



Scottish Human Rights Bill consultation

Lived Experiences of EU migrants in Scotland



Authors:

Monika Connelly, Anda Griveteanu, Elixabeth Mulero, Maria Grazia Scarda

September 2023



The Citizens Rights Project conducted a series of four discussions in September, specifically engaging with EU migrants. These conversations were undertaken to gather insights and information that would contribute to the forthcoming report by the Human Rights Consortium Scotland. This report will be submitted as part of the consultation process regarding the new Human Rights Bill for Scotland.

To ensure inclusivity, the conversations were conducted in four different languages: Spanish, Romanian, Italian, and Polish, catering to the EU communities with significant populations in Scotland. Participants were actively consulted on their experiences in accessing public services within Scotland. We explored their interactions with regard to seeking advice and information about their rights, as well as addressing grievances and seeking redress when their human rights were infringed upon. These rights encompassed vital aspects such as adequate housing and the right to education.

The primary objective of these conversations was to gain a deeper understanding of the unique barriers and challenges faced by migrants. This includes the additional hurdles posed by language and cultural differences. It is crucial for the government to hear directly from individuals who have chosen to make Scotland their home, ensuring that policies and legislation are designed to accommodate their needs effectively.

The reports presented below do not encompass any analytical or reflective examination of the responses received. Instead, they faithfully reproduce the experiences, ideas, and comments shared by the participants.



Consultation with Spanish citizens

Report by Elixabeth Mulero [EU Settlement Scheme Caseworker for Citizens Rights Project, Volunteer Welfare Adviser for Scotland Precariat Office]

Out of the 23 Spanish citizens initially interested in participating in this conversation, we carefully selected a diverse group of 10 individuals from various backgrounds and locations. Ultimately, 8 of them actively participated in the discussion.

This diverse group included people residing in Edinburgh (6), Kirkcaldy (1), and Glasgow (1), comprising four women and four men. The participants fell within the age range of 45 to 59 years. Among the group, 5 individuals were employed, 1 was unemployed, 4 were claiming benefits, and 1 was pursuing studies. In terms of their duration of stay in Scotland, 3 participants had been living there for 1-5 years, 2 for 5-10 years, 1 for less than a year, and 1 for more than 10 years.

What is for you, or how do you define human rights?

- Being treated as a person, with dignity, equal treatment, freedom, basic rights, and responsibilities that the people have.
- Anything related to the Human Rights Declaration.
- Education, earning an income, right to work, and a dignified work.
- Having rights, no matter your cultural background, country of origin, language spoken, or religion.

What social services have you used? How did you feel when using them? Did you have any issues when accessing them?

- Participant 1. Benefits: A single father with an under 18 years old child, has been getting benefits for his child. Due to long-term sickness, he is unable to work, and he needs to claim PIP. He does not know how to fill up the forms, due to the language barrier. He has been ill for around three years. He has tried filling up the paperwork for claiming PIP in the past, but the claim was refused since it was not correctly completed. When he asks for a translator at the GP and the council office, to help him to fill up the forms, he is ignored. He has asked at Citizens Advice Bureau for an interpreter, but he is ignored. He said, "yes, yes, we will find you one", but in the end, he is ignored, and public services do not facilitate him an interpreter. Wrong diagnosis: The client has been wrongly diagnosed for a long time and has had some issues with universal credit due to this. The client has complained about this, but the GP was not listening for a while. In the end, the diagnosis was changed, but the GP did not recognize openly the wrong diagnosis, only to him. The client has been working when he should have not due to the wrong diagnosis.
- Participant 2. Renting: The individual finds the renting process for a flat not accessible. Does not like the matter of applying for homelessness assistance and needing to pass through temporary accommodation (hostels), to get a permanent house.
- Participant 3. GP: Another individual has found it difficult to register with a GP to get medical assistance. It has not been easy for her to register with the GP, she needs continuous medical treatment, so she needed to register as soon as she came to the

UK. Once she got registered on her GP, she had to move and get registered with another GP. Again, a difficult process to get registered, because they do not accept new patients. She had to go to the hospital and ask to be treated there to get registered with her second GP. School registration for children, her children were for around six months not going to school, due to all schools in the area being out of capacity, and no one accepting them.

Homeless accommodation: The matter of being in temporary accommodation, until you pass to permanent accommodation is not easy, "you cannot continue with your normal life, because you need to be all the time checking if there is news for your permanent accommodation".

