



Children's Commissioner Call for Evidence 2022

Introduction

A decade ago, in 2012, a Minimum Income Requirement [MIR] was introduced by the government which required the British spouse to earn at least £18,600 to sponsor their foreign spouse or partner. With over 40% of the country not earning this amount, it means that many low-income earners are unable to reunite with their partner/family here in the UK - and with British/EU families now required to meet the MIR as well, far more families will be affected. It's believed that currently up to 60,000 people could be affected but this could turn into millions post Brexit.

Data available shows that 40% of British non-white, young, female employees cannot sponsor their partners (The Migration Observatory 2016). The UK spouse visa falls outside of the legal aid, and many are unable to successfully navigate this difficult process alone. RFUK helps vulnerable couples/families who are pushed into poverty, single parent households and a life of uncertainty as a result of this visa process.

For many, the rules and application process also cause extreme mental, emotional difficulties. Many feel lost, anxious and alone and don't know where to turn. Compounded by the cost of living and a lack of knowledge in the services and therefore resources available our families see us as a critical source of information and, for some, a lifeline.

Since RFUK was created in 2017, we've seen a small Facebook group grow from just a few members to now over 2400 people - made up of couples and families affected by the current spouse visa rules. During our time, we've been privy to some very upsetting and disturbing accounts from members as they navigate one of the world's most hostile immigration systems. Amidst those accounts, we've had the misfortune of reading many that involve children.

We feel very strongly that our member's speak for themselves and that you, the Children's Commissioner, are able to read in their own words what their children have been subjected to - and provide insight into what other families have experienced over the last decade since the MIR was introduced. With that in mind, what follows below are testimonies from them (all names have been changed for anonymity purposes) and the major themes that these testimonies touch on. At the end of the report, we will detail recommendations for the government.

Themes:

1. Mental health impact on children

Children with pre-existing mental health problems can have their mental health exacerbated by being trapped in this family visa rules. There is an indication from our case studies that there is a lack of understanding from medical professionals regarding the impact of immigration on these children's mental health. As illustrated by one of our members who is subjected to this visa rule in this case study below:

Case study 001:

"We have been separated since May 2019. I have my son who is a British citizen with me a, British citizen and we have my husband and my child's father from a non-EU country (prior to Brexit). We were last together in 2019 when our child was 2.2months. At 2.5 years old a few months after his papa left, he stopped talking, he went from a child who was attempting to speak to silence. No words came from his mouth. He literally turned mute. He wouldn't ask for food or drink he would just cry and point. He screamed constantly. In 2020, things progressed worse, our child was regressing, he struggled with going to nursery, now we had to get the health visitor involved, I was worried it was ASD, they all told me it wasn't. So I said is it connected to his papa and the uncertainty, they (the professionals) said yes.

Then 2021 hits, son has been in and out of school nursery, school nursery see the delays, they agree something isn't right. They ask about home life, we get a key worker for support, no one can believe what the government are doing to us, why they ask? Why indeed, I say. Come to April 2021, we get the appointment through and a specialist speech and language (no one can believe our luck), health visitor continues to tell me that he's ok don't worry, basically saying it's all in my head... and then the Speech and Language categorically after one hour with our boy writes a report to a pediatrician to say yes I believe he has ASD... but it's down to the specialist. Appointment is had, diagnosis there and then is given... I cried I cried grief, relief a whole mix of emotions. It's not known to be given a diagnosis in the first appointment (hence us being the lucky ones!!!)"

As illustrated here, there can be a lack of understanding on the intimate link between immigration and mental health, which can leave children in this type of families waiting for an extended period of time before they get proper diagnosis, thus delay getting the right type of support for them. Children continues to suffer from mental health due to prolonged separation from their parents. Our case studies show that both parents and children experience an immense sense of ambiguous loss. The term ambiguous loss is coined by Pauline Boss to describe the type of "loss that remains unclear" (Boss 1999). In ambiguous loss, the family has to deal with whether a family member is present or absent. The main feature of this loss is that a family member may be physically absent but psychologically present (Falicov 2002, Solheim et al 2016). As opposed to death, where the loss is definite, ambiguous loss has no clear "defined event of loss" and "no rituals to mark it", therefore the sadness that comes with it is often not validated (Solheim and Ballard 2016, p.343). In Solheim and Ballard's study (2016), they state that ambiguous loss arises from the family's own voluntary decision to separate but also point out that the decision is not entirely their choice. Similarly, many of the families in this visa route made decision to live separately but their decisions are constraint by finances and visa requirements. Ambiguous loss takes an emotional toll on family members. This manifests as worry about safety and well-being of their partners, inability to make decisions, and never-ending grief (Solheim and Ballard 2016, p.344). Ambiguous loss can then be elevated by reunification. However, as pointed out by Solheim and Ballard (2016), the ambiguity around the likelihood of reunification can increase distress. They argue that it is not necessarily the length of separation but the uncertainty around the length of separation that can lead to negative impacts on family members and relationship (p.353). Again, as demonstrated by our case studies:

Case study 003:

"The strain on everyone's mental health up to this point has been enormous. Our son (Lucas) misses his Dad terribly and often asks, (especially at bedtime) how many days it will be until we can see him. Of course, now that Tom's spousal visa is under process and his passport is with VFS (visa application centre) we can't answer this question accurately, which is frustrating for Lucas. He is used to being apart, but he's also used to having a timeframe for when he will see Daddy next, so this is really difficult to explain to him this time that none of us know when the next time that Daddy will be at home in the UK is. It's extraordinarily hard on me being the one he's asking these questions to and not having the information to be able to answer him accurately. [...] For Tom, being apart from us and working a hugely stressful job in order to save for his visa has taken a huge toll on his mental health. This impacts upon Lucas definitely as he sees that both his parents are stressed about a variety of issues that most people growing up never witness. The simple task of being able to know and plan when we can next see on another over the past couple of years has been horrendous. Prior to the pandemic we had a good routine of seeing Tom every month to six weeks, but of course Covid changed everything."

Case study 007:

"My husband and I have been together for 16 years. We moved in with each other after dating for 4 months. In the years together we have only spent max a week apart. We missed our 10th wedding anniversary in March this year because of this [visa] process. My husband is still in South Africa. Myself and our two young children 5 years and 8 years moved to the UK as we are all UK citizens but unfortunately my husband has no links to the UK apart from his wife and children. Anyway, we, the boys and I moved to the UK in August 2021. It was NOT a decision we took lightly. [...] Since then I have had to reassure my children that daddy is coming (can't say when), hold them when they cry for him, try and explain a "timeline" to them, but able to give them a straight answer. When we got here we had an "event timeline" kids don't understand this whole process. So we ticked off events such as Halloween, Christmas, birthdays.... they knew Easter was our last one before daddy would come we at the time hoped for May/June this year. My eldest realised where we were in the year and said "yay, easter is done now, daddy is coming soon" And I had to tell him no he won't be here and I don't know when... do you know how hard it is for a parent to see the absolute disappointment on your child's face? It broke my heart."

The uncertainty around time of reunification can severely affect family planning, as illustrated below:

Case study 006:

"In 2017, way before we became parents, we found ourselves separated for 11 months because of the harsh family migration laws, mainly the minimum income requirement, that was wrongly implemented on our fiancé visa application. We met the MIR however the visa was incorrectly refused meaning our lives as a family was on hold. We had several news stories around this in 2018.

I have fertility issues and we so desperately wanted to have a baby but were prevented from doing so. The refusal costs us thousands in legal fees, and I lost my job because of it meaning I lost income, and also lost my mind as I was sectioned under 136 of the mental health act after trying to commit suicide as a direct result of the refusal. Which meant our plans of becoming a family would be a distant reality."

