

Research Briefing

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By CJ McKinney

Immigration fees



Summary

- 1 Immigration fee levels
- 2 Fee increases over time
- 3 Recent developments and Parliamentary interest
- 4 What do other countries do?

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Summary

People who want a visa, permission to stay or citizenship in the UK usually have to pay for it. Fees have risen significantly over the past 20 years, most recently in October 2023. For example, applications to settle in the UK indefinitely used to be free but now cost £2,900. The Government deliberately charges above the cost of processing applications to help fund the wider borders and immigration system.

The application fee and health surcharge often cost thousands of pounds

As well as headline application fees, an immigration health surcharge of £624 per year is levied on visas and extensions. This is due to increase to £1,035 per year in 2024.

There is also an employer levy of up to £1,000 a year on work permits. All in, a five-year work visa will cost around £9,000 in 2024, and a two-and-a-half-year partner visa £5,000.

There are some exemptions from fees and surcharge for certain groups, in particular applications for asylum or under the EU Settlement Scheme. People who cannot afford to pay for family routes or child citizenship can also apply for a fee waiver.

The Home Office generates a surplus on visa fees to cross-subsidise border security

Successive governments have taken the view that the people who benefit most from the immigration system (migrants themselves) should contribute to its costs. The Home Office wants migration and borders operations to be largely self-funding. Its UK Visas and Immigration arm, which processes applications, aims to recover twice as much in fees as it spends.

But generating income is not the only relevant consideration. The Immigration Act 2014 permits the Home Secretary to take account of economic growth in setting fees, along with costs, benefits to migrants and a few other factors. The Government says it tries to strike a balance between economic growth and properly funding the immigration system.

Fees have increased significantly above inflation in recent years

Until 2003, the UK charged nothing at all for visa extensions, work permits and settlement. Fees for initial visas and citizenship were relatively modest. A student visa cost £33.

The Blair Government began charging above the processing cost in order to fund wider immigration activities. Later governments continued that process and added the health surcharge (2015) and an employer levy (2017). Government income from immigration and nationality fees rose from £184 million in 2003 to £2,200 million in 2022, not including another £1,700 million in health surcharge and £600 million in employer levies.

Application fees recently went up 15–35%, and the health surcharge will rise 66% in 2024

In July 2023, the Government announced an increase in both headline fees and the health surcharge. On 4 October, work and visit visa fees went up by 15%, family visas, settlement and citizenship by 20%, and student visas by 35%. For example, settlement increased from around £2,400 to £2,900.

The health surcharge will rise by 66% to £1,035 a year no earlier than 16 January 2024, assuming parliamentary approval.

Other developed countries charge less

UK immigration costs are much higher than those in many other countries, including Canada, Germany, France and the USA, according to a 2021 report published by the Royal Society. This is not a strict like-for-like comparison because of the health surcharge being paid up front, whereas other countries charge ongoing health insurance premiums. But even without the surcharge, UK Skilled Worker visa costs were still considerably higher than the other countries studied.

1 Immigration fee levels

People applying for a visa, extension, settlement or British citizenship usually have to pay a fee to have the application considered. The fees fund Home Office immigration and border operations. There is a separate immigration health surcharge levied on visas and extensions to fund the NHS, and an employer levy on work visas. All must be paid up front.

Application fees were increased in October 2023 and the health surcharge is due to rise in early 2024 (see section 3 below).

1.1 How much are the fees?

Application fees

Application fees vary depending on the category and duration of immigration status being applied for. They also change at least once a year, so this briefing should not be relied upon for the latest rates; [a list of current fees is on GOV.UK](#).

To give a flavour, at time of writing:

- A six-month visitor visa cost £115
- A student visa for the duration of the course cost £490
- A three-year work visa cost £719
- Permission to stay in the UK as a spouse cost £1,048
- Settlement cost £2,885
- Naturalisation as a British citizen cost £1,500¹

Immigration health surcharge

Most migrants moving to the UK also need to pay a separate '[immigration health surcharge](#)'. This is levied on most forms of temporary immigration permission (visitor visas and asylum applications are exempt). The money raised is ringfenced for healthcare spending.