This participant states that she speaks with her doctor any time she has issues of any type, and the doctor helps with it.

The individual received a letter for paying Council Tax for some dates when she was in homelessness accommodation, she does not understand why. She now has a debt she has to pay and is putting more stress on her life.

Because of health issues, the client has been advised by social services to reduce her working hours with the aim of getting benefits (CU).

The client does not trust the help that social services may offer until she sees it "on the table" until she sees the facts. She is not going to stop working until she gets UC.

- Participant 4: when she arrived in Edinburgh, she got in touch with the council to look for a school for her children. She usually accesses NHS services as well. She did not encounter any issues since everything can be done online.

How was your experience with public and social services when you first arrived in Scotland? Is there any difference with now? Do you feel more confident using these services?

- Participant 1: Recently moved from England to Scotland. Found easy-to-use and access public services and made all the needed changes. He has registered himself in the Spanish consulate as well. The only thing, he is waiting for his driver's license to arrive. He has asked a couple of times when it is due to arrive, but he has received any answer from the government.
- Participant 2: he has been living in the UK for a while, but his partner recently moved to the UK with him. She had some diagnosed health issues back in Germany. When his partner was checked in by the doctor, the doctor said that the patient was fine. The partner had to travel back to her country to be treated, the doctor in here was not treating her and this was very risky for her life. Doctors in Germany were shocked UK doctors deny medicines and the diagnosis. Due to his wife's health issues, the individual needs to reduce his working hours. He has approached his employer and told them he wants to work part-time work shifts and a fixed schedule in order to take care of his children, and because of his sleeping issues. He has apnoea and must keep a fixed schedule. He is a bus driver. He was told to put the request and give 3 months' notice, but at the last minute, the company did not allow for it. Also, the company is not calling him to work anymore. Getting rid of furniture, council. The individual has phoned the council to get rid of some furniture, but the council has not responded.



- Participant 3: When she first arrived, she felt very lost in the process of accessing social services, now she feels more confident. She asks her sister-in-law when she needs help.
- Participant 4: When she first arrived, she felt very lost because she could not express herself in English and had to face a system completely different from the one in her own country. Now, she feels a little bit more confident, but still, there are aspects or questions that she does not know where to go get an answer and help for, such as her pension, employment history, etc. She always asks friends who can speak English or have been here longer when she needs help.
- Participant 5: She feels that when she arrived the council worked better and was more organised than now. She recently accompanied a friend who cannot speak much English to the Council for a welfare matter. They were told they would be offered an appointment via text message, which they did. When they arrived at the appointment, council workers told her that such service did not exist, that they did not give appointments via text message. They did not help them, and she felt they were treated as if they were crazy. The person had the appointment on a mobile message and showed it to them. Finally, the people in the office apologised for the mistake. In the end, she decided to take her friend to Granton Information Centre. They are currently helping her friend.
- Participant 6: When he arrived in Scotland, he arrived in the Livingstone area and he felt, that, because there were fewer immigrant people arriving when he arrived, it was easier for him to get help.

Have you received help from any charity or organization to access public services?

- Participant 1: he has been helped by Turning Point Scotland, and he usually contacts them when he needs help with something.
- Participant 2: he has been helped in the past by a Polish association to get his settled status. Most of the rest of the individuals refer to ask friends or workmates when they have an issue, and they do not where to go to have it solved.

How do you think the Scottish Government could make information more accessible about access to public services, and human rights? Do you find easily information in your own language?

The individuals state that mostly they get information from friends and workmates.

Some of the individuals have found that they find information in many different languages, but Spanish does not appear in many of the places where they get information, finding it unusual. (Spanish is quite known worldwide spoken language)

They also refer to government websites as a source of information, but they find it very difficult to navigate.

One of the participants states that she finds easily information on her own language, and government is doing fine with that, in their countries these is not so much support.



Have you had any issues with social services? Have you ever submitted a complaint about it? How it was? How did you feel through the process?

