

HOW VISA COSTS AFFECT HOUSING AND FOOD

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 impact the pressure of these fees have on families' food and housing situation.

Below are examples of the impact that the extortionate cost of visas has on housing and food security for migrants in the UK. 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.**

Many migrants paying extortionate visa fees feel unable to lead what they consider a "normal" life, with the quality of their housing and food highlighted as a key area. Their wishes and visions of a life without fees entail proper accommodation, safety, security, enough resources for their families, and the stability needed to plan for the future.

Some said that they were unable to feed their children properly. They were usually forced to choose the cheapest options when grocery shopping, sometimes foregoing quality. In some cases, this can mean going "without food sometimes" or missing "breakfast, sometimes lunch."

Some had to access food banks due to the impact of visa costs, despite working long hours as most of their income had to be put aside for the upcoming visa fees. "I can't feed my kids due to the visa fees and borrowing money."

The housing conditions of many respondents are also affected by visa costs. Participants mentioned the impossibility of saving money to buy a house, or denounced poor housing conditions, including living in crowded accommodations, lack of space and lack of heating. One focus group participant said she is sharing her home with five others but sees no alternative as she must save to pay for her visa fees.

Accommodation becomes more precarious as accumulating debts and going into rent arrears is a real risk especially when so much income must be paid into visa fees. A respondent told us, “I am in debt and rent arrears which I have failed to recover from the last renewal in 2019.” Another wrote: “In order to save [for] visa fees I was ... homeless.”

The pandemic has worsened the impact on people’s lives in terms of their housing situation as well as their family life. One respondent said they have been made homeless, while others talked about their struggles living in cramped conditions in shared houses.

Please note that the research presented in the report and, in this briefing, was conducted in 2021 – since then we recognise that due to many factors including rising inflation and a sharp increase in the cost of living that many families across the UK are currently struggling with the same consequences that those paying visa fees face.

While we acknowledge the struggles that millions of people are currently facing, we do note that on top of rising costs, there are tens of thousands of migrants who are having to pay additional thousands of pounds to the Home Office.

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