¹ Home Office, [Immigration and nationality fees: 4 October 2023](#), 15 September 2023. Excludes smaller biometric enrolment, test and ceremony fees, and optional priority fees.

At time of writing, the immigration health surcharge was £624 per year, or £470 for students and children.² That means it is generally higher than the headline application fee. For example, someone applying for a Skilled Worker visa valid for three years would pay £719 in application fees plus £1,872 in surcharge. Both must be paid up front at the point of application, but only the surcharge is refunded if the application is refused.

Immigration skills charge

Employers sponsoring migrants for work visas pay an additional levy of £1,000 per year, or £364 for smaller businesses. Getting and renewing a sponsor licence, and issuing sponsorship certificates, also attract fees. Some companies may choose to bear the visa application and surcharge costs on behalf of employees being sponsored.³

A 2022 case study on the Free Movement website gives an indicative total cost for a small business to sponsor a single migrant worker with no dependants, assuming it bears all fees and charges, of around £7,000.⁴ The equivalent figure for 2024 will be over £9,000, taking into account recent and forthcoming increases (see section 3 below).

1.2

Who doesn't have to pay?

Group exemptions

There is no application fee or immigration health surcharge for certain categories, in particular applications for asylum or under the EU Settlement Scheme. Children being looked after by a local authority are also exempt.⁵ The No Recourse to Public Funds Network has [more information about exempt categories and groups](#).⁶

Individual exceptions

It is also possible to [apply for permission not to pay, known as a 'fee waiver'](#), in certain categories. These fall under three broad headings.

First, it is possible to apply for a fee waiver for certain family visas. This includes visas granted under [Appendix FM to the Immigration Rules](#), which covers the main family immigration routes such as for spouses/partners of British citizens. The test for granting a fee waiver is whether the applicant and

² [Immigration \(Health Charge\) Order 2015 \(SI 2015/792\), sch 1](#)

³ Home Office, [Skilled Worker visa: early insights evaluation](#), 15 July 2022

⁴ Free Movement, [How much does it cost to sponsor someone for a UK work visa?](#), 27 April 2022

⁵ Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/330), [sch 2, para 9.6](#); [sch 3, para 13.4.1](#); [sch 8, para 20A.3](#)

⁶ NRPF Network, [Immigration application fees](#), accessed 29 August 2023. The network supports people who are unable to access benefits because of their immigration status.

sponsor have credibly demonstrated that they cannot afford to pay. Waivers can be granted for both the application fee and health surcharge, or for just the surcharge.⁷

Second, a similar waiver scheme is available for people applying for permission to stay in the UK on family or human rights grounds. Again, the fundamental requirement is to show that the applicant and sponsor cannot afford the fee after meeting their “essential living needs”. The Home Office expects detailed evidence of financial circumstances.⁸

Third, fee waivers are available for children applying for British citizenship.⁹ This normally costs around £1,000. Campaigners had long complained that the fee excluded some families from being able to avail of their child’s right to citizenship. In 2022, the Supreme Court held that charging for child citizenship was legal but the Government decided to bring in a fee waiver scheme anyway.¹⁰

The Home Secretary has broad discretion to waive or refund application fees under provisions scattered throughout the fee regulations.¹¹ The same applies to the immigration health surcharge.¹² But unless there is a dedicated application process to apply for a waiver or refund, as in the cases above, it is not clear how this discretion can be requested in practice.

1.3

How are fees decided?

Successive governments have taken the view that the people who benefit most from the immigration system (migrants themselves) should contribute to its costs, reducing the contribution from general taxation.

