising the requirement to B2 would be unfair, too demanding and not necessary for demonstrating integration. A few also thought the 1-year reduction for those with advanced English language skills should be increased given the difficulty of achieving C1 qualifications, and the benefits it has for work and civic participation.

A small group of respondents also highlighted groups who may struggle with stricter language rules, including older migrants, particularly some BN(O) visa holders, and those who had limited access to education before coming to the UK. They felt these groups should be treated with flexibility. There was also criticism of formal English language tests, including Secure English Language Tests (SELTs). A small group of respondents said these tests did not reflect how people actually use English in everyday life. As a result, there were calls for exemptions or alternative evidence, especially for people who have studied in English, completed degrees in English, or use English regularly at work.

Summary

Views were mixed on how integration should be assessed as part of the Earned Settlement scheme. There was wide variation in views on which method should be used, with some favouring formal tests, while others favoured more informal ways of gathering evidence. Throughout open text responses, respondents emphasised the need for a flexible and inclusive integration

assessment. Respondents generally accepted the principle of English language requirements, but there was widespread opposition to increasing the threshold to B2.

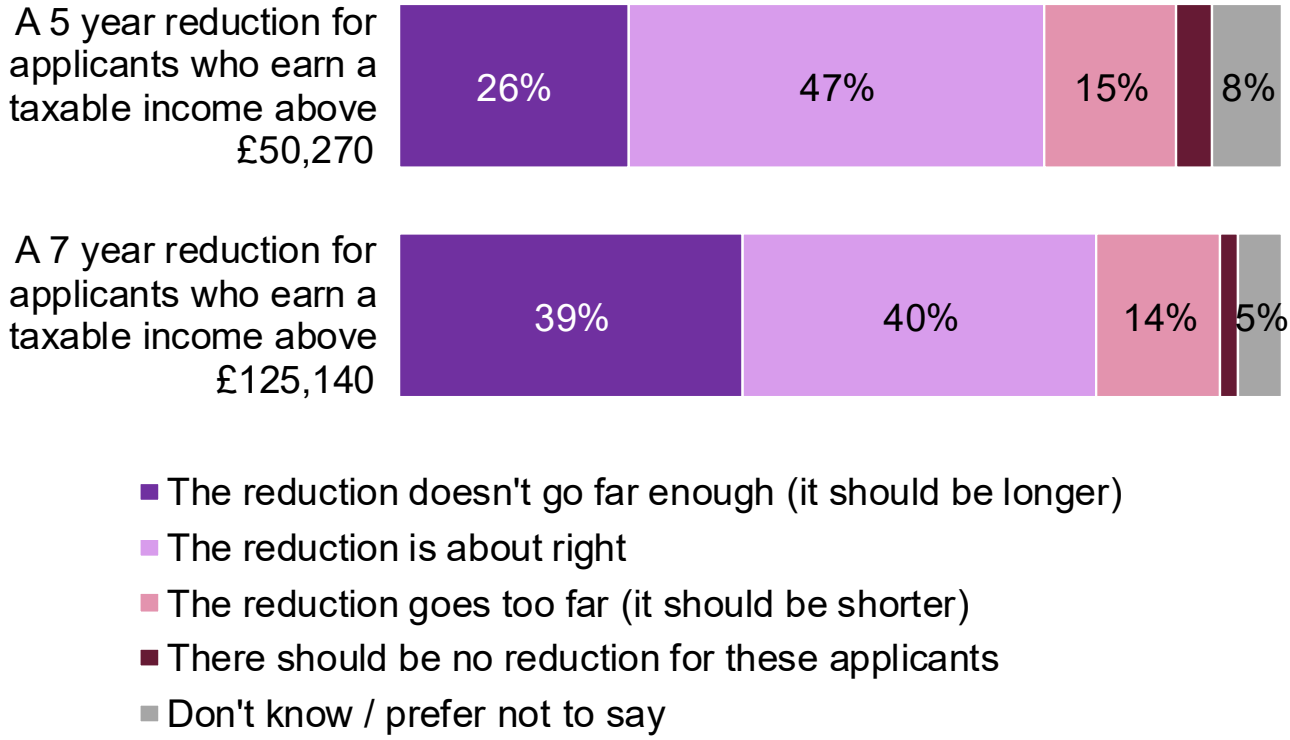
Chapter 4: Contribution

This chapter covers views on how contribution should be considered as part of the Earned Settlement framework, including the role of income, qualifications, sector, use of public funds, and giving back to the local community.

Income requirements
Respondents were asked how income should be considered when determining settlement qualifying length. 41% of individuals agreed that those earning above £50,270 should be eligible for a reduction in their time to settlement, compared to 38% who disagreed and 14% who neither agreed nor disagreed. Current visa holders were more likely to agree with the reduction in time to settlement than British Citizens (44% compared with 29%). Those who agreed with the proposed changes overall were also more likely to agree with this reduction than those who disagreed with the proposed changes (55% compared with 38%). Those in higher or intermediate managerial and professional roles were more likely to agree with this reduction than any other occupational group (49% compared to 41% overall).

33% of organisations agreed with a reduction in time to settlement for those earning over £50,270, with a greater proportion disagreeing with this proposed change (42%). Third sector/voluntary organisations were more likely to disagree with this reduction (49%) than private sector organisations (38%). As with individuals, those who agreed with the proposed changes overall were more likely to agree with the reduction for higher earners (45%) compared with those who disagreed with the proposed changes (31%).

Figure 6: Views on the proposed reductions for applicants based on their income (Individuals)

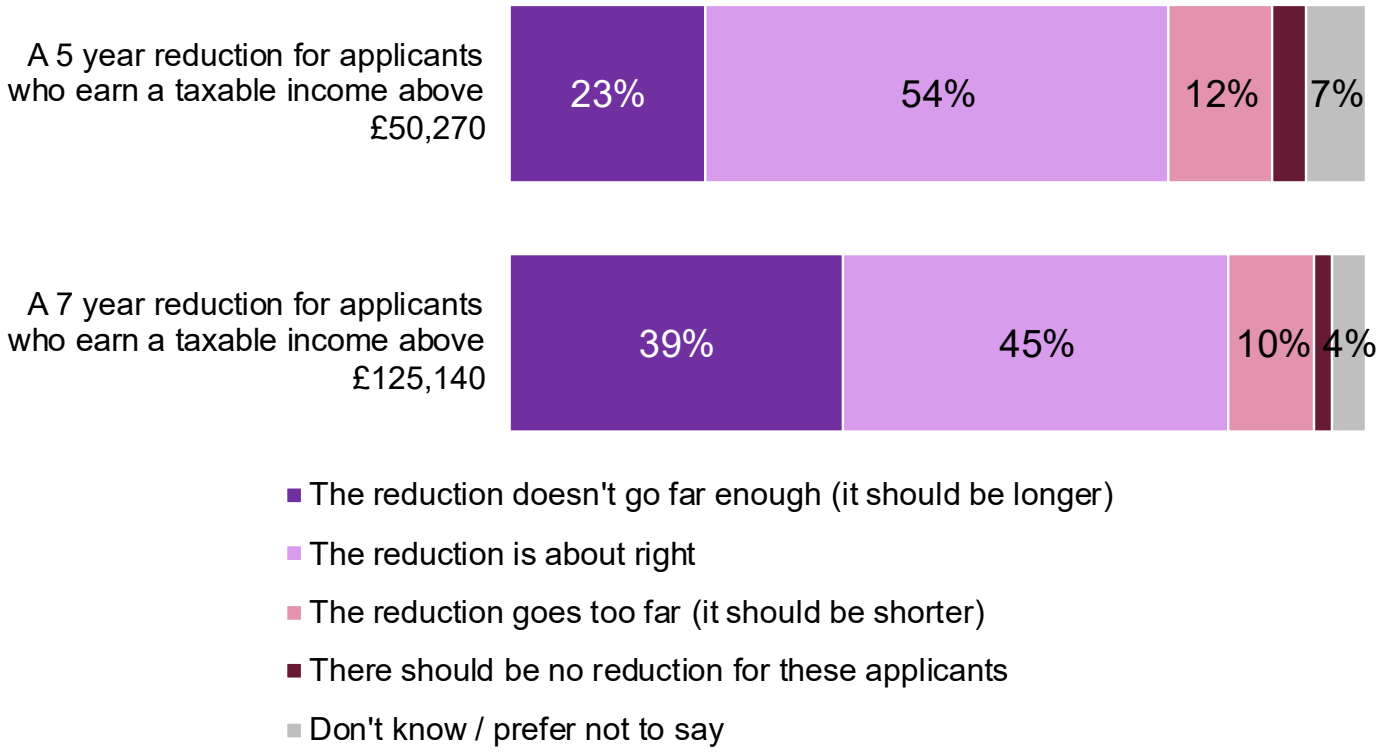


Base: D3B_X What do you think about the proposed reductions for applicants based on their annual taxable income? Individuals who agree that applicants who earn a taxable income above £50,270 should be eligible for a reduction in their time to settlement, and responded to these questions (between 80,960 and 81,492).

Respondents who agreed with a reduction for those earning over £50,270 were then asked what they thought about the proposed reductions for certain income levels. As shown in Figure 6, these respondents were most likely to think that the proposed 5-year reduction for applicants earning above £50,270 was about right (47%), followed by 26% who thought the reduction should be longer. 40% thought the 7-year reduction was about right and 39% thought the reduction should be longer.

British Citizens were more likely than current visa holders to think that the 5-year reduction for those earning above £50,270 did not go far enough (30% compared with 25%). Those in higher or intermediate managerial and professional roles were more likely to feel the 7-year reduction did not go far enough (45%) when compared to those from all other occupational groups, especially those in semi-skilled or unskilled roles (22%).

Figure 7: Views on the proposed reductions for applicants based on their income (Organisations)



Base: D3B_X What do you think about the proposed reductions for applicants based on their annual taxable income? Organisations who agree that applicants who earn a taxable income above £50,270 should be eligible for a reduction in their time to settlement which responded to these questions (between 777 and 783).

54% of organisations thought a 5-year reduction for applicants earning above £50,270 was about right, while 23% felt this did not go far enough. 45% thought that a 7-year reduction for applicants earning above £125,140 was about right, while 39% felt this did not go far enough. In the open text responses, salary thresholds were largely seen as too high. A small proportion of respondents felt that it was unfair for the minimum salary to qualify for a reduced settlement period to be set higher than the average income across the UK. Others were concerned that the thresholds did not account for regional variability in salaries, noting that salaries tend to be higher in London. Similarly, there was a concern, raised by a minority of respondents, that thresholds did not account for sector-based variations in pay grades, with some noting considerable differences in sector pay standards that were not always linked to skill level. More generally, respondents opposed the concept of salary-based variations in qualifying settlement periods as privileging wealthy individuals. However, a small group of respondents felt it was appropriate to provide a shorter path to settlement to those who paid higher levels of tax.