2. Impacts on parent-child relationship

Children develop abandonment issues and resentment toward parents who are not able to be with them due to the family visa rules. Children become angry at one or both parents and this in turn effects the parent-child relationship (some children refuse to communicate with the absent parent). Children suffer great anxiety worrying that they may be the cause of the situation their parents find themselves trapped in. The needs of the child have to come before the immigration needs of the parent and this can cause friction within the family unit.

Case study 004:

“Our situation since 2018 has changed significantly for the better; but that is only a consequence of our having been rendered completely unable to return to the UK to be reunited as a family with my daughter from a previous marriage. My wife is South African and we applied for a UK spouse visa in 2017, but were rejected upon the grounds of my having not supplied sufficient proof of my earnings to demonstrate that I was above the Minimum Income Requirement.

As a consequence, we have been left with no alternative but to settle permanently in the Republic of Ireland, which has been our home since 2016. Whilst my wife and I have both forged successful careers here, I have not been able to see my daughter in the UK in person since 2019 due to the Covid pandemic. Next year, both my wife and I will be eligible to apply for Irish citizenship, which is what we plan to do. Due to the Common Travel area, attaining Irish citizenship will enable my wife to live and work in the UK if she so wishes. Some form of family reunification - in whatever form that is now available to us - may then be possible. However, at present, there is no conceivable way to return to the UK with my wife under British immigration rules.

My relationship with my daughter has suffered greatly since 2016. She was not quite six when we left for Ireland; she is now 12. Our move was only supposed to be temporary, so she has been labouring under the notion that we would be coming back at some point. She has frequently been deeply upset by our being apart and has displayed unmistakable signs of separation anxiety. There have been many instances over the last few years when my daughter has not wanted to talk to me on the phone, because she finds it too upsetting not having me there in person. This situation persists to this day.”

3. Access to benefits by migrant partners

Lack of access to mainstream benefits by the migrant partners can financially impact the well-being of the whole family. The migrant partner is not entitled to any mainstream benefits, therefore can put the whole family in a financially difficult situation. Families restrict their spending for visa fees, thus can devoid children of important things that they may want, or opportunities, etc. As explained by one of our members here. Her husband, a migrant partner is not entitled to any financial support or benefit, thus pushing him to work long hours, away from their newborn.

Case study 006:

“Even now, 9/10 months on, we struggle as my husband has to work long hours, to make sure he has enough money to pay for future visa applications due to their rising costs, which again now has another impact on our baby as she is very clingy to me and often doesn’t know how to react having her dad around as she hardly knows him. Had our visa not been refused in 2017, we would have completed the 5 year route to ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain) now, and could be living a stress free life as a loving family.

This should be a time for our family to flourish and grow, however due the constant red tape because of the immigration system is preventing that and causing us nothing but stress and heartache. We are constantly waiting for what is going to happen next. Will visa fees increase? Will the requirements change? Will we be forced to leave the UK, the only home we have ever known?”

Recommendations and conclusion:

As explained above, families and children who are subjected to this harsh family visa rule are facing a barrage of issues and are receiving inadequate support from their communities, public services and the government. Many of these families feel betrayed by the nation they called “home”. They feel neglected and excluded just because their family structures and circumstances do not necessarily fit the desirable and stereotypical image of an ideal family to the nation.

In order for the Government to enable these families to thrive steps should be taken to remove the Minimum Income Requirement from family visas thus reducing the strain on single parents and enabling them to consistently care for their own children. Reducing the visa fees will make the family visas more affordable. By locking families out of the visa process we are not only effecting the outcomes of children through poverty and separation we are also impacting the public purse leaving many families reliant on the benefits system.

Public services also need to be better informed about family visa rules. There is a distinct lack of knowledge within community, public and voluntary services (a very good example is Citizens Advice who simply refer individuals to legal advice they can barely afford). We cannot support children and their families if we have no understanding of the issues they are facing. This lack of knowledge and understanding leads families to isolation and this again will cause disparity and effect the outcomes of the child.

Legal aid is not available for family visa applications, visa fees are incredibly high therefore locking low income or families on certain benefits completely out of reuniting and attaining a family life. Children of these types of families are already at a disadvantage from day one not only will their outcomes be impacted by the disadvantages the financial constraints their parents are under but they will also be effected by the insecurity of family separation.

In 2018, we provided the Children's Commissioner with testimonials from our members regarding the impact of the rules on their children. Below

Case study

Here is my story. My husband is Thai, and we have a 3-year-old daughter. His visa was refused so I gave birth alone. The whole experience was very stressful and depressing. I was kept in due to lack of fetal movement. I was the only woman on my ward who was alone. Everyone else had the partner around them to support and worry with them. It was a very dark time. I felt like everyone was judging me. Why was she alone where is the dad? My daughter's birth was straight forward and as any woman's knows you just want it to be over. The worst part was after seeing all the happy families seeing what I couldn't have. I will never forget Face Timing my husband so he could see his first born. He just cried because he couldn't hold her. After that I suffered postnatal depression and so did he but kept mine secret as my situation was already complicated and I didn't want the Health visitor to judge. There have been so many heart-breaking moments when my daughter was 6 months, we went to see her dad and she was terrified because he was practically a stranger. However, as she gets older it only gets harder as she cries every time, she says goodbye she asks constantly where her daddy is and often cries at night wanting cuddles. He has missed every milestone and I'm practically a single mum. It's so inhuman to keep a father and daughter separated over money. I would do anything for us to be a regular family. There is so much to tell you I can't convey in an email. If you need anything further, please contact me

Case study

I'm writing to highlight concerns about the failure to uphold the rights of the child in the context of immigration law in the UK. My circumstances are that my husband has been in India since February 2014, four and a half years separated from our daughter. She was 7 when he left and is now 12. He has been unable to return to the UK because he was an overstayer. My husband has been unable to pass the A1 English test and return to the UK. We satisfy all the requirements for a spouse visa, including income and accommodation but he has not been able to pass the test. We applied for a visitor's visa for my husband in August 2018, after four and a half years and this was refused on a technical point. The Entry Clearance Officer did not read the documents we submitted properly. Not only is there poor decision making but most fundamentally our daughter is being denied the right of seeing and living with her father. We communicate via FaceTime and nightly phone calls. This is difficult because of the time difference, currently four and a half hours. My daughter cries for her father and misses him very much. As she has got older, she has been travelling to and from India by herself as an accompanied minor. This costs us a lot of money in extra airfares. I would highlight that my husband is not a drain on the public purse and that the UK government policies on immigration are draconian and racist. They seek to penalise those from outside the EU. I am happy to provide more information should you require it for your report.

Case study

Our son who was born in January 2017. Although he was still a baby, I believe now is the most important time to gain a bond with parents, but how can he do that if his Baba is still in Turkey? Facetime/WhatsApp/Skype calls aren't enough.

I feel so strongly about him having his Baba around we have no choice but to travel to Turkey to visit as every time we applied for a visit visa it's been declined on the basis the HO don't believe he is a genuine visitor. This is expensive, stressful and not something a baby should have to do to see both mum and dad together. I can't say how it will affect him in the future because I'm hoping that soon I will find a job to reach the minimum income without having to leave him in childcare, with a stranger who will be sharing every special moment with him for 10 hours a day. But I can tell you he has seen me cry, his Baba cry, he has heard our pain on the phone, he has been literally pulled out of his Babas arms screaming at the airport because we've held each other till the last second before I have to run to the departure gate. How is this fair? How is this OK for my child? What has he done

to deserve this start to life?

Yes, I need to get a job. Yes, a majority of parents leave children in nurseries and babysitters. But my son only has me in the UK and I worry that both we are going to miss his exciting years and he will look at both of us in the way he looks at strangers.

Family is important and without choosing so we are a broken family.

