

# Family Visa Survey Technical Note

### 1 Introduction

#### Purpose of the survey

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) commissioned IFF Research to deliver a survey of Family Visa applicants under their Quantitative Research Call-off Contract. The statement of work stated the following project objectives:

- To explore the decision-making around applying for a family visa, including the role and impact of financial requirements (including the minimum income requirement (MIR))
- To gain more detail about the financial situation of those who have applied for the family visa
- To explore applicants' views of the MIR in relation to their application
- Explore the process of meeting the financial requirements including barriers for both successful and unsuccessful applicants
- Explore the outcome and impact of meeting / not meeting the financial requirements
- Explore the impact on family life and quality of life of those who applied for the family visa

## 2 Survey design

#### Survey design

The questionnaire was designed collaboratively between MAC and IFF Research. Prior to commission, MAC had several questions specified and provided guidance on the areas the questionnaire should cover. The brief outlined that MAC had gaps in their descriptive information about people applying for a family visa. The questionnaire focused on addressing those gaps.

The questionnaire comprised five sections:

- A screener was used to ensure the individual contacted was a genuine applicant for a family visa. The screener also recorded any benefits held by the applicant's sponsor, and whether they met Adequate Maintenance (AM), or the Minimum Income Requirements (MIR) for their visa.
- Section A collected descriptive data about the applicant and their application including when they applied, their residential status before and after application, their current employment status and pay, and that at the time of application, where they live and their type of accommodation, and demographic data (gender, age and number of children).
- Section B collected similar information about their sponsor (the person who lived in the UK who they applied to join).

- Section C asked a series of questions about meeting the financial requirements to enter the UK, including hypotheticals about different minimum income thresholds. Applicants whose applications was rejected were also asked why.
- Section D contained a series of recontact questions and permissions to share/match data.

## 3 Sampling approach and response rates

#### Fieldwork design

The fieldwork involved both a pilot and main survey phase. Figure 1 summarises the main stages of sampling and fieldwork. Note the figure below includes reference to the Home Office's Managed Migration Analysis (MMA) team who drew the sample and issued the survey invites, advised by IFF.



Figure 1: Outline of our suggested sampling and survey issue approach

#### Sampling design and approach

The target population for the Family Visa MIR Survey were family visa partner applicants who applied for a family visa during the five years in scope- 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. The sampling approach sought to achieve responses from 1,500 applicants for each year in scope, totalling 7,500 responses. The survey was sampled to be representative of the overall population in terms of place of application, divided into those who applied for the visa from inside and outside of the UK. IFF and MAC jointly decided to split the sample for each year according to the proportions of the population for in-country and out-of-country applicants (25% and 75% respectively, which were estimates based on data held by the Home Office because accurate data per year was not available). Our sampling approach, therefore, targeted the following proportions of respondents:

Year of application	In-country	Out-of-country	Total
2020	375	1,125	1,500
2021	375	1,125	1,500
2022	375	1,125	1,500
2023	375	1,125	1,500
2024	375	1,125	1,500
Total	1,875	5,625	7,500

Table 1: Target survey responses per year of application and location from which an application was made

#### Survey issue

A pilot batch of invites was issued and the response rate to this batch was analysed by IFF to determine the number of invites per year to send for the main launch. The pilot mailout invited a total of 5,000 applicants: 1,000 per year in scope. Within each year, in line with the proportions for the targets, 250 invites were sent to in-country applicants and 750 to out-of-country applicants.

Based on response to the pilot, IFF projected a 6% response rate by the end of mainstage fieldwork. This projection was based on analysis of response rates of previous similar surveys. To achieve the targeted 7,500 survey responses, IFF recommended issuing a total of 120,000 invites for the main launch. Response rate to the pilot mailout was stronger among more recent applicants. Therefore, IFF proposed issuing a larger proportion of invites to those who applied in earlier years. The mainstage batch of invites was split into the proportions outlined in Table 2 below. The total number of invites sent was 122,896 (Table 3 below).



