

Commentary

Accessing Rights and Entitlements Under the Withdrawal Agreement: A View From the East of England

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Abstract

In this commentary we reflect on the citizens' rights provisions of the Withdrawal Agreement (WA), which came into force on 1 February 2020, and the experiences of low paid (low skilled) EU migrant workers in the East of England in accessing these rights and entitlements. It is well documented that low paid EU citizens do not access/enforce their rights and entitlements via traditional dispute resolution routes. The Independent Monitoring Authority (IMA) was, in fact, set up to assist EU nationals in the UK not with enforcement as such but with (i) Monitoring how UK public bodies are protecting the rights of EU and EEA EFTA citizens and their family members; and (ii) Promoting the effective implementation of citizens' rights. They (the IMA) also have powers to launch inquiries and take legal action when appropriate. We have been working with two charities, GYROS (in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk) and PBIC (in 12 Bedford, Bedfordshire), who carried out a survey (drawing on the IMA's annual citizens' rights 13 survey) to understand the experiences of low skilled migrant workers from 'hard to reach' 14 communities. Using this data, we wanted to understand first, whether low skilled EU nationals are having difficulties accessing their rights (monitoring), and second, whether there are issues with the implementation of those rights (implementation)? The data from the survey suggests that low skilled EU citizens are still having difficulty gaining access to their rights. This is for two reasons: (1) lack of awareness of those rights and (2) some lack of trust in public bodies to fulfil these obligations. These findings are relevant to the full implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and citizen's rights to which the UK has committed to faithfully implement (where failure to do so can result in proceedings brought by the EU Commission). This article therefore aims to contribute to the evolving area of scholarship around understanding the experiences of EU citizens in the UK post Brexit by including those 'harder to reach' communities and their experiences of accessing rights and entitlements under the WA.

Keywords: Brexit, Citizens' Rights, Trust, Discrimination, EUSS, Withdrawal Agreement

Introduction

Following the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, the Withdrawal Agreement (WA) set the terms of the UK's exit.³ Part Two lays down the position of UK nationals in the EU and EU nationals in the UK who had already exercised their free

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³ European Commission, UK EU Withdrawal Agreement; < https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-withdrawal-agreement_en>.



movement rights under EU law prior to Brexit. Those within the scope of Part Two WA have broadly the same entitlements to work, study and access public services and benefits as they had held pre-Brexit. To oversee the implementation of these rights the Independent Monitoring Authority for Citizens' Rights Agreements (IMA)⁴ was set up. It is an independent non-departmental public body whose duties are (broadly):

1. *Monitoring* how UK public bodies are protecting the rights of EU and EEA EFTA citizens and their family members. This means that 'we actively seek information that will help us to identify where things are going well and where things are not'.
2. Promoting the effective *implementation* of citizens' rights. This means that 'we help citizens to understand their rights and we help public bodies to understand where things are going wrong so that they can put them right'.⁵

We have been working with two charities, GYROS (in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk) and PBIC (in Bedford, Bedfordshire), who carried out a survey (drawing on the IMA's annual citizens' rights survey) to understand the experiences of low skilled migrant workers from 'hard to reach' communities. Drawing on this data, we wanted to understand first, whether low skilled EU nationals are having difficulties accessing their rights (monitoring), and second, whether there are issues with the implementation of those rights (implementation)? Using this local lens enables us to provide insights into the experiences of the operation of the post Brexit arrangements for a particular group of EU nationals.

In the next section we will describe our methodology and data collection processes (section 2). Using the two (broad) duties of the IMA as our frame of reference, we then look at the issues arising from our data: first, in respect of monitoring, we will look at the issues around securing a continued right to reside under the EUSS (EU Settlement Scheme) and difficulties in accessing rights (section 3) and second, in respect of effective enforcement, we look at the lack of awareness of rights under the WA and experiences of engaging with public bodies in the context of accessing rights and entitlements (section 4). Section 5 concludes.

Methodology and Survey Demographics

As outlined above, part of the role of the IMA is to monitor the implementation and application of the Citizens' Rights Agreements. They undertake an annual survey as 'part of a range of methods used by the IMA and [they] are particularly valuable to hear directly from European citizens and their family members about their lived experiences'.⁶ Their most recent (published) survey was undertaken in 2023, their third annual survey. The 2023 survey was launched online for all EU and EEA EFTA citizens and their family members in the UK and Gibraltar from 12 April to 7 June 2023. The IMA's survey was available in a digital, English-only format. Over 1,000 people responded.⁷

⁴ European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, Section 15.

