



# THE USE OF FEES IN RESIDENCE PROCEDURES IN EUROPE: PRICING PEOPLE OUT OF A RESIDENCE PERMIT?

 **PICUM**

PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON  
UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

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# SUMMARY

Fees are a common element of migration policies and are widely used by European countries. Nine of the eleven European countries under review<sup>1</sup> levy fees for residence permits based on human rights grounds. Application fees vary from 38€ (Spain<sup>2</sup>) to more than 250€ (Belgium<sup>3</sup>, Finland, Greece<sup>4</sup>, Ireland, and the UK). The highest fees are paid in the UK (upwards of 1,100€<sup>5</sup>) but some EU Member States levy high fees too. For instance, Ireland<sup>6</sup> and Finland<sup>7</sup> ask for more than 500€ to be paid. Up until January 2023, The Netherlands required applicants to pay 1,109€ for permits on humanitarian grounds but has since reduced it to 210€.<sup>8</sup>

Application or renewal fees are not the only issue, however. Regularising one's stay involves other costs too, including paying for identity card pictures, photocopies, the translation of and/or sending for documents, the registration of biometric data, the issuing (printing) of permits, hiring a lawyer, travelling for interviews and submissions, travel costs and taking time off from work. Together, these costs can be too high for a person to bear and cause them not to regularise even though they meet all other criteria. It can also cause them to become undocumented if they cannot afford the renewal fee. The financial burden also impacts people's mental health, household finances, their trust in the government and their family life.<sup>9</sup>

The UN<sup>10</sup> and EU framework recognize that costs and fees pose concrete obstacles for people regularising their stay. The EU regular migration policy framework calls for fees to be proportionate, linked to the services needed for processing and issuing permits and/or mentions that fees should not be disproportionate or excessive.<sup>11</sup>

Governments should review their existing residence procedures (regularisation measures) and, where necessary, redesign them to make them more accessible. This includes making them more affordable by reducing or eliminating fees and hidden costs.<sup>12</sup> Where fees are levied, they should not be disproportionate, excessive, or pose a barrier to inclusion and should not exceed actual processing and issuing costs. This is also in line with related EU legislation which calls for fees to be proportionate, not excessive and linked to the services needed for processing and issuing permits.<sup>13</sup> Fees should be waived for people living in poverty, children, young people, people with disabilities, stateless people, and victims of trafficking, labour exploitation and victims of crime.

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1 We reviewed fees in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and the UK.

2 Government [website with fees](#) [checked on 10 February 2023]

3 Immigration Office, [Retributie](#) [checked on 13 January 2023]

4 Article 19 of [law 4251/2014](#). See PICUM, 2022, [Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#) (Annex 2). This permit cannot be renewed.

5 Currency converter on 20 February 2023. Sources : UK Visas and Regulations, 9 November 2022, [Home Office immigration and nationality fees: 9 November 2022](#); UK Visas and Immigration, [UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services](#)

6 Department of Justice, [Regularisation of Long Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme](#) [checked on 31 August 2022]

7 All fees and payment methods can be found on Finnish Immigration Service, [Processing fees and payment methods](#).

8 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, [Leges: kosten van een aanvraag](#) [checked on 22 April 2022]

9 See Chapter IV. What is the impact of fees?

10 See, for instance, UN Network on Migration, 2021, [Regular Pathways for Admission and Stay for Migrants in Situations of Vulnerability](#). The UN Network on Migration was established to support governments in the implementation and review of the Global Compact on Migration.

11 Although they use different wording, the Blue Card Directive (art. 12), the Students and Researchers Directive (art. 36), the Seasonal Workers Directive (art. 19), the Intra-Corporate Transfer Directive (art. 16), the Single Permit directive (art. 10) and the proposal of its recasting all cover fees.

12 In line with UN guidance. See Chapter II. Global and EU framework

13 See footnote 11.

## INTRODUCTION

Life is expensive and regularizing your stay is no different. Across Europe, hundreds of thousands of people are involved in regularisation measures<sup>14</sup> – applying for or renewing a residence permit based on work, studies or family unity, or applying for a residence permit on humanitarian grounds, for instance. These procedures require resources from the government to process them but are expensive for the applicants themselves too. Application and renewal fees are an obvious cost, but hidden costs are ubiquitous. Many procedures require applicants to submit (and thus pay for) photographs, photocopies, official translations of documents, and the printing of the residence permit itself. Many procedures also require hiring a lawyer to prepare or submit the application, which requires the applicant to cover the costs if they have no recourse to

legal aid. A less obvious, but no less impactful cost, is the time the undocumented person must take off work to submit applications in person,<sup>15</sup> meet for interviews or have their fingerprints taken (something several governments charge for too). They may have to travel to submit their documents or be interviewed and possibly stay overnight.

Given that undocumented migrants usually live in or at risk of poverty, the cost – the real cost – of residence procedures must be better understood in order to design fair migration procedures and policies. This position paper is a first step in that direction, reviewing practices concerning fees for residence procedures in eleven countries.

### Ten key elements of humane and fair regularisation programmes and mechanisms

For regularisation measures to work well and be effective, quick, humane and fair, they must meet necessary safeguards and have certain characteristics. Based on PICUM and its members' expertise, ten key elements were identified and elaborated in PICUM's report [Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: why they matter and how to design them](#). The affordability of applications is a facet of key element 6 "The procedure is accessible in practice." Making sure residence procedures are affordable is part and parcel of a fair, effective and humane migration policy on the EU and national level.



<sup>14</sup> 'Regularisation' refers to any process or procedure through which someone can obtain a residence permit from a relevant government authority authorising – 'regularising' – their stay in the country they reside in. The person applies for these procedures from inside the country, including when residing irregularly, in contrast to residence and work permits which must be applied for from another country. The grounds vary and include ties to the community, work, studies, family unity, child rights, statelessness, (vocational) training, non-refoulement, being a victim of crime, (labour) exploitation, trafficking or domestic abuse, etc.

<sup>15</sup> Undocumented migrant workers are also largely working in the informal economy where they have no protections enabling for paid time off due to illness or other reasons.

# GLOBAL AND EU FRAMEWORK

Both the global and EU normative and legal framework mention fees in relation to regularisation procedures and residence permits.