- Participant 1: Lothian buses: The individual made a claim to Lothian buses. One of the buses passed next to her car at some point, scratching the car's surface. She took the bus registration number. She complained about it to the company but was ignored, and she did not know where to go to make a proper complaint.
- Participant 2: GP wrong diagnosis. When the individual was wrongly diagnosed, he complained about it. The GP recognized it to him but did not recognise it openly in a letter.
- Participant 3: working with an agency. The individual was working for an agency for 2/3 days. He did not receive the payment for these days. He complained and the people from the agency said that they should have taken the number from the card wrongly, and the person taking the number did not work anymore for the agency. The client got help from Citizens Advice Bureau to write formal letters and ask for the payment due. Finally, he got the issue solved thanks to the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Participant 4: The individual has been working for some hours painting a house for an agency. Apparently, the house owner complained about the part of the painting that the individual had made and was refusing to pay her. The agency told the individual to apologise, but she refused. The client found help from an organization (she does not remember the name) and thanks to them, finally she got paid for her work.
- Participant 5: She has complaint to Edinburgh Council about the latest experience she has with them but that did not listen. When she went to Granton Centre, they phoned the Council, and it was only then when the council apologise. She finds Granton Centre more reliable than the Council.

Have you ever referred to lawyers to solve an issue with social services?

- Participant 1: When the agency was refusing to pay him, he was thinking of getting a lawyer, but Citizens Advice Bureau advised him that the amount of money due to pay, was low, and getting a lawyer would have incurred in higher cost than the amount that was due to him. That is why he decided to go with the formal letters to ask for the money due.
- Participant 2: Never had to use a lawyer, but she will use one if she must.



Consultation with Polish Citizens

Report by Monika Connelly [Project Officer at Citizens Rights Project, Interpreter and translator]

19 Polish citizens were interested in taking part in this conversation, we picked 10, assuring they are from different backgrounds and locations but in the end only 5 of them participated.

Nevertheless, I believe that the input we have received from this group evidence well, how they perceive Human Rights.

Our group consisted of women from Dumfries, Glasgow, Boness, Edinburgh, 4 of them where English speakers, one was not. They are all employed, the one from Glasgow is employed, self-employed and studying, one of them is employed and getting additional support through Universal Credit. 2 of them have lived in Scotland between 5-10 years, 3 for over 10 years.

On a question what public services they know, their combined answers were:

Medical and council services, interpreters, housing, roads, schools, employer's contributions, infrastructure.

Public services used:

Council services, public nursery for a child, housing services, social care – this participant tried to get a social worker involved due to her disability and she feels that it's almost impossible to get information or find appropriate forms to fill in, overall, it was a very negative experience, and the lack of information with regards to self-directed support (SDS) is very visible. NHS – she does not trust her GP, and constantly checks if referrals to specialists are sent. She filed a formal complaint about her GP not carrying out his duties properly and she received an apologetic reply about the GP's neglect. She feels that medical help from hospitals is at a satisfactory level but she's also under the impression that some specialists (like mental health) are trying to deter patients, convincing them, they don't need to be seen. She has never been asked her if she would like any language support and additionally, even with a clear note in her medical record, that all written correspondence is to be send to her in a large format, only her optician does it. She constantly phones other NHS departments to remind them about the large format, they make promises, but all letters come in a standard format anyway. She thinks that police in Scotland is unfit to help after she reported her mobile phone theft and that someone was trying to steal her car. They were unable to help and offered assistance via victim support.

Our other participant is a housing association tenant, she feels, that it's very positive that the repairs are done in timely and efficient manner. NHS – She thinks it's a positive experience but it's still difficult to book face to face GP appointments. She works and is in receiving of Universal Credit as a single mother and she has no issues communicating with the Job centre staff. Police – she reported a noisy neighbour, but the police were unable to help with the matter.

Non-English speaker from Edinburgh, feels that there is no problem with booking face-to-face GP appointments but it's difficult to get appointments with specialists. She has Interpreters provided by the NHS. Police – she wanted to report a crime, but interpreter was not provided after asking for one. She made s complaint with a help of an organisation about



not getting a language support. She also reported a noisy neighbour to her council, phoned the Police and the antisocial behaviour team, who did nothing and refused to provide an interpreter when she asked for one.

This person works for an organisation helping other people and often phones public services to arrange medical appointments. On many occasions, she's been told that interpreters cannot be provided and she argues that they can (She works as an NHS interpreter). Her clients often complain that they are treated with no respect by the reception staff, because they do not speak English. She feels that it is easier to talk to SSS than to the DWP, who are always happy to provide interpreters. Local council – she makes regular complaints about rubbish and mess in public places. Not only they claim that that's not their responsibility, but she feels that various council departments and employees do not communicate with each other, the outcome - nothing gets resolved, the communication is very time consuming and gets a complainer nowhere. She feels that the NHS specialists put patients at the heart of all they do.