⁵ For more: <https://ima-citizensrights.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>

⁶ For more information see <https://ima-citizensrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IMA-Survey-Report-23.pdf>, p 4.

⁷ *Ibid*, p 5.



For our empirical work⁸, and with permission from the IMA⁹, we used many of the same IMA survey questions to undertake a survey with EU citizens and their family members living in the East of England. Working with two community organisations (GYROS and PBIC) whose services extend across Norfolk, Suffolk, Bedford, Cambridgeshire and Lincoln city. We were able to reach 397 EU citizens (and their family members). GYROS and PBIC are migrant-led advice services both of which offer frontline advice in a multilingual format, meaning they have unique access to non-English-speaking migrant workers in the East of England. PBIC's largest community is Polish and for GRYOS it is Romanian (including Roma Romanian) and Portuguese (including those from former colonies of Portugal¹⁰). The results of this survey have been shared with the IMA, offering the IMA a deeper understanding of those traditionally described as 'hard to reach' who often do not respond to surveys (Buetlmann and Bulat, 2021:10).

In terms of the concentration of responses, 90% of survey respondents were from three geographical areas, Great Yarmouth (52%), Bedford (24%) and Ipswich (14%). GYROS coordinated the translation of the questions into Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian and Russian.¹¹ The questionnaire was made available in paper copies at PBIC and GYROS' advice services with 1-1 support from multilingual advisers to help participants complete it online, via 'Survey Monkey'. All paper copies were entered into the English-only online version.

Of the 397 respondents (see table 1):

- 91% held EU citizenship, with 28 countries in total represented across the whole dataset, 11 EU countries and the remainder from outside the EU.
- 65% of the total respondents were women (this reflects a trend in GRYOS' services more broadly which tends to see more women).
- The most numerous nationality groups were (in order) Romanian (24%), Polish (18%) and Portuguese (16%).
- In terms of the ethnicity profile of those who completed the survey: 65% self-identified as White, 14% as Roma, 13% as Black/ African, 3% as Asian and 5% as Other/ Not Disclosed. This is a demographic difference to the IMA data in which 89% of respondents identified as White.¹² This illustrates the ethnic diversity present in local areas across the East of England- one which has not fully been recognised to date.

⁸ This work was funded by the EU Delegation to the UK, for which support we are very grateful.

⁹ We are very grateful to the IMA for sharing with us an overview of their questions and allowing us to undertake this research.

¹⁰ Those from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, East Timor, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe were also included in the data.

¹¹ Russian has historically been a language also spoken by those from older Eastern European states- although this is changing.

¹² See footnote 6.

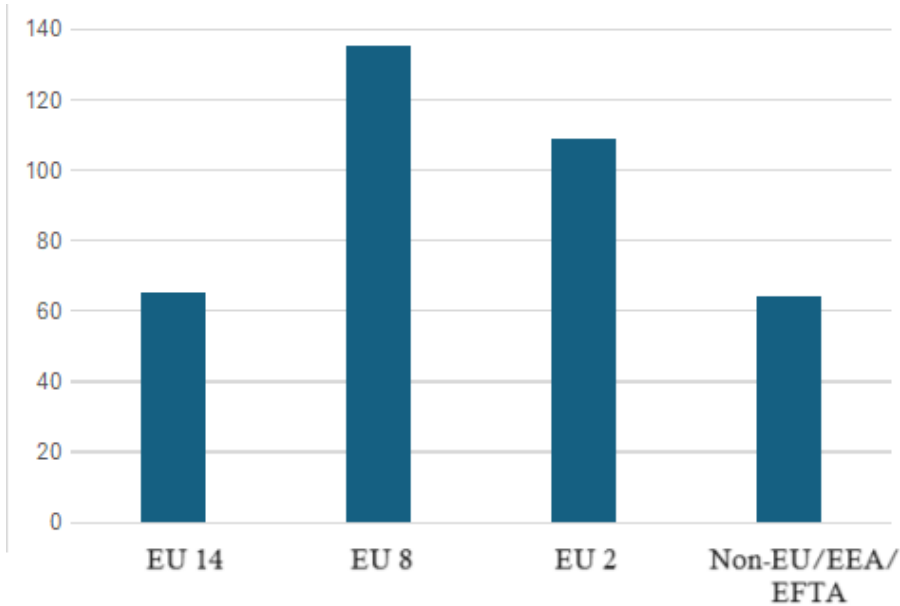


Table 1: Nationality groupings

As outlined above, one of the aims of the survey was to ensure it was able to reach non-English speakers and non-digital users. In their own report, the IMA recognise the limitation of those who respond to their English-only and digital-only survey.¹³ In our survey data, only 37% of people rated their English language as ‘good’, with 63% of people rating their English language skills as None (9%), Very Limited (30%) and Limited (24%).