## UN guidance on regular pathways for admission and stay

The UN Network on Migration, which is tasked with supporting governments in the implementation and review of the Global Compact on Migration, notes that submission costs, issuance costs and fines for undocumented migrants represent “concrete obstacles (...), especially [for] migrant women and LGBTIQ migrants and those who are unemployed or working in precarious conditions and in the informal economy.” The Network recommends that “[p]athways for admission and stay for migrants in situations of vulnerability should be affordable or free of charge, including obtaining the required documentation.” They also recommend that governments eliminate recruitment fees in regularisation procedures and other regular pathways for admission and stay based on labour.<sup>16</sup>

The UN elaborates that both “[entail] providing clear instructions for application procedures to ensure migrants do not approach unscrupulous brokers to facilitate the procedures for them, for a fee. Mechanisms for requesting exemption from paying related fees should be clear, accessible, timely and transparent. Pathways-related costs should be paid per family group and the procedure should be free of charge for children. States should avoid charging fines on account of irregular migration status.”<sup>17</sup>

## EU migration law and jurisprudence

Some instruments of EU migration law mention fees. Although they use different wording, the Blue Card Directive<sup>18</sup> (art. 12), the Students and Researchers Directive<sup>19</sup> (art. 36), the Seasonal Workers Directive<sup>20</sup> (art. 19), the Intra-Corporate Transfer Directive<sup>21</sup> (art. 16) and the Single Permit directive<sup>22</sup> (art. 10) and the proposal of its recasting<sup>23</sup> all cover fees. All these directives call for fees to be proportionate and linked to the services needed for processing and issuing permits and/or that fees should not be disproportionate or excessive.

16 UN Network on Migration, 2021, [Regular Pathways for Admission and Stay for Migrants in Situations of Vulnerability](#), para 22

17 UN Network on Migration, 2021, [Regular Pathways for Admission and Stay for Migrants in Situations of Vulnerability](#), para 31. Other references to costs in para 22 and 29.

18 [Council Directive 2009/50/EC](#) of 25 May 2009 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment

19 [Directive \(EU\) 2016/801](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing (recast)

20 [Directive 2014/36/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers

21 [Directive 2014/66/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer

22 [Directive 2011/98/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State

23 The Commission's 2022 proposal for the recasting of the Single Permit Directive requires fees to be proportionate and based on the services “actually provided” to process applications and issue permits (article 10). Source: European Commission, 2022, [Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State \(recast\)](#)

The Court of Justice of the European Union has condemned a Member State for the use of administrative fees on at least one occasion. After having received complaints from third country nationals about the fees the Dutch government levied, the European Commission started an infringement procedure against the country. After non-compliance by the Dutch government, the Commission requested the Court to declare that, by requiring third country nationals and their family members applying for long-term resident status to pay “high and unfair fees”, the Netherlands had failed to fulfil its obligations under the Long-term Residents Directive.<sup>24</sup> At the time, the Netherlands levied

fees between 188€ and 830€.<sup>25</sup> In C-508/10 European Commission versus the Netherlands, the Court recognizes Member States’ right to levy fees and their margin of discretion in determining the amount of the fees. However, that discretion is “not without limits” as “[Member States] may not apply national rules which are liable to jeopardise the achievement of the objectives pursued by a directive and, therefore, deprive it of its effectiveness.” In the end, the Court found that “excessive and disproportionate administrative charges (...) [were] liable to create an obstacle to the exercise of the rights” conferred by the Long-term residents’ Directive.<sup>26</sup> Note that the Directive itself does not mention fees.

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24 [Council Directive 2003/109/EC](#) of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents

25 Notably: 201€ for applications for long-term resident status, 433€ for a residence permit for work or study, 331€ for a permit for other reasons, 188€ for a residence permit for accompanying family members, and 830€ for a residence permit for non-accompanying family members. Source: EU Court of Justice, 26 April 2012, [Case C-508/10](#), para 18.

26 EU Court of Justice, 26 April 2012, [Case C-508/10](#), para 81.

# THE PRACTICE

Governments levy administrative fees for many processes in migration management, including visa application fees, permit application fees, renewal fees, fees to take pictures, and even fees to issue the permit or to have biometric data taken. The amount tends to differ depending on the grounds invoked, whether it concerns a permit application or renewal, whether it is an online submission or in-person,<sup>27</sup> or whether a child or an adult applies.

This paper is not exhaustive but rather highlights fees that undocumented migrants must pay when applying for a residence permit on human rights grounds, with the exception of persecution as understood by the Geneva Convention (i.e., asylum).<sup>28</sup> The paper lists examples of application and renewal fees of regularisation mechanisms<sup>29</sup> in eight EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, The Netherlands, Poland and Spain), the UK and Switzerland and two regularisation programmes<sup>30</sup> (Ireland). It also looks into incidental, permit-related costs, method of payments and whether the application fees truly cover the processing costs.

## Application and renewal fees in eleven countries.

Fees regularly change, often yearly. Some countries index application and renewal fees or have done so in the past (for instance, Belgium<sup>31</sup> and The Netherlands<sup>32</sup>). The application fees below are listed from lowest to highest.

In **Denmark**, the residence permit on humanitarian grounds is free, but only asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers can apply.<sup>33</sup>

In the **Swiss** canton of Geneva, applying for a permit on humanitarian grounds is free but people must cover several other costs ('taxes') (see subchapter 'Incidental, permit-related costs').

In **Spain**, not all applications for and renewals of residence permits on the grounds of 'exceptional circumstances' cost the same.<sup>34</sup> Applications for female victims of gender-based violence or victims of trafficking cost 10.94 €. Applications for the 'arraigo social', 'arraigo laboral', 'arraigo familiar'<sup>35</sup> and 'arraigo formativo'<sup>37</sup> all cost 38.28 €, while renewals cost 16.40 €. <sup>38</sup>

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27 This is the case in Finland, where electronic applications are cheaper than paper applications. However, a residence permit on humanitarian grounds can only be done in paper. Sources: email exchange with [Refugee Advice Centre](#), 11 March 2022; Finnish Immigration Service, [Processing fees and payment methods](#) [checked on 10 February 2023]

28 (First) asylum applications are usually exempt from an application fee.

29 Regularisation mechanisms are processes or procedures through which someone can obtain a residence permit from a relevant government authority on a rolling basis. See PICUM, 2023, [Regularisation Mechanisms and programmes: Why they matter and how to design them for more on definitions](#).

30 Regularisation programmes have a limited period in which people can apply.

31 Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, [Bijdrage in administratieve kost voor verblijfsaanvragen vanaf 2 maart 2015](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

32 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, 30 December 2022, [IND past leges aan met ingang van het nieuwe jaar](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]

33 Email exchange with PICUM member [Refugees Welcome](#), 2 March 2022; New to Denmark, [Fee – who must pay a fee?](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]; New to Denmark, [Apply for residence permit on humanitarian grounds](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

34 Grounds of 'exceptional circumstances' in Spain includes permits for: all *arraigos*, international protection, humanitarian grounds, collaboration with law enforcement, victims of trafficking, and former unaccompanied children who aged out without a secure residence permit. See Spain's [Immigration law](#) and [Immigration Portal](#).

35 Ibid.

36 These are all temporary residence permits for exceptional circumstances. See PICUM, 2018, [Manual on regularisations for children, families and youth](#), and PICUM, 2022, [Turning 18 and undocumented: supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#) (Annex 2) for more details about the criteria.

