

FAMILY IMMIGRATION · APPLICATION GUIDE

UK spouse and partner visa applications

A practical guide to the requirements, the evidence and the process, updated for the rules in force in 2026.

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Please read first. This guide is general information about UK immigration law as at 8 August 2026. It is not legal advice, no outcome is guaranteed, and the Immigration Rules and Home Office fees change frequently. Always check the current position on GOV.UK or take advice.

How we work

- Enquiry — you contact the firm by telephone, email or the enquiry form, and we confirm whether we are able to help.
- Advice appointment — a solicitor reviews your circumstances and explains the position, the route options and the requirements that apply on those facts.
- Scope and fees agreed in writing — no application work begins before this is confirmed.
- Evidence preparation — we set out what is needed, review what you provide and identify gaps before submission.
- Submission — the application and the written submissions are checked and approved by a solicitor before they are filed.
- After submission — we deal with Home Office correspondence and keep you updated until the matter concludes.

SECTION 01

Who this guide is for

This guide is for couples applying under the partner route in Appendix FM of the Immigration Rules: spouses, civil partners, unmarried partners who have lived together for at least two years, and fiancé(e)s or proposed civil partners coming to the UK to marry.

It covers first applications made from outside the UK, switching into the partner route from inside the UK, extension applications, and the position of applicants approaching settlement at the end of the route.

- Couples applying for a partner visa for the first time, from inside or outside the UK
- Applicants extending existing leave as a spouse, civil partner or unmarried partner
- Sponsors who are self-employed, employed on variable hours, or relying on more than one income source
- Applicants with children or other dependent family members included in the application
- Applicants whose application has been refused and who want the refusal reviewed before deciding what to do next

SECTION 02

Eligibility: the core requirements

To apply as a partner, both you and your partner must be aged 18 or over, and your partner must be a British or Irish citizen, settled in the UK, hold pre-settled status having started living in the UK before 1 January 2021, hold protection status, or hold a Turkish Businessperson or Turkish Worker visa.

You must also be able to prove one of the following: that you are in a marriage or civil partnership recognised in the UK; that you have been living together in a relationship for at least two years at the date of application; that you are a fiancé(e) or proposed civil partner and will marry within six months of arrival; or that you have been in a relationship for at least two years but cannot live together, for example because you work or study in different places.

You and your partner must intend to live together permanently in the UK. The relationship must be genuine and subsisting at the date of application and at the date of decision.

The five requirement areas

- Suitability — immigration history, criminality and any previous breaches
- Relationship — genuine and subsisting, and one of the recognised relationship categories
- Financial — the minimum income requirement, evidenced in the specified format
- Accommodation — adequate accommodation available without recourse to public funds

— English language — at the CEFR level required for the stage of the route

SECTION 03

The financial requirement in 2026

For applications made under the partner route, the minimum income requirement is a combined income of at least £29,000 a year. This figure has applied to new partner applications made on or after 11 April 2024.

MINIMUM INCOME REQUIREMENT

SITUATION	REQUIREMENT
New partner application (on or after 11 April 2024)	£29,000 a year
Extending a partner visa first applied for before 11 April 2024	£18,600 a year
Additional amount for the first child (transitional cases only)	£3,800 a year
Additional amount for each further child (transitional cases only)	£2,400 a year
Partner in receipt of specified disability or carer's benefits	No minimum income requirement; adequate maintenance test applies

In transitional cases, where the child uplifts would take the total above £29,000, only £29,000 needs to be evidenced.

Cash savings

Cash savings held for at least six months and under the applicant's or sponsor's control may be used instead of, or in combination with, income. The specified calculation disregards the first £16,000 of savings and then requires 2.5 times the shortfall for the 30-month period of leave applied for. Relying wholly on savings to meet a £29,000 requirement therefore calls for a substantial sum, and the arithmetic should be checked against Appendix FM-SE before an application is made.

Evidencing income

- Salaried employment — payslips and corresponding bank statements covering the specified period, plus a letter from the employer
- Non-salaried and variable income — a longer evidential period, with the average calculated in the way the Rules specify
- Self-employment — accounts, tax returns, SA302s, business bank statements and evidence of registration, based on the last full financial year
- Pension, rental and other non-employment income — documentary proof of the source and of receipt

- Cash savings — six months of statements showing the funds held and their source

Meeting the financial requirement and evidencing it are two different exercises. Most financial refusals we see follow from evidence that does not cover the required period, or is not in the format Appendix FM-SE specifies, rather than from income that is genuinely too low.