Current visa holders also felt that they had already contributed to the UK economy through taxes, including income tax, national insurance and council tax. A minority also mentioned contributions through VAT, capital gains and stamp duty, or that investments made in the UK, including through

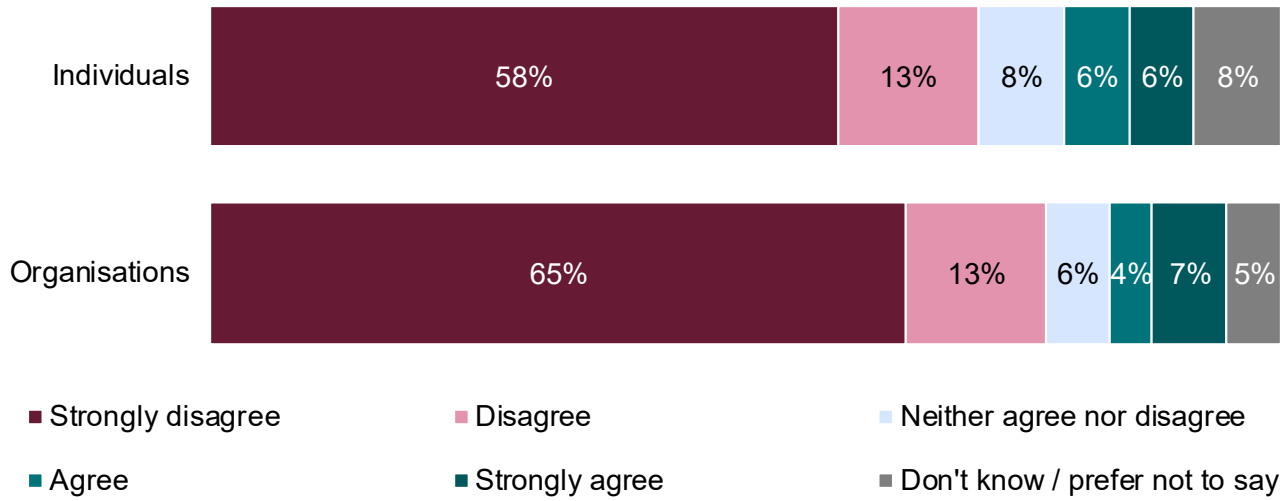
home ownership, should be considered. Others highlighted high cost of visas and health surcharges as further evidence of current visa holder contributions.

Respondents were also asked if certain groups should be exempt from the requirement to have earned above £12,570 for at least 3-5 years. Most individuals (78%) and organisations (73%) agreed that those on maternity leave or with a long-term illness/disability should be eligible for an exemption. In addition, individuals who disagreed with the proposed changes overall were more likely to agree with this exemption (81%) compared to those who agreed with the proposed changes (57%). A lower proportion (54% of both individuals and organisations) believed those in certain occupations with different pay arrangements (e.g. Ministers of Religion) should be exempt from this requirement. Respondents over the age of 65 were more likely to agree with this exemption (65%) than respondents of all other ages.

In the open text question, a relatively common theme was respondents expressing concerns about the fairness of salary-based requirements for certain groups. A small proportion of respondents argued that household income should be taken as a whole, so non-working partners are not disadvantaged. A common theme was that salary-based requirements would risk splitting up families in terms of qualifying periods for settlement. There was also some concern about the proposals not taking account of some people with caring responsibilities, such as childcare or caring for elderly relatives, being unable to work outside the home. A minority of respondents commented that for these reasons, as well as gender-based pay differences, women would be disadvantaged by these proposals.

Qualification level

Figure 8: Views on the proposed 15-year settlement qualifying period for work below RQF level 6



Base: D2, To what extent do you agree or disagree that migrants who have worked in an occupation below RQF level 6 should have their standard qualifying period for settlement set at 15 years? Total responses received from individuals (200,246) and organisations (2372) who responded to this question.

As shown in Figure 8, individuals and organisations generally disagreed that applicants who have worked in an occupation below RQF level 6 should have their standard qualifying period for settlement set at 15 years (72% and 78% disagreed respectively). 74% of British Citizens disagreed with this proposal, compared to 71% of current visa holders. 86% of third sector/voluntary organisations disagreed with this proposal compared to 76% of public sector organisations and 74% of private sector organisations. Occupations skilled to RQF level 6 are those which require a qualification equivalent to degree level or higher.

In the responses to the open text question, RQF Level 6 was regarded as an unreliable and inconsistent measure on which to base requirements. Respondents highlighted work that was highly skilled or offered high social value but fell below RQF Level 6.

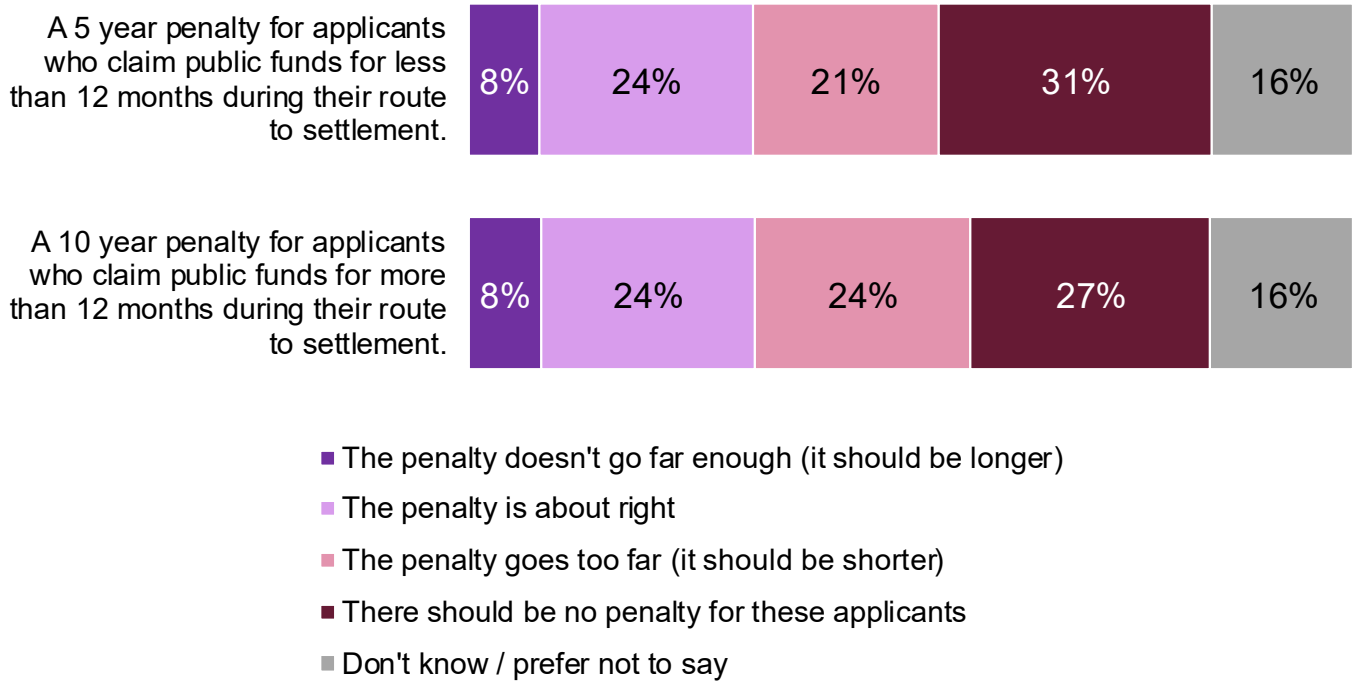
Sector

Respondents were asked whether public sector employees should be eligible for a reduction in their qualifying period. 71% of individuals and 62% of organisations agreed. Current visa holders were more likely to agree (72%) than British Citizens (65%). Public sector organisations were also more likely agree (78%) than private sector (62%) and third sector/voluntary organisations (53%). Black or Black British respondents were more likely to agree with this reduction (88%) than those from all other ethnic groups, and Asian or Asian British respondents were less likely to agree than those from all other ethnic groups (67%).

In the open text question, there was relatively broad agreement that there should be exemptions for individuals in roles with high social value, especially those that would not allow individuals to receive salary-based reductions. This included health and social care jobs, as well as some roles in science and technology and jobs that supported UK-based infrastructure and third sector roles.

Claiming public funds

Figure 9: Views on the proposed penalties for applicants claiming public funds (Individuals)

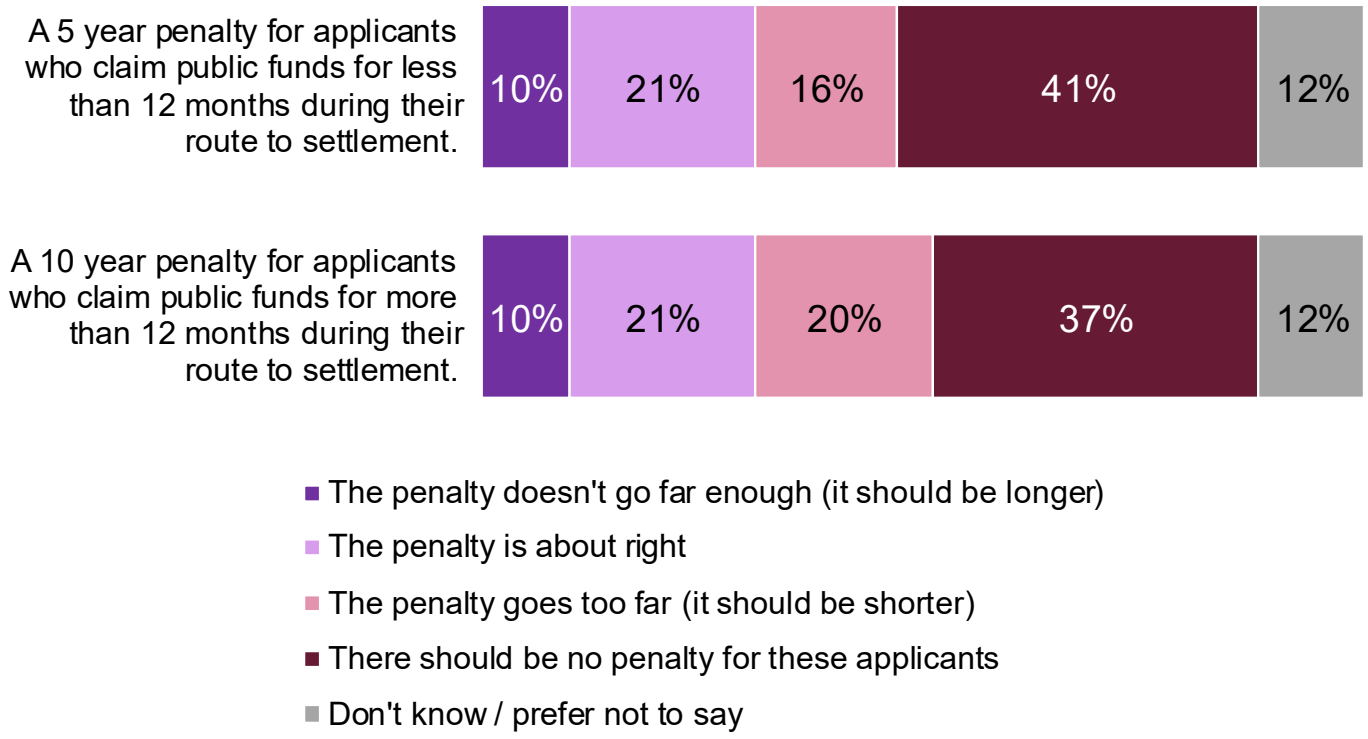


Base: D5, What do you think about the proposed penalties for applicants claiming public funds? Total responses received from individuals who responded to these questions (between 198,783 and 198,916 based on question).

Respondents were also asked their views on what impact claiming public funds should have on settlement qualifying periods. 31% of individuals thought there should be no penalty for applicants who had claimed public funds for less than 12 months, while 24% felt the proposed penalty was about right. Similarly, 27% of individuals thought there should be no penalty for those who had claimed public funds for more than 12 months, while equal proportions (24%) felt this penalty was about right or went too far.

Those with refugee status or humanitarian protection were most likely to oppose penalties for claiming public funds for less than 12 months (74%), followed by British Citizens (55%), while support was considerably lower among current visa holders (21%). Opposition was also higher among respondents aged over 65 (46%) compared with younger age groups. In addition, those who disagreed with the proposed changes were more likely to oppose penalties (34%) than those who agreed with them (12%). Similar subgroup differences were seen among views towards those who claimed public funds for more than 12 months.

Figure 10: Views on the proposed penalties for applicants claiming public funds (Organisations)



Base: D5, What do you think about the proposed penalties for applicants claiming public funds? Total responses received from organisations who responded to these questions (between 2,359 and 2,364 based on question).