37 Introduced in 2022. See [official website](#) for more info [checked on 10 February 2023]

38 Government [website with fees](#) [checked on 10 February 2023]



In **Poland**, the application for a temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds cost 340 zł (± 71€). The issuing of the permit costs another 100 zł (± 21€), except for students, pupils, and children younger than 16 years old who pay 50 zł (± 10.50€).<sup>39</sup>

In **Austria**, like in several other countries, the fee depends on the type of permit a person applies for. Applying for a temporary residence permit costs 160€, while an indefinite residence permit costs 210€. These cost 145€ and 195€ respectively for anyone younger than 6.<sup>40</sup>

In **Greece**, undocumented migrants must pay 300€ when applying for the exceptional three-year residence permit for third country nationals who have lived in Greece for seven consecutive years.<sup>41</sup> The same amount must be paid for by young people<sup>42</sup> who were born in or attended six years of schooling in Greece and are applying for a residence permit on that ground.<sup>43</sup> However, residence permits on certain humanitarian grounds are free of charge, including renewals – this includes permits for accidents at work, for seriously ill people and for children placed into care.<sup>44</sup> Late renewal applications are fined 100€.<sup>45</sup>

The amount people must pay in **Belgium** when applying for an exceptional residence permit on humanitarian grounds has changed several times in the last couple of years. In April 2022, the amount was 366€ per adult.<sup>46</sup> By August 2022 it had been lowered to 313€,<sup>47</sup> to then be increased again to 343€ on 1 January 2023.<sup>48</sup> If the fee is not paid in full within 30 days, the application is deemed inadmissible.<sup>49</sup> Applications by/for children are free.<sup>50</sup>

In **The Netherlands**, it costs 210€ to apply for or renew most permits on humanitarian grounds.<sup>51</sup> However, applications and renewals on ‘temporary humanitarian grounds’ are free of charge. These include applicants who are victims or witnesses of trafficking, victims of domestic violence without a prior residence permit, unaccompanied children who cannot return ‘for reasons outside of their control’, children placed under a child protection measure,<sup>52</sup> and children who are temporarily placed in (foster) care.

Applications for ‘continued residence’ for witnesses or victims of trafficking, domestic violence of gender-based violence cost 210€.<sup>53</sup>

People whose return is impossible due to external reasons must pay 350€ when applying for a ‘no-fault permit’ (*Buitenschuld*).<sup>54</sup> The fee is to be paid per person, meaning that a family of four must pay 1,400€.

39 Email exchange with PICUM member [Association for Legal Intervention](#) on 8 March 2022; Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, [Oplaty za zezwolenia i dokumenty](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]. Currency converted on 10 February 2023. The issuing fee doubled in July 2022.

40 Bundesministerium Inneres, [Gebühren für Aufenthaltstitel für Drittstaatsangehörige](#) [checked on 10 February 2023]

41 Article 19 of [law 4251/2014](#). See PICUM, 2022, [Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#) (Annex 2). This permit cannot be renewed.

42 “Adults not yet 23 years old”

43 Article 108 of [law 4251/2014](#). See also PICUM, 2022, [Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#) (Annex 2)

44 Article 19a of [law 4251/2014](#). Email exchange with PICUM member [ARSIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth](#) on 6 March 2022.

45 Email exchange with PICUM member [ARSIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth](#) on 25 February 2022.

46 Immigration Office, [Redevance](#) [checked on 22 April 2022]

47 Immigration Office, [Retributie](#) [checked on 31 August 2022]

48 Immigration Office, [Retributie](#) [checked on 13 January 2023]

49 Agentchap Integratie & Inburgering, [Bijdrage in administratieve kosten](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

50 Email exchange with PICUM member [Medimmigrant](#) on 1 March 2022. See conditions of admissibility here, Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, [Wat zijn de voorwaarden voor een ontvankelijke 9ter-aanvraag?](#)

51 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, 30 December 2022, [IND past leges aan met ingang van nieuwe jaar](#)

52 ‘Kinderbeschermingsmaatregel’ in Dutch.

53 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, [Leges: kosten van een aanvraag](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]

54 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, [Leges: kosten van een aanvraag](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]. For more on this procedure, see PICUM, 2022, [Barriers to return: protection in international, EU and national frameworks](#).

### Recent fee decrease in The Netherlands

Up until recently, The Netherlands levied amongst the highest fees in Europe for permits on human rights grounds. For example, people applying for a temporary stay on humanitarian grounds in 2018 paid 1,495€ and 1,460€ to prolong their stay on humanitarian grounds.<sup>55</sup> More recently, people paid 1,109€, with renewals costing another 387€.<sup>56</sup> However, The Netherlands significantly lowered the fees of several permits on 1 January 2023, now requiring people pay 210€ for these permits.

According to the Dutch Immigration Office (IND),<sup>57</sup> the decrease is a consequence of their effort to even out differences with permits based on EU regulations and directives. The fees were lowered in 2019, after the EU Court of Justice condemned the Netherlands for levying fees that were so high that they endangered the application of the EU Long-term Residents Directive.<sup>58</sup> Since the Netherlands had decreased fees for permits based on EU legislation, the IND decided that levying higher fees for permits based on national law was no longer tenable.

The IND also notes the benefits of decreasing fees in their press release. They recognize that some people could not afford the high fees, and “by making it more affordable, applicants are more likely to opt for a non-temporary licence. This means that someone will get a permit that is valid for five years and therefore does not have to apply and pay for a renewal every year. This saves both the applicant and the IND time and money. Moreover, a non-temporary permit also gives the applicant a stronger right of residence, giving them more rights and opportunities, for example to work and integrate. Finally, the new situation is fairer.”<sup>59</sup>

In **Finland**, the Finnish Immigration Service automatically analyses if an asylum seeker who does not fulfil the grounds for refugee status or subsidiary protection has humanitarian grounds to stay in the country (called an ‘ex officio’ examination). In this case, the evaluation is free of charge. If a person applies for the residence permit on humanitarian grounds<sup>60</sup> themselves, they must pay 520€ and pay 430€ when extending the one-year permit. Children pay 270€ and 250€, respectively.<sup>61</sup>

Single individuals applying for the 2022 regularisation programme in **Ireland** paid 550€, while families paid a lumpsum of 700€. Spouses, de facto and civil partners without children, and children and young adults younger than 23 years old who were living with their parent(s) could also apply as (part of the) a family.<sup>62</sup>

People applying in Ireland’s 2018 regularisation programme for former students (known as ‘the Student Scheme’) paid 700€ per person.<sup>63</sup>

55 Overheid.nl, [Bijlage 1: IND legeskostprijzen 2018](#) [checked on 22 February 2023]

56 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, [Leges: kosten van een aanvraag](#) [checked on 22 April 2022]

57 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst (literally Immigration and Naturalisation Service)

58 EU Court of Justice, 26 April 2012, [Case C-508/10](#)

59 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, 30 December 2022, [IND past leges aan met ingang van nieuwe jaar](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]. Own translation.

