

UK science and immigration: attracting top international talent

Long-term researcher mobility

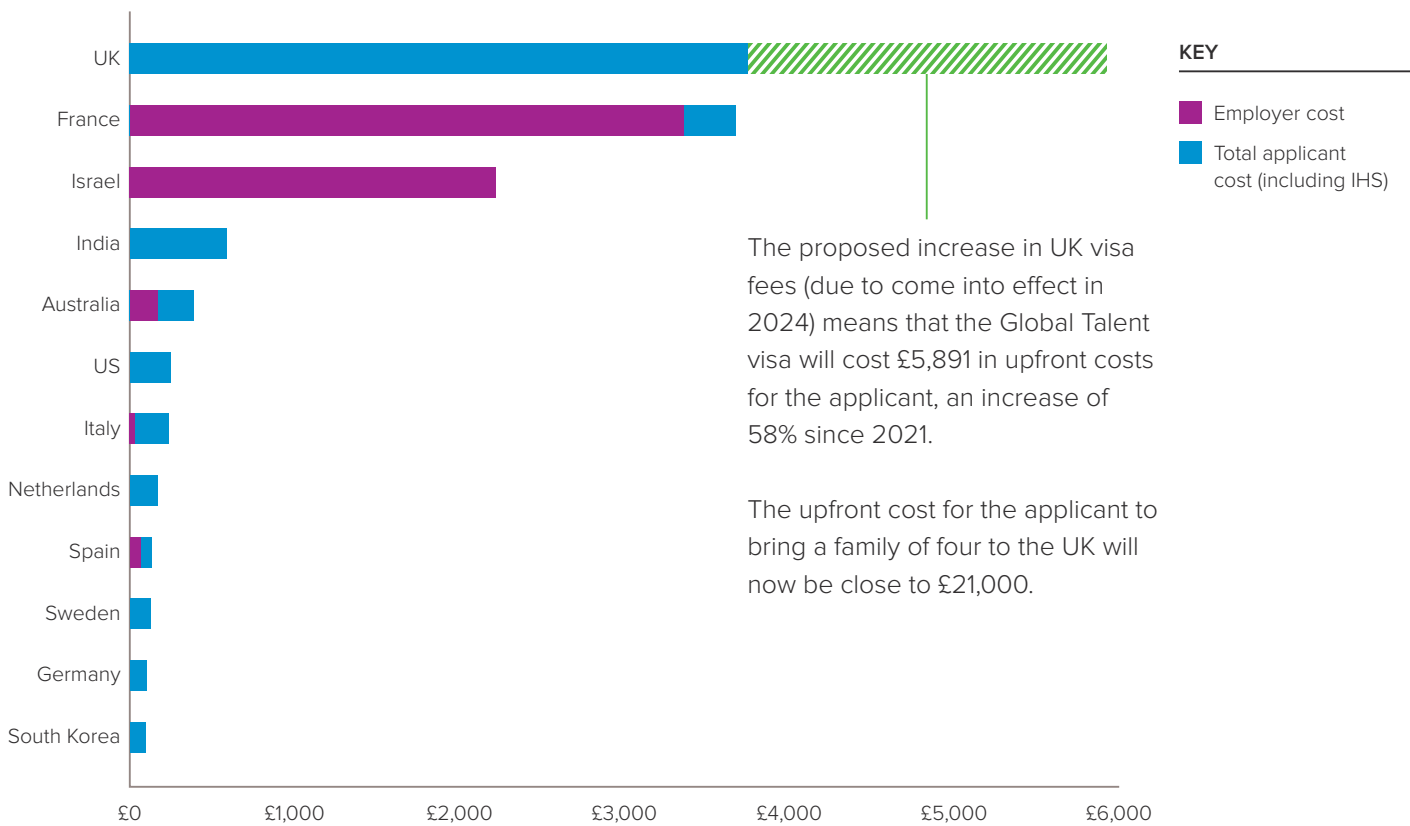
Researchers who want to bring their skills to the UK face upfront visa costs up to ten times higher than the average fees of other leading science nations.

This is a punitive tax on talent for UK business and public/non-profit research organisations, which undermines our ability to attract international researchers and innovators to the UK.

The Global Talent visa (GTV) is the UK’s premier entry route for talented and promising researchers and innovators from other countries. However, with the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS), the GTV is the most expensive visa compared to other leading science nations, when comparing both upfront costs paid by the applicant and total upfront costs met by the applicant and their employer.