Case study

We lived happily together as a family in Turkey for the first 6 years of our daughter's life. Following on from the military coup which directly impacted our family and for other reasons we decided we would return to live in the UK. I, and our now 9-year-old daughter had to return to the UK without her father. It took a year as an experienced and qualified secondary school teacher before I could find suitable work in Devon to meet the income threshold of £18,600 and a further 6 months before we could apply. In total our family was separated for almost 2 years.

Unfortunately, this indefinite separation had devastating effects on our daughter who was 6 years old when we first moved. I spotted a problem with her ability to speak and this was later diagnosed by a doctor as selective mutism. She suffered with such severe anxieties it affected her life every day. When I was working, she would scream, cry and plead with me not to leave her, a form of separation anxiety. Having been pulled away from her father, she was now losing her mother too to the world of work in an attempt to live and meet the requirements. My daughter was referred to CAMHS to see a psychologist for anxiety that on occasions was so severe caused her to collapse.

This whole process, due to living in 2 countries, the need for my husband to give up his job as an English Teacher in Turkey because of the difficulties he had to leave Turkey, and the need to financially support him in Turkey at the same time as supporting myself and our daughter, not without the near £3,000 visa application fees, cost of flights to visit my husband in Turkey and generally costs that normal UK families would not have to find has left us financially impoverished.

We are now together as a family again. We need time to rebuild our family life of which for 2 years our daughter has hardly had any communication with her father. She refused to use skype to speak to her Dad, always running away from the screen and hiding because in her words "I miss Daddy too much". It is already noticeable that this separation has had an effect on her and her relationships with other people. Now, she clings to her Dad, she won't let him out of her sight. In the meantime, emotionally and financially we are rebuilding our family again after such a devastating separation.

Case study

My son was separated from his dad for 9 months ... he was 1 at the time. There was a huge emotional impact on him. When reunited with his dad the first time he was wary, after a few weeks the interaction was normal once again.

We then had to return to south Africa to apply for the spouse visa. My son had to share a bedroom with me and sleep on a mattress on the floor. I could not sleep on the floor and give him the bed as he fell out of bed on two occasions and landed on wooden floor in the middle of night. We had to live in a house that was not childproof ... that had 5 staircases which was a constant worry. There was the constant worry about his actual safety as we were a victim of an attempted hijacking / smash and grab and a break in. He certainly picked up on my constant anxiety.

When we came back it was very difficult for him to adjust again. He would not bath with his father even though this was always their special time. His speech is severely delayed now I cannot claim this is a direct result, but I can certainly say we could not get assistance or advice as we were living in limbo at the time. What we thought would be a quick 3 week visit to South Africa ended up being an extremely stressful 4-month separation.

When we returned to our home in UK for the second time ... the first day his dad returned to work was heart breaking he stood sobbing at the door, he was inconsolable. Of course, for him the last time he had said goodbye to daddy in person there was a 4-month separation. When I left him for the first time he sobbed and clung to me for dear life. It was extremely hard for him. A mother actually made a snide remark about "how pathetic it was". Clearly, she had no idea my child had lived in 5 different houses, England, Wales, South Africa had people come into his life for a period of time and then completely disappear. Done 3 international flights. But ignorance is bliss.

It's now 10 months later he has finally settled. I can now leave him at nursery and his father can leave for work without him being distraught. He is still not talking appropriately for his age, but we have put plans into action and getting him help.

I could most probably go on for hours as to the affect this had on an innocent child.

Case study

I remember very clearly when I read of the new rule changes. I remember sitting, with my one-year-old daughter on my knee, confused and shocked. How would we as a family, me as a mum who only worked part time in a developing country ever be able to meet these new criteria?

I had given birth to my daughter in my country of residence one year previously. It was August 2011. When I researched the possibility of us returning to the UK to birth in a familiar environment Citizen's advice told me two things. 1) The visit visa would be difficult so I would be looking at giving birth alone or giving birth in Thailand (also alone since men could not be in the labour room) 2) The settlement visa was an option to us.

My mother-in-law was diagnosed with terminal cancer while I was pregnant, so we stayed in Thailand. We had savings, professional jobs. I saw no reason why we could not move later.

I hated it. I had a stressful pregnancy, was treated appallingly by my employers, the doctors did nothing to promote modern childbirth (separated from my baby for 8 hours at birth for no reason, c section, formula given without consent at first feed). The birth was also expensive and could have run into tens of thousands of pounds if there were complications. I had to fight every step of the way to have mine and my daughter's voice heard.

In time of course the effect of the rules on our family life became clear. Post-natal depression unrecognized by the medical profession set in. My second daughter arrived as the country experienced yet another coup- the route to the hospital was blocked by protesters and tanks. It was frightening and uncertain, with a long history of political instability there was talk of civil war. Two children were killed leaving a major shopping mall less than 200 metres from myself and my week-old baby. My husband inadvertently drove through a shoot-out outside another shopping mall with our two-year-old in the car.

I was sinking under the weight of two small children, a dying mother-in-law, a husband who worked extremely long hours and my own worried mother who could not understand why we could not just come home.

We were also extremely poor. The medical fees, my lack of work, my husband's local salary could not support a family. We received no statutory maternity pay and no child benefit from our resident country. Our situation was precarious.

In 2014 I went back to full time work in order to slowly build up to meeting the income requirement. My youngest daughter was 3 months old. My youngest has grown up with both her parents working between 50 hours and 100 hours a week, with their living grandparents 10,000 miles from them. As long we live here my children will suffer.

Both free education and healthcare are poor. The education system is one of the worst in the world. Our youngest daughter has a very obvious, yet thankfully benign heart condition. This was not picked up until she saw a doctor in the UK in 2016. The doctor suspected a heart murmur. Private healthcare is very expensive. This now costs us thousands every year to monitor and excess health insurance.

Private education is very expensive and excluding a few international schools that meets UK standards remains extremely poor. Corporal punishment, shaming, outdated teaching methods are widespread. My eldest daughter has suspected dyslexia. She is seven and struggles to read and write. To test her would cost £.1,000. There is no specialist support at her private school.

In this Asian mega city, we commute for 4 hours a day just to take the children to school (travelling less than 10km). They are exposed to air pollution that is always listed as unhealthy, and often dangerous to sensitive groups. Occasionally it is dangerous to all. My youngest daughter wheezes and coughs. They wear a face mask at times in the year so they can breathe. If we leave the city, we lose the magical income which would allow us to return to the UK.

- Is it British children's fault that their parents are unable to give them a better life with the same opportunities as their UK based peers because of family migration policies?
- Why to British citizens (and until recently their spouses) automatically receive their UK pension abroad but British children abroad in exile are not entitled to child benefit?
- Why are British children living in exile denied or charged for using healthcare services in the UK?
- If the French government can subsidize education for French children abroad, why is the British government happy with the possibility of its children growing up with poor educational experiences?

The American government can issue a spousal visa if the applicant can prove poverty. British children are being denied basic rights because their parents cannot afford a reasonable education/ healthcare in the resident country.

The British government, in following this policy targets young mums and their children. We are forced to make the impossible decision to a) leave the children's father for an unspecified period of time b) leave the children and the father for an unspecified period of time c) relinquish our right to live in our home country.

Case study

It's difficult to find the right words to use to describe our situation. My daughter is still a baby - a toddler - therefore unaware. Unaware emotionally and mentally of the fact that because of the income threshold her daddy has not been able to hold her. Unaware that her daddy ended up in the hospital after suffering a nervous mental breakdown trying so desperately to bring his family

home. One day however, if things don't change, I will have to have these conversations with her. I will have to explain to her why she was not allowed to have a normal healthy up bringing with two parents that love each other honestly. How do you explain to your child that because we are normal working class, she is not up to par to having her daddy tuck her in at night and read her a bedtime story? Or simply have breakfast with her, walk her to school. Take care of her when she is sickly, hug her and kiss her cheeks. Light the candles on her birthday cake. I could go on and on all the little things that make up our everyday lives, that my baby girl will not get to have with her daddy.