60 Section 52 and 53 of the Finnish [Immigration Act](#).

61 All fees and payment methods can be found on Finnish Immigration Service, [Processing fees and payment methods](#).

62 Department of Justice, [Regularisation of Long Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme](#) [checked on 31 August 2022]

63 SpunOut, [Government to introduce regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]; EMN, 15 October 2018, [Special scheme announced which will allow certain former students to apply for permission to remain in Ireland](#); MRCI and Justice for the Undocumented group, 2021, [Submission to the Department of Justice on the proposed Regularisation Scheme for Undocumented People in Ireland](#), p. 10.

Fees in the **United Kingdom** have tripled since 2014.<sup>64</sup> People must pay £1,048 (+- 1,180€)<sup>65</sup> when applying for a limited leave to remain based on private life – the most likely option, including for children and young people who have grown up in the UK. However, several other fees come on top of this which add another £1,579.20 (+- 1,777€<sup>66</sup>) (see further).

Amigrant in the UK who is on a spouse/partner visa<sup>67</sup> and is experiencing domestic violence is entitled to indefinite leave to remain independent from their sponsor (partner). Children born in the UK who have lived in the UK until at least their 7th birthday, are also eligible for indefinite leave to remain.<sup>68</sup> As for any application for an indefinite leave to remain, a £2,404 fee (+- 2,705€<sup>69</sup>) must be paid per person – unless the person can prove they do not have adequate accommodation or cannot meet other essential living needs.<sup>70</sup>

### Incidental, permit-related costs.

The application or renewal fee is not the only cost people must cover. Many governments charge additional fees, and people must also cover incidental costs.

Applicants must often pay for identity card pictures, photocopies, the translation of and/or sending for documents to complete their application. More costs are incurred when the permit is issued: some countries require the individual to pay for the permit (Austria,<sup>71</sup> Greece,<sup>72</sup> Ireland,<sup>73</sup> Spain<sup>74</sup> and Switzerland), while others charge for the registering of biometric data (Austria, UK<sup>75</sup> and Switzerland). Making changes to or replacing lost permits also costs money (UK<sup>76</sup> and Switzerland). Some of these fees are expensive: registering biometric data in Austria costs adults 140€ and children 125€,<sup>77</sup> and it costs 300€ to register an ‘immigration permission’ in Ireland.<sup>78</sup>

One example of the additional or hidden costs can be found in Switzerland. In the canton of Geneva, applying for a permit on humanitarian grounds is free but in reality it costs at least CHF 187,- because of the several additional costs (‘taxes’). People must provide an extract of their criminal record (CHF 25.-), cover a printing fee (CHF 22.-), have their biometric data taken (CHF 20.-), submit proof they don’t have any outstanding debts (CHF 25.-) and proof they speak a certain level of French (costs vary<sup>79</sup>) when applying.<sup>80</sup> The issuing of the B-permit<sup>81</sup> (the permit usually issued to people with a right to reside on humanitarian grounds) costs an additional CHF 95.- for adults and CHF 47.5.- for children. Renewing it costs adults CHF 117.- and children CHF 79.5.-.<sup>82 83</sup>

64 We Belong, 2020, [Mental Health Check](#)

65 Currency converter on 20 February 2023. Sources : UK Visas and Regulations, 9 November 2022, [Home Office immigration and nationality fees: 9 November 2022](#); UK Visas and Immigration, [UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services](#)

66 Currency converted on 20 February 2023.

67 Spouse, civil or unmarried partner or same-sex partner of a British citizen or person settled in the UK.

68 Gov.uk, [Indefinite leave to remain \(private life\)](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]

69 Converted on 20 February 2023.

70 Free Movement, [How to apply for leave to remain as a victim of domestic violence](#) [checked on 27 April 2022]

71 26.30€ Email exchange with PICUM member [UNDOK – Anlaufstelle zur gewerkschaftlichen Unterstützung undokumentiert Arbeitender](#) on 2 March 2022.

72 16€ must be paid to print the three-year residence permit for third country nationals who have lived in Greece for seven consecutive years. Source: Email correspondence with PICUM member [ARSIS](#) on 6 March 2022.

73 Email exchange with PICUM member [Immigrant Council Ireland](#) on 15 August 2022.

74 People must pay 16,08€ for the ‘Tarjeta de Identidad de Extranjeros’ (TIE), an ID card proving they hold a residence or working permit on the grounds of exceptional circumstances. Renewals cost 19.30€. Source: Government [website with fees](#) [checked on 26 October 2022]

75 Gov.uk, [Visa fees transparency data. Table with details of fees and unit costs – 26 February 2022](#)

76 Gov.uk, [Visa fees transparency data. Table with details of fees and unit costs – 26 February 2022](#)

77 Email exchange with PICUM member [UNDOK – Anlaufstelle zur gewerkschaftlichen Unterstützung undokumentiert Arbeitender on 2 March 2022.](#)

78 Department of Justice, [Requirements and documents needed](#) [checked on 13 September 2022].

79 The document may be free but French language classes are not.

80 Email exchange with [CCSI](#) on 1 September 2022.

81 These are the fees of a B-permit, a 1 to 2-year temporary residence permit that one usually receives when applying for a stay on humanitarian grounds. Source: email exchange with [CCSI](#) on 23 February 2022.

82 ‘Recapitulatif des taxes’ received from [CCSI](#) on 23 February 2022.

83 The Swiss Franc and the Euro are worth about the same at the time of writing (13 February 2023), namely CHF 1 = EUR 1.01.

Another example is found in the UK, where each applicant must pay £2,627.20 (+- EUR 3,098)<sup>84</sup> when applying for a 30-month limited leave to remain based on private life. The application fee alone is £1,048, but people must also pay a £1,560 Immigration Health Surcharge<sup>85</sup> and a £19.20 biometric information enrolment fee.

Re-examinations of rejected applications might also cost money, like in Greece.<sup>86</sup>

Another common cost is the cost of a lawyer.<sup>87</sup> Even though several countries have schemes for pro bono lawyers or free legal aid, undocumented people cannot always access pro bono lawyers or expert civil society organisations.<sup>88</sup>

Other costs come on top of these legal and administrative fees. Unless people live within walking distance of the Immigration Office or police station where their application is processed,<sup>89</sup> they must travel to wherever their application must be submitted or processed. People must take time off work, pay for transport for themselves and their family and, if they live far away, stay overnight. More than one trip may be necessary. In Spain, for instance, it is common to take at least three trips: once to apply, a second to register biometric data (which the applicant must also pay for) and a third time to collect the permit.<sup>90</sup> Renewals include more trips. So, while the application fees themselves are quite affordable in Spain, acquiring a permit can be expensive.

