

## Migrants' Access to Health Services

### Background

As part of the JustCitizens Panel we are conducting community research across a number of different policy areas to support our aim to create a fairer Scotland for migrants. Two of these topics are access to health and access to further and higher education. These topics were chosen by migrant members on the panel and all research and recommendations were developed by them.

Across February and March 2021 we conducted a survey for migrants to complete to tell us about their experiences of healthcare (including mental health) and education (specifically accessing colleges and universities) this survey was completed by 62 people. This was also supported with the delivery of 2 focus groups with 7 migrants.

### What we found out:

**58%** of those involved in the research felt there was a lack of inclusion for migrants in Scotland



*"There is a sense of loneliness since moving to Scotland. Every time you try to speak you are shut down with 'Is that how it is done in your country'. Feel like there is a massive unconscious bias towards migrants. This sense is probably heightened by current pandemic"*

*"A lot of the belonging and inclusion campaigns are very surface level and there is a lack of a real commitment in facilitating migrants from accessing health and well-being – for example, language barriers are not always addressed"*

### On health:

- ▶ **1 in 3** migrants have experienced barriers in using health or mental health services in Scotland



## What migrants said:

*"There is a lack of understanding that we do not have the same support network as someone whose family, friends and hometown are a few hours journey away at most. When I said I felt lonely to my counsellor they told me I need to find new friends (during covid)."*

*"insufficient provision, poor crisis response and massive waiting lists. For migrants with language barrier most of services are virtually inaccessible"*

*"When I was studying in University and asked for mental health support it was really difficult to get through; I was struggling seriously with my mental health and they put me on a waiting list- that meant that I had to wait at least 3 months, in order to see a counsellor. I was able to finally see uni's counsellor, when I got worse and emailed them to say that I have suicidal thoughts."*

*"I faced this barrier before I applied for the asylum. There was this mental and physical barrier that stopped from visiting doctors because of being scared of the immigration police."*

*"When humans migrate separation anxiety strikes hard; from our friends, our habits, our familiar places and climate. Having GPs telling you you're overreacting and should be just fine by reading 2-3 universal pieces of paper on every visit when your psychological tests indicate depression is very confusing and invalidating"*

## Recommendations from our snapshot research:

- ▶ Culture and inclusion training for NHS staff (especially reception staff who are often first person met and registering migrants in NHS system).
- ▶ Investment in trauma and culture specific mental health services for migrants
- ▶ Health and wellbeing welcome packs, in different languages provided on arrival and 6 months after arrival – as information presented is not enough, and if it is only done on arrival it can be overwhelming or overlooked.
- ▶ Better referrals and links between migration support programmes/legal support and mental health services
- ▶ More effort to tackle fear caused by Home Office which prevents people from coming forward for their needs – need to reassure people about information sharing.
- ▶ A right to professional and confidential translation services and language support across all health services.

## Next steps:

The Just Citizens panel will be working to disseminate this information across Scotland. We will be conducting Freedom of Information requests to identify more data on these two policy areas, we will be writing articles for media and will be talking to key public institutions to promote our recommendations.

In autumn 2021 we will be producing a full report which includes recommendation, data and commentary across five key policy areas to promote a social citizenship strategy for migrants in Scotland.