A 2022 written statement by the immigration minister explains the idea that the Home Office should raise money from migrants to spend on its immigration functions:

... the department has pursued an approach over the last decade of progressively increasing the role fees play in funding the borders and

⁷ Home Office, [Affordability fee waiver: overseas Human Rights-based applications \(Article 8\)](#), version 1.0, 16 June 2022; Free Movement, [Free family visas: the entry clearance fee waiver policy](#), 30 June 2022

⁸ Home Office, [Fee waiver: Human Rights-based and other specified applications](#), version 6.0, 8 April 2022; Free Movement, [In-country fee waivers: who qualifies and what does the Home Office guidance say?](#), 12 July 2022

⁹ Home Office, [Affordability fee waiver: Citizenship registration for individuals under the age of 18](#), version 1.0, 26 May 2022; Free Movement, [Children can now apply for a waiver of citizenship fees](#), 26 May 2022

¹⁰ *R (O) v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2022] UKSC 3*, 2 February 2022; [Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022, SI 2022/581](#), laid on 26 May 2022

¹¹ [Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) Regulations 2018, SI 2018/330](#), for example [sch 1, para 5.1 on visa fee waivers](#) and [reg 13D on refunds of any and all fees](#)

¹² [Immigration \(Health Charge\) Order 2015, SI 2015/792, art 8](#)

migration system. This self-funding model serves to ensure those who benefit from the system contribute to its effective operation and maintenance, while reducing reliance on taxpayer funding. This in turn helps to ensure the system is able to support the Home Office's priority outcomes, including enabling the legitimate movement of people and goods to support economic prosperity, and tackling illegal migration, removing those with no right to be here and protecting the vulnerable.¹³

This does not necessarily mean that fees need to fund 100% of spending on immigration. The 2015 spending review targeted a “fully self-funded borders and immigration system”, excluding customs and asylum.¹⁴ By 2019 this had been reduced to an “ambition” to increase the extent to which services are funded by fees.¹⁵

The Home Office now says it wants a “largely self-funded” system, with frontline operations “substantially recovered through fees”.¹⁶ UK Visas and Immigration has a cost recovery target for processing applications of 202%.¹⁷

In 2021/22, around 40% of the cost of the migration and borders system was covered by fee income, according to the Home Office.¹⁸ It gives the cost of the system as £4,800 million, which matches spending on the following arms of the department: Migration and Borders Group (£250 million); UK Visas and Immigration and HM Passport Office (£880 million); Border Force and Immigration Enforcement (£1,060 million); Asylum and Protection Group (£2,580 million).¹⁹

Generating income is not the only relevant factor. In particular, visa fees affect the economy, because prospective tourists and migrant workers could be deterred if costs are too high. The Government says it tries to strike a balance “between setting fee levels to support economic growth whilst ensuring that the immigration system is properly funded”.²⁰

[Section 68\(9\) of the Immigration Act 2014](#) lists the things that the Home Secretary can take into account when setting fees for immigration and nationality functions:

the Secretary of State may have regard only to—

¹³ [HCWS65](#), 26 May 2022

¹⁴ 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](#), 4 April 2019, pp15-16

¹⁵ As above, p2

¹⁶ Home Office impact assessment, [Immigration and nationality \(fees\) and passport \(fees\) \(amendment\) regulations 2023 \(PDF\)](#), 9 January 2023, para 1

¹⁷ Home Office, [Annual report and accounts: 2022 to 2023](#), HC 1355, 19 September 2023, p198

¹⁸ [Explanatory memorandum to the Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) \(Amendment\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2023, SI 2023/1004](#), para 7.4

¹⁹ Home Office, [Annual report and accounts: 2022 to 2023](#), HC 1355, 19 September 2023, p241

²⁰ Home Office, [Impact Assessment for Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) Regulations 2021 \(PDF\)](#), 6 September 2021, para 5

- (a) the costs of exercising the function;
- (b) benefits that the Secretary of State thinks are likely to accrue to any person in connection with the exercise of the function;
- (c) the costs of exercising any other function in connection with immigration or nationality;
- (d) the promotion of economic growth;
- (e) fees charged by or on behalf of governments of other countries in respect of comparable functions;
- (f) any international agreement.