For all these reasons, it is more accurate to consider the total cost of the application process rather than government-levied fees alone.

### Do the fees cover processing and issuing costs only?

Although processing residence applications certainly costs money to governments, the paid fees are not necessarily used to cover processing costs alone. For example, a former State Secretary for Asylum and Migration of Belgium argued that once the administrative costs for processing the applications were covered, the fees paid by undocumented migrants when applying for residence on humanitarian grounds could also be used to fund detention centres.<sup>91</sup>

In the UK, fees are many times higher than the actual processing costs. For instance, processing an application for a temporary permit on private life grounds costs the government £335, but applicants pay £1,048 (a 312% profit margin). An application for indefinite leave to remain costs £2,404 per applicant, while the processing costs £491 to the British Home Office (a 489% profit margin).<sup>92</sup> Fees have also steadily increased over the years. And, while the UK fees play a part in the broader 'hostile environment policy',<sup>93</sup> "[p]art of the reason behind these fee increases is profit," according to Jon Burnett, lecturer in criminology at Swansea University.<sup>94</sup> In 2018 alone, the Home Office made £500 million (+- 563m€) from immigration fees.<sup>95</sup>

84 Currency converter on 20 February 2023. Sources : UK Visas and Regulations, 9 November 2022, [Home Office immigration and nationality fees: 9 November 2022](#); UK Visas and Immigration, [UK Visa and Citizenship Application Services](#)

85 The exact amount depends on the permit one applies for and the amount of leave granted by the permit. A 30-month leave on private grounds costs £1,560 (+- 1756 €), while the surcharge for a 60-month leave costs £3,120 (+- 3512 €). Despite the name, people must often continue to pay towards certain NHS care, including prescriptions, dental care, eye care, etc. The Immigration Health Charge is reimbursed when the application is unsuccessful. Gov.uk, [Pay for UK healthcare as part of your immigration application](#) [checked on 31 August 2022]; NHS, [When you need to pay towards NHS care](#) [checked on 31 August 2022]. Amounts can be calculated here: Gov.uk, [Calculate your immigration health surcharge](#)

86 Email exchange with PICUM member [ARSIS](#) on 25 February 2022.

87 Not all residence procedures/regularisation measures require a lawyer, although people may not know this or may feel more secure when they are assisted by a lawyer.

88 For example, Refugee Action, 2022, [No access to justice: How legal advice deserts fail refugees, migrants and our communities](#)

89 Depending on the country. In Spain, for instance, applications are made in local immigration offices, while in Belgium people must travel to the capital.

90 Email exchange with PICUM member [Pro Igual](#) on 27 February 2022.

91 EMN Belgium, 2020, [Comparative overview of national protection statuses in Belgium 2010-2019; theofrancken.be, 8 January 2018, Bijdrage voor verblijfsaanvragen brengt 10 miljoen in het laatje](#) [checked on 9 March 2023]

92 Gov.uk, [Visa fees transparency data. Table with details of fees and unit costs – 9 November 2022](#)

93 The 'hostile environment' is a broad set of policies, introduced since 2010, which attempt to encourage people to leave voluntarily by making survival hard and regularisation expensive. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, [The Hostile Environment explained](#) [checked on 10 Dec 2021]

94 Burnett J., Situating immigration fees in 21st century Britain, in Migrant Voices, 2022, [Destroying hopes, dreams and lives. How the UK visa costs and process impact migrants' lives](#), pp. 15-19.

95 The Times, 11 August 2019, [Hostile environment: Home Office makes £500m from immigration fees](#) [checked on 9 March 2023]

Few governments are as transparent about the actual processing costs as the UK, so it remains difficult to understand what costs the fees levied by other governments cover, or if and how much profit they make.

### Electronic payments – an additional hurdle to overcome.

The payment method itself can be an obstacle for undocumented migrants. Fees must usually be paid into a government bank account (e.g., Belgium<sup>96</sup>, UK<sup>97</sup>), while undocumented people very likely do not have a bank account.<sup>98</sup> This is because banks regularly require official documents, like passports or national identity cards to verify a customer's identity, something an undocumented person may not have.<sup>99</sup>

Some countries accept payments by third persons (possible in Belgium<sup>100</sup>) and cash payments (e.g., Finland<sup>101</sup>, Poland<sup>102</sup> and Switzerland<sup>103</sup>), so payment methods do not create additional barriers to a secure residence status.

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96 Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, [Bijdrage in administratieve kosten](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

97 Gov.uk, [Pay for UK healthcare as part of your immigration application](#) [checked on 31 August 2022]

98 In some countries this financial exclusion appears to be a by-product of the tightening of measures to prevent money laundering, in others it is a calculated policy to deter migration – as in the UK's 'hostile environment policy.' (Source on UK: The Telegraph, 25 May 2012, [Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception'](#) [checked on 9 March 2023])

99 However, EU law leaves it up to national law to determine and clarify the spectrum of documents banks can accept. For more on this, see PICUM, 26 February 2020, [Cash only: measures imposed to counter money laundering are having serious implications for undocumented people](#).

100 Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, n.d., [Bijdrage in administratieve kosten](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

101 Finnish Immigration Service, 2022, [Processing fees and payment methods](#)

102 Email exchange with PICUM member [Association for Legal Intervention](#) on 8 March 2022; Migrantinfo.pl, [Temporary residence – general information](#) [checked on 20 October 2022]

103 Email exchange with PICUM member on 23 February 2022.

# WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF FEES?

The automatic and incidental costs listed above have real consequences for people and society. The following section highlights five areas where individuals are especially impacted: people's ability to apply for a permit to regularise their stay; their mental health; household finances; family life; and their faith in the government.