The online multilingual survey results were downloaded and translated, and all responses entered into a single English-language excel datasheet. This was then analysed using STATA. The researchers conducted their own analysis of any qualitative responses for the (small number) of free text questions. To contextualise our survey data, we draw on our earlier work (Barnard et al, 2021, 2024) and that of others in the field (Guma and Jones, 2019; Sumption and Fernandez-Reino 2020). We also refer to the findings of the IMA’s third annual report (2023).

The questions asked concerned experiences of discrimination, trust in public bodies and finally knowledge of and accessing rights under the Withdrawal Agreement. Targeting these specific lines of enquiry supports the IMA in understanding whether individuals can access their rights under the Withdrawal Agreement and particularly their interactions with public bodies charged with implementation.

¹³ Ibid; p 25.



Monitoring

It will be recalled that the first duty of the IMA is how UK public bodies are protecting the rights of EU and EEA EFTA citizens and their family members, namely ‘seeking information that will help us to identify where things are going well and where things are not’. At the core of this duty lies the question of how the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) is working because it provides a gateway to other rights (section 3.1). For those with rights under the EUSS, the next question is whether they actually enjoy their WA rights? (section 3.2)

Pre-settled or settled status

To continue exercising their right to remain in the UK (and fall within the scope of these WA protections) any EU or EEA national and their family members had to apply via an online platform to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS),¹⁴ a scheme set up by the UK government to fulfil its obligations under the WA.¹⁵ The UK chose to implement a ‘constitutive’ scheme, meaning that those already resident in the UK had to make an application to secure their status. Based on the evidence provided in their application, applicants were awarded either pre settled status (PSS) (for those with evidence of less than 5 years residency) or settled status (SS) (for those with more than 5 years). The UK also chose to implement a digital-first approach to the new scheme, with applications made online via an app.¹⁶ Applicants are granted a digital status, which can be accessed online. To give evidence to landlords, employers etc of their rights, status holders can generate a ‘share code’¹⁷ which can be used by a third party to verify the status and therefore a person’s right to rent, to work and more. Since 2019 more than 8 million people have made applications to the scheme, corresponding to more than 6 million people (EU citizens and their family members) holding status under the scheme.¹⁸ However, our previous research has shown that those in more temporary or informal work (such as zero hours work) have struggled to prove their history of residence in the UK (Barnard et al, 2021). Those vulnerable in other ways - the old, the young, victims of domestic abuse, those with disabilities (Sumption and Mariña Fernández-Reino, 2021) - have also struggled to make an application.¹⁹ Although the deadline to make an ‘in time’ application was 30 June 2021, ‘late’ applications (i.e. after the deadline) and ‘upgrade’ applications (below) have continued at pace, with an average 56,000 applications per month since the deadline.²⁰

The scheme originally envisaged that those with PSS needed to make a further application to ‘upgrade’ to settled status. Initially, it was suggested by a government minister that those

¹⁴ For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>

¹⁵ Part Two of the WA, given legal effect in the UK via Section 7A of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, provides residence rights for ‘Union citizens who exercise their right to reside in the United Kingdom in accordance with Union law before the end of the transition period and continue to reside there thereafter’ (Article 10(1)(a)).

¹⁶ WA Article 18(1). Paper applications were possible in limited situations.

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status>

¹⁸ See footnote 14.

