

UCU Migrant Members' Standing Committee Annual Report 2023-2024

About the committee

The committee is currently chaired by Vivek Thuppil (Bangor University). The vice chair is Laura Loyola Hernandez (University of Leeds). The rest of the committee is comprised of:

- Maha Rafi Atal (University of Glasgow)
- Minjie Cai (University of Birmingham)
- Michael Carley (University of Bath)
- Daniel Keeler (Canterbury Christ Church University)
- Gertjan Lucas (University of Nottingham)
- Guoxin Ma (University of Southampton)
- Penny Oderberg (Open University)
- Robyn Orfitelli (University of Sheffield)

The committee is supported by the UCU Head of Equality and Policy, Mary Meekings.

About the conference

The annual equality conference is an opportunity for migrant members to explore and discuss some of the major issues facing migrant workers in the UK. The theme for this year's conference is **"Defending Migration, Resetting the Narrative"**.

Committee activity 2023-24

Since last year's conference, the committee has prioritised the following areas of work, informed in large part by the priorities identified from the 2023 migrant members' conference.

Response to Suella Braverman speech – September 2023

- UCU issued a statement in response to the disturbing speech from the former Home Secretary Suella Braverman on 26th September, which sought to demonise migrants as criminals and fraudsters. The response can be found on UCU's equality page: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/equality>

Legal support for student members

- UCU provides a range of legal support for migrant members, supported by expert immigration lawyers Bindmans.
- The MMSC were successful in bringing a motion to UCU congress to extend legal support to student members. This rule change was enacted in 2023.

Response to the Middle East conflict

- UCU has called for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza and for the provision of urgent humanitarian aid. We have circulated advice to migrant members taking part in demonstrations over the conflict, recognising that they face additional risks for participating in any kind of protest activity. We also issued updated guidance material on our website: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/equality>
- UCU has responded stridently to recent attacks on freedom of speech in relation to the conflict in Gaza which have been directed towards UCU members. We know that racialised and migrant staff have been disproportionately impacted by speaking out. The union has launched the Exposed campaign to highlight the ways in which academic staff are being monitored by the state, including through visa monitoring and the restrictions this places on members' freedoms.
- MMSC have contributed to advice for migrant members taking part in protests. This has been uploaded to the legal page of the UCU website.

Visa concerns and support

- MMSC held a webinar in March to address member concerns about the implications that the increase would have on their ability to either renew their existing visa types or obtain new visas going forward.
- The webinar was particularly useful in that it was clarified by Bindmans that members already in the UK on an existing visa could renew their visas to continue in the same job without having to meet the new income requirements, which was not clear from government announcements at all.
- In response to the announcement about visa fees rising, UCU circulated information about the day of action on 31 October 2023 to members and encouraged them to get involved in activity to oppose this damaging development.
- UCU has raised our concerns about the visa fee rise in joint union discussions with the employer body UCEA.
- On 18 November 2024, the MMSC held a E-visa webinar with Bindmans, giving members an overview of the UK government's planned transition from physical biometric permits, including Indefinite Leave to Remain, EU settlement scheme and all types of visa to an electronic format.

Congress motion

- A MMSC motion was passed calling for congress to bring in a speaker from the Global South / historically marginalised community to speak at a marquee event in person. Work is ongoing for congress 2025 to satisfy this motion.