The speaker who lives in Boness tried to report a criminal damage to the Police but was sent from Police station to Police station, which was frustrating and time consuming, eventually, she spoke to someone a week later, and was told by one of the police officers on duty that as a force, they have no money, no time, no resources and that they cannot assist her, as there are no witnesses to the crime. She thinks that police are genially nice, but unable to help citizens. During this process, she tried to call 101 but was advised by a police officer to give up as they won't be able to assist in anyway. She was on JSA years ago and claims that the job centre staff was above and beyond helpful. She lives in a council flat and has been unable to request repairs since the pandemic. She feels it's time consuming to contact the repairs team and that there is no communication between council staff and trades. The phone number provided, only allows to leave messages, therefore she can't speak to anyone to raise any concerns. She feels that her GP is not great – the referrals to specialists are not sent, it's also almost impossible to receive physiotherapy.

One of the persons living in Dumfries believes that police is nice, the NHS is helpful, and she gets all the help she needs from her small GP practise. She works for her local council so cannot comment on that aspect.

The barriers

Dumfries Woman's Aid helped one of the speakers after leaving her abusive partner in England. They helped her with all aspects of moving to a new country. She felt grateful for so much help and even that she speaks English, she did not understand Scottish accent for the first few months. The help from Woman's Aid was immensely appreciated.

Another of our speakers, came to Scotland to join her friends and they explained to her how to organise her new life here, she uses an organisation called "Feniks" and their page to find out information and about upcoming meetings.

One moved from Dublin with her Scottish partner who assisted with all aspects of moving to a new country.

One person has been waiting for a charity organisation Feniks to start counselling sessions with them since March, she thinks that waiting times are too long. When she moved to the UK, her friends helped her for free, but she also used help of people who charged £30-£40



an hour for filling in the forms. She knows the law quite well, but she is not great with the language. She knows where and how to seek help.

One speaker came to Scotland to study at the University of Stirling, so she received all the help from them. Thereafter, she commenced employment as an advisor assisting others, and went through various courses and training sessions so she is fully aware as to where to seek help.

Another person came to study at the college in Alloa and at the Stirling University thereafter. At the beginning she rented a room from Polish people but shortly after, she moved into her own accommodation. Whilst at college, her sources of information were the internet, other students and her own research. Years ago, she had an accident at work and engaged a solicitor to represent her, so she understands how the judicial system works. She is married to a non- European, so she tried to gather information about what to do to get her husband to join her in the UK. She felt there was a lot of contradicting information with regard to the immigration law, so she used an immigration lawyer, who charged a lot but was not too helpful. The most help with that matter she received from her local MP.

In conclusion, all the ladies apart from one can speak English so they do not encounter too many barriers in accessing public services.

Gathering information

Using Google mostly and in a conversation with others.

Social media, FB, the internet, newspapers, Citizens Advice Scotland website, CAB also helped with this person's EUSS application. Information is best absorbed by reading.

Social Media, the internet, and looking for friends' opinions. Information is absorbed best, by reading and watching.

One speaker thinks that sometimes it's hard to find information because one professional says one thing and another organisation says the opposite. Organizations that help advisors would for example say that the advice given, based on certain laws/rules was wrong which then leaves my speaker in a position of explaining to the first person that what he/she said originally was incorrect, and that they are not aware of their own rules and regulations. She would often check CAB webpage and look for representing rules and regulations in the Law. She absorbs information through reading and during various training sessions.

Social media, Glasgow council, and NHS website. If something is unclear, she writes letters to the Head of departments asking for clarification. Within her employment, she participates in various groups like accessibility of information about how to present information. She absorbs information by reading but also needs to write them down, in her own handwriting.

How to best inform communities?

Non- English speaker – She believes that it would be best to create a website for different nations. I, the facilitator suggested that the.gov.uk page is automatically Google translated into chosen language, she is aware of that and believes that information provided there, is clear enough.