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2024/how-many-people-have-been-granted-settlement-via-the-eu-settlement-scheme>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

who did not upgrade to settled status in time would be deported, (Weaver and Gentleman, 2019). This matter was, however, the subject of a judicial review brought by the IMA,²¹ where the Divisional Court recognised that Article 13(4) WA offered lifelong protection for those who had been granted residence rights in the UK under the WA. Once the rights had been given, they could not be lost due to a failure to apply for further rights at the end of the five-year period. Further, Article 18 WA meant that the rights conferred by the grant of new residence status under the WA (pre-settled status) to those who did not have the requisite five-year residence period for permanent residence had to include a right to reside permanently once the five-year period had been satisfied. Consequently, the High Court declared that the EUSS was unlawful insofar as it abrogated the right of permanent residence for those granted limited leave to remain.

Following this ruling, the Home Office introduced at first a two-year, and now a five-year, extension to PSS holders and committed to automatically upgrade people where possible via automated checks (of tax records etc) to settled status.²² However, for many people the digital footprint needed to evidence life in the UK is simply not being generated. For those more vulnerable, this means they still need to access support (where it is available) to submit the requisite evidence to prove they are entitled to settled status.

In terms of EUSS outcomes, Fig 1 below outlines the overall level of status held by those who completed the survey. In total 92% of people (of 382 who answered this question) reported that they had EUSS. However, only 360 people answered the follow up question and of this group 85% held either settled or pre settled status.

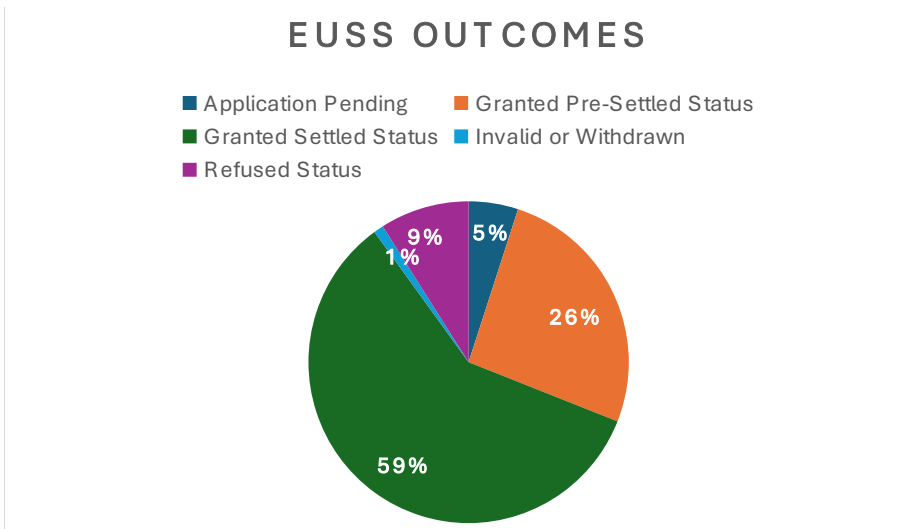


Figure 1 EUSS Outcomes for the cohort who responded to the local survey

²¹ R (*Independent Monitoring Authority*) v *Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2022] EWHC 3274

²² For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>



Overall, these local outcomes are broadly similar to Home Office's nation-wide statistics (50% SS and 35% PSS²³). The relatively high numbers of those holding EUSS may be influenced by the fact that those helping individuals to actually undertake the survey- both GYROS and PBIC- also help people to make EUSS applications. GYROS and PBIC advisers are accredited by the OISC (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner),²⁴ re-branded the IAA (Immigration Advice Authority) in 2025 to undertake this work.²⁵ Consequently, they are less likely to be working with individuals who have not made applications to the scheme.

However, within our data set we can also see that those who identify as 'Roma' are much less likely to receive 'settled status' compared to the wider group, with only 21% of those who identify as Roma holding settled status, 34% holding pre settled status and 30% having Other/ Refused outcomes (as well as 15% still pending decision). This highlights the legal vulnerability experienced by this group: the EUSS is the gateway to legal life in the UK. However, both GYROS and PBIC say that demand for access to EUSS has not subsided even though the deadline expired over four years ago. This is also reflected in the Home Office data. At the time of writing, GRYOS had funding confirmed from the Home Office to support people to make EUSS applications until the end of March 2025.²⁶ However, the charity is concerned that demand will continue beyond this date both for people still making an initial application, and for those who need to 'upgrade' from PSS to SS.

Issues experienced by those with EUPS and EUSS

The Withdrawal Agreement is underpinned by the principle of non-discrimination. It also carries over a number of rights previously in the Citizens' Rights Directive 2004/38 and the Workers Regulation 492/11. For those with EUPS or EUSS, the survey asked respondents to specify areas where they were experiencing issues with accessing their rights. Table 2 provides an overview of this data: in order, access to healthcare, housing, employment and welfare benefits were the areas of particular difficulty.