Impact assessments published alongside major fee increases [give information about the methodology and assumptions involved](#) (for example, if visitor visa fees were increased, how much would that reduce the number of visitors to the UK?). But the immigration inspector has noted that exact calculations are not made public, and there is “scant information about costs”.²¹

The fact that immigration fees are of interest to other government departments apart from the Home Office and Treasury is reflected in governance arrangements. As of 2019, a Cross-Whitehall Fees Committee of senior civil servants considered Home Office proposals for fee changes, and final approval was given by a sub-committee of the Cabinet.²²

The immigration health surcharge is set separately from the application fees. The policy is to broadly cover the cost of NHS services to migrants while exempting migrants who work for the NHS.²³ Money raised from the surcharge is intended for healthcare spending and is not retained by the Home Office.

Legal mechanics of changing the fees

The legal power to charge application fees is in [section 68\(1\) of the Immigration Act 2014](#).

Assuming the power to charge is exercised, the act then requires two pieces of secondary legislation:

- A fees order specifying what can be charged for, how the fee is calculated and an upper limit on the amount
- Fee regulations setting the actual amount

²¹ 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](#), 4 April 2019, para 3.10

²² As above, paras 5.22-5.25

²³ Home Office, [Updating the Immigration Health Surcharge, 2020 \(PDF\)](#), 16 July 2020, p1

A fees order must be approved in advance by a vote of both Houses of Parliament: the [draft affirmative procedure](#).²⁴ By contrast, the fee regulations are made under the [negative procedure](#), so do not require a vote. Both must have the consent of the Treasury.²⁵

The current fees order was made in 2016 and has been amended several times. It provides, for example, that the maximum amount that can be charged for a standard visitor visa is £140.²⁶ The current fee regulations then prescribe that the actual visitor visa fee is £115.²⁷

The immigration health surcharge is authorised by [section 38 of the 2014 Act](#) and the amount is set by a separate order.²⁸

Cost of processing applications

Before the early 2000s, the philosophy behind fees was to charge enough to recover the administrative costs of processing the application.²⁹ The Blair Government began charging above the processing cost in order to fund wider immigration activities, such as the appeal system and enforcement activity.³⁰ As mentioned above, the policy today is that fees should fund as much of the immigration and border system as possible.

This means that application fees are no longer constrained by processing costs; these costs are only one of several factors that the Home Secretary can take into account when setting fees.³¹

The Home Office publishes [estimated processing costs for different types of application](#).³² Charities and advocacy groups often draw attention to the fact that the fee charged is usually much higher than the processing cost. For example, a settlement application costs around £650 to process but the fee at time of writing was £2,900.

²⁴ [Immigration Act 2014, s74\(2\)\(j\)](#)

²⁵ [Immigration Act 2014, s69\(1\)](#)

²⁶ [Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) Order 2016, SI 2016/117, art 4](#)

²⁷ [Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) Regulations 2018, SI 2018/330, sch 1, table 1, para 1.1.1](#)

²⁸ [Immigration \(Health Charge\) Order 2015, SI 2015/792](#)

²⁹ [HC Deb 25 February 2003 c431W](#); Home Office, [Review of charges for immigration applications \(PDF\)](#), September 2004, para 1.2

³⁰ Immigration (Leave to Remain) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2005, SI 2005/654, [explanatory memorandum](#), para 3.1; Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, [A response to the consultation on a new charging regime for immigration & nationality fees \(PDF\)](#), March 2007, p3 (foreword)

³¹ [Immigration Act 2014, s68\(9\)\(a\)](#)

³² UK Visas and Immigration, [Visa fees transparency data](#), accessed on 23 October 2023

2

Fee increases over time

The result of the Government's policy of charging above the cost of processing applications to cross-subsidise other areas of the immigration system is that rates have increased significantly above inflation in recent years. The introduction of the immigration health surcharge in 2015 has added to the costs for applicants, and to government revenue.