For now, she is a toddler who is completely oblivious to his absence. It is him and I who suffer for her. How does this affect her now? Financially it does. If we were allowed to be together then we would both be able to work, providing her with a financially stable home. At the moment I am at home with her, as she is now receiving therapies to help her with speech and sensory. Yes, I am in the States and because I am here and he is there, I am left with no option but to get public aid and state insurance. If we were together that would be different, I know this for a fact. I am aware that us being in the States makes that something that does not affect directly over there. But I do often think of the mothers in the U.K. being forced to live like me like single mothers, having to rely on public aid. I hope that this somehow helps make things right. I hope that one day all of our children will get to live a regular childhood, without having to carry such a heavy burden of not feeling they belong. Or having to choose which parent to live with if it splits the parents up. This is wrong in every possible way.

Case study

It took us 8 months to reach the criteria and then apply for the visa, and then a wrong refusal before getting the visa just over 1 year apart. During this time, I had to be with my son alone and was pregnant with my daughter. It came about that my son needed intervention for his hearing and behaviour. He is now undergoing autism assessment. As you can imagine this has meant that I he has needed to complete many tasks at home which was impossible with a new-born baby and a child who was all over.

I wasn't able to work, and I had no idea of when we would see my husband and their daddy again. We would FaceTime but my son couldn't talk so would just say dada or run around.

Due to the rules he missed the first 10 months nearly of his daughter's life. This is a bond that can't be replaced. I have photos of him holding his baby son looking proud as punch but nothing like that with our daughter.

He missed some of her firsts. The children have had to deal with only seeing daddy on the Internet and sometimes we couldn't do this due to the 8hr time difference or bad connection. Father's Day my son had to send a picture of what he made to his dad because he wasn't here - due to an error on the visa decision.

We have had to save as well due to the costs, and my son is so happy now that he is used to having his dad here. The first month he was lost but now he will happily play with him, have bonding time etc.

My daughter is becoming a daddy's girl which is cute to watch. Since my daughter is only nearly 1 and son only nearly 3, we won't fully know the negative impacts but the fact he is trying to interact with his dad shows a lot.

Case study

I am a UK citizen and met my husband (an Indian national) while working in India in 2010. We married in 2012 and have been wanting to move to the UK since around 2015 to be closer to my family, but we were put off by the lengthy time we'd have to be apart. As my husband is a software engineer, we thought that eventually we might be able to move when he got a job transfer, or similar. But with UK work sponsorship visas harder and harder to secure as well, that never happened.

Our (British) daughter was born in November 2016, and we finally made the very difficult decision to go ahead with moving to the UK in early 2018. I received a job offer above the income threshold and moved (with our 16-month-old) to start that in April 2018. My husband remained in Bangalore.

Relocating from abroad and needing to take up a job as soon as possible to secure the 6 payslips required to even apply, meant that couldn't really afford to be picky about what I took. I therefore took a job in Oxford - a region of the UK where I have no family support. The rental market is very competitive in Oxford, and also very expensive. On a salary of £27,000, and effectively a single parent as my husband was not allowed to join me, I was not able to afford both the rent on even a one-bedroom flat within a 30-minute radius of my office, and the full-time childcare I would need to enable me to work. If my husband had been allowed to even come and provide childcare (even if he was initially not allowed to work) we would have been able to manage on my salary.

Therefore, I took the decision to move in with my mother in Lincolnshire. It means that I have a 2- 2.5-hour commute to Oxford, but that our child is in safe and loving hands while I'm at work. My mother gave up her full-time job to support us through this period. With the commute as it is, I often don't see my daughter at all Monday - Thursday, as I leave before she is awake, and return home after she is in bed. I'm lucky that my office allows me to work from home on Fridays.

This means that the UK visa system has deprived our child of her father, and also, for a large proportion of the time, her mother. It also means that it has deprived another UK citizen (my mother) of her ability to work.

Our daughter is now 22 months, and we will have enough payslips to apply for my husband's visa at the end of October, though with processing times as they are, we most likely won't be reunited until early 2019.

It's hard to quantify the impact that this year will have had on my daughter. When we first moved back, she had separation anxiety when simultaneously her surroundings changed, and I was suddenly apart from her. When we moved, I was still breastfeeding, but the amount of time I was apart from her while working to meet the income threshold meant that I was unable to continue.

She still gets distressed when she wakes up on a Monday morning and finds that I'm not there. She gets very anxious when me/my mother leave the room and has a habit of repeating 'mummy is here' 'grandma is here' when we are there, I think to reassure herself that no-one else is going to suddenly disappear from her life.

With regard to her Papa, she's now been apart from him for 1/3 of her life, at a crucial stage in her language acquisition and development. While her English is progressing well, she's forgotten how to speak/understand Hindi, as there's no-one to speak to her at home in that language. Skype conversations are just not able to replicate the process of slowly acquiring a language through exposure to a parent speaking it in context. As her paternal grandparents don't speak English, this could really distance her from the Indian side of her heritage and is a source of worry.

I can't see how any of this situation is in keeping with our fundamental right to a family life, or my daughter's right to be brought up by both of her parents.

Sorry if this is a bit long-winded, but I hope it helps to show how making the UK citizen meet the income threshold in order to bring their partner here effectively deprives young children of both of their parents.

Case study

I am from the US, but have lived in the UK since 2008, and became a naturalised citizen in 2014. I am also a divorced father of two lovely children, who live in the US with their mother. In the past couple of years, my ex-wife's mother has become increasingly ill, and requires care. Since she lives in Russia, it is very difficult to arrange any care, as family members generally provide care for their elders. The children's mother needed to return to Russia to provide this care, so we decided that the only avenue available to us was for the children to come live with me in London. We spent two solid years preparing for this move, including following various instructions set out by my lawyers, in order to transfer legal custody over to me. We also assembled a mountain of evidence to verify our situation.

In May, we applied to the Home Office for resident permits for the children, on the basis that I would be the sole carer, and in consideration of "compelling family or other considerations" as per S297(i)(f) of the Immigration Rules. In June, their applications were rejected, throwing our entire plan into chaos. Despite having provided volumes of evidence, including doctor's certification of the illness, my own income and housing situation, and written testimonials, the only response was that the officer was "not satisfied that there are serious and compelling family or other considerations which make your exclusion undesirable and that suitable arrangements have been made for your care". (The latter point is absurd, as we secured places in a good school, and my remuneration is more than sufficient, as per the Home Office's own requirements.)

We have since appealed this decision, but unfortunately have been told that this process could take up to a year. In the meantime, we had to give up their school places, and the children are staying with relatives in the US, while their mother travels back home to care for her ailing mother. This situation is unsustainable in the long term; however, we feel we have no other choice but to wait and hope that our appeal will be successful. In the meantime, their names have been placed on a list of failed visa applicants, which causes them to undergo extra scrutiny whenever they cross the UK border. This involved a 90-minute wait in Heathrow when they came for a visit in the summer. Not only are they not allowed to come live with their father, but they are treated as common criminals whenever they even try to visit me. It's all very disheartening.

Case study

We have been living as a happy family until January 2017, when we had to move to the UK from abroad. I had to go to Ukraine to apply for the spouse visa and my husband went to the UK to start his new job, find a place for us to live and settle down.

I was pregnant with our second son then and was due in July 2017, our elder son was 19 months old when we had to say goodbye to his dad and my husband and go to Ukraine. In total, we were separated for 4.5 months but we still see the consequences and deal with them.