***The immigration system (...) deprived his family of its financial stability and affected their mental and physical health: they ended up in £27,000 debt from paying Home Office and legal fees; while his mother endures chronic back pain from years of sleeping on the floor in their one-bedroom flat (they couldn't afford an additional bed). Shahmir says his little sister, who was born in the UK, can't run and skip like other children her age, as her mobility has been limited from having grown up in such cramped conditions.***

– about Shahmir, 21 years old <sup>104</sup>



## A barrier to regularisation

Several PICUM members indicated that fees are difficult for undocumented people to pay, given that people with irregular migration status most often live at or below the official poverty line. Administrative fees can be the reason some people do not apply for a residence permit, even though they meet all the requirements of that permit.<sup>105</sup> This was, for example, the case in Ireland's 2018 regularisation programme for former students, where not everyone could cover the 1,000€ needed to regularize (700€ application fee + 300€ for the permit).<sup>106</sup>

This dissuasive effect of application fees has been confirmed by government officials.<sup>107</sup> For example, the number of applications for a regularisation on humanitarian grounds decreased from 6,789 in 2014 to 2,867 in 2016 after Belgium introduced fees in early 2015 (57% decrease).<sup>108</sup> The very fees in the UK must also be understood as part of the wider 'hostile environment' policy.<sup>109</sup> For anyone older than 24, the limited leave to remain puts them on a ten-year route to settlement, during which they will pay between £10,000 and £15,000 (+- 11,250€ and +- 16,883€) as well as lawyer's fees. As fees apply for each applicant, undocumented families will pay a multiple of this.<sup>110</sup>

High fees have also caused people to fall out of status and become undocumented, when they could not afford to renew their permit or apply for one on different grounds.<sup>111</sup>

104 We Belong, 2020, [Mental Health Check](#), p. 17

105 Email exchange with PICUM member [HumanRights360](#) (Greece, on 28 February 2022) and [Refugee Advice Centre](#) (Finland, on 11 March 2022). Also mentioned at a meeting of the Task force on Regularisations on 4 May 2022.

106 MRCI and Justice for the Undocumented group, 2021, [Submission to the Department of Justice on the proposed Regularisation Scheme for Undocumented People in Ireland](#), p. 10; SpunOut, [Government to introduce regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]

107 E.g. see EMN Belgium, 2020, [Comparative overview of national protection statuses in Belgium 2010-2019](#); PICUM, 2018, [Manual on regularisations for undocumented children, young people and families](#), p. 76; Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, 30 December 2022, [IND past leges aan met ingang van nieuwe jaar](#) [checked on 20 February 2023].

108 Het Laatste Nieuws, 27 January 2017, [Francken maakt verblijfsaanvraag pak duurder: "Vroeger hadden we een diarree van aanvragen, nu is dat veel minder"](#) [checked on 9 March 2023]

109 The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, [The Hostile Environment explained](#) [checked on 10 Dec 2021]

110 Gardner, Z and Patel, C, 2021, [We are here: Routes to regularisation for the UK's undocumented population](#), The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, see pp. 37-41.

111 Gardner, Z and Patel, C, 2021, [We are here: Routes to regularisation for the UK's undocumented population](#), The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, pp.20-21; Migrant Voices, 2022, [Destroying hopes, dreams and lives. How the UK visa costs and process impact migrants' lives](#)

### Hardship fund in Ireland

PICUM member Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) established a hardship fund ahead of the 2022 regularisation programme for long-staying undocumented people to help some of the people they work with cover certain expenses. MRCI paid for the applications of 56 individuals and 20 families, covered two partial payments and one passport renewal for a total amount of 45,403€. MRCI believes most of these people would not have been able to regularize their stay without this financial help.<sup>112</sup>

## Mental and physical health

The experience of applying for a permit is quite stressful.<sup>113</sup> While administrators and policy makers might not think of people's mental health when levying fees, they are certainly correlated. The compounding effect of the financial burden of applications, the experience of the procedure itself (whether people feel heard and treated fairly), the uncertainty of the outcome and the stress of temporary permits all impact people's mental health.

Looming renewal deadlines and their fees can feel like a constant burden. The stress of knowing one will have to go through a renewal procedure again and again is a constant reminder of the frailty of people's status and the life they have built for themselves.

People must also save up for fees, especially where fees are high. The stress caused by having to severely budget to save up while working with irregular migration status in oftentimes exploitative conditions also impact on people's mental health.

## Household finances

Most undocumented migrants experience poverty because of their residence status, and fees further compound already-stretched finances. For example, it cost a single adult at least 850€ to regularize through Ireland's 2022 regularisation scheme (550€ application fee + 300€ for the permit) - an exorbitant amount for people who make less than minimum wage, many of whom also live in Dublin, a high cost of living area.<sup>114</sup>

Fees can make people vulnerable to predatory lenders and exploitative employers, further aggravating an already-skewed power dynamic. Debts are incurred, and families rent cramped housing to save up for fees.<sup>115</sup> Two thirds of respondents to a survey by PICUM member Migrant Voice said they had been forced into debt because of the fees, sometimes reaching £30,000 (+- 33,790€).<sup>116</sup>

“**All our money is tied into keeping ourselves legal.**”  
- Joy, 21 years old <sup>117</sup>

112 Email exchange with PICUM member [MRCI](#) on 9 and 14 March 2023.

113 See also PICUM, 2022, [Insecure residence status, mental health and resilience](#), briefing paper; PICUM, 2021, [Navigating irregularity: the impact of growing up undocumented in Europe](#)

114 The OECD ranks Ireland as the 13th most expensive OECD country in 2022 (Source: OECD Data, [Price level indices](#) [checked on 8 March 2023] and World data info ranks Ireland as the 10th highest when comparing cost of living and purchasing power with average income (source: Worlddata.info, [Comparison of worldwide cost of living](#) [checked on 8 March 2023]. Dublin also features on several “most expensive capitals of Europe” lists (for instance, Govisafree.com, 6 March 2023, [Most Expensive Cities in Europe | Updated in March 2023](#) [checked on 8 March 2023]).

115 We Belong, 2020, [Mental Health Check](#)

116 Migrant Voice, 2022, [Destroying hopes, dreams and lives. How the UK visa cost and process impact migrants' lives](#)

117 Let us Learn!, Justice for Kids Law and We Belong, 2019, [Normality is a luxury. How 'limited leave to remain is blighting young lives'](#), p. 2.

If several renewals are necessary before an indefinite, secure residence status can be obtained, household finances remain strained for prolonged periods of time. During that time, earnings which could otherwise go towards securing a decent home, education or childcare must be set aside to pay for the processing costs to the Immigration Office.<sup>118</sup>

High fees have pushed people into homelessness and inadequate housing. Fees have left many young people and their families unable to afford anything

but overcrowded, insecure and unsuitable living accommodation.<sup>119</sup> Living and growing up in inadequate housing has direct and long-term consequences for people's well-being, especially for children. Inadequate housing impacts children's physical and mental health, educational attainment, and social lives.<sup>120</sup> A child's risk of ill-health and disability increases by up to 25 percent during childhood and early adulthood when they experience multiple housing problems.<sup>121</sup>

### Advocating for lower fees in Greece, The Netherlands, and the UK

As fees can be a barrier to regularisation, calls to lower fees have rung in several countries.

In **Greece**, PICUM member Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity (G2RED) raised awareness around access to citizenship in the mid-2000s, which led to several changes in law. One of the changes included the halving of fees for a residence permit after seven years of consecutive stay from 1,500€ to 700€ (the fee has since been reduced further to 300€).<sup>122</sup>

Civil society have campaigned against fee increases in **The Netherlands** since the early 2000s. There was a campaign and petition in 2004 calling the government to lower fees, which had just been increased 300% to 1,150% in a year.<sup>123</sup> A 'working group against fee increases' ('*Werkgroep Tegen Legesverhogingen*') also aimed to decrease the fees "to a reasonable amount."<sup>124</sup> Campaigning has focussed on legal action in recent years.