If the financial requirement cannot be met

Where the requirement cannot be met, an application may still be possible on human rights grounds, or where there is a qualifying child in the UK. Applicants granted leave outside the standard route normally face a ten-year path to settlement rather than a five-year path. This is a complex area and advice should be taken before applying.

SECTION 04

English language and accommodation

English language

For a first application you must normally pass a Secure English Language Test at CEFR level A1 or above, unless you are exempt. Exemptions include nationals of certain majority English-speaking countries, applicants aged 65 or over, applicants with a degree taught in English (with an Ecctis assessment where the degree is not from a UK institution), and applicants with a physical or mental condition preventing them from meeting the requirement.

- First application: at least CEFR level A1 (speaking and listening)
- Extension after 2.5 years, where A1 was passed previously: at least CEFR level A2
- Settlement after 5 years: CEFR level B1 or above, together with the Life in the UK Test
- A pass at B1 or above at the first stage can normally be re-used later in the route

Accommodation

You must show that adequate accommodation is available to you and any dependants, owned or occupied exclusively, without recourse to public funds and without overcrowding as defined by the Housing Act 1985. Evidence should establish the property, who lives there, the number of rooms and your right to live there — for example a tenancy agreement or title document, a letter from the owner where you are living with family, and a property inspection report where overcrowding may be in issue.

SECTION 05

Fees and other costs

Home Office fees and the immigration health surcharge are payable to the Home Office and are separate from any professional fees. The figures below were checked on GOV.UK on 8 August 2026.

HOME OFFICE FEES — PARTNER ROUTE

ITEM	OUTSIDE THE UK	INSIDE THE UK
Application to join a partner	£2,064	£1,407
Each dependant added	£2,064	£1,407
Immigration health surcharge, adult, 2 years 6 months	£2,587.50	£2,587.50
Immigration health surcharge, adult, 5 years	£5,175	£5,175
Immigration health surcharge, child, 2 years 6 months	£1,940	£1,940
Super priority service (in-UK applications)	Not available	£1,000

If you cannot afford the fee, a fee waiver may be available for certain human rights based applications. Our separate fee waiver guide explains the test that is applied and the evidence required.

Current processing times

- Applications from outside the UK: usually a decision within 12 weeks
- In-UK applications meeting the financial and English language requirements: usually within 8 weeks
- In-UK applications not meeting those requirements: currently around 12 months
- Service standards are published by the Home Office and change; they are not guarantees

SECTION 06

Preparing the evidence

A partner application is decided on documents. The strongest applications present the evidence in a structured bundle, indexed and cross-referenced to written submissions that explain how each requirement is met.

A working document checklist

- Passports and travel documents for the applicant and any dependants, and evidence of the sponsor's status
- Marriage or civil partnership certificate, or evidence of two years' cohabitation
- Relationship history: photographs across the whole relationship, correspondence, evidence of visits, messages and call records
- Evidence of contact during periods apart, and an explanation of any gap in the history
- Financial evidence in the format Appendix FM-SE specifies, covering the full required period
- Accommodation evidence: tenancy or title documents, occupancy details and, where relevant, a property report
- English language test certificate or evidence of exemption
- Evidence relating to children included in the application, including consent where relevant
- A covering letter or written submissions addressing suitability, relationship, finances, accommodation and English language in turn

Areas that most often cause difficulty

Refusals frequently follow from evidence that is incomplete rather than from a relationship or an income that is not genuine. Common risk areas include financial evidence that does not cover the required period or is not in the specified format, inconsistencies between the accounts given by each partner, unexplained gaps in the relationship history, accommodation evidence that does not establish occupancy or the right to live at the property, English language evidence from a provider that is not approved, and previous immigration history that has not been addressed. These are general observations, not a prediction about any individual application.