The speaker who works as an advisor believes that there is a lot of useful information on the Scottish Gov. or CAB page but they could be more specific like the "turn to us" or

“enabled.co.uk” Pages like CAB are good but could be more specific with providing answers, based on particular situations like: Are you a British citizen yes or no, Do you have settled status yes or no, do you have pre-settled status yes or no and once you click on appropriate information it would provide a reader with a specific for your situation advice as the general one is simply too general. It would also be useful to have links on the Scottish gov page to organisations or charities that offer specific help and to promote them.

My speaker from Boness believes that one-stop shop - welcome to Scotland page in various languages providing information about the EUSS, NHS, Schools, could be a solution. It would show how to access public services and provide links to other pages, so everything would be in one place. She uses the gov.uk or Scottish .gov page when she needs them. She provided an example of situation where she lost her passport abroad and wondered about being able to return to Britain, with the EUSS and a different ID than the one provided on her digital status page. She claims that there is no information available online about what to do about coming back to the UK if your document gets stolen and you are an EU citizen living in the UK. She has also recently renewed her EHIC card. Having a status under the EUSS, she was asked to prove her residence status and was informed that the information will be passed to a third party with no explanation as to what, why and to whom, making her uneasy about the process. During the process, she was asked to prove her identity with two additional pieces of evidence. She believes that the online infrastructure is not prepared for the EUSS and the information provided/requested contradicts itself. She feels that too often, to get what you need/want, the only way is through your local MP and by providing specific regulations/acts to public services staff who don't always know them. In that case, the language barrier would be a big problem with hours of your own time spent on resolving your specific issue.

Another speaker believes that the information available online is present yet very general, there is an option to phone, but it takes hours to get through and to speak to someone and it's frustrating. She provided a different example of the EUSS complications, related to her daughter who started studying at the university, and even with her settled status and providing the share code, she was required to show additional evidence to prove her identity as the staff was unaware of correct procedures. Also, at high school - as a person who was born in the UK, and who is fully settled, her daughter's right to study was questioned and she missed out on available to other pupils university courses, as she was not able to prove her rights.

The other speaker claims that it's sometimes very difficult to get a document in a bigger format, Braille, or in a different language, and thinks that, there should be a link where you could leave your details and the appropriate requested format could be sent directly to you by post or email. She shared her EUSS and share code example, where in February of this year, the airport staff in Katmandu Nepal, did not accept the fact that there was no physical proof of status. She believes that something has to be done about it because those problems at the airports in other countries happen to others regularly. Information for those who just arrived in the UK, should be more accessible, as the information is hard to find and quite complicated.

Facing problems

My Glasgow speaker is in constant battle with her local housing about rubbish and mess outside her property. The council argues that it is not their responsibility. What the council



does is they say they cannot help and ask if they can now close the complaint. It is evident from this example, is that they are more interested in ticking their boxes within their reports instead of dealing with actual complaints and solving issues. As an advisor she knows that there is a lack of information about how to write complaints, where to direct them, what details should they contain, what is considered to be a complaint and when you write one. She also believes that making a complaint as a private person has less weight than writing a complaint as an organization. She provided an example of filing a noise complaint to the council and that they are being ignored. She believes that it is sometimes difficult to write a complaint when a complainer is emotionally attached to the situation and she thinks that asking a third-party organisation to write it on their behalf, would remove the element of emotion.

Non- English speaker made a complaint to the police about not providing an interpreter, and noise complaints to the council who did nothing for years. She regrets not taking it to the Ombudsman service. Shelter Scotland helped her with making a complaint to Universal Credit and the decision was revised to her favour.

Another speaker believes that the complaints are meant to be closed quickly to tick the “done” box instead of concentrating on the issues.

Private complaints have lesser value than the ones written by organisations.

It takes a long time to resolve complaints made to big organisations like DWP or HMRC sometimes even about one year or longer.

One person never made a complaint but would start with CAB to find out how to do it.



Consultation with Romanian Citizens

Report by Anda Griveteanu [Finance and Administration Manager for Venture Scotland, Volunteer for Citizens Rights Project]

15 individuals initially expressed their interest in participating in the conversation, yet ultimately, only 5 people attended. The profile of participants included 4 women and one man hailing from diverse locations, namely Dunfermline, Dundee, Kirkcaldy, Balloch and Aberdeen. Their age range spanned from 45 to 49 years for one participant, while the remaining four fell within the 26 to 44 age group. In terms of employment, 2 participants were employed, and 3 identified as self-employed. Regarding their time living in Scotland, one participant had been residing for 1-5 years, another for 5-10 years, and the remaining three for over a decade.