In the **United Kingdom**, many civil organisations, including PICUM member Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JWCI)<sup>125</sup> and the migrant youth-led We Belong, have long advocated for lower fees. In 2021, thanks to campaigning and a legal case being brought against the Home Office, the route to settlement was halved for young people, thus also halving the cost.<sup>126</sup> Since then, 18-to-25-year-olds who have lived in the UK for more than half of their lives can enter a five-year route to settlement rather than a ten-year route.<sup>127</sup>

118 Let us Learn!, Justice for Kids Law and We Belong, 2019, [Normality is a luxury. How 'limited leave to remain' is blighting young lives](#); Migrant Voice, 2022, [Destroying hopes, dreams and lives. How the UK visa cost and process impact migrants' lives](#)

119 We Belong, 2020, [Mental Health Check](#)

120 See PICUM, 2021, [Navigating irregularity. The Impact of growing up undocumented in Europe](#)

121 Such as bad housing conditions, overcrowding, etc. Harker L., 2006, Chance of a lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children's lives, Shelter.

122 For more on this, see PICUM, 2018, [Manual on regularisations for undocumented children, young people and families](#).

123 Email exchange with PICUM member [Stichting LOS](#) on 21 and 22 February 2022.

124 Stichting INLIA, [Dossier Leges](#) [checked on 22 February 2023]

125 See for example Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, 2021, [We Are Here: Routes to regularisation for the UK's undocumented population](#).

126 Home Office, 21 October 2021, [Concession to the family Immigration Rules for granting longer periods of leave and early indefinite leave to remain](#). See also PICUM, 2022, [Turning 18 and undocumented: supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#), pp. 59-61 and PICUM, [1 September 2022, UK: New Rules make it easier for Young People to Access Secure Residence Permit](#).

127 PICUM, 2022, [UK: new rules make it easier for young people to access secure residence permit](#); PICUM, 2022, [Turning 18 and undocumented: supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#), annex 2



## Family life

The impact of costly residence procedures on families and family life should not be underestimated. It can impact dynamics between family members and family life as a whole.

If a family includes several dependent children, and fees are to be paid for each person, the price can be exorbitant. For example, a family of four that cannot return to the country of origin due to no fault of their own must pay 1,500€ for a ‘no fault’ (*buitenschuld*) permit in The Netherlands.<sup>128</sup>

Families with children (either under or over the age of 18) sometimes have to choose which child’s application they support financially, as paying for all of the children may be too expensive.<sup>129</sup>

These choices together with the financial impact put people under constant stress, causing friction within otherwise well-functioning families, disrupting health dynamics and relationships. The situation may even lead to toxic or chronic stress in parents and children.<sup>130</sup> Experiencing chronic or toxic stress as a child can lead to high risk of cardiovascular disease, cancers, asthma, and depression when they are adults.<sup>131</sup>

## Loss of trust in and resentment towards the government

Long and costly procedures can create resentment towards the government. Matthew, a young man who has lived in the UK since he was 11 and who is close to being eligible for British citizenship, says that the UK’s belated acceptance of him is not a source of pride for him. He feels it is based solely on having paid “*ridiculous amounts of money,*” rather than anything more meaningful. He says, “*It’s a piece of paper that I paid for. It wasn’t given to me on some sort of moral grounds, or for the merit of being a good citizen, or to help make an inclusive society. It was just an economic project by the Home Secretary to pounce on those vulnerable people, and I was just one of those numbers.*”<sup>132</sup>

Trust in the government is a foundation of a peaceful, well-functioning society. Policy choices should be made with the building of trust in mind.

128 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, [Leges: kosten van een aanvraag](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]. For more on this procedure, see PICUM, 2022, [Barriers to return: protection in international, EU and national frameworks](#).

129 PICUM, 1 September 2022, [UK: New Rules make it easier for Young People to Access Secure Residence Permit](#)

130 The term ‘chronic’ stress comes from the medical world and denotes “a constant stress experienced over a prolonged period of time, [which] can contribute to long-term problems for heart and blood vessels.” The term ‘toxic stress’ comes from the Adverse Childhood Experiences research and “alters the developing brain and gives rise to diseases, both physical and mental. Stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline shut down areas of the brain as a defence against uncontrollable feelings related to fear. Toxic stress is of a different order to ordinary stress in that it is persistent and systemic, the child has no control over their situation and nothing they can do will make a difference, they are powerless to change the situation and it is a more or less permanent situation.” Source: Cunnane D., 13 March 2018, [Toxic stress vs chronic stress – what is the difference?](#), Our Time’s views. For more about the Adverse Childhood Experiences research, see CDC, [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#).

131 Johnson S. B., Riley A. W., Granger D. A. & Riis J., 2013, [The Science of Early Life Toxic Stress for Pediatric Practice and Advocacy](#), *Pediatrics*, 131 (2), pp. 319-327

132 We Belong, 2020, [Mental Health Check](#), p. 27

# PROMISING PRACTICES

The following are some promising practices concerning administrative fees for processing residence applications:

## 1. No fees for certain permits/grounds

- In France, applying for the statelessness determination procedure is free.<sup>133</sup>
- The Netherlands does not levy fees for applications or renewals for 'temporary humanitarian grounds. This includes permits for victims or witnesses of trafficking, victims of domestic violence without a prior residence permit, unaccompanied children who cannot return 'for reasons outside of their control', children placed under a child protection measure,<sup>134</sup> and children who are temporarily placed in (foster) care.<sup>135</sup>
- In the canton of Geneva, Switzerland, applying for a permit on humanitarian grounds is free, although other costs must be paid.<sup>136</sup>
- In Denmark, the residence permit on humanitarian grounds is free.<sup>137</sup>

## 2. Fee waivers for certain groups of people

- Belgium exempts children and stateless people from application fees.<sup>138</sup>
- No fees must be paid for the residence permit of a child born in Austria until the child turns two years old.<sup>139</sup>
- In the UK, people who can prove that they are destitute, cannot meet their child's particular and additional needs or are faced with exceptional financial circumstances may see their fees waived.<sup>140</sup> No fee is levied from people who experienced modern slavery and who are not eligible for asylum or international protection and are applying for discretionary leave.<sup>141</sup>

## 3. Lower fees for certain groups of people

- In the canton of Geneva, children pay half the fee required for adults for the printing of a B-permit (but the same as adults for having their biometric data taken).<sup>142</sup>
- Austria levies lower fees for children under six.<sup>143</sup>
- In Poland, students, pupils, and children younger than 16 years old who are issued a temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds pay half of what others pay for the issuing itself.<sup>144</sup>

133 For more on this residence permit, see PICUM, 2022, [Barriers to return: protection in international, EU and national frameworks](#).