	Mainstage							
Year of application	In country	Out of Country	Total					
2020	4,075	18,075	22,150					
2021	5,960	18,098	24,058					
2022	5,965	18,024	23,989					
2023	5,957	17,900	23,857					
2024	5,952	17,890	23,842					
	27,909	89,987	117,896					

## Table 2: Mainstage Survey invitations sent by year of application and location from which an application was made

## Table 3: Total survey invitations (mainstage and pilot stage) sent by year of application and location from which an application was made

	Total							
Year of application	In country	Out of Country	Total					
2020	4,325	18,825	23,150					
2021	6,210	18,848	25,058					
2022	6,215	18,774	24,989					
2023	6,207	18,650	24,857					
2024	6,202	18,640	24,842					
	29,159	93,737	122,896					

Reminders were issued to respondents on 26<sup>th</sup> February and 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Ahead of each reminder, IFF provided MAC with a spreadsheet of completed and unusable survey IDs, to ensure they were excluded from reminder mailouts.

The first reminder was sent to all that had not yet completed the survey (excluding any who had opted out), and the second sent only to non-completers who had applied in 2020 and 2021 (because the response rate for those years was lower compared to the others). Further reminders would have boosted the response rate, but it was agreed this was not appropriate due to concerns of overburdening potential respondents with too many communications.

#### Achieved survey responses

At close of fieldwork, the achieved sample totalled 9,840 respondents, broken down into the following proportions by year and place of application:



Year of	In-countr	у	Out-of-co	ountry	DK/not sure		Total	
application	n	% of group	n	% of group	n	% of group	n	% of total
2020	437	22.0%	1,529	76.8%	24	1.2%	1,990	20.2%
2021	379	20.2%	1,480	78.7%	21	1.1%	1,880	19.1%
2022	387	20.5%	1,481	78.6%	16	0.8%	1,884	19.1%
2023	426	23.0%	1,393	75.3%	30	1.6%	1,849	18.8%
2024	598	26.7%	1,574	70.4%	65	2.9%	2,237	22.7%
Total	2,227	22.6%	7,457	75.8%	156	1.6%	9,840	

## Table 4: Achieved responses by year of application and location from which an application was made

#### Average survey length and response rates

The median average length of time it took respondents to complete the survey was fifteen minutes and two seconds.

The MMA team issued approximately 123,000 invites in total across the pilot and mainstage phases of fieldwork and 9,840 responses were achieved in total. The response rate was 8%, exceeding the 6% response rate projected by IFF following the pilot phase.

#### Role of the Home Office and the Migration Advisory Committee

The Home Office provided population data on number of applicants per year in scope and split by place of application, which was used by IFF to inform the sampling approach.

MAC did not have relevant GDPR permissions in place to transfer contact data to IFF for sampling purposes. As such, the Home Office's Managed Migration Analysis (MMA) team drew the sample and issued the survey invites, advised by IFF.

After completion of fieldwork, IFF sent the MMA team a list of completed survey IDs. The MMA team matched completed IDs with data on nationality at individual level and sent back to IFF to append to the datafile and added to tables.

### 4 Data processing

#### Converting survey data to final outputs

Raw data files containing survey data from UniCom Dimensions, and coded verbatim responses (see 'coding' section below), were converted to an SPSS file and data tables, based on an agreed specification. This specification detailed how each variable was to be programmed, what the base should be, and how tables and variables should be labelled to make them intuitive to use. The SPSS file and data tables were then used to inform the writing of the core report.



#### Coding

The survey contained several questions that included respondents with the option to select 'other' and offer a response that was not covered by the list of presented to them. These responses were coded by IFF's coding team and incorporated into the final SPSS data file.

Coding was done in two ways:

- Backcoding, i.e. assigning a respondent's answer to the pre-existing list of answer options. This was done where the team felt the response did fit best under one of those pre-existing options, or where the pre-existing options represented all the categories to be used for analysis (questions about ethnicity and the source of income used to show the individual met financial requirements were only backcoded).
- Where respondent answers did not fit into the pre-existing options, new codes were created to group answers thematically and added to the code frame.