SECTION 07

The application process

- 1. Check eligibility and the date at which each requirement will be met, before anything is filed.
- 2. Complete the online application on GOV.UK and pay the fee and the health surcharge, or apply for a fee waiver first where relevant.
- 3. Book and attend a biometrics appointment at a visa application centre or UKVCAS service point.
- 4. Upload the evidence bundle and the written submissions in the order stated in the index.
- 5. Respond promptly to any Home Office request for further information; these usually carry a short deadline.
- 6. On a grant, check the conditions of leave and the settlement date. On a refusal, check the decision letter for the review or appeal route and the deadline that applies to it.

Applications should not normally be submitted before the evidence is complete. Where a document cannot be obtained, the position is better explained in submissions than left unaddressed.

SECTION 08

After the decision

If the application is granted

Leave under the five-year partner route is normally granted in stages of 30 or 33 months. You will need to extend before your leave expires and, at the end of five years' continuous leave on the route, you may apply for indefinite leave to remain, subject to the settlement requirements including the Life in the UK Test and English at B1.

If the application is refused

A refusal letter should state the ground relied on and the remedy available: an administrative review, a right of appeal to the First-tier Tribunal, or a fresh application. Time limits are short and are calculated from the date the decision is served. Take advice quickly; making a fresh application can, in some circumstances, affect an existing right of appeal.

WORKING WITH US

How we can help

Andrew Williams Solicitors is a regulated immigration law practice. Our solicitors advise on and prepare applications in this area, and every submission is checked and approved by a solicitor before it is filed.

- Spouse and partner applications from inside and outside the UK
- Financial requirement reviews, including self-employed and variable-income sponsors
- Relationship and accommodation evidence planning
- Extension applications and settlement planning
- Applications including children and other dependent family members
- Review of refusals and advice on the options and their deadlines

Professional indemnity and scope of service

We use internal working methods to support our solicitors in delivering an efficient, evidence-led service. The following applies without exception:

- We are a regulated law firm providing legal services. We are not a technology or software provider.
- Any internal working methods we use support our solicitors. They are not products, and they are not supplied, licensed or made available to clients.
- Clients receive legal advice from a solicitor. Clients do not receive access to any internal system.
- No internal working method makes, replaces or influences a legal judgment. Every piece of advice and every submission is prepared and approved by a solicitor.
- We do not control Home Office decisions, processing times, eligibility or policy, and we make no representation that we do.
- Nothing in this guide is a guarantee of any outcome, timescale or eligibility.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Disclaimer and terms of use

- This guide is general information about UK immigration law and Home Office practice as at 8 August 2026. It is not legal advice and must not be relied on as advice about your own circumstances.
- The Immigration Rules, Home Office fees, published service standards and policy guidance change regularly and often at short notice. Figures and requirements stated here were checked against GOV.UK on the date shown and may have changed since. Always check the current position on GOV.UK, or take advice, before you make an application.
- No solicitor can guarantee the outcome of an immigration application or appeal. Every case is decided by the Home Office, or by the tribunal, on its own facts and on the evidence submitted.
- Andrew Williams Solicitors accepts no liability for any loss arising from reliance on this guide. Downloading or reading this guide does not create a solicitor and client relationship. A relationship begins only once we have issued, and you have accepted, a written engagement letter.
- We strongly recommend that you take advice from a regulated immigration solicitor before making or responding to any immigration application.

Sources checked

- GOV.UK — Family visas: apply, extend or switch (checked 8 August 2026)
- Immigration Rules Appendix FM and Appendix FM-SE
- Home Office guidance: Family Migration — Appendix FM Section 1.7 (financial requirement)
- Home Office immigration and nationality fees table

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Andrew Nathaniel Williams is the principal solicitor and founder of Andrew Williams Solicitors, an immigration practice based in Leeds. He holds a Bachelor of Laws (LLB Hons) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice, and began working in immigration law in 2001 as a caseworker at the Refugee Legal Centre in Leeds.

Andrew qualified as a solicitor in 2004 and established the practice that trades today as Andrew Williams Solicitors in 2007. He has held supervisory roles in immigration practices in Leeds, Hull and Manchester, and has acted in family, work, settlement, fee waiver and appeal matters at every level from initial application to the Upper Tribunal.

Andrew practises through the firm, which is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. The firm holds professional indemnity insurance as required by the SRA Indemnity Insurance Rules.

FIRM AND REGULATORY DETAILS

DETAIL	INFORMATION
Practice name	Andrew Williams Solicitors
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