

Migration: Policy & Practice
Birmingham - Black Country

MIGRANT VOICES ON BARRIERS TO SETTLEMENT IN BIRMINGHAM AND THE BLACK COUNTRY

A **MIGRATION POLICY AND PRACTICE** ANNUAL ASSESSMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Authors would like to thank our funders – The Barrow Cadbury Trust and Paul Hamlyn Foundation for their support. We would also like to acknowledge the support of our host organisation Birmingham Settlement.

Thank you also to the organisations represented on our Project Board for their help and guidance – ASIRT, Asylum Matters, Centrala, Central England Law Centre, Refugee and Migrant Centre, Restore, Spring Housing Association.

We would also like to thank the additional organisations who helped us in hosting the focus groups that supported this report – Brushstrokes, Near Neighbours, Nechells POD, Refugee Action, Stories of Hope and Home.

Most importantly, we would like to acknowledge and thank all those who attended our events and shared their experiences with us.

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REGIONAL CONTEXT

The West Midlands region, and in particular Birmingham and the Black Country, remains one of the most diverse areas in the country. The region as a whole is estimated to have a population where 13.9% were born outside of the UK. ¹ Although overall this is slightly lower than the UK average, in those areas with densely populated urban areas the number is significantly higher. In four of the five Local Authority areas, over 10% of the population are estimated to have been born outside of the UK. There are also significant populations of non-UK nationals resident within all areas, highlighting the number of migrants living throughout the region.

Local Authority	% Population Non-UK born	% Population Non-UK Nationals
Birmingham	25	12
Dudley	4	3
Sandwell	22	15
Walsall	10	7
Wolverhampton	19	13
UK	14	9

Source: Office for National Statistics, June 2021

ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT

This report was informed by a series of focus groups and meetings held with the support of partner organisations across the region. In total we spoke with almost 100 individuals, with a range of immigration status and living in the UK for different periods. All discussions were open-ended but grouped around the four broad themes of our work. ² This allowed participants to talk freely around the issues and barriers they have encountered during their time in the region, and the wider UK.

It should also be noted that the sample of people we spoke to provides only a small sample of the migrant population in the region and may not be reflective of those with greatest need. The nature of the focus groups we arranged, through partner organisations, meant that those who took part were already engaged with established networks. We had no contact with those outside of the range of this study, meaning that that some issues may not have been raised.

¹ House of Commons Briefing Paper: Migration Statistics, September 2022

² Rights, Health, Opportunities (encompassing education, employment and training), Communities

THE KEY ISSUES RAISED HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AND DETAILED AS FOLLOWS:

RIGHTS KEY FINDINGS

- Migrants find it difficult to access the correct specialist advice to deal with the complex situations they experience.
- The availability and provision of quality housing remains a problem for migrants, regardless of their status.
- The problems experienced by many migrants, regardless of immigration status, have been exacerbated by delays in resolving claims or responding to queries and appeals

HEALTH KEY FINDINGS

- There have been a number of ways in which migrants have struggled to access healthcare treatment, particularly those in initial asylum accommodation.
- Mental health support and treatment continues to be difficult to access for many migrants
- Further work needs to be conducted to ensure that the specific needs of migrants are included in strategic planning.

OPPORTUNITIES KEY FINDINGS

- There are issues around the awareness of ESOL course availability and whether these are suitable for those with work or caring commitments.
- Access to Further and Higher Education remains a barrier.
- Volunteering has been a positive experience for many migrants, both in terms of increasing social integration and developing an employment history.
- Problems persist in ensuring that overseas qualifications are converted and recognised.

COMMUNITY KEY FINDINGS

- Many migrants are unable to engage outside of established networks due to childcare or work commitments.
- There remains a difficulty in establishing successful criteria for measuring community integration.
- Hate Crime remains a problem experienced by many migrants.
- Modern Day Slavery continues to be evidenced in the region.
- The sector itself also needs to reflect the population it works with, particularly in its leadership and through empowering those with lived experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Support greater signposting of specialist advice services, both online and in locations used by migrants populations.

Engagement with wider voluntary sector campaigns around housing provision and support to increase awareness of rights.

Investment in all specialist advice services to increase sector capacity.

Campaign for increased government investment in the asylum system in order to reduce timescales for cases to be resolved.

Advocate for increased access to Mental Health support.

Ensure involvement of those with lived experience in the planning of healthcare service provision.

Develop links between formal and informal ESOL providers to ensure availability of courses at suitable times and locations.

Liaise with Higher Education Institutions through groups such as the City of Sanctuary movement to encourage availability of bursaries for migrant groups.

Support for conversion of overseas qualifications and increased investment in IELTS courses.

Development of training and support pathway for education and training in the region.

Development of network supporting volunteering opportunities in the region.

Encourage further links between host and migrant communities through social activities.

Establish a framework for measuring success of social integration in the region.

Encourage the reporting of Hate Crime through use of trusted partner organisation and language support for victims.

Empower those with lived experience into leadership positions in the sector as well as developing their own groups and networks.

Read our full report on our website
www.migrationpolicy.org.uk

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