

**Birmingham
Schools
of Sanctuary**



**£15,000 to have the
right to stay in the UK**



Join the Migrant Voice campaign against extortionate visa fees

What is a visa, and who needs it?

At the moment there are thousands of people, all around you, who are having to pay huge sums of money just to be able to stay with their families, spend time with their friends, or even work. This is because the cost of what are known as “visas”.

A visa is something which governments issue to people from other countries so that they can enter the country. What is happening at the moment though is that those people are being charged as about seven to TEN times the amount if actually costs for one of these visas to get it. That’s not including a lot of extra charges which are included along the way.

There are lots of different types of visas, and most countries issue them, but in the UK the costs are high and the process is long. It can take five or even ten years or longer of renewing your visa every 2.5 years to get what is called ‘permanent settlement,’ meaning a person can live and work here without having to carry on paying for a visa to do so

Not everyone needs a visa, refugees for example have a different process which they have to go through to be allowed to live and work here, but for those who do it can be a painful, and expensive, process, which leaves some families unable to even afford food as they try and get the money together to carry on with their lives.

What do they cost?

At the moment the fees amount to £2,608 for each person every 2.5 years. For a family of four, this means they can expect to pay more than £50,000 over the course of a ten-year-route. This amount includes what is called an *Immigration Health Surcharge* – meaning that many people who work in the NHS or in the caring professions are actually paying money towards funding their own jobs.

In July 2023 the government announced its plans to increase the visa fees to about £3,920 per person every 2.25 years, meaning that this will cost more than £15,000 per person over the ten years.

It is possible to apply for a fee waiver on the grounds that an applicant cannot afford this, but this involves filling in very long and complex forms and providing detailed evidence of income and savings over a period of six months – an intrusive and lengthy procedure seemingly designed to catch people out. If the fee waiver application fails, many families may find that they are having to pay both the fee and lawyers’ fees because of the complexity of the process.

What can we do?

First of all, learn about people's stories.

Have a look at Migrant Voice's report: *Destroying Hopes, Dreams and Lives*



<https://www.migrantvoice.org/resources/reports/destroying-hopes-dreams-and-lives--230422122311>

If you invite visitors to your school who might have to pay these fees, ask them if they can tell you about what it has meant for their lives.

Learn about Takesh from Birmingham who told her story in the Houses of Parliament as part of the Migrant Voice campaign:

<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/mum-campaigns-against-extortiate-visa-23862534>

Write to your MP about this issue

We know that many of your MPs are very supportive of the work done in our Schools of Sanctuary and even come into schools to listen to your concerns. Don't be afraid to tackle them about this very complex issue.

Talk to people at your place of worship

If you go to a church, a mosque or a temple, ask if you can present this concern to the faith leaders there and the rest of the congregation, so that they will become aware and take action themselves.

Don't forget to share what you are doing on your school web-site and on social media!