Before 2003, fees were comparatively low or non-existent. Naturalisation as a British citizen at that time cost £150, while a student visa cost £33.³³ There was no charge for applications from within the UK for permission to stay ('leave to remain' or 'indefinite leave to remain') until 1 August 2003, when a fee of £155 was introduced.³⁴ Work permit fees for employers were also introduced that year, at a rate of £95.³⁵

In 2003/04, Home Office income from immigration and nationality fees was around £72 million.³⁶ Visa fees were at that time collected by the Foreign Office, which raised £112 million, for a total of £184 million.³⁷ By contrast, combined fee income in 2022/23 was £2,200 million. A further £1,700 million was collected in health surcharge and £600 million in skills charge (neither of which are retained by the department).³⁸

Significant fee increases under Labour Governments took place in 2005, 2007 and 2010, in each case following a consultation process. The incoming Coalition Government undertook a second round of increases later in 2010.

After 2015, fee rises were accompanied by the introduction of the health surcharge, which was itself increased in 2019 and 2020. For example, a typical spouse visa cost £885 in 2014 but £2,064 (including £600 surcharge) in 2017 and £3,395 (including £1,872 surcharge) by 2020.³⁹ The immigration skills charge, an employer levy of up to £1,000 a year for each person on a sponsored work visa, was introduced in 2017.⁴⁰

³³ [British Nationality \(Fees\) Regulations 2003, SI 2003/3157, sch. para 2](#); [Consular Fees \(No. 2\) Order 1999, SI 1999/3132, sch. para 20\(1\)\(b\)\(i\)](#)

³⁴ [Immigration \(Leave to Remain\) \(Fees\) Regulations 2003, SI 2003/1711](#)

³⁵ [Immigration Employment Document \(Fees\) Regulations 2003, SI 2003/541](#)

³⁶ Home Office, [Resource Accounts 2004-05 \(PDF\)](#), HC 826, 31 January 2006, p56 (sum of income for 'nationality fees', 'immigration: certificates right of abode', 'immigration: additional services', 'work permits' and 'leave to remain')

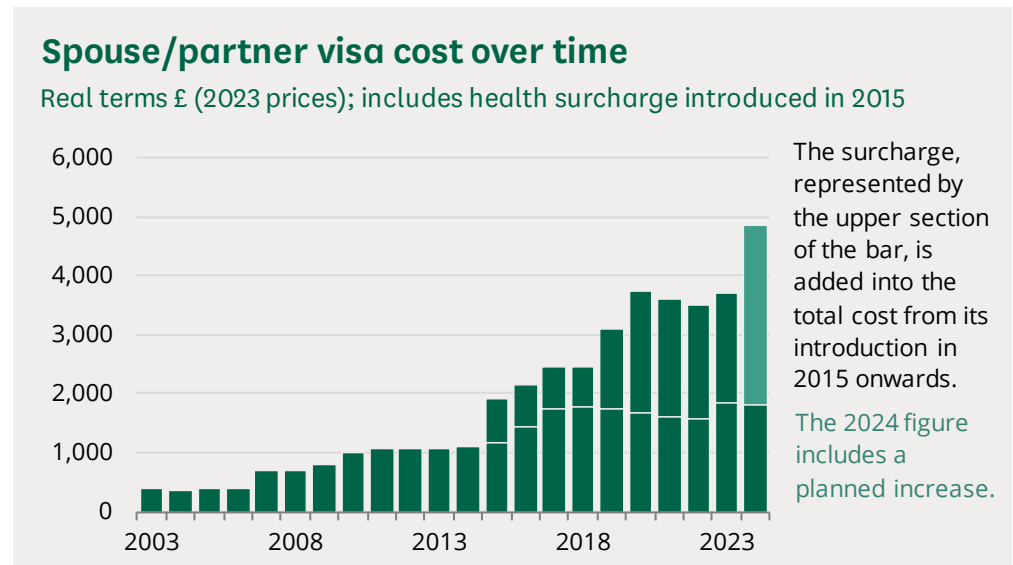
³⁷ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Resource Accounts 2004-05 \(PDF\)](#), HC 776, 19 December 2005, p29. Visas were transferred entirely to the Home Office from 1 April 2008.

³⁸ Home Office, [Annual report and accounts: 2022 to 2023](#), HC 1355, 19 September 2023, pp247 and 284

³⁹ Entry clearance for spouses is [granted for two years and nine months](#), so three years of surcharge is due because [the rules require rounding up](#).

