

# “It’s a chain around your neck that chokes you more and more”



**Migrant Voice briefing on the impact of the NHS surcharge & visa fees on migrants in the UK**

**27 May 2020**

We welcome the fact that [NHS workers will no longer have to pay an extortionate surcharge](#) to use the healthcare system that they help to sustain.

But this doesn't go far enough. Just like Brits, migrants contribute to the NHS through taxes. Demanding £400 extra per year – rising to £624 from October – is a form of deeply unfair double taxation.

It also adds to the extortionate cost of visas themselves, which are crippling for many.

Because of these combined costs, teachers, bus drivers and other workers across the country are drowning in debt and struggling to feed their children. From October, a family of four renewing their 2.5-year leave to remain will have to pay **£4,132 for the visas + £6,240 for the NHS surcharge** – an unfathomable sum for most people.

We recently had an online meeting with dozens of our members who are struggling because of these fees. One of them is **Caroline\***, whose visa expires next month. She has two British daughters and works as a supervisor in the catering department of a university. She has no idea how she will pay £1,000 for the surcharge and £1,033 for the visa itself in just a few weeks.

“These fees are a constant chain around your neck that chokes you more and more,” she tells us.

And many families who were living on the edge even before Covid-19 now find themselves in freefall, having lost employment through no fault of their own. For them, raising the thousands of pounds to renew their visas is utterly impossible.

The fees are deeply unfair at the best of times; at a time when many people have lost their jobs or are on reduced income, they are indefensible.

Furthermore, to abolish the NHS surcharge only for NHS workers feeds a poisonous narrative – one that has flourished during the Covid-19 pandemic – that says some migrants are worth more than others, that only those who risk their lives on the frontline deserve a semblance of fair treatment, while the rest are left to drown in stress and debt.

**Migrant Voice calls for:**

- **An immediate and automatic one-year extension of all visas**
- **The NHS surcharge to be abolished for everyone**
- **Visa fees for adults to be reduced to administration costs ([usually £150-300](#))**
- **Children’s visas to be free of charge**

## Context

Immigration fees have risen exponentially in the last decade. Ostensibly, this is part of a bid to make the immigration system self-funded, but different fees have been increased by strikingly different amounts, with those in lower paid jobs facing the sharpest increase in costs.

In 2015, the NHS surcharge was added on top at £200/year, rising to £400 in 2019 and to £624 later this year. These incessant and excessive hikes – so far beyond inflation – are pricing out many migrants and are a form of discrimination, against ordinary people, ordinary families.

For a family of four on standard Leave to Remain (LTR) visas, the costs are prohibitively high:

- £1,033 for each LTR application every 2.5 years for 10 years = **£16,528**
- £400 per person per year for the NHS health surcharge = **£16,000** over 10 years (rising to **£24,960** for families arriving after October)
- £2,389 per Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) application after 10 years = **£9,556**
- £1,250 per person for naturalisation = **£5,000**

**Total: £47,084 (rising to £56,044 for families arriving after October)**

If there's a small mistake in an application, or the Home Office rejects it or ignores or loses evidence, families then have to appeal to an immigration tribunal, which can cost £130 plus thousands in legal fees – with no guarantee that the judge will decide in their favour. The only other option is to re-submit the application and pay the fee again.

**Sam\***, another of our members, told us that the Home Office lost his and his wife's passports after submitting them as part of a visa application. They were told to get new ones, at their own cost, despite the Home Office admitting their mistake. The Home Office then refused their original application on the grounds that there was one mistaken date. He and his wife have since submitted a number of new applications, at huge financial cost to themselves.

**But it doesn't have to be this way.** A decade ago, fees in this country were much more affordable and our immigration system was no less functional. We should learn from other Western countries, where fees have remained affordable and where mistakes on either side can be easily rectified without further costs.

In the UK, a 30-month "limited leave to remain" visa costs £1,033. In France, a 12-month visa is just €99, in Italy it's €116. "Indefinite leave to remain" in the UK costs £2,389. In Canada it's \$490, in France €269, in Germany €135. And in most countries, you can get this after five years, not the 10 years that so many people have to wait (and pay visa costs) in the UK.

"Most of the time we can't afford to save for £2100 every 2.5 years," **Caroline\*** says. "We have to go to friends, to credit cards. You're forever in debt, in debt to stay in a country that treats you like you don't belong."

We believe your level of income should not determine what rights you can access. We call on the Government to dismantle this discriminatory system, abolish the NHS surcharge, and bring the fees down to truly affordable levels.

*\* Names have been changed*