

Migrant Voice briefing on UK immigration fees

A response to the [report](#) published 4 April 2019 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration:

‘An inspection of the policies and practices of the Home Office’s Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Systems relating to charging and fees’

We welcome the recommendations in the report published by the Chief Inspector on 4 April 2019, particularly the call for a detailed breakdown of how immigration fees are calculated and for a review of settlement routes and the fee waiver process. We are pleased that the Home Office has partially accepted those and several other recommendations.

However, we are disappointed that the Home Office has rejected the Inspector’s call for a full public consultation on the issue of Home Office fees, and that the report itself does not recommend any reduction in the fees, which we believe are disproportionate and discriminatory.

High visa costs continue to put undue burdens on families in our communities and are pricing people out of their rights.

It doesn’t have to be this way. An application for permanent residence in France costs just £315, and citizenship a mere £47 – compared to £2,389 and £1,250 in the UK. Permanent residence in Germany is even cheaper – just £115.

Migrant Voice calls for all immigration-related fees to be reduced significantly and brought in line with our European neighbours such as France and Germany. We also call for a pricing system where the fees never exceed the cost to process the application.

‘How can we even afford to put clothes on our children?’

Fees have risen dramatically in the last decade as the government bids to make the visa and immigration system fully self-funded. But a side effect of the incessant and excessive hikes has been to price out most migrants. We believe the high fees 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
 - £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**

That’s if everything goes smoothly. If there’s a small mistake in an application, it will be rejected and the fee must usually be paid again.

For a family who wants to live together in the UK, and has the right to do so, the costs can spiral far beyond what's affordable. They are denied the security of permanent status, denied the chance to be a citizen of this country, denied the rights that citizenship bestows.

We've spoken with a number of people, both migrants and their British families, learning first-hand about the devastating impact of visa fees in this country.

One of those people is a support worker in Birmingham. She works 50 hours per week, often night shifts, and she's a single mother. Just keeping on top of rent, bills and food is hard enough.

"How can we even afford clothes to put on our children? And we still have to be finding these £3,000 to send off for paperwork."

Another woman told us of her fear as she faces the prospect of renewing visas for herself and her children later this year. She gave birth to twins last year, but their visas will expire before they even reach their second birthday, as the Home Office issued them when their mother was only two months pregnant.

'Families are having to choose which kid they apply for'

Many organisations are particularly concerned about the impact of the fees on children and families.

Mohammed Shazad, The Children's Society, told our recent meeting:

"We've had major issues with families that have come back to us a number of times, becoming destitute... and one of the many reasons for that is Home Office fees."

Shazad is also concerned that, while the government does issue fee waivers for destitute applicants or those who would be made destitute by the fee, the difficulty of proving this means that people eligible for the waiver are often refused. In that context, we welcome the Home Office's partial acceptance of the Chief Inspector's recommendation for a review of the fee waiver process.

Immigration solicitor John Sandiford of TRP Solicitors, Birmingham, pointed out at the same meeting that it is often children who lose out the most, despite Section 55 of the [Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009](#), which states that immigration decisions must be made with "regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children".

"Families are having to choose which kid they apply for, which child should have status and which child it is that shouldn't have status because they can't afford to pay the fees."

Organisations such as the Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens (PRCBC) and Amnesty International UK are calling for significant reductions to the citizenship fee for children, and we support their campaign.

But the government must go further than that – and further than the recommendations in the Chief Inspector's report. And they must act quickly. With each passing week, more families are being forced to bankrupt themselves, just to access their rights.

We call on the government to dismantle this discriminatory system and bring all immigration fees down to truly affordable levels.