FIGURE 1

Upfront costs for UK GTV compared to visa routes in other leading science nations, 2021.



Short-term researcher mobility

Allowing researchers short-term entry into the UK for collaborations and conferences has important scientific, economic, and societal benefits. This should be facilitated by efficient and effective visa policy.

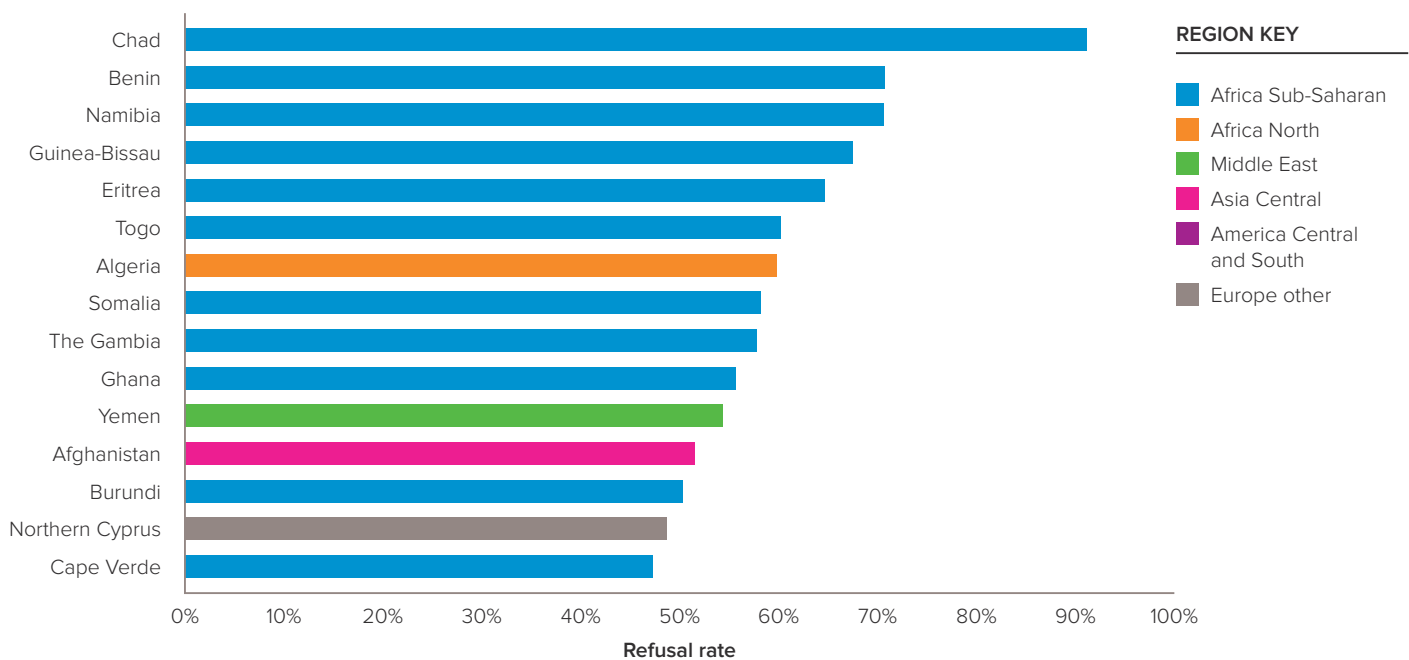
The Society’s report, *Borders of Science*, analyses the UK’s visitor visa arrangements for international researchers. Drawing on data from UK and international sources and a series of stakeholder interviews, it finds barriers and inefficiencies with the current system which cast doubt on its effectiveness. The issues identified were:

- The application process for UK visitor visas is bureaucratic and unwieldy.
- Delays in securing biometric appointments means the end-to-end process for visitor visa applications is often much longer compared with other science nations. This has led to missed opportunities to exchange knowledge with UK researchers through conferences and collaborations.

- The visitor visa application cost of £100 does not reflect the hidden costs of international travel for biometric appointments, cancelled flights following delayed or refused applications, or hiring designated administrative staff to facilitate applications.
- Although official policy states that “all applications are considered on their individual merits”, visa refusals disproportionately affect individuals from low to middle income countries (LMICs). In particular, African nationals are twice as likely to have their visa rejected than any region, bar Oceania, and the top 10 of the most highly refused visa nations were in Africa in 2022.

FIGURE 2

Top 15 nations by Standard Visitor visa refusal rate, 2022.



Source: Home Office, 2022. Includes Standard Visitor visas for all visit purposes.



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