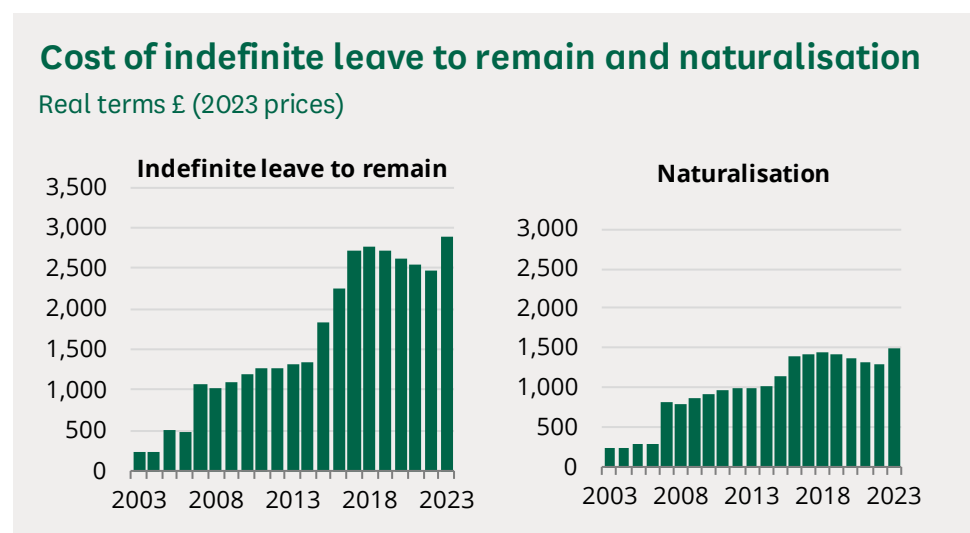
⁴⁰ [Immigration Skills Charge Regulations 2017, SI 2017/499](#)

The chart below shows the change in the price of a spouse visa, including immigration health surcharge from 2015, taking inflation into account. It includes a planned increase to the surcharge in 2024.⁴¹



Sources: Immigration (Health Charge) Order 2015, SI 2015/792; Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Regulations 2007-2018 (as amended); Consular Fees Orders 1999-2007; HM Treasury, [GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP September 2023](#). GDP deflator growth for 2020/21 and 2021/22 have been averaged across the two years to smooth the distortions caused by pandemic-related factors. OBR forecasts are used for 2021/22.

The charge for indefinite leave to remain (settlement) began at £155 in 2003 and rose to £840 in April 2010, to £1,500 in 2015 and £2,300 in 2017.⁴²



Sources: As above. GDP deflator growth for 2020/21 and 2021/22 have been averaged across the two years to smooth the distortions caused by pandemic-related factors. OBR forecasts are used for 2021/22. Excludes test and ceremony fees.

⁴¹ [Draft Immigration \(Health Charge\) \(Amendment\) Order 2023, art 1](#)

⁴² Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, [Migrant Settlement in the UK](#), 26 August 2020, Figure 7; [Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\)\(No.2\) Regulations 2010, SI 2010/2807, reg 12](#)

3 Recent developments and Parliamentary interest

3.1 Increases in 2023 and 2024

On 13 July 2023, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced increases to application fees and the health surcharge.⁴³ The application fee changes [came into effect on 4 October 2023](#). The surcharge increase [will take effect no earlier than 16 January 2024](#), assuming parliamentary approval.

The increases include:

- Work and visitor visas rising by 15%
- Family visas, settlement and citizenship rising by 20%
- Student visas rising by 35%
- The immigration health surcharge rising by 66%, from £624 a year to £1,035 (and from £470 to £776 for students and under-18s)

For example, a three-year Skilled Worker visa in a shortage occupation previously cost around £2,350 in application fees and surcharge. Once both increases are implemented, the combined cost will be £3,650 (ignoring employer levy and sponsorship certificate). Settlement has increased from around £2,400 to £2,900.

The Government estimates that the increase to application fees will raise an extra £560 million a year in 2024/25.⁴⁴ This will (indirectly) help to fund a pay rise for the police.