Our survey also asked for more granular detail on what issues people were experiencing in the context of employment, welfare benefits and housing, a question which does not appear in the IMA survey. In the context of employment, the main reported issue was (in order) 'poor conditions' (94 people, (24%)), followed by 'harassment and bullying at work' (57 people, (14%)), 'threats of being sacked or made redundant' (49 people, (12%)) and 'under or nonpayment of wages' (47 people, 12%). These findings speak to our earlier work on the experiences of people in low paid work in the East of England where similar poor conditions at work was one of the most reported issues, followed by poor treatment in that work by superiors (Barnard et al, 2022).

²³ Data up to September 2024, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-september-2024/how-many-people-have-been-granted-settlement-via-the-eu-settlement-scheme>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-of-the-immigration-services-commissioner>

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/immigration-advice-authority>

²⁶ For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-support-for-vulnerable-citizens/list-of-organisations>

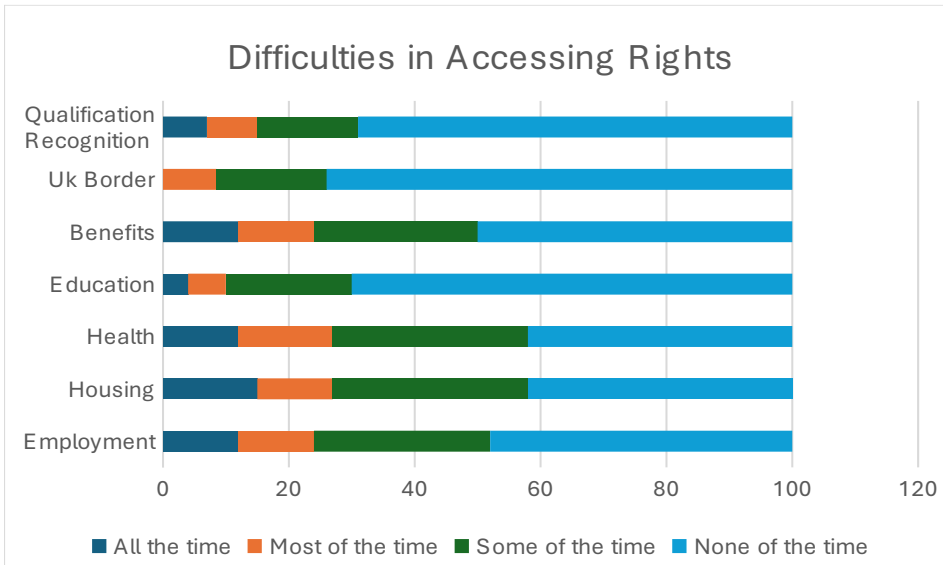


Table 2 – Difficulties in accessing rights as expressed in the data responses

In the context of welfare benefits, the leading issue reported by those in our survey was that of ‘entitlement to payment’ (61 people (15%)) and ‘suspension of payment’ (44 people, (11%)). As we and others have noted, the snowball effect of clustered issues concerning employment and welfare benefits often leads to another related outcome: debt. For those in our cohort most people reported debt issues linked to ‘not being able to pay money you owe’ (86 people, (22%)) and ‘poor financial advice’ (49 people, (12%)). The role of advice sharks (those who charge exploitative fees for (unregulated) advice work) has also been examined in our previous work (Barnard and Costello, 2022); our research shows that this is relatively common.

Finally, in the context of housing issues, the problems most reported by those in our cohort, is once again around ‘poor maintenance’ (by landlords) (96 people reporting, (24%)), followed by ‘rent arrears’ (73 people, (18%)) and ‘problems with neighbours’ (69 people, (17%)). For those from the Black/ African/ Caribbean cohort problems with neighbours was one of the most cited examples of (related) experiences of racism. Yet generally reports of discrimination or racism are low. This is consistent with our earlier research which also reported low levels of discrimination by those GYROS are working with. Our previous research recorded a pattern highlighted by GYROS where clients were more reluctant to commit negative comments to paper (such as in surveys), especially in the context of access to services (such as healthcare), due to fear that this written record could have an impact on future services they might receive (Barnard et al, 2024:179). