

MIGRANT EXPERIENCES OF THE BARRIERS TO SETTLEMENT IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

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



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Authors would like to thank our funders – The Barrow Cadbury Trust and The National Lottery Community Fund for their support. We would also like to acknowledge the support of our host organisation Birmingham Settlement.

Thank you also to our Board of Trustees for their guidance and support as well as Trisha Gallardo for her invaluable work coordinating the focus groups that informed this report.

We would also like to thank the additional organisations who helped us in hosting the focus groups– All Saints Action Network, Hope Community Project, Journey, Refugee Action, Refugee and Migrant Centre, Restore and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

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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ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT

This report was informed by a series of focus groups and interviews held with the support of partner organisations across the region over spring and summer 2023. In total we spoke with almost 100 individuals, all at different stages of their migration journey.

All discussions were open-ended but grouped around the four broad themes of our work, allowing participants to talk freely about the issues and barriers they have encountered during their time in the region, and the wider UK.

The key issues raised across the four themes are expanded below:

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 In five Local Authority areas, over 10% of the population are estimated to have been born overseas. This number has increased in all boroughs since the last census, with Sandwell seeing the largest change.

| Local Authority | % Population Non-UK born | % Change since last Census |
|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Birmingham | 26.7 | 4.5 |
| Dudley | 7.9 | 2.6 |
| Sandwell | 15.9 | 7.7 |
| Solihull | 10.3 | 2.8 |
| Walsall | 14.8 | 4.9 |
| Wolverhampton | 22.9 | 6.5 |

Source: Office for National Statistics, Census 2021

The percentage of the population who have been born overseas continues to be reflective of the many communities who have migrated to the region from the post-war period to the present day, including those recently arrived from areas such as Eastern Europe and Hong Kong. The largest numbers of overseas born residents are from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Poland. The highest numbers of overseas born populations are found in urban areas in the region, primarily in Birmingham but with significant communities also in Coventry, Sandwell and Wolverhampton. ²

¹ Office for National Statistics: Census 2021 Country of Birth – 13th December 2022 ² Office for National Statistics: International Migration England and Wales Census 2021 – November 2022

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

RIGHTS KEY FINDINGS

- Migrants continue to experience difficulty in accessing legal support and advice, especially for asylum cases.
- There are significant barriers to accessing housing and issues with the conditions in many properties. Many face overcrowding, and landlords unwilling to make needed repairs.
- Frequent moves between accommodation are disruptive to employment, education, support systems and wellbeing.
- The lack of clarity or awareness around rights, entitlements and UK systems caused stress and delayed access to support. Many relied on advice and/or signposting from friends or family rather than formal avenues.

HEALTH KEY FINDINGS

- There remains a lack of awareness about how to access some NHS services, especially when newly arrived.
- Mental health support is needed but lacking, with counselling services not always effective. Depression and anxiety were common issues for many migrants in our focus groups.
- Some reported negative experiences with maternity care, including dismissal of concerns, inadequate monitoring during labour, and lack of pain relief options.
- There were difficulties for some in gaining approval prescriptions following prior diagnosis in other countries which made management of chronic health conditions difficult.

OPPORTUNITIES KEY FINDINGS

- A lack of UK work experience prevents professionals from finding jobs at their skill level with many remaining underemployed in low wage jobs.
- There is difficulty progressing in further education and training due to costs, immigration status and lack of flexible study options to fit around work or childcare commitments.
- Limited English skills make finding suitable work very difficult and can lead to a lack of progression and a cycle of long-term low paid work.
- There is a lack of awareness of how to get foreign qualifications recognised with the process often costly and out of reach for those on low incomes.
- Migrant women carry the burden of childcare responsibilities, causing significant difficulties in finding suitable work. As a result, migrant women are particularly prone to becoming underemployed in low paid work, especially in the care sector.

COMMUNITY KEY FINDINGS

- Many migrants experience loneliness due to a lack of close friendships or people to rely on for support, with many citing having no family in the UK.
- There can be difficulty integrating into local communities and developing trust with feelings of isolation persisting despite living in the UK for a number of years.
- Limited English skills prevent participation in community activities and friendship with locals.
- There is a lack of awareness of groups, activities, and spaces to meet people. Although there is great interest in involvement in community activities, cost of public transport can limit participation.
- There appears to be a lack of tailored support and opportunities to connect migrants and local people to foster understanding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Encourage and support links between generalist and specialist support organisations to develop joint working and knowledge sharing.

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.

Support national campaigns for increased investment and reform of 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.

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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