Organisations were more likely than individuals to oppose penalties linked to claiming public funds. 41% of organisations thought there should be no penalty for applicants who had claimed public funds for less than 12 months, compared with 21% who felt the penalty was about right. 37% of organisations thought there should be no penalty for applicants who had claimed public funds for more than 12 months, 21% felt the proposed 10-year penalty was about right and 20% thought it went too far.

Third sector/voluntary organisations were considerably more likely to disagree with penalties for those who had claimed public funds, with 76% opposing penalties for those who claimed for less than 12 months, and 71% opposing penalties for those who claimed for more than 12 months.

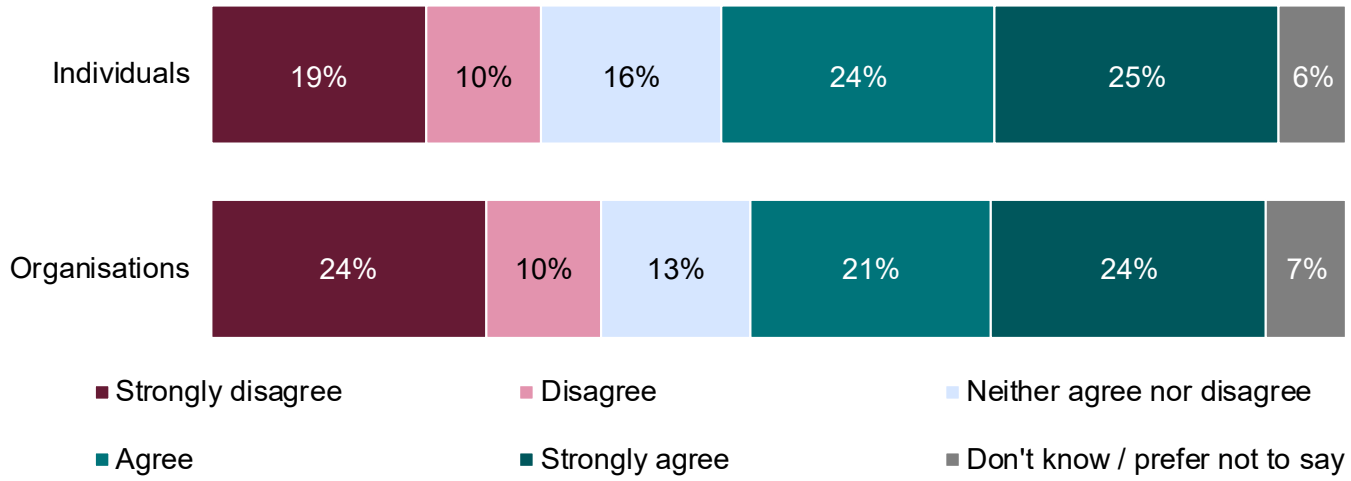
Individuals and organisations generally agreed that those who have been granted Settlement in the UK should be eligible to claim public funds (60% and 62% respectively). This was highest among those with settled status (77%) compared with British Citizens (71%) and current visa holders (56%). Those who disagreed with the proposed changes were more likely to support access to public funds (62%) than those who agreed with the changes (48%). Among organisations, agreement was greatest among third sector/voluntary organisations (83%) compared to public sector (66%) and private sector organisations (51%).

In the open text responses, there was a similar division in opinions on penalties for those who had accessed public funds. A relatively small proportion of respondents mentioned that penalising use of public funds could lead to visa holders falling into poverty in cases of otherwise short-term

financial difficulty. Others noted that those who had paid taxes since they had arrived in the UK should have access to the protections afforded by the state. A very small proportion of respondents were in favour of benefits eligibility restrictions and felt it was appropriate to take steps to ensure migrants provided a net positive financial contribution to the UK. Others noted that most visa holders were ineligible to claim public funds in any case.

Volunteering

Figure 11: Views on considering volunteering as a criterion for reducing the length of time to qualify for settlement



Base: D7, To what extent do you agree or disagree that giving back to local communities (e.g. by volunteering) should be considered as a contribution that can reduce the length of time required to qualify for settlement? Total responses received from individuals (200,056) and organisations (2374) who responded to this question.

Views on recognising volunteering as a contribution to settlement were mixed. As shown in Figure 11, 49% of individuals and 46% of organisations agreed that giving back to the local community should be considered as a contribution that could reduce the length of time required to qualify for settlement.

Those with refugee or humanitarian status were more likely to agree that volunteering should be considered a contribution (64%) compared to those with settled status (52%), British Citizens (50%) and current visa holders (48%). Agreement was higher among those under 18 (60%) compared to all other age groups. It was also higher among public sector organisations (57%) compared to private sector (47%) and third sector/voluntary organisations (38%).

In the open text responses, respondents tended to welcome consideration of volunteering to reduce settlement periods. However, there were concerns it would be difficult or impossible to implement this fairly. Long working hours were highlighted as reducing many individuals' capacity to volunteer. A small proportion of respondents were concerned that expectations around volunteering after busy working weeks and other commitments (i.e. childcare), could increase the risk of burnout among migrants and reduce the quality time with their families. This was also seen as unfair, as the same volunteering requirements do not apply to UK citizens.

A small proportion of respondents felt having volunteering as a criterion for settlement went against the ethos of volunteering and felt strongly that it should remain a free choice. There were also concerns about the commitment and reliability of volunteers who were motivated by reducing their settlement qualifying period. Respondents felt that measuring volunteering would be overly subjective, difficult to measure and potentially vulnerable to abuse, including forged volunteer testimonies. Verifying and processing evidence around volunteering was anticipated to lead to a costly administrative burden for the government as well as for third sector organisations.

Organisations with volunteers were asked their views on considering volunteering as part of the Earned Settlement framework. 44% of organisations reported accepting or managing volunteers, this figure was significantly higher among third sector/voluntary organisations (86%). Among organisations with volunteers, 35% thought it would be easy for applicants to provide evidence of giving back to the community, compared to 48% who thought it would be difficult. Those who agreed with the proposed changes were more likely to think it would be easy for applicants to provide evidence of giving back to the community (60%) than those who disagreed with the proposed changes (31%).

48% of organisations with volunteers thought that including it as a contribution towards settlement would have a positive impact on their organisation. A further 29% thought it would have a negative impact, and 13% thought it would have no impact. Third sector/voluntary organisations were more likely to say it would have a negative impact on their organisation (41%), compared to public (16%) and private sector (14%) organisations.

Summary

Respondents had mixed views on how contribution should be considered as part of the Earned Settlement framework, including the role of income, qualifications, sector, use of public funds, and giving back to the local community. Open text responses raised concerns about which criteria would be used to assess contribution, and how this would be measured in practice. Respondents also mentioned the importance of recognising contributions beyond salary, arguing that this would better reflect the broader social value of visa holders and lead to a fairer settlement policy.

Chapter 5: Residence

This chapter covers respondents' views on how lawful, continuous residence in the UK should impact applicants' path to settlement under the proposed new framework.

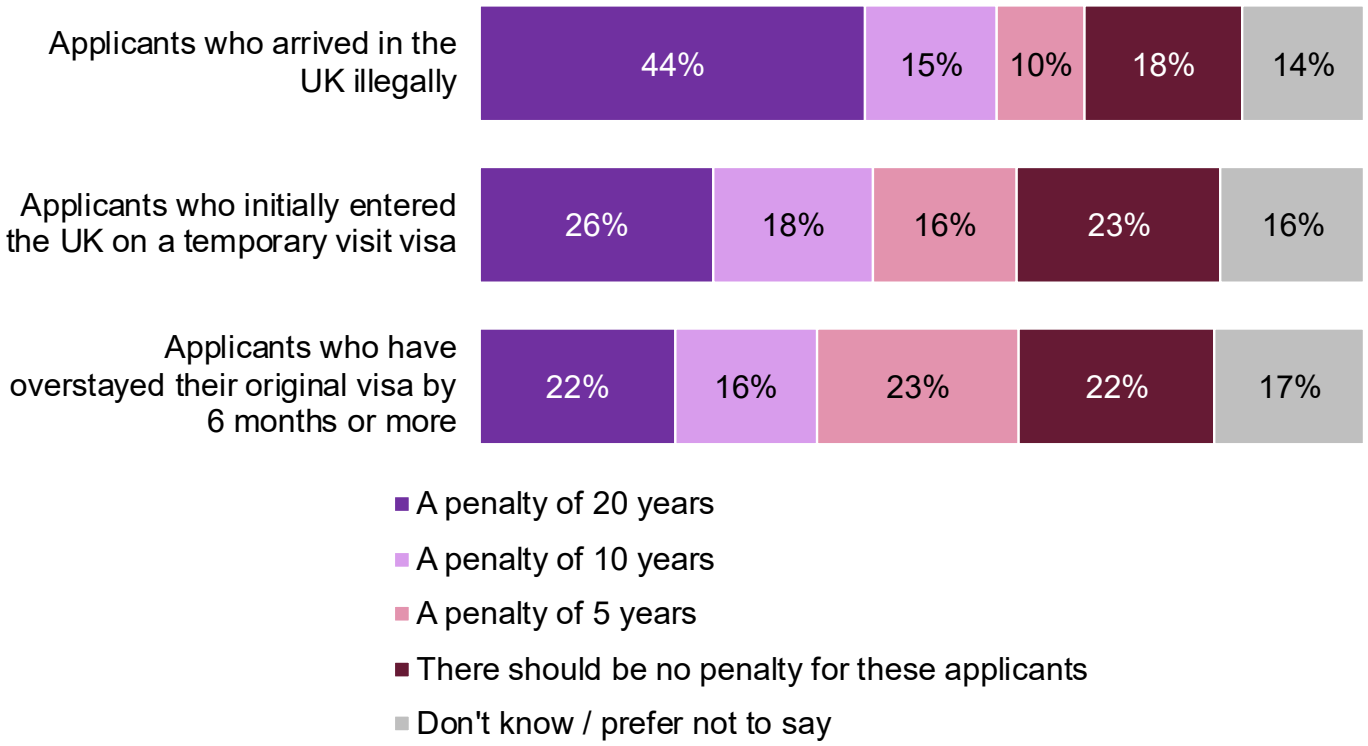
Lawful, continuous residence

In the open text responses, respondents commonly stated residence was an important settlement requirement. Long-term residence was seen as an appropriate reason to reduce settlement length because it demonstrated integration and a commitment to the UK in itself. Smaller proportions of respondents also noted the importance of considering other factors alongside residence, such as the economic contribution of migrants, particularly those in key sectors such as health and social care. Other important factors mentioned by respondents included paying taxes, building a life in the UK and engaging with the local community. However, respondents also highlighted the importance of allowing for reasonable adjustments to residence requirements for short-term absences due to family emergencies, caring commitments or work trips. They emphasised the importance of not unfairly penalising applicants for short-term absences due to circumstances beyond their control.

Illegal entry and overstaying visas

The consultation also asked about how compliance with immigration laws should impact applicants' pathway to settlement.

Figure 12: Views on what penalties should be applied to applicants who breached immigration laws (Individuals)



Base: E1, Which of the following penalties do you think should be applied to each of the following applicants? Total responses received from individuals who responded to this question (199,429 - 199,818).

As shown in Figure 12, 69% of individuals felt those who arrived in the UK illegally should receive a penalty of at least 5 years, with 44% saying this penalty should be over 20 years. A majority also thought there should be a penalty of at least 5 years for applicants who entered the UK on a temporary visit visa or who overstayed their original visa by 6 months or more (69% for both). A minority of individuals thought there should be no penalty for these applicants. This was 23% for those who had entered the UK on a temporary visa, 22% for those who had overstayed their visa, and 18% for those who arrived illegally.