134 'Kinderbeschermingsmaatregel' in Dutch.

135 Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, [Leges: kosten van een aanvraag](#) [checked on 20 February 2023]

136 Email exchange with [CCSI](#) on 1 September 2022.

137 But only asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers can apply. Email exchange with PICUM member [Refugees Welcome](#), 2 March 2022; New to Denmark, [Fee – who must pay a fee?](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]; New to Denmark, [Apply for residence permit on humanitarian grounds](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

138 Immigration Office, [Redevance](#)

139 Bundesministerium Inneres, [Gebühren für Aufenthaltstitel für Drittstaatsangehörige](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

140 NRPF Network, [Immigration application fees](#); Home Office, 5 March 2021, [Fee waiver: Human Rights-based and other specified applications](#)

141 UK Home Office, 2021, [Discretionary leave considerations for victims of modern slavery](#). For more on residence permits for victims of crime, see PICUM, 2020, [Insecure justice? Residence permits for victims of crime in Europe](#).

142 Recapitulatif des taxes. Received from PICUM member [CCSI](#) on 23 February 2022.

143 Bundesministerium Inneres, [Gebühren für Aufenthaltstitel für Drittstaatsangehörige](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

144 Email exchange with PICUM member [Association for Legal Intervention](#) on 8 March 2022; Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, [Opłaty za zezwolenia i dokumenty](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]. Currency converted on 10 February 2023. The issuing fee doubled in July 2022.

#### 4. Fee per application (rather than per applicant)

- As fees can be costly for families if each individual is required to pay, Ireland levied a fee per application rather than per applicant in their 2022 regularisation programme. Importantly, Ireland defined 'family' as married, civil partners or de facto partners with or without children, or single parents with children. 'Children' had to be younger than 23 years old and living with the principal applicant.<sup>145</sup>

#### 5. Shorter routes to settlement

- While not a fee reduction, recent changes to the UK's immigration rules have made regularising less costly for young people. Since October 2021, 18-to-24-year-olds who have grown up in the UK and spent half of their lives there are now on a five-year-route, halving the total cost of the regularisation.<sup>146</sup> However, the cost remains significant.

#### 6. Accessible payment methods

- Belgium accepts payments by third parties.<sup>147</sup>
- Finland<sup>148</sup>, Poland<sup>149</sup> and Switzerland<sup>150</sup> accept cash payments.

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145 Department of Justice, [Regularisation of Long Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme](#) [checked on 22 February 2023]

146 Home Office, 21 October 2021, [Concession to the family Immigration Rules for granting longer periods of leave and early indefinite leave to remain](#). See also PICUM, 2022, [Turning 18 and undocumented: supporting children in their transition into adulthood](#), pp. 59-61 and PICUM, [1 September 2022, UK: New Rules make it easier for Young People to Access Secure Residence Permit](#)

147 Agentchap Integratie & Inburgering, n.d., [Bijdrage in administratieve kosten](#) [checked on 25 March 2022]

148 Finnish Immigration Service, 2022, [Processing fees and payment methods](#)

149 Email exchange with PICUM member [Association for Legal Intervention](#) on 8 March 2022; Migrantinfo.pl, [Temporary residence – general information](#) [checked on 20 October 2022]

150 Email exchange with PICUM member on 23 February 2022.

# CONCLUSION

Fees are a common element of migration policies and are widely used by European countries. All the countries under review in this paper, except for Denmark and Switzerland, levy application fees for residence permits based on human rights grounds. These varied from 38€ (Spain) to more than 250€ (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Ireland, and the UK). Finland, Ireland and the UK even require application fees in excess of 500€. Most of these fees are excessive when considering that undocumented people generally live in or at risk of poverty.

Many countries' procedures require applicants to cover additional costs, like paying for identity card pictures, photocopies, the translation of documents, sending for documents in a third country, having biometric data taken, or the printing of the permit. In addition to these costs, people must bear other costs – such as paying for a lawyer to handle the process, lack of income on days when they must take time off work to go for interviews or meet with the Immigration Office and travel costs.

Together, these costs can be overwhelming for an undocumented person and price them out of a secure residence permit, even when they meet all other requirements. The dissuasive effect of fees has been noted by government officials<sup>151</sup> and PICUM members. Consequently, a decrease in applications after the introduction of fees may mean that people cannot afford to regularise.

Although processing applications costs money to governments, fees may not reflect actual costs. Some countries inflate fees and make money from residence applications, essentially benefiting from people who (very likely) live in poverty, are routinely exploited and underpaid by employers, and who the same governments usually exclude from accessing services, social protection measures and benefits intended for people living in poverty.<sup>152</sup>

Fees are a political choice, exemplified by the vast array of practices listed in this brief and the Netherland's recent decision to lower fees from 1,109€ to 210€ for permits on humanitarian grounds. Disproportionate fees, then, can be understood within a broader policy to dissuade people from applying and/or making life exceedingly hard for undocumented people in hopes that they will leave. In contrast, low fees that recognize the reality of undocumented people's daily life and income should be seen as part and parcel of broader social inclusion policies, and a fair and effective migration policy.

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151 For example, by a former State Secretary for Asylum and Migration of Belgium. Source: EMN Belgium, 2020, [Comparative overview of national protection statuses in Belgium 2010-2019](#)

152 PICUM, 2022, [A snapshot of social protection measures for undocumented migrants by national and local governments](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the EU institutions:

- Integrate language in relevant legislative and policy instruments requiring that fees not be disproportionate or excessive, and affordable for applicants so as not to pose a barrier to inclusion.
- Gather data on and research the use of fees in residence procedures across the EU and their impact on (undocumented) people's ability to regularize their stay, their health and well-being. Make sure permits based on national legislation are included.

### To national and regional<sup>153</sup> governments:

- Review and (re)design regularisation mechanisms and any ongoing programmes, ensuring
  - » They are accessible in practice, including by making them more affordable by reducing, limiting or eliminating fees and additional administrative costs. Incidental costs should be limited as much as possible;
  - » Fees can be paid in cash, by third parties as well as by bank transfer;
  - » Application and renewal fees do not exceed the actual processing and issuing costs;
  - » Fees are waived for children, young people, people in or at risk of poverty, people with disabilities, stateless people, victims of trafficking, labour exploitation and victims of crime;
  - » Fees are levied per application rather than per applicant, so fees do not pose a barrier for families, including childless spouses, civil and de facto partners;
  - » Any changes in amounts are publicised well in advance, and limiting increases due to inflation, to give people the time to save up for applications and renewals.
- Research the impact of fees on (undocumented) people's ability to regularize their stay, and on their health and well-being.

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153 If applicable.







PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON  
UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

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