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Mahmood to stop study visas from four countries due to 'abuse'

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REUTERS

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood walks outside of Downing Street

Jennifer McKiernan

Political reporter

3 March 2026

Updated 3 hours ago

The UK government will stop issuing study visas to people from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan from this month, Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood has said, as well as stopping skilled work visas to Afghans.

The Home Office said the action was being taken due to what it said was widespread visa abuse.

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According to official figures, people from the four countries were the most likely to make an asylum claim after originally coming to the UK to study.

"The government is clamping down on visa abuse so the UK can maintain its ability and proud tradition of helping those genuinely in need," a government spokesperson added.

In its release, the government said asylum claims from people who had originally travelled to the UK legally - to do something like studying - had more than tripled between 2021 and 2025.

Home Office figures showed that people claiming asylum off the back of a study visa make up 13% of all claims currently in the system.

Mahmood said she was "taking the unprecedented decision to refuse visas for those nationals seeking to exploit our generosity".

"I will restore order and control to our borders."

The Home Office said a higher proportion of people than average from the four specified country cited destitution as part of their asylum claim, and there were 16,000 people from the four countries currently being supported.

About 95% of Afghans who arrived in the UK on a study visa then applied for asylum since 2021, while applications by students from Myanmar increased 16-fold and claims by students from Cameroon and Sudan more than quadrupled.

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On its reasoning for ending work visas for Afghans, the Home Office also cited the large numbers claiming asylum in the UK once their visas expired.

It said this this posed "an unsustainable threat to the UK's asylum system".

Mahmood will introduce new legislation to stop the issuing of visas through an Immigration Rules change on Thursday 5 March.

In November, the home secretary threatened to shut down all UK visas for Angola, Namibia and the Democratic of Congo unless their governments agreed to take deportations, which led to a resumption of returns flights with all three countries.

The measures follow the prime minister's decision to adopt a more hard-edged approach to diplomacy in response to pressure to reduce immigration from those on the political right, including the Conservatives and Reform UK.

Last week, the government announced protection for refugees **would be halved to 30 months** in an attempt to reduce small boat crossings.

In 2025, a total of 41,472 migrants crossed the Channel in small boats, which was almost 5,000 more than the previous year.

The UK has resettled the sixth largest number of refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the world, which the Home Office said demonstrated the government's commitment to helping those genuinely in need.

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The home secretary will give a speech this week on making the "progressive case" for immigration control.

Last month, about 40 Labour MPs raised concerns about the impact of the proposals to change permanent settlement rights for migrants already living here, describing the retrospective approach as "un-British" and "moving the goalposts".

They have warned it could worsen the UK's skills shortage, particularly in the care sector.

The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were contacted for comment.



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Visa categories and detected entries without permission

January 2025 to December 2025

Study

Work

Family

Other

Note: Detected entries without permission includes small boat arrivals and other irregular methods

Source: Home Office



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