Current visa holders were more likely to agree with a penalty of at least 5 years for those who arrived illegally (77%) compared to British Citizens (45%) and those with refugee status or humanitarian protection (31%). Similar subgroup differences were observed in support for applicants who entered on a temporary visa and those who overstayed their original visa receiving a penalty of at least five years, as follows:

- For applicants who initially entered the UK on a temporary visit visa, 61% overall agreed with the penalty, with variation by respondent type as follows:
    - Current visa holders (68%) compared to British Citizens (42%) and those with refugee or humanitarian protection (24%)

- Respondents over 65 (45%) compared with all other age groups
- Black or Black British respondents (69%), followed by Asian or Asian British respondents (68%) compared with other ethnic groups

- For applicants who have overstayed their original visa by 6 months or more, 61% overall agreed with the penalty, with variation by respondent type as follows:
  - Current visa holders (68%) compared to British Citizens (45%) and those with refugee or humanitarian protection (32%)
  - Respondents over 65 (47%) compared with those age 18-34 (59%) and those age 35-64 (63%)
  - Asian or Asian British respondents (69%) or Black or Black British respondents (66%) compared with other ethnic groups.

Figure 13: Views on what penalties should be applied to applicants who breached immigration laws (Organisations)



Base: E1, Which of the following penalties do you think should be applied to each of the following applicants?: Total responses received from organisations who responded to this question (2,361-2,365).

As shown in Figure 13, organisations were generally less supportive of penalties for breaches of immigration law. 53% of organisations thought there should be a penalty for applicants who arrived in the UK illegally, 50% supported penalties for those who overstayed their visa by six months or more and 48% for those who entered on a temporary visit visa. A substantial minority of organisations felt there should be no penalty for these groups, including 35% for those who entered on a temporary visa, 32% for those who overstayed and 30% for those who arrived illegally.

Third sector organisations were particularly likely to oppose penalties, with 66% saying those who arrived illegally should not receive a penalty, compared to 28% for public sector organisations and 14% for private sector organisations.

In the open text question, the most common view was that applicants for settlement should live in the UK legally and have followed visa rules, and that legal and irregular migrants should be considered in different ways. A less commonly held view was that settlement should not be granted to individuals who enter the UK irregularly, or that longer qualifying periods for settlement should be applied in such cases. These respondents felt that granting settlement to those who entered irregularly was unfair to individuals who had entered the country through legal routes.

However, a similar proportion of respondents felt that penalties should not necessarily be given to those entering the UK illegally. In particular, these respondents were concerned about vulnerable groups such as refugees, asylum seekers and victims of trafficking. They felt that individuals in these groups may have entered the country illegally because they lacked safe alternatives, or because of circumstances outside of their control. These respondents advocated for protections or exemptions for asylum seekers. In addition, a small proportion of respondents also argued that visa overstay should be considered on a case-by-case basis, given that some exceptional circumstances may justify violations of immigration law, particularly in cases of short periods of overstaying.

Summary
Respondents generally felt that those who had lived in the UK for a consistent period of time and had complied with the law should be rewarded with a reduction in their time to settlement, while those who had violated immigration law should be penalised to some degree (with exceptions in specific cases) or be prevented from applying altogether.

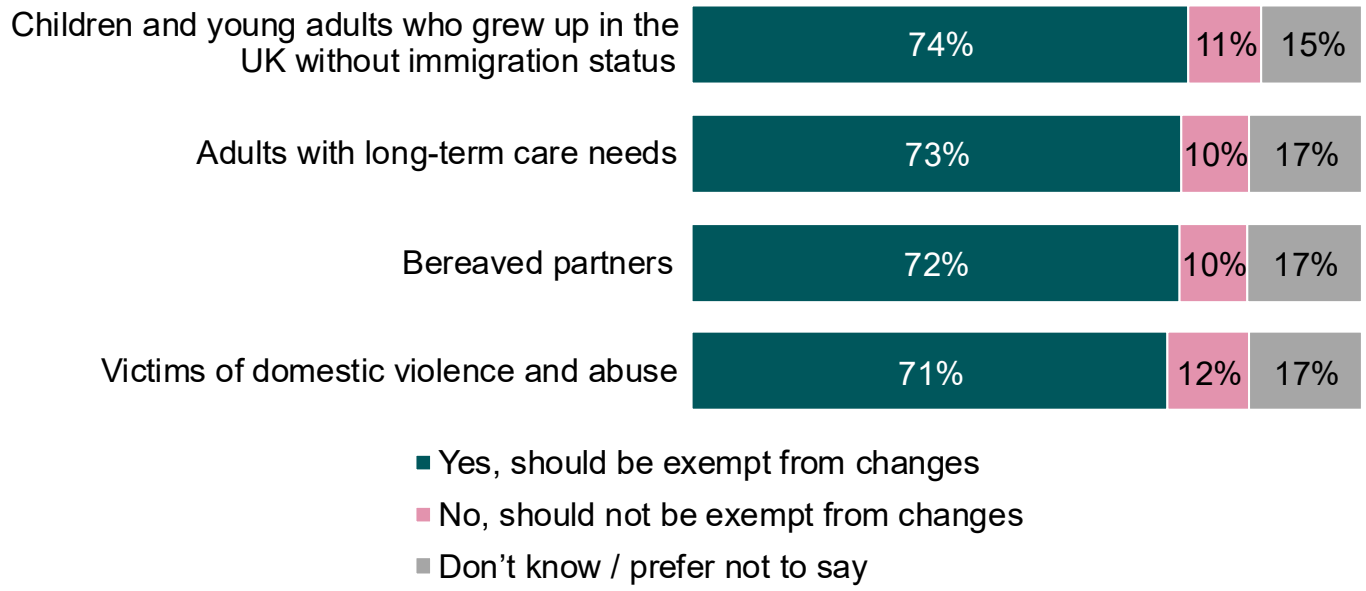
Chapter 6: Eligibility and Equalities

This chapter explores consultation respondents' views on whether specific groups including dependants, vulnerable groups, armed service groups and resettled refugees should be eligible for reductions or exemptions from proposed Earned Settlement changes.

Treatment of vulnerable groups within proposed changes

Overall, most individuals felt all vulnerable groups mentioned within the consultation should be exempt from proposed changes. This was highest in the case of children and young adults who grew up in the UK without immigration status, whom 74% of individuals felt should be exempt. It also included broad agreement for exemptions for adults with long-term care needs (73%), bereaved partners (72%) and for victims of domestic violence and abuse (71%).

Figure 14: Individual responses on exemptions and retaining current arrangements for certain vulnerable groups



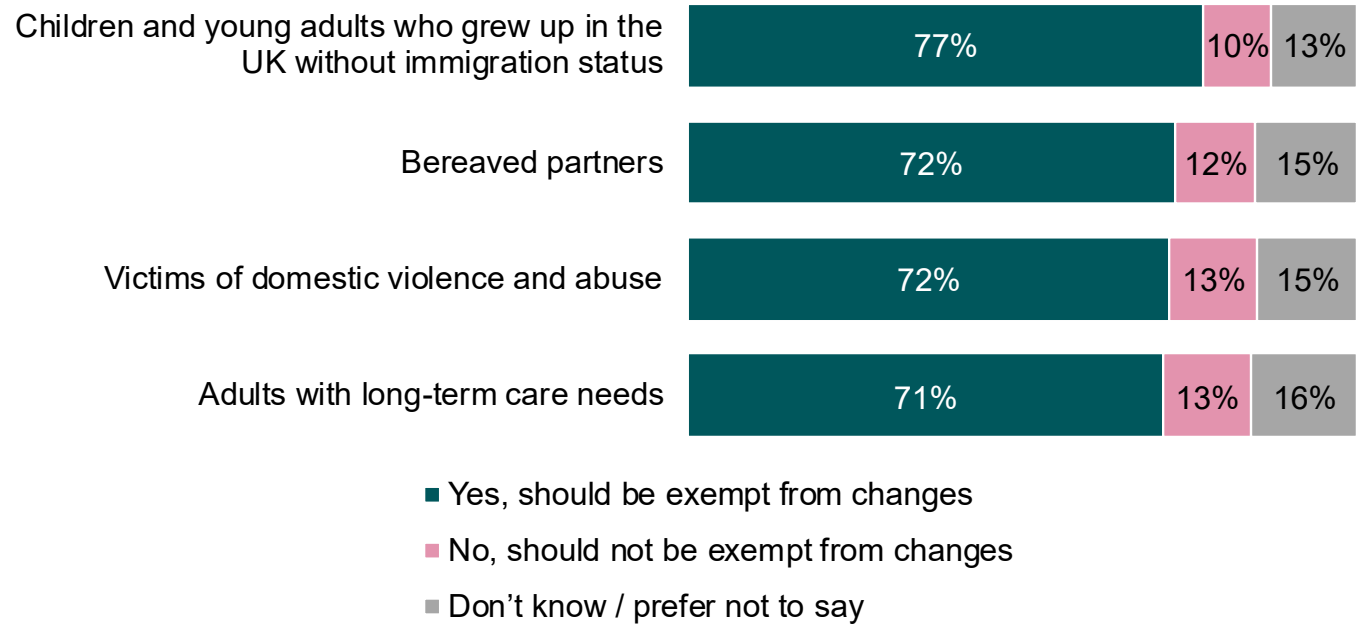
Base: F3, Do you think the following vulnerable groups should retain their current arrangements and be exempt from the proposed settlement changes? Total individual responses / responses received (between 195,010 and 197,712).

Those with settled status and British Citizens were consistently more likely to respond that there should be exemptions for these groups (between 81% and 84% and between 75% and 80%, respectively). However, a higher proportion of British Citizens also said there should not be exemptions for adults with long-term care needs (17% compared to 10% overall), victims of domestic violence (16% compared to 12% overall), bereaved partners (15% compared to 10% overall) or children and young adults who grew up in the UK without immigration status (15% compared to 11% overall). This may be impacted by a notably higher proportion of current visa holders who responded 'Don't know / prefer not to say' when asked about these groups. This included exemptions for victims of domestic violence, adults with long-term care needs and

bereaved partners (all 20%) and children and young adults without immigration status (18%), lowering the relative proportion of respondents who gave a clear 'yes' or 'no' response.

Among organisational respondents, 77% felt children and young adults who grew up in the UK should be exempt from changes. A slightly lower proportion also agreed with exemptions for bereaved partners (72%), for victims of domestic violence and abuse (72%) and for adults with long-term care needs (71%).

Figure 15: Organisation responses on exemptions and retaining current arrangements for certain vulnerable groups



Base: F3, Do you think the following vulnerable groups should retain their current arrangements and be exempt from the proposed settlement changes? Total organisational responses / responses received (between 2,320 and 2,340).

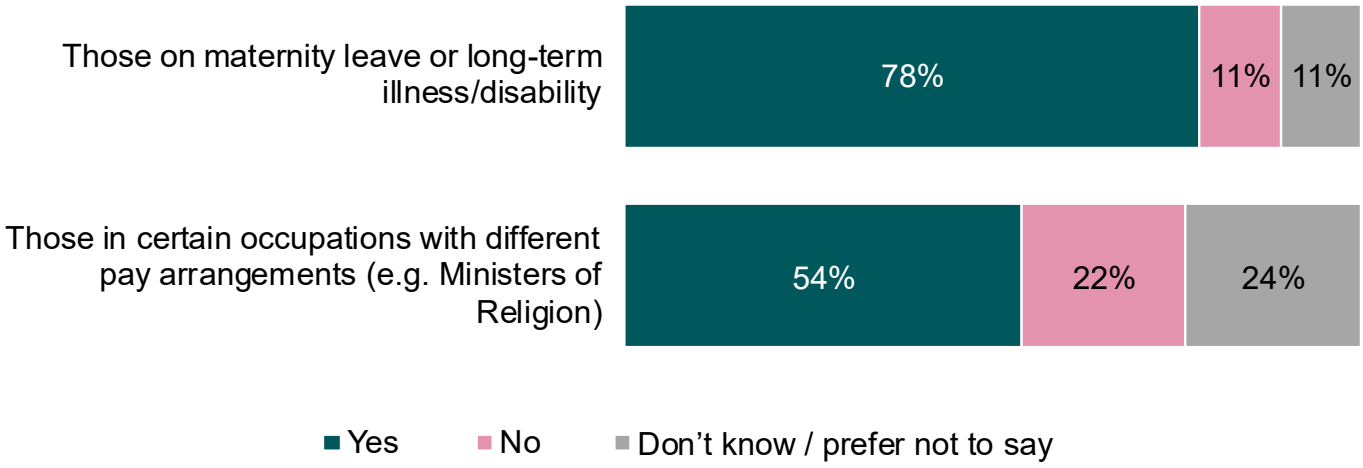
Generally, third sector/voluntary organisations were more likely to feel these groups should be exempt (between 85% and 88% for each group). Opinion was more divided on whether resettled refugees should have a 10-year Settlement route. Individuals were more likely to agree (39%) than disagree (30%) that refugees should have a 10-year route, while organisations were more likely to disagree (41%, compared to 34% who agreed). British Citizens were far more likely to disagree (48%), particularly compared to current visa holders (23%), as were those with refugee status or humanitarian protection (72%) and asylum seekers (66%). A common theme in open text responses was the need for refugee support and protection, with some calling for refugees to be allowed to work. However, a small group of respondents agreed with longer settlement pathways for refugees, with some feeling that refugees should not be eligible for settlement at all.

