

# HOW VISA COSTS AFFECT WORK

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 are the reports of people working in exploitative conditions in order to pay for the visa fees and other associated costs of renewing their visas.

Below are examples of how migrants' work lives are affected 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.**

**In order to pay the extortionate fees to renew their visas – the cost of which is in some cases 7-10 times higher than the actual administrative cost of processing them, many go into debt.** Debt was an issue for two thirds of our respondents and people have told us of debts reaching £30,000.

**Due to pressures from upcoming fees and existing debt, migrants are at a significant risk of exploitation at work.** They are also often trapped in sub-standard housing, while many reported that they were unable to feed their children properly, and parents sometimes had to forgo meals to keep their children fed. This also has a significant impact on mental and physical health.

Although legally entitled to continue working while waiting for a visa renewal decision, there is a real risk of losing one's job every 2.5 years. **Employers often do not allow people to work if their visas have expired even if they have applied for their next visa, leading some migrants to spend more money to avoid waiting for too long without any form of paid labour.** Under what's known as 3c Leave, migrants who have applied for their next visa maintain the rights they have from their previous visa – but due to the hostile environment, many employers are nervous to keep someone employed under these regulations.

**Some employers take advantage of the situation, knowing that employees are in a vulnerable position.** One focus group participant said that, since her managers know about her visa situation, they demand that she come in for a shift with less than the mandatory notice and they hint at possible "cuts" that would leave her unemployed and unable to pay for her fees.

**Many survey respondents discussed how their job often takes over their lives to ensure they can save money to meet the cost of visas. Some are forced to work long hours, weekends, and have to choose their job over seeing friends and family, ruining relationships and negatively affecting their mental health.**

Despite the respondents not mentioning the precise number of hours they work, many state that they are (or have been) forced to work long hours – even up to 80 hours per week.

A respondent mentioned that her “husband has had to work jobs that were stressful for minimum wage,” and another writes, “Walk to work. Work extra hard with little or no good rest.”

**Having to pay this huge amount for visa fees can mean being forced to work while seriously ill**, as one respondent stated: “If I am in pain still I have to work though I am on strong medication since September 2016 but I need to earn for my day to day living.”

**Many participants described how their career choices had been affected by their visa status.** Some said that their immigration status or financial situation made it impossible to study and take up their career of choice (such as nursing); others expressed how the persistent worry about visa fees makes them work longer hours, sometimes in multiple jobs. In yet another of the many vicious cycles created by the high costs of visas, several people explained how they were forced into lower-paying jobs because they needed to work there and then, and could not afford to be unemployed while studying, training or looking for better opportunities.

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