This separation affected our son so much. He was crying to sleep almost every night. He started hating the phone because he had to talk to his dad on Skype and he couldn't understand why his dad was never coming home from work. In general, he was a happy boy, playing and being happy, but when we were talking on Skype, he didn't want to stay in the room. It looked like it was a betrayal from his dad not to come home. I could feel that he was also angry but couldn't express it well. He was just pushing the phone away when we were on skype. We were trying to keep him busy, occupied every day, but it was not easy. It

was very traumatic for our son. We could not arrange things in a different way, unfortunately, as my husband started his new job and it was not possible for him to take care of our son there in the UK. I don't agree with the process at all. Why are families separated that way? I cannot imagine our son growing up without his dad. Our son is so happy to spend time with him, playing, reading, doing just anything! Anything, but together.

My son is still very clingy to his dad. Even when my husband travels for work for a couple of days and we speak on skype, our son doesn't like it and starts crying all the time and asks me when daddy will be coming from work. Last weekend my husband had to travel and was away till Monday, so we were talking on skype every day. Every time he was calling, my son was crying and saying, 'I want my daddy'. When my husband was talking to us all, our son was asking dad just to come home. It was heart-breaking and it took me around 45 minutes to make our son to calm down and stop crying while putting him to sleep in the evening as he sounded so desperate and kept crying and saying, 'I want my daddy'. He was sobbing and I had to teach him how to take deep breaths and relax, giving him water to drink as well just to make sure he doesn't start crying again. Our elder son is 39 months old now and I really hope that this will pass soon, and he won't remember that he had a long separation with his dad in the past.

I really hope that he will grow out of it soon and forgets about it, as it is really heart-breaking to see our son not letting his dad out of sight and getting upset. My husband is spending a lot of time together with our son, trying to make our son feel confident that they will never be separated again and always be together, that dad is always there to support him, to teach him things and play.

And there is one more side of our story: it is a congenital heart defect of our younger son. When I applied for the visa from Ukraine, I found out during our scan that our son has a transposition of the great arteries and required an open-heart surgery straight after birth. We informed UKVI about it, but it was ignored. If they delayed it for longer and if our local MP didn't intervene, I don't know what would happen if this surgery had to be performed not in the UK. It is a life-saving surgery as the baby is not able to survive and the whole life of the baby depends on the result.

We met all the criteria for the spouse visa, but it was put on hold just because a few papers were missing, and we explained it in our cover letter. The situation in Ukraine was not stable at that time too, and we were just two hundred kilometres from the war zone. This fact was also ignored.

Case study

My daughter only moved from turkey to UK end of July. I've been here since beginning March 18. She stayed with her grandparents so her father could work (4 hours away in a different town) & so that I could come back, find a job etc. That was an incredibly stressful time for all, the extra stress on me in laws, us as a couple & our daughter, who at 4 years old, doesn't understand why we had to be apart. She has now started school, but wets herself every day in school, asks for her daddy every day & has separation anxiety with me. She follows me like a puppy. I find it so hard being a single parent (& not by choice) working full time & struggling financially. My parents passed away 6 years ago so I don't really have any support network here but rely on childminders & after school clubs-which all costs money too. I can apply for his visa at the end of October & although we have a good case & we meet all requirements, I can't help panicking, thinking what will happen if they say no.

Case study

"I just want to be a 'normal' family!"

3 years ago, I met and fell in love with my partner. I am a UK citizen, born and raised in Great Britain, but my partner is a Kenyan citizen, and this is where our 'happy ever after' became a battle!

Our son was born in March 2016 and his daddy missed the whole pregnancy and the birth as he had returned home to Kenya due to his current visa. Myself and my older son travelled to Kenya to visit my partner and stay with him for a week, so we could be a family. He felt the baby move and became attached to his baby. At each midwife appointment and scan I felt so alone, he should be with me, but I would send him photographs of the scans. Seeing the other father's supporting their wives was just heart-breaking and I spent most of the 9 months crying.

We applied and were rejected for 3 visitor's visas so that my partner could be part of his baby's life from the beginning.

I was induced early due to stress and the baby being in distress and gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby boy. A magical moment when our baby should be looking into his mother's and father's eyes as he is being held knowing that he is part of a family, but this couldn't happen! These refusals lead to our son having only a skype and photo messenger relationship with his father and therefore no physical bond was formed between father and son (a basic human right?)

Due to work commitments and our GP advising that I could not travel with my son under the age of 12 months due to vaccinations that could not be given at that age to protect him whilst in Kenya, we had to wait until our son was 18 months old to take him to Kenya to meet his father for the first time. The meeting was exciting and scary. What if our son saw a stranger there and did not

bond?! We were extremely lucky to have 3 weeks together giving our son and his father time to bond and for us to become the family that we all wish for. We had a wonderful 3 weeks and it was just amazing to see the love that they both had for each other, until the heart-breaking day we had to return home. Our son only has a limited language but is constantly saying "daddy gone". What must he be thinking? I had a man I cuddled and played with who I called daddy and now he isn't there?! When our son now asks for Daddy, I am resorted to show him photographs on the laptop so he can remember his daddy and call him through Skype, so the bond remains. It tears me apart when he looks at a photo of our time in Kenya and says, "Daddy cuddle". He looks at an aeroplane and asks, "Me go plane, cuddle daddy!" It is heart breaking at this age that the effect of this separation has on our son, but I am scared what long term damage this can have on his mental health.

I am aware that there is a wealth of evidence which indicates that children are far more likely to thrive when they are raised by parents in a warm, stable and loving family environment and research shows that many children being brought up in a 'skype family' suffer from stress and anxiety, affecting their well-being and development. It may also have an impact on their educational attainment and outcomes due to these inflexible rules which take little account of regional income levels or family support available. This scares me as we obviously want the best for our son and are very aware of any moods, tempers that he has and am working closely with my Health Visitor to support any behaviours that may arise due to our circumstances.

The financial pressure that this is putting on me as a forced single mother is unbearable. Childcare costs as I Work to pay bills alone, whereas if my partner was here then these costs would reduce, and I would be less burden on society as his wage also would cease the Tax Credits that I am currently receiving.

Case study

My wife and I have two children. At the time of the refusal our daughter was nearly four years old and settled in our local pre-school. Our son was 8 months old and still breast feeding. I had been working away and had given up the job to return to the UK to reunite our family. The main reason was for the health of the family unit, and particularly for our daughter, as she was often reported to be staring at the world map in school, "to be near her Daddy".

We considered having the whole family return to my wife's home country to make her application, but it would mean taking our daughter out of Pre-school for 3 months minimum and doing so would unsettle her. It never occurred to us for my wife to go without the children.

We felt that the children's interests should and would be considered of utmost importance by the Home Office, therefore made the application for Leave to Remain. The refusal was a big shock. Not just the decision, but the reasoning within. It states:

"This decision takes into account as a primary consideration the best interests of any relevant child in line with the Secretary of States duty under section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009".

Then in the same correspondence refuses a breast-feeding mother the right to stay with her children, and in gross contradiction states:

"The Secretary of State will not be denying your children the rights of being a British Citizen as it is open for them to remain in the UK with their father.....".

Our MPs office also indicated that the separation of mother and child no longer carried weight. A startling admission, which frankly reduced me to tears. How can this not carry weight? What could be more important in a civilised society? I asked if this

was government policy and was met with terse emails saying I wasn't allowed to quote them. It therefore seems to me, that a conscious decision has been made to ignore section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, and to try and keep it quiet.

After significant media attention, our decision was overturned.

