

Migrant communities and political participation

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. One of these topics is political participation. We launched a survey earlier this year to ask migrants about their experiences of political participation (which included voting, responding to consultations and engaging with local and national government). The survey was launched to help the panel come up with recommendations on how Scotland can create more inclusive and representative participation routes.



What we found out:

Please note:

57

people took part in this survey, the survey was online and in English, as such it is likely some migrants will not have taken part, particularly those furthest away from political participation already.

- ▶ **1 in 4** migrants in our survey have never voted in Scotland.
- ▶ **1 in 5** migrants in our survey didn't know they had the right to vote.
- ▶ **82%** had signed a petition.
- ▶ **66%** had voted in Scottish Parliament Elections.
- ▶ **64%** had voted in Local Elections.
- ▶ **56%** had written to a local councillor or MSP.
- ▶ **22%** had joined a political party.
- ▶ **52%** did not feel represented in Scottish Politics.

Respondents to the survey said they felt the system was confusing, that they did not feel their participation would make any difference and that they did not know their rights fully.

Some key quotes:

"It's confusing. I know I'm allowed to vote in some elections but in others I'm not, still struggle to remember which ones."

"No representation from my background or colour of skin is in the parliament or in the council."

"I'm not sure if I am entitled and I feel like it would not make a difference anyways."

"The issues that affect me or other migrants I know are rarely addressed, I feel."

Our recommendations:

- 1** Consultation by Government, Scottish Parliament and local authorities in different languages and include a pathway for the insights from migrants to feed back directly to parliamentary committees – There should be better and clearer ways for migrants to share their views year round, not just at election time.
- 2** Creation of a Migrants Voice Panel (like the YWCA women panel) or larger involvement in Citizen Assemblies to enable the participation of migrants in a more meaningful way and for there to be a focus on issues migrants believe to be a priority to their lives.
- 3** Scottish Government and/or local councils should create and fund a project focused on supporting/enabling community leaders to be spokespeople for civic participation, ensuring they have up to date and detailed information on pathways of participation and can encourage others across their communities as trusted advocates (e.g. those from mosques, churches, BAME communities groups).
- 4** Political participation educational programmes should be delivered in a variety of languages and at a community level.
- 5** A monthly update focused on what is happening in parliament should be made available in many language, to enable communities to know what is happening and feel able to hold it to account.
- 6** Social media promotion on who has the right to vote and act as a reminder for May 2021.
- 7** Ensure/encourage political parties having adequate anti racism & representation policies in place.

From our meeting with key policy makers, where we launched these recommendations, further ideas followed which included:

- 1** Ensuring the right to vote is included in Home Office letters which confirm leave to remain.
- 2** There should not be an over-reliance on community and third sector organisations which are already stretched, to be supporting voter registration/information sharing. This should be either funded or invested in centrally.
- 3** Access to participation needs to be made clearer; too much information is hidden or difficult to identify. There should be a review of accessibility of information and process which are currently exclusionary (e.g. voter registration or consultation responses).



Next steps:

The recommendations have been shared at a meeting with the Electoral Commission, the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Open Government Partnership.

We will be following up with them to make sure these recommendations are shared further and that action is taken.