

HOW VISA COSTS AFFECT HEALTH

MIGRANT VOICE, 2022



The cost of visas impacts all aspects of the lives of migrants in the UK. With costs exceeding £2,500 per application per person every 2.5 years, and some routes to settlement taking 10 years the impact is devastating.

One of the most worrying effects on migrants on a path to settlement in the UK is the massive impact it has on both their physical and mental health due to high costs, high stress, and long wait times.

Below are examples of how migrants mental and physical health is impacted due to the extortionate cost of visas. These examples come from our report on the Extortionate Cost of Visas - **Destroying hopes, dreams and lives: How the UK visa costs and process impact migrants' lives.**

The pressures from applications, the huge costs, as well as some being in significant amounts of debt often has a detrimental effect on many migrants' physical and mental health, with anxiety over the application process, waiting times, and the struggle to raise funds causing people severe stress. Some people said they were in a "living hell" as paying visa fees makes it "difficult to survive".

People are constantly forced to consider all of their purchases however small. This burden has a detrimental effect on many individuals' mental health, as many expressed during focus groups, interviews, and when completing the survey. One person said, "The financial cost is huge. The social and mental toll is even higher."

Even those able to afford fees without going into debt described the application process and the long waiting times as distressing. Many talked about their permanent feeling of uncertainty, both while they wait after submitting an application and even while they have a visa but are preparing for the next one.

Some migrants discussed feelings of anxiety, depression, loss of self-confidence and stress when it comes to their mental health. Some also experienced insomnia, high blood pressure and fatigue.

Others stated they live in "constant fear" of not being able to pay for their next visa. "The cost of immigration literally destroys ambition and dreams," one said.

A daughter of one of the respondents to our research is currently seeking therapy and her father is on anti-depressants; another respondent suffered a type of brain haemorrhage due to hypertension.

The vast majority of respondents expressed very negative feelings about the impact of the visa fees on their health and how they felt as human beings.

Recurring themes were a negative view of the future, concern about the impact on their families, increasingly negative views about the country, anger and bitterness, precariousness, depression and suicidal feelings. Several respondents expressed feeling that they lack any control over their lives and are worried and uncertain about the future.

In some cases, people experienced physical manifestations of their distress, such as trouble sleeping, high blood pressure, dizziness, and palpitation when thinking about their situation.

This is one of four briefings, looking at the impact of the visa renewal process and costs on mental and physical health, work, food and housing, and debt. The impact and effects of these policies are only likely to get worse with the cost-of-living crisis.

In order to fix this Migrant Voice are calling for

- Visa fees for adults not to be higher than the administrative cost, children should go free,
- Abolish the Immigration Health Surcharge,
- Cap all routes to settlement at 5 years,
- Cut waiting times and improve communication from the Home Office, devise a quicker, simplified and less stressful visa application process