The research team carried out checks on both the code frame and the coded responses.

#### Grouping of survey responses for analysis

During the data processing stage some data were grouped in order to report them in a logical, understandable way.

Certain figures used in data tables were derived by combining responses. For example, income was aggregated into larger bands in questions like A8 (How much is your annual pay from employment/self-employment, before tax and other deductions?).

#### **Derived variables**

Some variables in the final dataset were derived by combining responses from multiple survey variables, by combining survey responses with sample information, or by rebasing questions to exclude certain responses; these are referred to as 'derived variables'. A full list of derived variables is included in the codebook that accompanies the SPSS dataset.

#### Weighting

Once fieldwork had closed, post-stratification weighting was used to align the survey responses as closely as possible with the target population. Weighting was applied to correct for variable non-response by subgroups after a random, representative sample was drawn by MMA.

Variations of the weighting scheme were discussed with MAC and a final design was agreed that addressed non-response by the following variables:

- Year of application and whether the application was made from within the UK, or from overseas,
- The nationality of the applicant and whether the application was made from within the UK, or from overseas, and

• The age of the applicant and whether the application was made from within the UK, or from overseas.

The survey was representative of the population for gender, so weighting was unnecessary for this characteristic.

Weighting grids were created detailing the population breakdown and the achieved sample breakdown by these variables. The proportion in the population for each cell was determined and corresponding weights were then assigned for each cell within the grid. The three weighting grids used are presented in the tables below.

Weighting was carried out using random iterative method, or RIM weighting. In this method, weights are applied by an algorithm on a sequential basis. The process repeats until a stable equilibrium weight is achieved, which is the optimal weighting solution. RIM weighting is a standard process for survey data which needs correcting for non-response across several variables.



Weighting strata	Survey com	oletes	Target popu	lation	Weighting targets*	Difference: survey v target	Final weighted profile
	n	%	n	%	%	%	%
2020 out of country	1529	15.54%	27433	10.63%	10.47%	5.07%	10.47%
2021 out of country	1480	15.04%	33898	13.14%	12.93%	2.11%	12.92%
2022 out of country	1481	15.05%	43708	16.94%	16.67%	-1.62%	16.66%
2023 out of country	1393	14.16%	52073	20.19%	19.86%	-5.71%	19.85%
2024 out of country	1574	16.00%	54073	20.96%	20.63%	-4.63%	20.63%
2020 in country	437	4.44%	9346	3.62%	3.57%	0.88%	3.58%
2021 in country	379	3.85%	7997	3.10%	3.05%	0.80%	3.06%
2022 in country	387	3.93%	7007	2.72%	2.67%	1.26%	2.67%
2023 in country	426	4.33%	9676	3.75%	3.69%	0.64%	3.70%
2024 in country	598	6.08%	12761	4.95%	4.87%	1.21%	4.88%
Don't know in or out of country	156	1.59%			1.59%	n/a	1.59%
Total	9840	100.00%	257972	100.0%			

#### Table 5: Weighting grid – year of application by location from which application made

\*Weighting targets are the population figures, re-percentaged to take account of where we had survey options that do not feature in the population data