Q1. What social services have you used? How did you feel when using them? Did you have any issues when accessing them?

Combined answers:

- NHS – GP, midwifery, cancer treatment; specialist appointments and surgeries, treatment for chronic disease, hospital appointments with children; thankful that the service is free for residents; unhappy with the fact that you need to wait a very long time to receive an appointment.
- Social services/benefits – receiving or helping people with translations, completing forms.
- Police – very helpful but overstretched.
- Gov.uk and HMRC websites – for tax return/self-assessments, finding out different information, applying for settle or pre-settle status.
- Local council – council tax, customer service
- Nurseries, primary schools, high schools

Q2. What barriers do you (or your community) face when accessing public services? What was your experience of accessing them when you arrived in Scotland? How did you find out about them and how do they work? Do you understand them better now than in the past? Is there someone who supports you with advice and helps you contact these services?

Combined answers:

- Language barrier was the main issue; it is good that most public services offer an interpreter free of charge but not many people know that they can go there and ask for one. There are many Romanians who speak basic English but this is not enough to understand the questions in some forms or important information.
- Long waiting time to get an appointment to a GP – At the beginning, this was thought to be discrimination due to the fact that we are foreigners, we took it personally, but now we realise that everyone is treated the same. NHS is trying to offer the best services but you can see that they are short-staffed and overwhelmed; so hard to receive proper treatment when needed – they offer you paracetamol for a very long time, sometimes weeks, instead of sending you to a specialist where they can treat you as they should.; very hard to get an appointment with a specialist (lived experience – waiting time to test a child with Autism is 3 years; you have to wait at least 8 weeks for mental health issues); access to your personal medical records is

almost inexistent – if you are asking for more details, they are treating you as you don't know what you are talking about, they don't take time to go into details about your health, appointments are too short (in busy practices, most of the times, you can't talk to your doctor for more than 10 minutes)

- When first arrived in Scotland, we used the government website a lot to find information because we didn't know where else to ask for help; it is very helpful if you speak English, and you are confident in using a computer. Not enough info in Romanian; the Romanian community is quite big but there are not many public services that give you the option to complete forms in Romanian as the other communities have.
- Long waiting time to receive help from police, A&E and ambulance.
- Frustrating that the police are too busy sometimes. Lived experience: someone broke into our shop, and although we had enough info to find the criminal, we were sent to the insurance company to make a claim because the police didn't have enough time or they were short-staffed. Youth crime is increasing and young people are taking advantage as they cannot be prosecuted if they are younger than 18 years old. Police proved to be very helpful when they had time and resources. Lived experience (Dunfermline, Fife area): Police helped when the high school failed to protect a young person aged 12- 13 who was bullied on the school bus by a group of teenagers a few years older. Complaints were made a few times to High School, but they haven't done anything, suggesting that the victim should take a different bus to school rather than dealing with the bullies. She was also physically abused on the school bus, slapped, and pushed around, throwing things at her but the bus driver ignored this, even when she asked for help. Parents contacted the Police, and they started a proper investigation, interviewed the victim and her parents, visited the high school on several occasions, went undercover on the bus and managed to stop the bullying. The police were in touch several times after to make sure that she felt safe to go to school using the school bus. Bullying in schools is very common but the schools are not taking any actions unless the parents or guardians are coming to school to complain. They don't seem to take into consideration the pupil's complaints.
- Lack of info regarding benefits, not easy to access; not enough information on how to apply for benefits if you have a job but sometimes you might need some extra help to live a decent life (like Working Tax Credit); maternity leave is not covering basic needs and is for a very short period of time. Inconsistency between systems when applying for benefits – the employer has up-to-date records but HMRC doesn't update their systems in time and this might lead to losing your benefits temporarily; if you have some savings, you can't apply for any kind of benefits (e.g. if you had an accident and you can't work for a period of time and the sick leave doesn't cover your basic needs); local council doesn't promote as much as they should the money advice service
- Difficulty in proving your right to live and work in the UK (pre-settled or settled status) – people are finding it difficult to go online to obtain the code, and employers don't always know the procedure – would be very useful if physical proof would be issued (e.g. a card)
- Hard to get information about the rights of unpaid carers; not enough help for unpaid carers who are working full time; most of the time, you can't get any benefits if you don't have universal credit, not even a reduction in your council tax.
- Hard to bring grandparents here to help you raise a child if necessary.