Employment-based exemptions within proposed changes

A large majority of individuals (78%) also felt that those on maternity leave or with a long-term illness/disability should be exempt from financial requirements to have earned over £12,570 for at

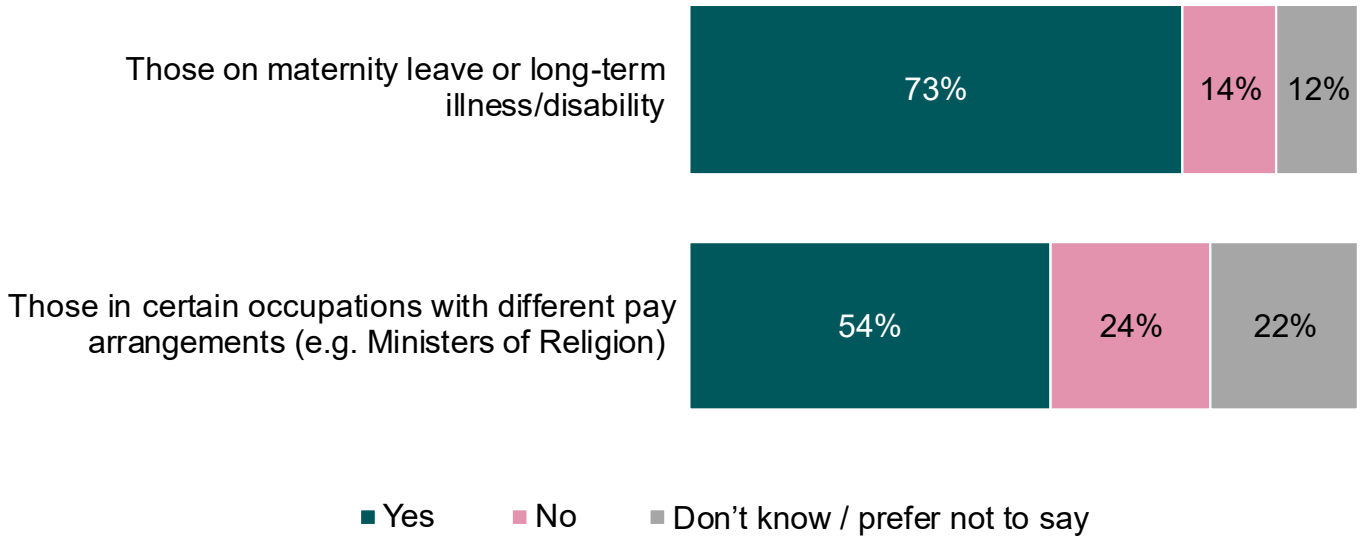
least 3 to 5 years. Agreement with exemptions for these groups was high but varied by respondent immigration status. 82% of those with settled status thought that this group should be exempt, compared to 75% of British Citizens. This was a similar proportion among organisations (73%) and was especially high among third sector/voluntary organisations (84%) compared to private sector organisations (69%).

Figure 16: Individuals' responses on exemptions from income requirements (to earn above £12,570 for at least 3 to 5 years)



Base: D1a, Do you think the following groups should be exempt from the requirement to have earned above £12,570 for at least 3 to 5 years? Total individual responses / responses received (between 196,612 and 199,620).

Figure 17: Organisational responses on exemptions from income requirements (to earn above £12,570 for at least 3 to 5 years)



Base: D1a, Do you think the following groups should be exempt from the requirement to have earned above £12,570 for at least 3 to 5 years? Total organisational responses / responses received (between 2,329 and 2,359).

Within the open text responses, special considerations were also suggested for other groups who may struggle to meet requirements, including older people and those with caring responsibilities. This was largely related to concern around imposing salary-based thresholds on these groups. There was particular concern for the impact of reforms on stay-at-home parents and care-givers, who were seen as performing a valuable role within society outside of their individual economic contribution.

Individuals (54%) and organisations (54%) also felt that those in certain occupations with different pay arrangements (e.g. Ministers of Religion) should be exempt from financial requirements. However, there was a high degree of variation among organisations, with 70% of third sector/voluntary organisations compared to 46% of private sector organisations agreeing with exemptions for this group.

Most individuals felt that current arrangements should be retained for members of the Armed Forces (54%) and their immediate family (55%). In both cases, British Citizens were somewhat more likely to think that current arrangements should be retained for Armed Forces members (59% compared to 54% overall) and their immediate families (60% of British Citizens, compared to 55% overall). 53% organisations also felt current arrangements should be retained for both groups. This proportion was particularly high among private sector organisations for both Armed Forces members (62%) and their immediate family (63%). A notable proportion of individuals and organisations responded 'don't know / prefer not to say' when asked about arrangements for Armed Forces members (30% of individuals and 33% of organisations) and their immediate families (31% of individuals and 33% of organisations).

Treatment of dependants within proposed changes

Most respondents felt that dependants of current visa holders should not have to earn settlement in their own right. 57% of individuals disagreed that dependant partners of migrants should earn settlement in their own right, while 29% agreed. This aligned with the proportion who felt children of migrants should earn settlement in their own right (60% disagreed while 29% agreed), as well as responses from organisations, where 27% agreed that partners of migrants should earn settlement in their own right, with 61% disagreeing.

British Citizens and those with settled status were particularly likely to disagree that dependants should earn settlement in their own right, particularly in the case of children (66% disagreed, compared to 58% among those with temporary leave to remain). Those in higher or intermediate level roles were also more likely to think this should not be a requirement for children of migrants (66%). Organisations were particularly likely to disagree that dependent children of migrants should earn settlement in their own right (66%), compared to only 22% agreeing.

Most individuals (65%) and organisations (56%) also agreed that dependants of migrants who hold Global Talent or Innovator Founder visa status should retain their current 5-year path to settlement. Among individuals, this proportion was highest among those with settled status (70%), those applying for immigration status or awaiting decisions (68%) and current visa holders (66%) and notably lower among British Citizens (58%).

In the open text responses, respondents commonly raised concerns about the negative impacts that the proposed changes would have on children.

In particular, they felt the changes could lead to family hardship and separation, with adverse consequences for the children of applicants. They emphasised the importance of children having a clear and stable route to settlement, and argued that preventing family separation should be a priority for the sake of children. Respondents also highlighted the psychological impact on parents facing uncertainty about their settlement status, as well as the financial and emotional pressures the reforms might place on families. Overall, respondents stressed the need for a child-centred settlement policy that safeguards children's social and emotional wellbeing, and suggested that special considerations should be given to children and other vulnerable groups.

Respondents also felt that children should not be disadvantaged by their parents' immigration status. They highlighted that children have no control over the actions of their parents, and that any proposed changes should consider the best interests of the child. Some of these responses mentioned that these children have often grown up in the UK and have limited day-to-day ties to their parent's home country, so uprooting them could cause considerable distress. Respondents called for children to be exempt from changes to the settlement framework.

A small proportion of respondents also called for special considerations for young people who had grown up in the UK and only recently turned 18 years old. Respondents highlighted that meeting the Earned Settlement requirements, particularly those to do with contribution, would be particularly difficult for these applicants because of their age.

Summary

Respondents were generally in favour of there being accommodations for the specific groups mentioned within the consultation. There were notable differences in how individuals responded based on immigration status. Among organisations, third sector/voluntary organisations were more likely to favour exemptions compared to private sector organisations. Most respondents felt that dependants of current visa holders should not have to earn settlement in their own right.

Chapter 7: Impact on organisations

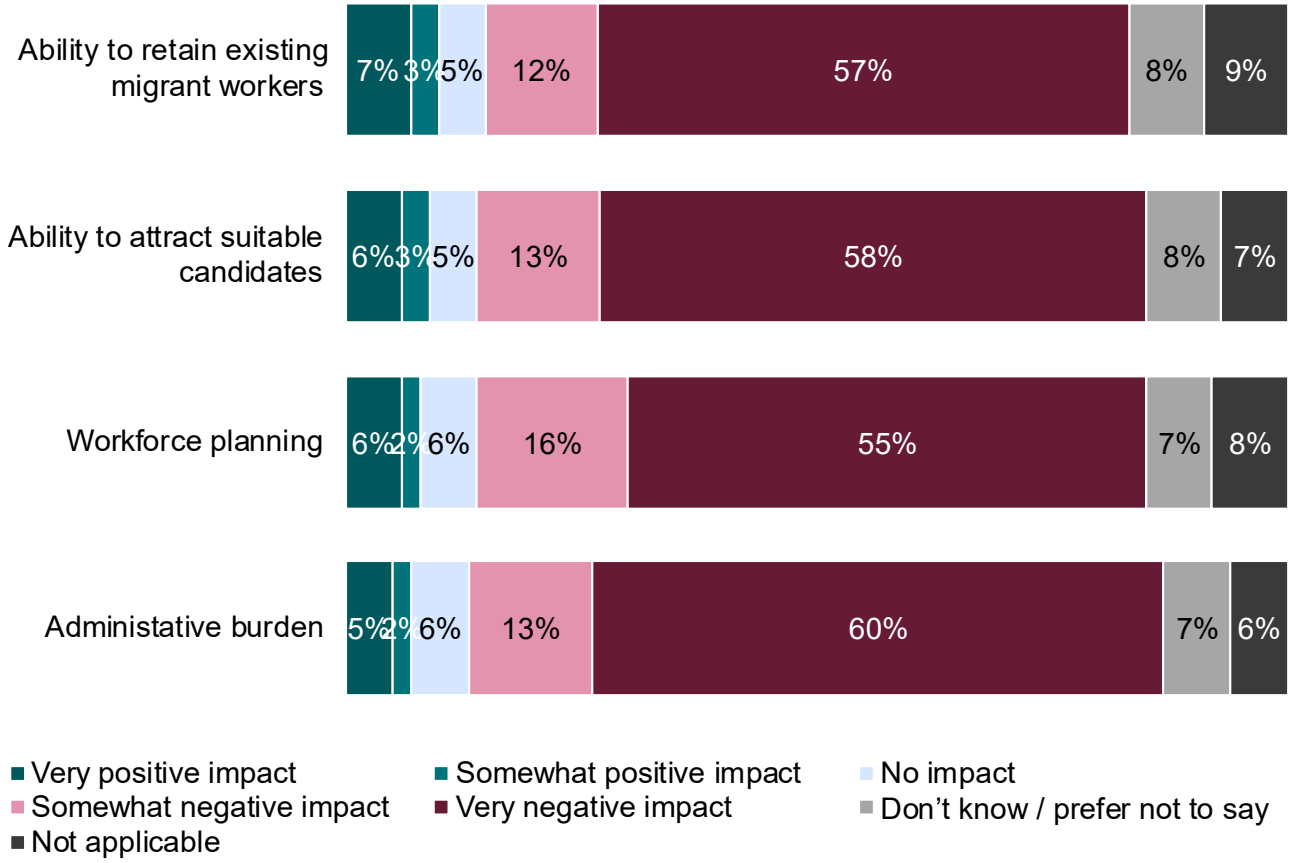
This chapter covers organisations' views on the impact the proposed changes would have on their organisation.

