



UCU Migrant Members' Standing Committee statement on the removal of the Immigration Health Surcharge for migrant staff working in the NHS, May 22, 2020

Yesterday the UK government announced that migrant NHS and care workers would be exempt from the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) after [considerable backlash](#) from the general public and key political figures. As UCU's committee representing migrant members, we welcome the government's decision to exempt some migrant workers from the IHS. The IHS was first introduced in 2015 by then Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, ostensibly as a '[fair](#)' way for migrants to pay for the NHS. But the Surcharge is in fact a symptomatic example of the 'hostile environment', and we call for it to be scrapped.

When introduced in 2015, the IHS cost was £200 per person per year of visa application. In 2018 it was increased to £400pa, and it will increase to £624pa on 1 October 2020. This rise means it will cost a family of four close to £8,000 over three years, even before other visa fees are accounted for (see [here](#) for more information). We urge the government to abolish such punitive fees, which disproportionately affect precarious workers.

As a committee, we support [UNISON's](#) recent statement that the surcharge should be abolished for all migrant workers. The decision to exempt NHS workers from the IHS merely serves to highlight how fundamentally unjust it is. If it is morally wrong to charge an immigrant porter, doctor, or cleaner to access the NHS then it is also morally wrong to charge an immigrant bus driver, teacher, or postal worker. They too help to sustain the NHS both directly through their taxes and National Insurance contributions, and indirectly through the many wider economic and social contributions that they make to the UK. Healthcare and advocacy organisations such as [Docs Not Cops](#) have argued for the abolition of these fees as well as for a 'firewall' between the NHS and the Home Office. Countries such as [Ireland](#) have already waived similar fees on the understanding that draconian anti-immigrant policies will only hinder how we respond to the current global pandemic.

We call on the government to abolish the IHS entirely and to abolish the 'NHS visitor and migrant cost recovery programme' which began in 2017, and which [charges upfront fees of approximately 150%](#) of treatment cost to some migrants, inhibiting their access to necessary healthcare. The IHS amounts to double taxation on migrants, who must pay it for the entire duration of their visa before arrival, ostensibly to access a public service designed to be free to all at the point of use. The UK already operates one of the most [hostile and expensive](#) immigration systems in the world, and we call on the government and on politicians of all persuasions to work towards a humane immigration system; one which no longer simply privileges those immigrants with the ability to pay.

Signed;

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