The health surcharge increase is estimated to raise an extra £1.1 billion a year in 2024/25.⁴⁵ This will help to fund a pay rise for doctors.

Reaction to the changes

Barrister Colin Yeo noted that section 68 of the Immigration Act 2014 does not permit the Home Secretary to have regard to police pay in setting

⁴³ [HC Deb 13 July 2023 c526](#)

⁴⁴ [Explanatory memorandum to the Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) \(Amendment\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2023, SI 2023/1004](#), para 7.4

⁴⁵ [Explanatory memorandum to the draft Immigration \(Health Charge\) \(Amendment\) Order 2023](#), table 8

immigration fees.⁴⁶ Perhaps with this in mind, the announcement was carefully phrased: the fee increases “will help to cover more of the cost of the migration and border system, allowing the Home Secretary to divert more funding to police forces to help fund the pay rise for the police”. The cost of the migration and border system is a permissible consideration.

Madeleine Sumption of the Oxford University Migration Observatory predicted that the increases will “fall unevenly on different groups”, with people seeking family visas worst affected.⁴⁷

Migrants’ rights organisations and other interest groups oppose the increases.⁴⁸

Secondary legislation to increase the fees/surcharge

The Government [laid regulations to increase the application fees on 15 September 2023](#).⁴⁹ They came into force at 9am on 4 October.

This was done under the made negative procedure, meaning the changes do not need parliamentary approval.⁵⁰ Either House may however pass a motion to annul the regulations within the objection period, [which in this case ends on 17 November 2023](#).

Implementing the 66% surcharge increase means changing the [Immigration \(Health Charge\) Order 2015](#). This is done under the draft affirmative procedure, meaning there must be a positive vote in each House.

The [draft Immigration \(Health Charge\) \(Amendment\) Order 2023](#) was laid on 19 October 2023. It will come into force on 16 January 2024 or 21 days after it becomes law, whichever is later. For example, if the amending order did not receive final parliamentary approval until 22 January 2024, the surcharge increase would not take effect until 12 February.

The Government has [published a draft impact assessment](#) alongside the draft order itself. It estimates that additional health surcharge revenue as a result of the change will be £6.2 billion by the end of 2028.

⁴⁶ Free Movement, [Massive increases to immigration fees announced](#), 13 July 2023

⁴⁷ Madeleine Sumption (@M_Sumption), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 13 July 2023

⁴⁸ Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, [Unions and migrant organisations unite against funding pay rises by extorting migrants](#), July 2023; Campaign for Science and Engineering, [The negative impact of increased visa fees](#), 21 July 2023

⁴⁹ [Immigration and Nationality \(Fees\) \(Amendment\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2023, SI 2023/1004, SI 2023/1004](#)

⁵⁰ See Commons Library briefing SN06509, [Statutory Instruments](#), section 2.1

3.2

Recent Parliamentary interest in immigration fees

2022–23 session

In March 2023, Rob Roberts (independent) introduced a [Ten Minute Rule Bill to exempt NHS workers from immigration fees](#).⁵¹

On 30 January 2023, Tonia Antoniazzi (Labour) led a [debate on reducing settlement fees for healthcare workers](#). This was in response to a [petition which attracted over 34,000 signatures](#).

Healthcare workers already pay reduced visa and extension fees, and no health surcharge. Stuart C McDonald (SNP) argued “by taking those steps, we have encouraged people to come here to work; why do we now discourage them from staying? That seems utterly illogical”. But the immigration minister said waiving fees for this cohort would have a “significant impact on the funding of the migration and borders system”.

On 6 July 2023, the House of Lords debated a [motion to regret Government policy on child citizenship fees](#).