Impacts of proposed changes on organisations

Overall, most organisations felt they would be negatively impacted by proposed changes. This included organisations that felt the proposed changes would have either a 'somewhat negative' or 'very negative' impact on different areas of their organisation. In particular, most (73%) anticipated additional administrative burden due to the proposed changes. Education providers (85%) and private sector organisations (79%) were especially likely to think the proposed changes would lead to administrative burden.

Organisations also felt changes would have a negative impact on their ability to attract suitable candidates (71%), undertake workforce planning (71%), and retain existing migrant workers (70%). Private sector organisations were especially likely to anticipate negative impacts in all of these areas (80%, 79% and 78%, respectively).

Figure 18: Anticipated impacts of proposed changes on organisations



Base: G1, To what extent, if at all, do you think the proposed reforms will impact your organisation in the following ways? Total organisational responses / responses received (between 2,312 and 2,332). 'Somewhat positive impacts' ranged from 2-3%.

Impact of proposed changes on organisations' intentions to sponsor in future

Organisations intending to sponsor employees on visas in future were asked about the extent to which the proposed changes would impact their plans to do so. The majority said the proposed changes would make them less likely to sponsor employees to work in the UK in future (62%), while 18% felt there would be no change to their plans. 12% said they would be more likely to sponsor in future. Private sector organisations in particular said they would be less likely to sponsor in future (66%).

A smaller proportion of sponsoring organisations felt the changes would impact their plans to sponsor refugees and displaced people to work in the UK on a visa in the future (35%). 19% reported that changes would not impact their plans, and only 8% said they would be more likely to sponsor visas for refugees and displaced people.

Education providers intending to sponsor students in future were also asked if the changes would impact their plans. Equal proportions of education providers reported that their plans to sponsor would not change (41%) and said they would be less likely to sponsor (41%) (this is based on a small sample size (54) so should be interpreted with caution).

Organisations were asked about the likely influence of the proposed changes on visa applicants' or visa holders' decisions to come to or remain in the UK. The open text responses were then coded to key themes. Organisations generally felt the proposed changes would deter migrants from coming to or staying in the UK, and would have a negative impact on recruitment and retention.

Organisations were also asked to provide their views on how the proposed changes would affect their organisation. Most felt that they would have a negative impact, particularly on recruitment and retention, and make sponsorship more difficult.

Summary

Overall, most organisations felt they would be negatively impacted by the proposed changes, and that they would result in an additional administrative burden. Organisations also felt changes would have a negative impact on their ability to attract suitable candidates, undertake workforce planning, retain existing migrant workers, and make sponsorship more difficult.

Annex A: Consultation analysis methodology

The consultation includes a mix of closed and open questions, as well as some email submissions. The process and limitations of analysing these findings is outlined below.

Data processing and preparation

The consultation was hosted by the Home Office. Responses were securely transferred to IFF Research for data cleaning and analysis. Data cleaning included checks for responses submitted from outside the UK, as well as the removal of open text responses that were blank, illegible, or non-substantive (e.g. “N/A” or “nothing to add”).

Quantitative analysis

Responses to closed questions were analysed quantitatively, with results presented as proportions of respondents selecting each response option. Data tables were produced with breakdowns by key demographic characteristics, including immigration status, age and gender. Separate tables were produced for organisational respondents, including breakdowns by organisation type and size. These tables are published alongside the report.

Qualitative analysis of open text responses

Open text questions enabled respondents to express their views in their own words. There were 7 questions with open text responses. Responses were up to 200 words in length and often covered multiple topics, including issues beyond the specific question asked. In some cases, responses addressed broader aspects of the proposed settlement framework or wider immigration policy.

Two of the open questions were only asked of organisations (G3 and G4). There were also three ‘other - specify’ questions, and two which were asked of immigration support organisations only.

Findings from open text responses are presented descriptively. A relative ranking of key themes identified for each question is provided in Annex B, rather than reporting precise proportions of respondents expressing specific views.

The 904 email submissions to the consultation did not follow the same structure as the consultation survey so were analysed separately. Responses which included attachments (often detailed reports) have been analysed by the Home Office policy team.

The remaining responses (around 600, or roughly 0.3% of the total consultation responses) were analysed using an in-house tool developed by IFF Research’s AI lead, which identified the top themes. This analysis and coding were then manually reviewed and QA’d by two members of the IFF research team. The key themes covered were similar to those in the online responses.

Coding framework development

A coding framework was developed to enable systematic analysis of open text responses to the online consultation. This was initially based on a sample of responses and developed iteratively.

The IFF coding team produced an initial codeframe, which was quality assured internally. In parallel, members of the research team developed a separate codeframe. These were compared and refined, including through the use of in-house AI tools and AI-assisted codeframe development in Ascribe.

Draft codeframes were discussed and refined through a series of meetings within the IFF research team. The codeframes were also shared with Home Office Analysis and Insight (HOAI) and revised following feedback from policy and research stakeholders.

Coding process and quality assurance

The agreed codeframes were applied using Ascribe. Coding was conducted iteratively, with multiple stages of review, correction and quality assurance by coding and research teams, including senior oversight. This involved checking a selection of coded segments under each code to ensure the coding was correct, focusing on segments where Ascribe assigned lower levels of confidence (c80%) to the coding. Where codes were inaccurate, segments were manually recoded, or the code was removed. This process of manually assigning codes involved several rounds of corrections, following which the coding was re-run to improve accuracy. Codeframes were also refined following each stage to improve accuracy, reliability and validity.

Once finalised, the codeframes were applied to the full dataset, with additional checks and recoding where necessary.

Responses could be coded to multiple themes and often covered several topics. Given the frequency with which certain themes were raised across different questions, some codes were applied across multiple codeframes to capture cross-cutting issues.

Limitations of the qualitative analysis

Due to the volume of open text responses, it was not feasible to manually review all responses and coding in full. AI-assisted coding (via Ascribe) was used to support the analysis. Ascribe assigns a confidence score to each coded segment. As a general rule, segments with a confidence level below 80% were excluded from analysis, although in some cases this threshold was reduced to 70% where overall coding accuracy was high.

For each code, segments coded at or above the confidence threshold were subject to researcher review through targeted quality assurance checks. This approach aimed to balance robustness with proportionality given the scale of the dataset.

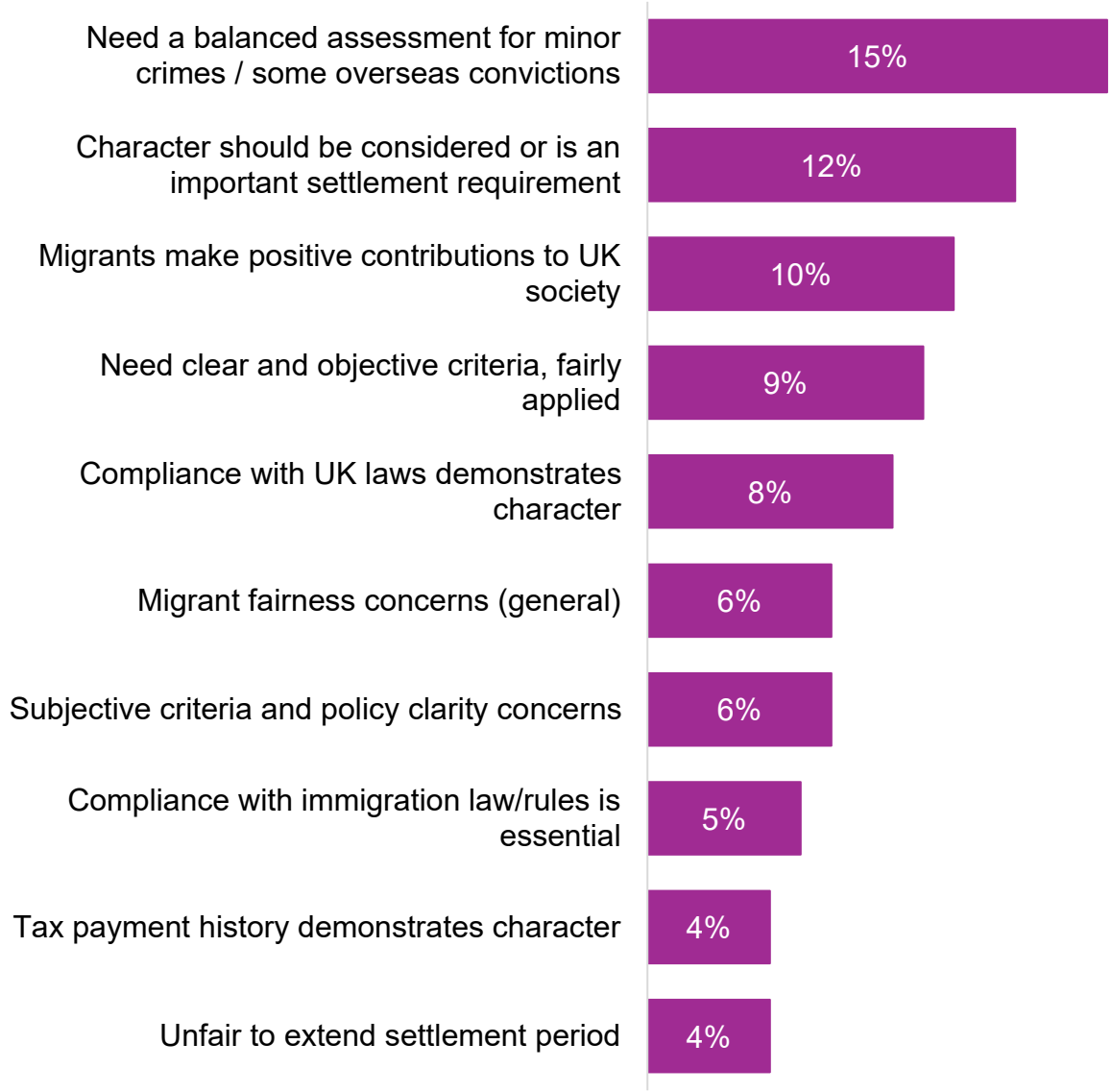
As a result, findings from open text responses are reported descriptively, reflecting the scale and strength of views expressed, rather than precise proportions of respondents holding specific views.

A small proportion of responses followed consistent templates, particularly among certain stakeholder groups (e.g. BN(O) visa holders and care sector workers). These responses typically presented structured arguments and considered both supporting and opposing perspectives. Template responses accounted for less than 1% individually and under 5% collectively across questions. Analysis indicated that these responses broadly aligned with wider response patterns and did not materially skew the findings.