Q3. How do you get information about your rights? How does important information flow in your community? What media do you use to get information? (Social media; specific news sites, radio, TV, podcasts, newspapers, letters, posters, etc.) How is it easier for you to receive important information? (By reading, listening, watching videos or directly talking to certain people)

Combined answers:

- Most of the information is gathered via social media, but the issue is that not everyone has access to it
- There is info on different websites (NHS, local council, HMRC, gov.uk) but there are also barriers to accessing this (see above)
- Citizens Advice Bureau – very helpful pre-pandemic, after, the appointment system intervened and made it harder to access their services.

Q4. How do you think the Scottish Government should inform communities about human rights and public services? Do you think there is enough information on this from the Scottish Government? How could they share information so that people in the community can easily access it? If the information is only provided in English, how accessible is it to your community? What can I do better to give you information about your rights?

Combined answers:

- Easy-read options on official websites.
- Posters and leaflets in main places of interest (local council, GP practices, consulate, airport, train stations, bus stations)
- MSPs and local councillors to be more involved in the community, getting to know their constituents better; Local newsletter in different languages.
- Leaflets for sessional workers – they should be informed about their rights before leaving Romania; their employers should be forced to give them info about their rights.
- Social media posts in Romanian.

Q5. Have you faced problems that you needed to solve with public services? Were you able to make a claim when needed? Do you know where to go with your problem? Did you get help? Has the problem been solved? What could have helped you do something concrete about the problem? Have you ever used or considered using a lawyer or the law to solve your problem? Why?

Combined answers:

- Gov.uk is most of the time easy to use but it's difficult to make a complaint or a suggestion; would be useful to have an option to do this at any point using the services.
- Hard to make complaints to service providers and sometimes they don't take you seriously unless you mention Ombudsman or similar organisations.
- It is useful to know your rights and then you can sort out a conflict. If you know your rights, people can't take advantage of you.



Consultation with Italian Citizens

**Maria Grazia Scarda [Change & Project Manager at Skills Development Scotland,
Volunteer at Citizens Rights Project]**

12 individuals initially expressed their interest in participating in the conversation, yet ultimately, only 5 people attended: 4 women and 1 man, mainly living in the Edinburgh or surrounding areas. One person was from Glasgow. One of them was resident in Scotland for 3 years, everyone else for more than 5 years.

What public services do you use or have contact with? Which public services did you use?

Participants moved immediately into talking about their experiences.

One of the participants (Participant C) who arrived around 6 years ago, was complaining about access to GP services. The participant said that is difficult to obtain a face-to-face appointment with a doctor and that most times you receive a diagnosis by meeting the GP online, which she thought was not enough to be diagnosed properly. The same participant is not using a dentist in Scotland, but she would wait and use a dentist in Italy whenever she is back in Italy on holiday.

Another participant (A), who works for a wellness company (Holland and Barratt), has the same opinion on doctors and the fact the GP support provided was generally not of good standard, based on personal experience. She was explaining to us that she sees a lot of customers using the shop and looking for a solution to their health issues – which should not be the case.

Participant A was complaining as well about not being able to register in her local GP and she complains about having to queue during her working hours to be able to register with one local GP practice, which should be an easier process. She was not able to register with her local dentist and at the moment she uses her Italian dentist when on holiday in Italy.

Participant A talked about what happened to her friend who suffered from a heart attack and could not get an ambulance. He had to make his way to the hospital using a taxi. At the hospital, he was checked, dismissed, and referred to his GP. He had to go back one more time to the hospital to be finally rightly diagnosed and taken care of.

Participant B is from Glasgow and is happy about the quality of her interactions with NHS, hospitals, and emergency rooms when she or a member of her family has to use the services. She compared the Scottish NHS services with the Italian health services, and she analysed her experience with both systems and found that in general, the Scottish system works well in most cases. Participant B also uses other services such as schools, universities, and nurseries and she used the Police to report an incident in the past. Generally, she thinks the Scottish public services are good because processes are standardised, the quality of the services are well defined – so the same level of quality of the service can be found throughout, and it does not depend on the single individual working for the public service.