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour) argued that the [introduction of a discretionary waiver](#) for families who cannot afford the £1,000 fee (see section 1.2 above) did not go far enough. Baroness Williams of Trafford, for the Government, said that reducing this to the estimated cost of processing (around £400) across the board would cost the Home Office £25 million a year.⁵²

2021–22 session

Settlement fees were waived for foreign members of the armed forces with at least six years’ service or a medical discharge. This took effect on 6 April 2022.⁵³ [The Government announced the change in February 2022](#) following a public consultation.⁵⁴

A Westminster Hall debate on [immigration requirements for non-UK members of the armed forces](#), in the name of Dan Jarvis (Labour), took place on 5 January 2022. Some MPs mentioned fees.⁵⁵

⁵¹ [HC Deb 20 March 2023 c41](#)

⁵² [HL Deb 6 July 2022 c1056](#)

⁵³ Immigration and Nationality and Immigration Services Commissioner (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2022, SI 2022/296, [regs 5\(5\)\(b\)](#) and [6\(4\)\(c\)](#)

⁵⁴ Ministry of Defence and Home Office press release, [Visa fees scrapped for Non-UK Service Personnel](#), 23 February 2022

⁵⁵ [HC Deb 5 January 2022 c65WH](#)

2019-21 session

A Westminster Hall [debate on immigration and nationality fees](#), in the name of Meg Hillier (Labour), took place on 19 March 2021.⁵⁶

A [petition calling for lower citizenship fees](#) received over 21,000 signatures. The Government responded to it on 5 February 2021.

[Lord Rosser \(Labour\) tabled a motion of regret](#) when the House of Lords debated an increase to the health surcharge on 23 September 2020.⁵⁷

In September 2020, Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat) [introduced a Ten Minute Rule Bill to grant settlement to healthcare workers for free](#).⁵⁸

In May 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government announced that overseas healthcare workers would be exempt from the health surcharge.⁵⁹ A [petition calling for the surcharge to be reduced or abolished for NHS staff](#) received 16,000 signatures. It received a Government response and a House of Commons debate led by Catherine McKinnell (Labour).⁶⁰

⁵⁶ [HC Deb 19 March 2021 c447WH](#)

⁵⁷ [HL Deb 23 September 2020 c1909](#)

⁵⁸ [HC Deb 1 September 2020 c62](#)

⁵⁹ [“NHS fees to be scrapped for overseas health staff and care workers”](#), BBC News, 21 May 2020

⁶⁰ [HC Deb 25 June 2020 c1501](#)

4

What do other countries do?

Total upfront immigration costs in the UK are higher than those in many other countries, including Canada, Germany, France and the USA, according to [a 2021 report by the Royal Society](#) (PDF).⁶¹

It found that the initial cost of a UK Skilled Worker visa, taken as £9,700, was 790% higher than the mean total upfront costs across the other countries studied. This would be for a five-year visa sponsored by a big company, combining application costs, employer costs and the health surcharge (so the most expensive example possible).

In comparison, allowing for currency conversion:

- A German Job-Seeker Residence Permit cost £65
- A Canadian Global Talent Stream application cost around £700
- A Swiss L&B Permit cost £1,000
- A United States H1B Specialty Occupation visa cost around £6,700 (the closest the report found to the cost of a UK Skilled Worker visa)

The exercise is not a strict like-for-like comparison. As the report states, much of the UK cost is accounted for by the upfront health surcharge, whereas other countries require ongoing health insurance premiums. The Skilled Worker visa also lasts longer than some of its equivalents.

Without the surcharge, upfront Skilled Worker visa costs were still much higher than all other countries studied except the United States and Australia. But the cheaper UK Graduate and Global Talent visa fees without surcharge were below the international average (because there is also no employer levy for these visas).

In 2019, the Institute for Government think tank found that a [family of five coming to the UK on a five-year intra-company transfer visa would pay over £21,000](#). That compared to £10,000 for Australia, £2,700 for France, £750 for Germany and £670 for Canada. Again, this is partly but not entirely explained by the health surcharge (then £400 a year, accounting for £10,000 of the UK total).⁶²

⁶¹ The Royal Society, [Summary of visa costs analysis \(2021\)](#) (PDF), undated. The Royal Society is the UK's national academy of sciences; it is independent but partly funded by the UK Government.

⁶² Institute for Government, [Managing migration after Brexit](#), 5 March 2019, figure 6

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