Annex B: Key themes from open text responses

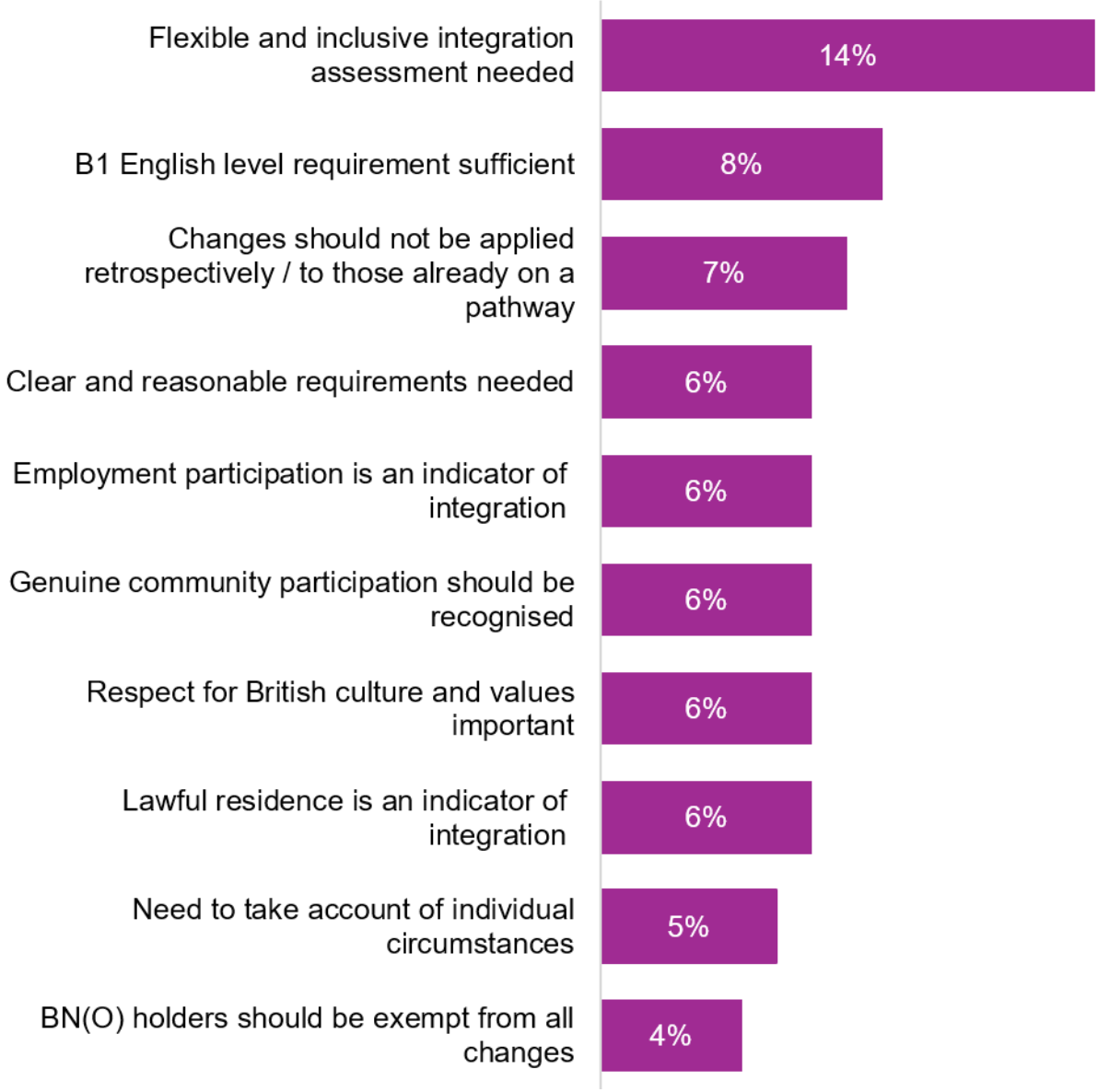
The following figures show the top 10 most commonly reported themes for each open text question, as well as the proportion of coded segments for each. Multiple codes can apply to a single response.

Figure B-1: Most commonly cited themes for 'Character'



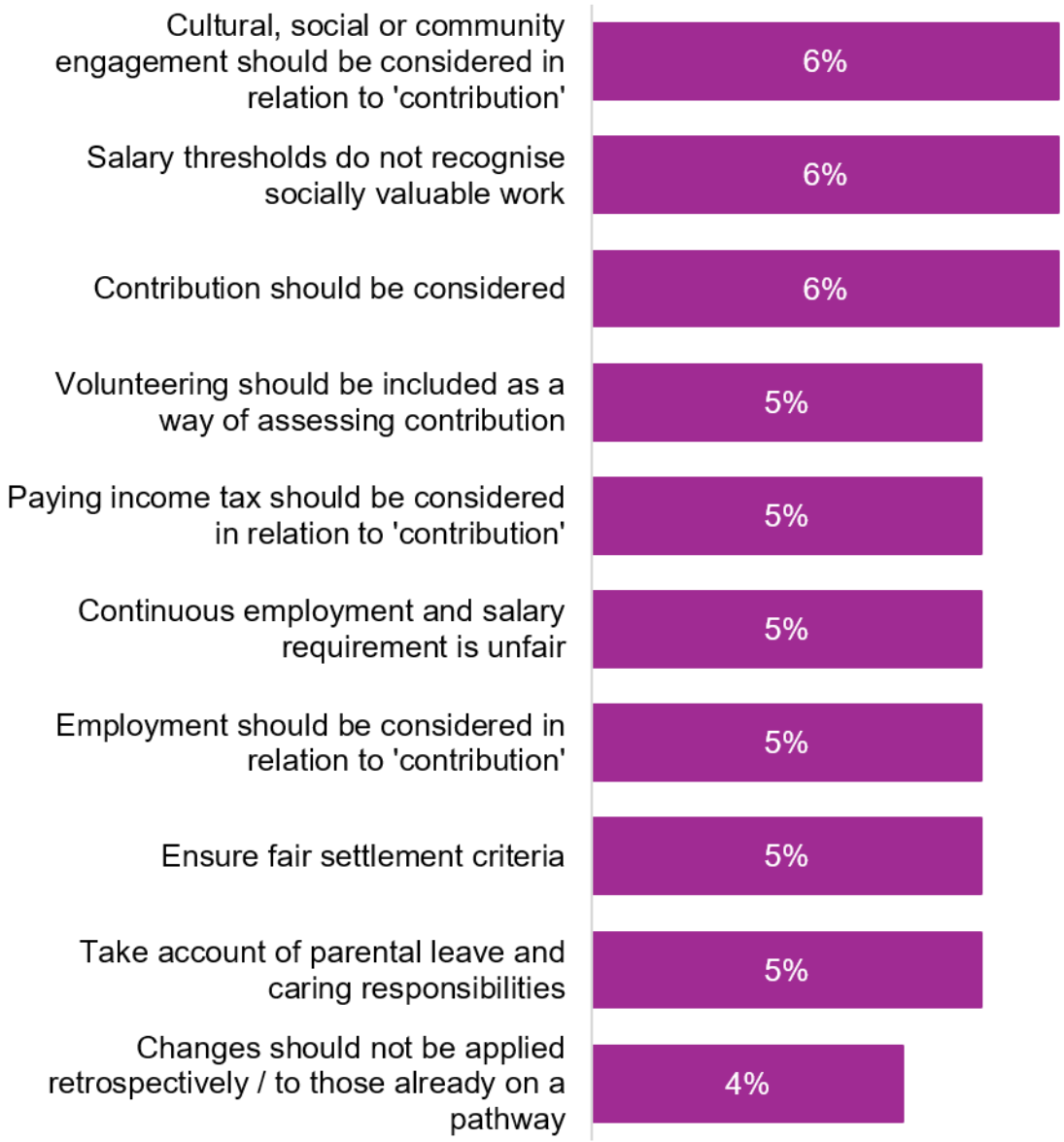
Base B2. Coded segments from responses to open text question 'Do you have any comments on how 'Character' should be considered in relation to settlement?' (113,895 responses).

Figure B-2: Most commonly cited themes for 'Integration'



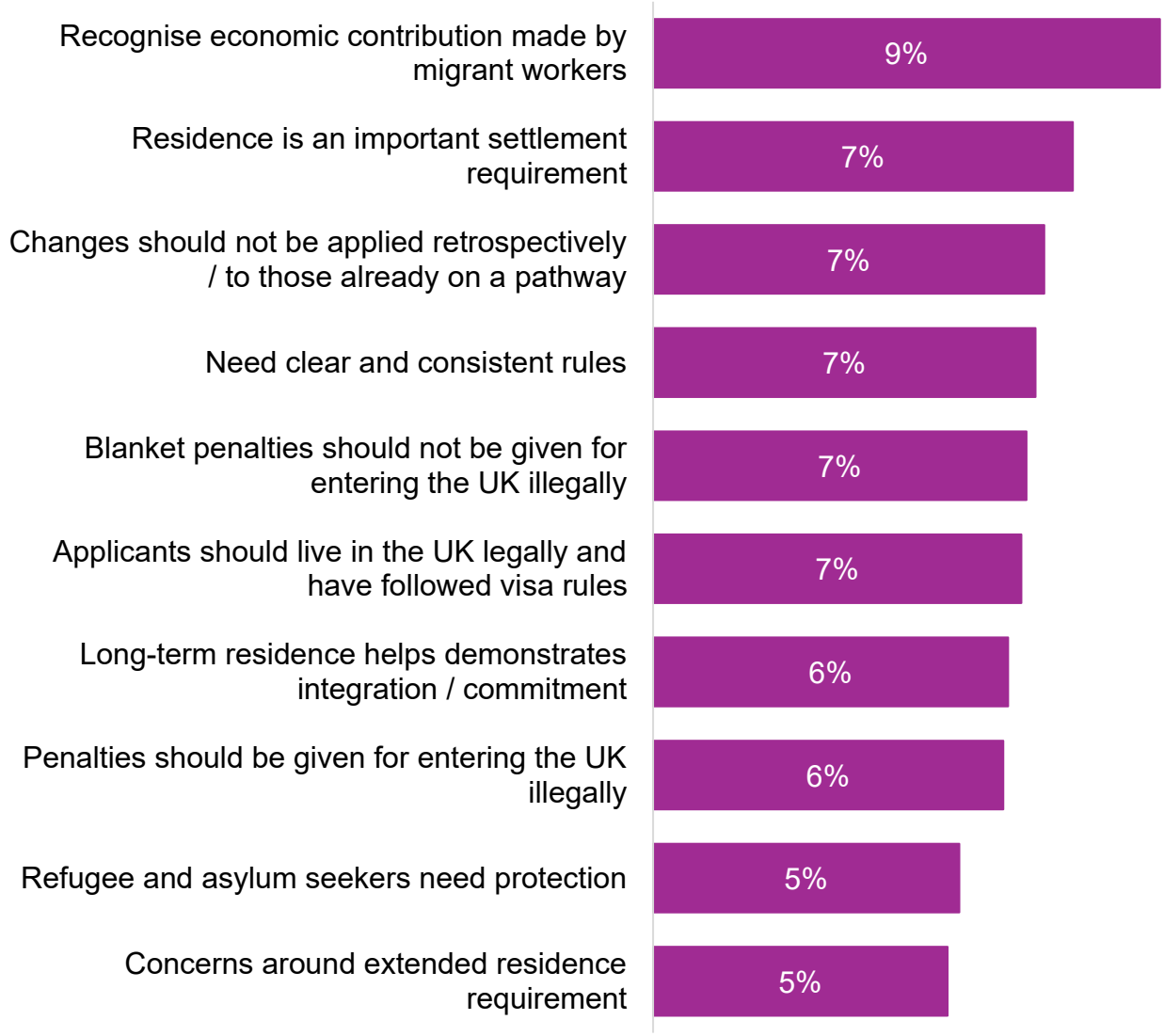
Base C3. Coded segments from responses to open text question 'Do you have any comments on how 'Integration' should be considered in relation to settlement?' (88,880 responses).