#### Table 6: Weighting grid – nationality by location from which application made

Weighting strata	Survey com	pletes	Target population		Weighting targets*	Difference: survey v target	Final weighted profile
	n	%	n	%	%	%	%
Pakistan out of country	683	6.94%	44594	17.29%	17.01%	-10.35%	17.00%
India out of country	363	3.69%	15383	5.96%	5.87%	-2.27%	5.87%
Bangladesh out of country	183	1.86%	12294	4.77%	4.69%	-2.91%	4.68%
United States out of country	739	7.51%	10777	4.18%	4.11%	3.33%	4.10%
Nigeria out of country	472	4.80%	7631	2.96%	2.91%	1.84%	2.90%
Iraq out of country	126	1.28%	6890	2.67%	2.63%	-1.39%	2.63%
Nepal out of country	240	2.44%	6638	2.57%	2.53%	-0.13%	2.53%
Ghana out of country	312	3.17%	6007	2.33%	2.29%	0.84%	2.28%
Philippines out of country	370	3.76%	5911	2.29%	2.25%	1.47%	2.24%
South Africa out of country	346	3.52%	5851	2.27%	2.23%	1.25%	2.22%
Other out of country	3623	36.82%	89209	34.58%	34.03%	2.24%	33.98%
India in country	160	1.63%	5136	1.99%	1.96%	-0.36%	1.96%
United States in country	307	3.12%	4896	1.90%	1.87%	1.22%	1.87%
Nigeria in country	222	2.26%	4083	1.58%	1.56%	0.67%	1.56%
Pakistan in country	146	1.48%	3842	1.49%	1.47%	-0.01%	1.47%
China in country	71	0.72%	3188	1.24%	1.22%	-0.51%	1.22%
Australia in country	109	1.11%	2279	0.88%	0.87%	0.22%	0.87%
Bangladesh in country	54	0.55%	2118	0.82%	0.81%	-0.27%	0.81%
Canada in country	114	1.16%	1996	0.77%	0.76%	0.38%	0.76%
Ghana in country	49	0.50%	977	0.38%	0.37%	0.12%	0.37%
South Africa in country	35	0.36%	846	0.33%	0.32%	0.03%	0.32%
Other in country	960	9.76%	17426	6.75%	6.65%	3.00%	6.74%
Don't know in or out of country	156	1.59%			1.59%	n/a	1.58%
Total	9840		257972				

\*Weighting targets are the population figures, re-percentaged to take account of where we had survey options that do not feature in the population data



Weighting strata	Survey completes		Target popu	Target population		Difference: survey v target	Final weighted profile
	n	%	n	%	%	%	%
18-24 out of country	340	3.46%	24036	9.32%	9.11%	5.66%	9.11%
25-34 out of country	2903	29.50%	102015	39.55%	38.68%	9.18%	38.69%
35-44 out of country	2488	25.28%	55885	21.67%	21.19%	-4.09%	21.19%
45-54 out of country	1044	10.61%	19644	7.62%	7.45%	-3.16%	7.46%
55+ out of country	640	6.50%	9593	3.72%	3.64%	-2.87%	3.62%
Prefer not to say out of country	42	0.43%			0.43%	n/a	0.43%
18-24 in country	53	0.54%	1922	0.75%	0.73%	0.19%	0.73%
25-34 in country	1223	12.43%	25572	9.91%	9.70%	-2.73%	9.68%
35-44 in country	699	7.10%	13313	5.16%	5.05%	-2.06%	5.04%
45-54 in country	169	1.72%	3814	1.48%	1.45%	-0.27%	1.45%
55+ in country	66	0.67%	2141	0.83%	0.81%	0.14%	0.81%
Prefer not to say in country	17	0.17%			0.17%	n/a	0.17%
Don't know in or out of country	156	1.59%			1.59%	n/a	1.58%
Total	9840	100.00%	257935	100.00%			

#### Table 7: Weighting grid – age on application by location from which application made

\*Weighting targets are the population figures, re-percentaged to take account of where we had survey options that do not feature in the population data



#### Outputs

IFF delivered a number of outputs to MAC, detailed in the following list:

- An unweighted topline, indicating basic frequencies for each question in the survey.
- An individual-level datafile in SPSS format, including a weight variable.
- Two individual-level data files in Excel format, one labelled and one containing numeric values only, each including a weight variable.
- Weighted data tables in Excel, including derived variables and cross tabulations as stipulated by MAC.
- Two sets of weighted data tables in Excel filtered by visa route- one containing responses for applicants who had taken the AM route and one containing responses for applicants who had taken the MIR route.