One other participant (D) found the interactions with GP and the health services of good quality, even if he wishes to being able to be checked and have access to specific

examinations because of a heart problem – this examination is not prescribed by the GP at regular intervals. He and his wife are registered with a dentist, and they prefer to keep being registered with the old dentist practice even after they moved from the area and there is an hour's journey from where they live to the dentist.

Barriers

Participant A accessed the Leith Mortgage Centre – which is a free-of-charge association that provides support to use the Mortgage Lift Scheme to buy a property – and was really grateful because she could use the service in Italian, as one of the Leith Mortgage Advice employees can speak Italian fluently. Apparently, this employee deals mainly with Italian citizens and makes it easier for the Italian community to understand the technical process and language of mortgages.

Gathering information – How do you get information about your rights and public services?

Participant C told us she found out about how to find a GP through friends – a person she knew helped her find her local GP – and using the NHS website.

Participant A finds information related to public services online, on the NHS website, Scottish Government websites, and so on. She also gets her sister's support, who moved to Scotland 5 years before she did. She was able to access the Scottish Lift Scheme to buy her first home and her sister gave her the initial information on the scheme, which was used successfully by a family friend. Participant A told us most of her colleagues, even Scottish, did not know about this scheme and were asking her for information on how to access it. She went to the Leith Mortgage Centre – which is an organisation that gives free information and services to people, similar to Citizens Advice – and they helped her throughout the process completely free of charge.

Participant E arrived in Scotland for a PhD with the Glasgow University and she received all the information about how to register with a GP and other information directly from the University. After that, she usually uses Google, the NHS website, and other public services websites to find information. Participant E accessed the unemployment benefits as she lost her job during the pandemic. She received a weekly call from her job center advisor who kept her informed on any job opportunities. Her colleagues, mainly Scottish, gave her information on her rights to obtain benefits and told her where to go to start the process.

Participant B indicated she refers to the website of the Italian Consulate in Edinburgh or their social media channels for useful information on how to access public services in Scotland. She uses the Scottish Government website and the NHS website to find specific information.

Participant A accesses information through social media channels – using the local communities pages where she finds useful information. Italian communities on social media are really active and she usually searches for previous questions from other members to find specific information (plumbers in the area or suggestions on how to use specific public services and so on). She found it really useful as well to receive the local free magazine – normally delivered to all the homes in the area - with the highlights of services available in the area.



Italian community on social media – is a valid support especially for Italians just arrived and need to find out specific information on services. Members often would ask specific questions and normally receive the information required on the social media pages.

Some other communities – not on social media – are active and support their members with information – The community of Italian people and other European members are often a good source of information.

Citizens Advice is well known – however, the waiting time for accessing the services is very long.

How does the Scottish Government best inform your community about your rights and public services?

Accessing information related to public services is easy online, even if not all people are comfortable navigating the web and searching for the information.

Calling public services is not always an easy task as the Scottish accent can be really difficult to understand over the phone. Sometimes the level of English spoken by the caller is not high, and this makes it more difficult to understand and access the information.

It would be easier to have access to interpreting services for medical services – participant B told us her mum was offered an interpreter when she was due to receive some medical exam results and when she was accessing physiotherapy through NHS.

Participant A confirmed she was offered the support of an Italian interpreter when accessing NHS and vaccination services during COVID-19.

Participant B moved to Scotland and her children, who started attending the school, were not offered English language support by the school – which is a service that in Italy is offered to foreigners accessing the education system. Participant B contracted private English lessons to support her children to support them with their education.

Participant D got great support from “The Welcoming”, an organisation that supports immigrants by giving them information on how to access public services, helping them to write their CV and providing support with job applications, providing English lessons and so on. This association was really important for him to gain information on benefits and where to go for specific information or support. Participant D found out about this association through one of his friends.

Have you faced problems that you needed to solve with public services?

Participant E received a letter as the rules for parking where she lives changed. She could not access the service online even if she tried to access it on different occasions. She had to write to them (the council) and they were able to resolve the issue.

Participant C was wondering where to go to “complain” about things that are not currently working properly in her workplace. She was thinking of referring herself to Citizens Advice however, but she is aware of the long waiting time to access their services. Another participant suggested discussing the situation with her internal HR department as they have a policy of non-disclosure and normally are effective and able to help.



The other participants did not need to complain to resolve issues. Only participant B is thinking of accessing the Citizens Advice service for an issue her family had with a local sporting association.