Figure B-3: Most commonly cited themes for 'Contribution'



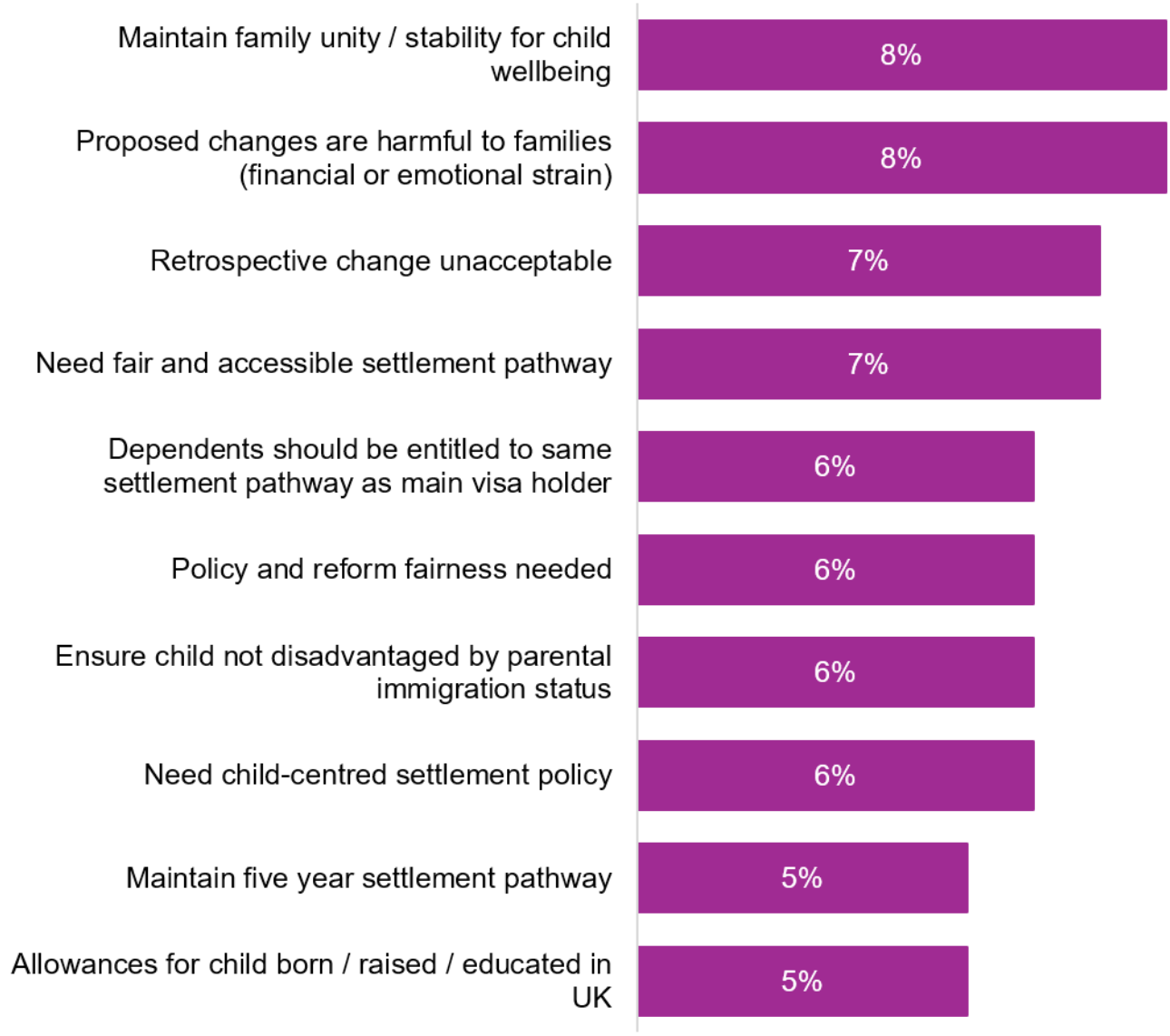
Base D11. Coded segments from responses to open text question 'Do you have any further comments on how 'Contributions' should be considered in relation to settlement, including any potential benefits or challenges of recognising giving back to the community as a contribution towards settlement?' (99,366 responses).

Figure B-4: Most commonly cited themes for 'Residence'



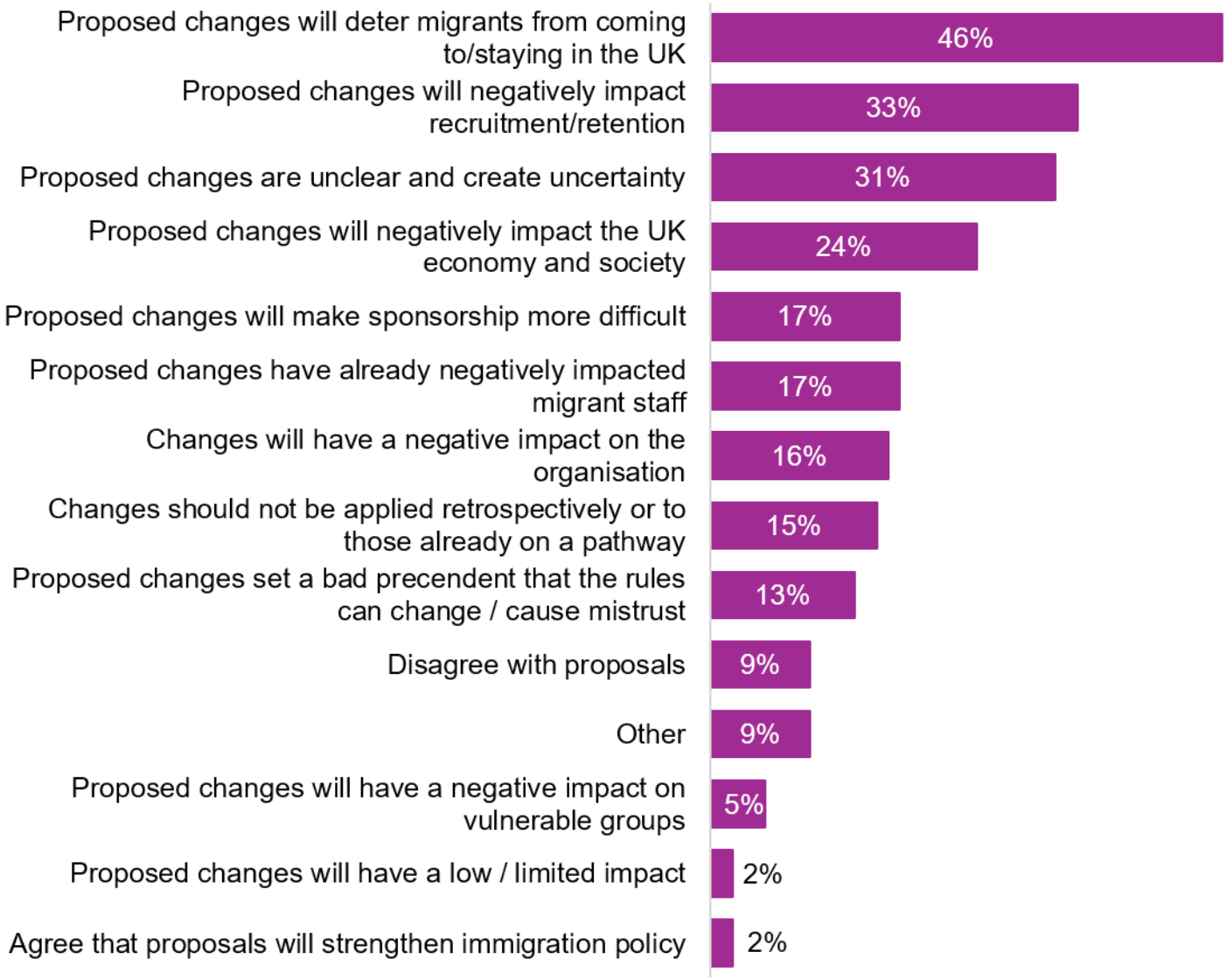
Base E2. Coded segments from responses to open text question 'Do you have any further comments on how 'Residence' should be considered in relation to settlement?' (64,999 responses).

Figure B-5: Comments on how specific groups should be considered



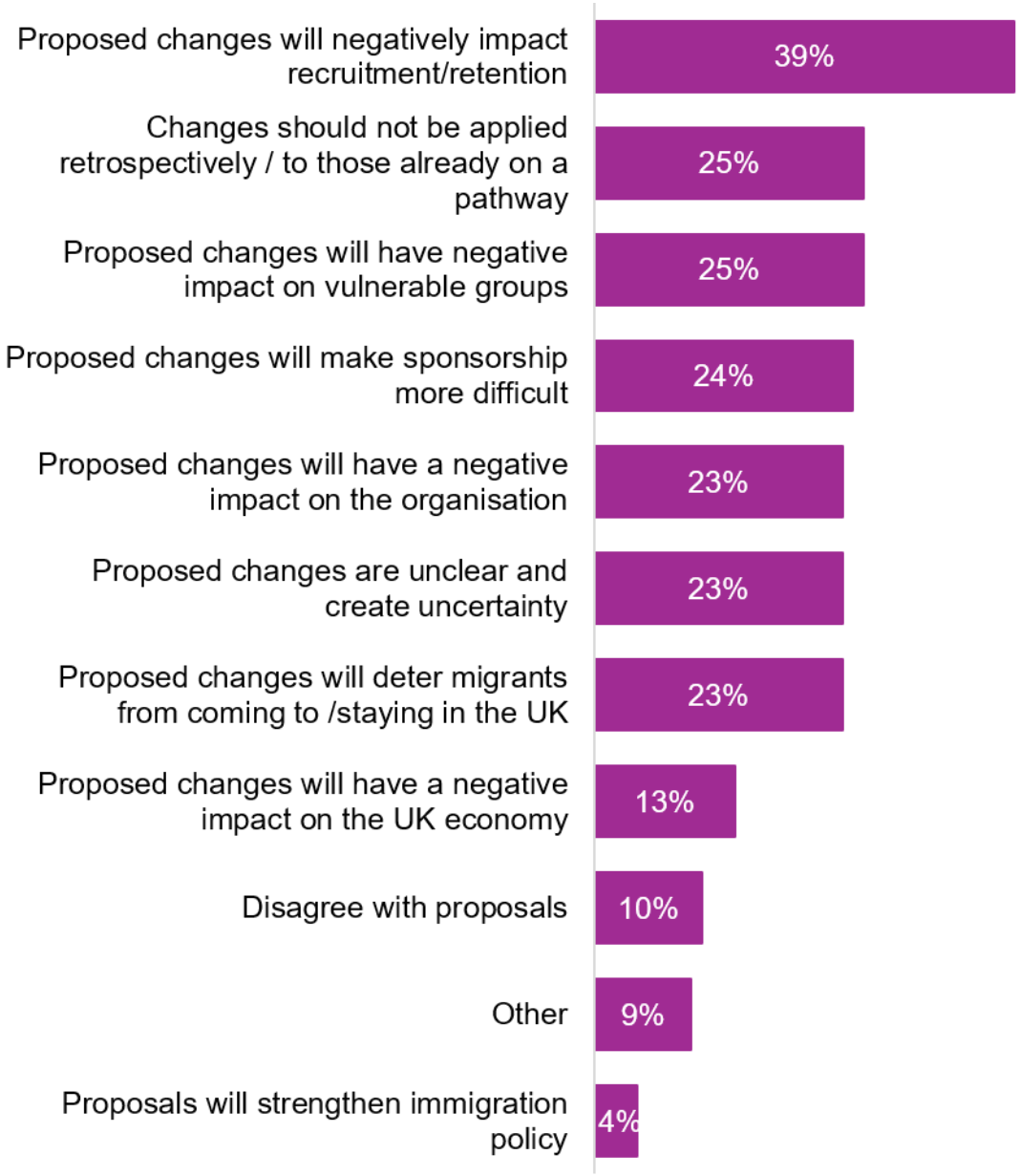
Base F8. Coded segments from responses to open text question 'Do you have any further comments on how specific groups should be considered in relation to settlement? We particularly welcome views on how the proposed changes could affect children in the UK.' (69,749 responses).

Figure B-6: Proposed changes and likely influence on migrant decision making



Base G3. Coded segments from responses to open text question 'Please provide any evidence you may have on whether the proposed changes might influence visa applicants' or visa holders' decisions to come to or remain in the UK.' (1,165 responses; multiple codes can apply to a single response).

Figure B-7: Impact on responding organisation



Base G4. Coded segments from responses to open text question 'Do you have any final comments on the potential impacts on your organisation in relation to the proposed changes to settlement?' (1,346 responses; multiple codes can apply to a single response).