

The Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF



12 February 2026

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of NCVO, the membership community for charities and voluntary organisations in England. Having engaged with our 17,000 members, we are keen to express our shared concerns about the Home Office proposal to make volunteering a route to “earned settlement”.

Since the consultation was launched, we have gathered feedback from over 300 organisations of all sizes. Their message has been clear with 75 % of those organisations we spoke to saying they oppose the proposals.

Volunteering is, by its very nature, an act freely given. These proposals would link it to immigration outcomes, and we believe risks turning it into a transactional requirement rather than an expression of goodwill. Our members tell us that the reality is refugees and migrants already want to volunteer, and that when they do, it fosters community, integration, and belonging. This policy proposal risks undermining these existing positive outcomes by creating conditionality and fails to address the barriers many face to volunteering such as insecure housing, frequent relocation changes and complex DBS checks.

Voluntary organisations are already operating under high levels of strain, with a significant number facing increasing demand and using reserves to meet day-to-day running costs. They cannot absorb additional responsibilities this policy would create, including recruitment, safeguarding, supervision, and reporting. In addition, there is a serious risk that bad actors from outside the voluntary sector could use this proposal to exploit refugees and migrants.

This proposed policy was announced without prior engagement with the sector, undermining the commitment to early engagement and open communication set out in the Civil Society Covenant that was launched by the Prime Minister in summer 2025. The Covenant explicitly states that ‘Government and civil society [will] work together to facilitate and create the conditions for active participation in society, such as volunteering or social action’. Whilst we welcome the constructive engagement from officials since the announcement, for the Covenant to be successful civil society

should have been engaged prior to the launch of the consultation to support better policy outcomes.

We have submitted to the consultation process and encouraged others from the sector to do the same, but in writing today we are urging the Home Office to withdraw this proposal. NCVO and its members stand ready to work constructively on alternative solutions to support integration and to remove existing barriers to volunteering.

I would welcome a meeting to discuss this with you further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Lee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Kate Lee, CEO, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)