Case study

The impact of the visa rules on my 5-month-old has been horrendous. At birth she came out unresponsive and had to be revived and following on from that she was constantly in and out of intensive care. She is now 5 months old and still hasn't met her dad due to her health. I now need to go back to work and earn £18600 a year, I am struggling to find a single full time job that pays that much, so I will probably have to balance two jobs meaning our daughter will be left 50 hours a week in the hands of a stranger. This means she will also be denied of her mother as well as her father and I am incredibly nervous that this will affect her mentally, physically and emotionally as she grows up wondering what she has done wrong and why she can't have 2 parents like the other children, while they are met by their fathers at school. I am concerned my daughter will feel like an 'outcast' and may also get bullied for this reason. She has done nothing wrong and deserves to have both parents. At the moment I am concerned that she will not recognise her father when she meets him and she may end up hating me and him for not being together for her in one place, I am upset this may have an incredibly negative affect in her as she thinks it's because we don't love her rather than it being because the laws are making things pretty impossible. Socially, this will also have an impact on Alia as I and her father will not be present for the majority of the week while trying to meet the minimum income threshold, I have concerns that it may make Alia shut herself off and continuously blame herself too, which may affect her physical development and things such as speech as well as social development, with teachers, classmates, authorities etc in the future. I also fear for our daughter's mental health growing up due to the knock-on effect of wrongly blaming herself. This may lead to depression at a young age, stress, not feeling good enough and panic attacks. Our daughter is already under the hospital as it is, and having her father kept away from her, the older she gets, will only have an incredibly negative impact on her. As a family we are already struggling, I am struggling going to and from the hospital alone (in the first 7 weeks of our daughters life we were constantly in and out of hospital due to blood transfusion, hypothermia, sickness and diarrhoea, infection, milk allergy and now possible thalassaemia), it has been very draining on us all as a family and her father is now suffering from depression due to this and I have been having chest pains and panic attacks due to the large amount of stress.

Case study

My kids are now British by Adoption but cannot get passports on the grounds of a technicality and a refusal by the Home Office to accept the wording of their own policy. My eldest son is therefore having his application to join the Army frustrated. And my kids are being denied the ability to prove their 'Britishness' and can't even travel abroad now for fear of being denied entry into the UK as they only have Philippine passports but no visas as no longer required

Case study

My family is hugely affected by the minimum income requirements. I do not earn £18,600 per year and therefore my husband cannot obtain a visa to live with us. This has a massive effect on our children (and on us). They miss him terribly and have no understanding of why we can only see him occasionally. Medically it also has an impact on them. Our 6-year-old suffers from IBS, but only has flare ups during the times her father is not here. Our 4-year-old suffers from asthma. Stress and worry cause her to have breathing difficulties, this also affects her during the times her Daddy is not here. Emotionally they are unable to cope. Crying for him during the night, asking why he has gone again. Seeing their Daddy on Skype also affects them. This is no way for children to communicate, they want him here, to cuddle and play with. They don't yet have the patience or understanding to sit and talk at a computer screen. It makes them hurt more that he is not here. It is not only emotionally that we as a family are affected, though I feel this is the most devastating for us. I'm positive that the visa requirements and their effect on us will have a permanent impact on our children's emotional wellbeing

Case study

My British two-year-old son has never been granted the opportunity to meet his non-EU Nigerian father, due to the hostile environment imposed under the Conservative government, led by Theresa May.

According to a child's human rights they have the right to have both loving parents in their life and under article 8 of the human rights act, a right to family life. Our British government is in breach of these rights and it is heavily impacting upon my son's life.

After two refused visitation visas for no just reason our son has missed out on having his father welcome him into the world, care for him, his dad has missed all of his 'first's' including the first time he sat alone, crawled, walked, talked, first day at nursery school, first hair cut- all of the little things which add up and feel so special. For a man who wants to care for his son this is absolutely devastating for him.

As our son grows older day by day, he has noticed that he doesn't have the same family unit that his peers have at nursery. He doesn't have a father to collect him like his friends do, or a father to play with or take him on adventures at the weekends. He doesn't have a father to look after him, protect him and do all the 'boy' activities which he loves so much like playing football. He doesn't have a father present as a role model who he can look up to and follow in his footsteps and most of all, he doesn't have a father to read him a story at night, give him an affectionate cuddle when he's sad and a kiss goodnight.

The Home Office has told numerous families that they are not in breach of their human rights as through modern means of technology, such as Skype, Facebook call messenger, FaceTime and Viber they can sustain a relationship with their parent. I cannot understand this thinking, how can a desktop screen look after your son while you go out to work or give them a kiss or a cuddle, they need human contact.

I could write a dissertation on how these circumstances have affected our son, but I will finish by saying how it has impacted on him financially. Without my partner being here, it has meant a large financial strain. Whilst pregnant and during our son's first year we had to survive on income support, child tax credit and child benefit with no help with rent as I have a mortgage, as I'm sure your aware this is a very small sum and it meant we had to resort to our local food bank for help. I found this embarrassing and shameful so is not something I'd normally share. When our son turned two, I got my current job- a contract of 16 hours per week in a neighbouring town. This has meant a move onto Universal Credit to include help with childcare payment. Although in a better situation than previously, we still face financial strain, working limited hours and paying £9 return per shift for bus fare. Additionally, we are taking far more in state benefits than if my partner was home with us because I am classed as a single parent and am unable to make enough money in a single parent household to be unentitled to benefits. Therefore, through no fault of his own but through Theresa May's 'Hostile Environment' my son has been forced to live in poverty

Case study

I've been with my husband four and half years I'm in UK he is in turkey - we have our 2-year-old son. My husband as only seen our son for 15 weeks in turkey when we have visited. We speak everyday by messenger and long to be together Our son gets very upset when he sees his baba and gets frustrated Myself had to stop work in January so to my health through the stress an upset and was diagnosed in June with fibromyalgia where now I'm in pain and tired always and stressed thinking when will we be together as a family here in the UK .

Case study

Our daughter is 4. She has never lived with her dad due to the visa rules. She suffers terrible separation anxiety and has done for a number of years due to our situation. It all has a lasting effect on her such as when we come home from seeing him and saying bye, she goes through bouts of emotional breakdowns, wetting herself, having bad dreams and a terrible sleeping pattern which professionals say is all due to her being away from her dad. She often says things like she wants her baba to live in our house and why he doesn't come to her birthday parties resulting in her feeling insecurities. She loves her dad so much but the only contact they have is video chat and seeing each other a couple of weeks a year. It is heart-breaking watching what the rules are doing to my daughter and as she gets older it's getting worse. It doesn't just go away either, this affects her every single day and it shouldn't have to. My child's wellbeing and mental health should not be affected on the grounds of what I earn. I wish I could wave a wand and make it all better for her -no one wants to watch their child suffer and be robbed of a loving parent and family home

Case study

My wife and I (both university educated) and our 2 British Children have been massively affected by a wrong decision to reject my wife's spouse settlement visa in June 2016.

After two years, two wrong Home Office decisions and three wrong Immigration Tribunal Judgements, we had our Judicial Review upheld on 17th Jan 2018 and consequently Justice Lane (President of the Upper Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber) decided in our favour at appeal on 4th May this year (23 Months after our initial valid application) (both judgements attached)

This simple miscalculation of our financial documents and repeated upholding of this mistake by three Tribunal Judges prior to Judicial Review. Unbelievably nearly 5 months after our successful appeal, we are still awaiting my wife's visa, although pressure on our local MP (David Rutley) and increasing media exposure, including an article covering a small aspect of our case in the Guardian back in May has meant that the Home Office is now communicating with us to expedite my wife's visa being issued.

Issuing my wife's visa will only begin to address the consequences we and our children have faced and still face, and after requesting a meeting with Sajid Javid we were promised over a month ago a response from Caroline Nokes, which has also yet to materialise.

Unable to return to the UK as planned for the birth of our second child in 2016, he was born in Thailand, whilst we waited over a year without our appeal being properly addressed. As we had sold our house and business in Thailand to meet the £62,500 savings requirement for the Settlement Visa, we were left not only homeless with our newborn son and 2-year-old daughter, but I was no longer eligible for a work permit under Thailand's strict labour laws.

It is not lightly when I say we were left stateless as a family, unable to work and living of our rapidly diminishing savings in hotel accommodation, as we had no idea how long we would have to remain to even enable us to sign a rental agreement.

