

We, the undersigned trade union members, unequivocally condemn UK government proposals to raise visa, Immigration Health Surcharge (commonly referred to as the NHS surcharge), and other immigration fees (Indefinite Leave to Remain and citizenship applications) to fund public sector pay rises. This is a transparent attempt by the government to divide migrant workers from the rest of the UK workforce and to sow division in the trade union movement, which we reject.

The United Kingdom already has the highest visa costs among comparator nations, with the cost of settling a family of five (£24,589) nearly twice the cost of settling in Australia, five times the cost of settling in the United States, and twenty times the cost of settling in most European countries.<sup>[i]</sup> These costs include annual surcharges of up to £624 per head to use public services like the NHS as well as bans on accessing other forms of public support. Migrant workers already go into debt and poverty to meet these costs, and the proposed doubling of the health surcharge and increase in immigration fees will only compound these harms.

We condemn the NHS “health surcharge” as an immoral and discriminatory form of double taxation. Migrants to the UK are overwhelmingly either workers, students, or children. They are individuals who are either contributing or will contribute in the future to economic productivity and pay their fair share of tax and national insurance contributions.<sup>[ii]</sup> Healthcare is a human right regardless of immigration status and as such levying a “health surcharge”, let alone the prospect of raising it, is morally repugnant.

Moreover, migrant workers are an integral part of the public sector workforce, representing at least 30% of doctors, 21% of other health care personnel, and 16% of workers in education.<sup>[iii]</sup> Our public services would not function without their labour, and our trade unions are stronger because of their membership. To present a public sector pay rise as derived from extortionate fees for migrants is to ask migrant workers in the public sector to pay for their own salary raise, and for those of their British colleagues. This is unfair and discriminatory.

We recognise that unions are not responsible for the government’s policies, and that government funding is fungible, such that pay may not ultimately come from these fees. Nevertheless, we call on union leadership to strongly condemn, as the University and College Union has done, the proposals to raise these fees.<sup>[iv]</sup> We call on all union leadership to assure migrant members in the trade union movement that they will not be made worse off or short-changed, relative to British comrades, by any proposed pay deal. We call on unions to support their migrant members, by campaigning for employers to cover fees while they last, making hardship funding available to members facing poverty as a result of fee increases and resisting the government’s Hostile Environment policies.

Finally, we urge union leadership to campaign strongly for funding public services, including pay, from appropriate taxation: general taxation borne equally by UK and migrant workers, taxes on wealth, and the closure of corporate tax loopholes. Workers across the UK, including in public services, deserve a pay rise funded by those in our society who can most afford it, and not by placing additional burdens on the most vulnerable.

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<sup>[i]</sup> APPG on Migration 2021

<sup>[ii]</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/migrationandthelabourmarketenglandandwales/census2021>

<sup>[iii]</sup> On Friday 14 July one sentence was removed from this paragraph which made use of non-inclusive language. The authors apologise for its inclusion. More detail is available here:

<https://twitter.com/UCUequality/status/1680969049012830212>

<sup>[iv]</sup> <https://twitter.com/ucu/status/1679883093149118464>

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