We were eventually exiled for over a year in Thailand, during which time my father became quite ill, and fearing he might die before meeting his grandchildren we returned to the UK with my wife on a 6 month Visitor Visa in August last year, hoping also our appeal would be upheld in the interim, but fearing we would have to relocate to Ireland under EU Treaty Rights as many British Citizens have been forced to do.

Unfortunately, our appeal was rejected by a third Judge in October, whilst my wife and I were living in cramped conditions at my parents with our two children. The emotional and financial strain and uncertainty became unbearable and I was forced to prepare and file the Judicial Review myself as we had very limited savings remaining to pay for Solicitors.

The night before I had to submit the Judicial review, my wife, unable to cope said she wanted to leave the children and return to Thailand and in the ensuing argument I pushed my wife and struck her with a Peppa Pig Sticker book whilst shouting which led to her phoning the police in desperation.

Despite everything we had suffered over the previous 2 years, neither my wife nor I could ever have imagined the nightmare that ensued.

As is police protocol, I was arrested and detained, and my wife left with both children. However, as we were living at my parents, my wife was not returned to her home as would normally occur but put into Social Care and subsequently a women's refuge with the children, as we were technically homeless.

Due to bail conditions, we were unable to communicate for the following 4 months with my seeing the children once a week for 90 minutes.

The manipulation of my wife and our children's plight by social services is an issue we hope to document in full for the Children's Commissioner and CRAE in future, although with Judicial support we were able to prevent my wife's worst fears materialising, namely that she would be deported, and our children adopted (which we still believe and have substantial evidence was Social Service's intention).

Thankfully my wife and I were quickly able to reconcile once we were able to re-establish communication and within days had received the Judicial Review Judgement in our favour and the Family Court quickly dropped all involvement.

It is frankly a miracle that we are still together happily with our children, and I am aware of many families that have collapsed or are still divided as a direct consequence of the largely unaccountable decisions targeted against low income or self-employed British Citizens and their Families.

The effects however have been exhausting, our children traumatised, denied access to nursery care, their grandparents and a stable home environment, and we have lost all our £100K in savings and a substantial part of my elderly parents' savings.

Despite the highest Judge in the Immigration Appeals Tribunals deciding in our favour 5 months ago, both the Home Office and Ministers continue to act as if their abiding by the Court judgements were at their discretion, and we have received no apology or response to our request for restitution.

27 months after my wife's valid Visa application she is still yet to have it issued, which denies her right to work or access to NHS, despite being a Chronic Hepatitis B sufferer and our children's legal access to free childcare, to which any family earning less than £100K is eligible.

A side issue which was featured in the Guardian, we discovered in court after 2 years, that the Home Office had lost a large proportion of my wife's appeal documents.

This farce has continued, and we were recently informed through our MP, that the 5-month delay since our appeal being upheld was partly due to the Home Office sending my wife's documents to the wrong country.

The Home Office Claims the delay in issuing my wife's visa has also been due to the exceptional nature of our case, however our case is only exceptional in that we were able to continue to Judicial Review and win, where as they know many people simply give up or fail to negotiate the lengthy and deeply compromised appeals process.

What kind of democratic immigration policy can focus on defeating its own citizen's rights to raise their children in their country of birth is beyond comprehension.

I would have thought the MIR is a clear breach of British Children's Article 8 ECHR and I intend to continue to work to focus on legally challenging MIR, Immigration Appeal and Family Court procedure and forced adoption and would be most thankful for your past and present efforts to highlight and rectify these unjust policies.

Case study

My husband and I have 9-year-old twins, they have never spent more than 2 months in a year together as my husband works on the ship. He gets more working there plus free plane ticket to Philippines every 6 months. It's heart-breaking whenever it's time for him to go back on the ship. We had decided to finally apply for settlement visa recently so he can retire working on the ship and stay in England, but we got refused. There is no way he can find a job here in Philippines that will be enough to support us especially now that we just have our third child. Our twins grew up without their father on their side and we're afraid it might happen to our newborn baby if we don't win our appeal. My husband missed a lot of occasions and important events in our children's life. Just because my husband's salary goes to my own account and not his we got denied living together as a normal family.

Case study

I am writing to tell of my family experiences and impact of the current immigration rules mostly with my two children. I have been married to a Russian national since July 2012 we have two children. Currently my wife is in Russia with our daughter and our son is here in the U.K. with me as he attends school here. My wife has been in Russia since November 2017 we saw each other as family for one week in April this year. Our son is a very happy and positive child, it sounds awful to say that I could not stand up in court and swear he was unhappy. Since his mother has gone away there have been some changes. While previously when it was time for him to sleep, I would read him a book turn out the light and leave him to go to sleep, with me waking him up in the morning. Now I have to sit with him till he sleeps because he truly is scared and I wake up in the night and he is asleep next to me, he woke up and had a nightmare. He suffers from nightmares frequently he dreams his mother has gone away and is not coming back and wakes up crying. He has saved all his good stickers from school to show his mum when she returns, and he has drawn pictures and made things which are all saved for his mum. He is very stoic, strong and will not show he misses his mum, but I can see he really does. He has made me promise to stop smoking before his mum returns too. Our son speaks two languages Russian and English fluently I can supply his school report on request. I miss our daughter greatly and unlike him because I do not have much physical contact with her anymore it's hard for me to describe. I see she has lost weight she now like me tall and the with the same hair. My wife tells me that when they are playing in the playground she tries to play with the fathers of the other children, she cries because she wants to play with her brother. If I had to move away from the UK, and to be honest my personal circumstances don't allow it, I firmly believe it would affect my son's education and mental wellbeing. The upheaval to move to the UK was hard for him, if he had to return to Russia for example he would only go to school when he is 7 years old. Everything the local school have invested in him will be for nothing, and he will lose his friends. Also, may I bring to your attention that in support of any applications to the Home Office in respect to visas the head of my son's school has been forbidden from writing any letter in support of a visa application by the local authority, why is this? This is not an immigration issue; this is about the rights of children who are being punished because the choices of their parents.

Case study

I am married to a man from Tunisia. We have been together for 7 1/2 years and married in 2013 when our little boy was 5 weeks old. We married in Tunisia and I went over with our little boy and my other two children from a previous marriage. If I take you back to 2013 in January when I found out that I was pregnant. I had quite a difficult pregnancy and I was unable to fly over to see my partner at the time due to me being high risk so my husband never got to see me in person pregnant never got to feel our baby kick, to be hands-on during my pregnancy. On September 29th 2013 I went into labour and my husband had to watch me in labour via a video call we were very lucky to be able to do this as the hospital did have strict guidelines that video recording could not be made however they understood our situation and honoured us that beautiful moment. For the first 5 weeks I was bringing up baby on my own and that was very difficult he missed a father bond and for my husband it was extremely upsetting because he just wanted to hold his baby for the first time and he had no control over that. Obviously when he got to meet his son for the first time at the airport with such an emotional experience something that will never be forgotten. Over the weeks and months after we returned the relationship of father and son was obviously done via video calls as our child developed he became used to the fact that his daddy was on a screen and he would give him kisses and cuddles on the phone I remember 1 time my little boy he was 14 months old and he had a toy phone he picked up the phone and looked at it and said Daddy and kiss the screen this broke my heart because this is what our son relates to as his daddy and that is a mobile phone! Visits in the early stages of our son's life were obviously very special and every time We went he had something new to show Daddy however when it was time to say goodbye you could see that he was very confused and started to become quite stressful and upset about it. As our son got towards preschool age and having more sociable awareness around him he started to ask questions such as why is my Daddy not here why does Daddy not come and pick me up from school why can't daddy come and sleep in my bed tonight why can't daddy come and watch me at the school play etc I remember him saying once to one of his friends that his Daddy lived in the sky his friend laughed and said don't be silly but to our son, he is Daddy lives in the sky because that was the only way that he could go and see him was by going on an aeroplane. Our son shows upset and frustration and it is clear that he is missing his father he clearly needs a male around him and is longing to have his daddy he asks many times when is daddy come to our house at the weekend can daddy come to my birthday party. There has been times where he showed anger towards his daddy on the phone saying he doesn't want to speak to him this is not due to a

normal behaviour this is due to the fact that my child is depressed that he has not got a regular contact with his father. When we go to visit, and we return I have noticed his behaviour changes dramatically for a couple of weeks he becomes quite withdrawn and angry frustrated his behaviour becomes erratic. At school he talks of his father all the time and is very proud of his daddy and of his other culture. Last year the school had a Father's Day and fathers are invited to come to school and play with their children, my son was the only child without his daddy there!!! I asked the school if we could do a video call so that his daddy was potentially there however due to data protection it wasn't possible, so I had to step in and be daddy! This year 2018 he got his wish he actually got to spend the very first time of his life his birthday with his daddy I had to take him out of school which I had to get authorisation for and we spent the day with Daddy it was the best present that he could ever want. ! The impact that is causing on our 5-year-old little boy is awful in fact disgusting that our little boy doesn't have a right to be with his dad and that the courts and the Home Office took that away from him. That he doesn't have a say and that he didn't even get thought off because in the home offices as we put him in that situation. The Home Office think that it's acceptable that we live our lives on a video call and that contact 2 or 3 times a year is enough! In court it was suggested that army life families deal with it so why can't we! When our little boy finally if he is granted gets his daddy in his life here in the UK where he can live a normal life, he will be nearly 7 years old. Is that fair for a child to have to wait 7 years to have his dad!!!!

Case study

I have been married to my husband from Turkey for 8 years and we have a daughter together who is 4 years old. We applied under exceptional circumstances for my husband to come and live as a family in April 2018, but we were refused. The refusal included details of another person and did not report any correct information. Our local MP has been in contact with the home office, who are not really cooperating very well. We have since appealed the decision and are still currently living in limbo whilst we await an update

Our daughter has really been affected by not having her dad around words honestly cannot describe how awful and heart-breaking it has been for me to witness the change in her behaviour, when we are together as a family, she is a very happy and content little girl. Right after we came back from seeing her dad 3 months ago, she went through a stage of pulling her own hair out, it was terrible, and it lasted for about a month. We were previously able to go and visit her dad in Turkey every 2 to 3 months, but now our daughter has started full time school, and I am back at work, we don't get the opportunity to visit until at least every 5-6 months.

I am too frightened to approach for any help from a medical professional as I didn't want social services to be contacted and involved, and start doubting us as parents, we just want to be a family but are prevented from that because of these laws, and because of the home office poor decision making.

The only way our daughter sees her daddy is through a telephone which every time she constantly kisses and hugs the phone and doesn't want to let it go.

When she gets ill, she doesn't want me around her, she constantly cries and screams for her dad to the point where I have to call him via video call, just so he can settle her down as she refuses to for me.

Since our daughter started school she is constantly seeing other children with their daddy's, and now the questions have now begun such as "why doesn't daddy want to live in the house with me?" and "why doesn't daddy not want to take me to school like other daddy's do?" I honestly have no answers for these questions and try to stop the tears from filling up in my eyes every time she asks them. She says at least 10 times a day "I miss my daddy mammy do you think he misses me?"

She has always been a very confident little girl, but with each day that goes past without her daddy she is losing her confidence and becoming quite confined.

For us as parents, the words tiring and heart-breaking doesn't come close when we have to describe how we are dealing with this. The onus is on me to hold this all together, I feel like I'm holding a wall and if I drop it, everything around me will crumble, but I have to be strong for our family.

Case study

I lived in The Philippines from 2005 until 2015. Since then I have been living and working in UK and returning to the Philippines every Christmas for as long as I can afford. I met my wife in 2007, we were friends until 2009 and married in Jan 2017. We have three children, two young daughters (5 & 8) and my wife's son (11) from previous. We also had another son, but he died at five weeks old.

I used to own a popular sports bar in Puerto Galera, my wife managed the day-to-day things there. When she became pregnant with our son it was becoming clear that I had to return to UK as there was not enough spare cash available to support us with a new baby properly. I left to come to UK when our youngest daughter had recently turned two years old and my wife was six months pregnant.

Our son was born, and I was away working. He was diagnosed with late neonatal sepsis.

Being 7000 miles away I was worried sick. My new-born son went into ICU in the nearest hospital from my family (54km) but there weren't enough incubators to put him in. Everything went wrong and I was not in control of anything. I had and in fact still have a hundred questions and nobody to ask them to. I don't know why this happened to my son.

I flew to the Philippines to meet my son in casket and put him in the ground. They do things differently there; the deceased are kept at home for a week in an open coffin with a plastic top so that all the relatives can come around and see them. This tradition sees the house open for a week and many visitors, friends' relatives and neighbours around. This is what I found when I arrived there.

Two weeks later I was back at work in UK. I had no time to grieve or to console my wife and children. My heart was broken into a thousand pieces.

The effect this tragedy had on my children was as you would expect but my wife to her credit was fantastic with them.

I couldn't stop crying for a long time, like 18 months. It would get me at work, in the car or in the shower. Always when I was alone, and my mind would wander.

At least my wife had the kids to keep her busy, but I did not. I turned to alcohol to help me sleep and forget. In the end, it made me quite ill and I had to dramatically change my lifestyle to get out of it. Four years on and we are still separated. I work 80 hours a week to support my family and make sure they have everything they need but I still cannot afford the visa application fees and all the associated costs... Almost twelve thousand pounds to get my family here on a two-year visa. As such, we are moving to Malta next year. My own mother has never met her granddaughters.

Case Study

Although we have been fortunate enough at this present time not to have to live separately from each other the impact the visa situation has had on our family especially our son has been immense.

My partner has been without status in this country since late 2013 due to visa issues and Home Office incompetence. We have found ourselves in and out of court at great expense to us as a family, my partner has to report to immigration every month and has also spent time in immigration detention. The impact this has had on us as a family has been quite devastating both financially and mentally. My partner has suffered a complete mental breakdown and now suffers from depression, panic disorder, anxiety disorder and PTSD.

Everyday life within our family is extremely difficult at times the huge cost of our constant battle with the Home Office has meant that we are not able to take our son on holiday he hasn't had a holiday since 2013 when he was 2, we don't really go anywhere as we are now paying back a huge amount of money that we had to borrow in order to get my partner released from detention. Our son who is 7 suffers from separation anxiety from his dad when he panics constantly that his dad will be taken away again. When the monthly signings come around our son goes into panic mode, we are not allowed to go into the signing centre with my partner and therefore have to play a waiting game until he returns home this is made doubly worse as this is how he was detained previously without warning and taken away without us being able to see him therefore our son is a nervous wreck on signing day constantly asking me to call his dad's phone until he answers, if this takes longer than expected he is begging me to go look for his dad as he says 'they've taken him again' he's petrified that he will never see his dad again.

This has impacted on our little boys mental health we struggle to get him to go out places or far from home , he doesn't like to go anywhere without us in case someone takes his dad. Its impacted on my son's friendships as he doesn't know what to tell his friends about his dad why he doesn't go to work because he isn't allowed its to much for a 7 year old to take on board whereas we don't discuss the details of everything some things we have to tell him so he at least has a little understanding of what is happening.

At this present moment we are living apart from my partner as his mental health is impacting on us to much as a family and its too distressing for our son. Before all of these visa issues we were a happy family, to quote my son 'its better to have a good life but we have a terrible life now because of dad' this is the most upsetting part my son doesn't understand Governments and their rules etc he believes its his dad's fault in some way which is heartbreaking but if we can't understand this need to tear families apart as adults how can you expect a child to.



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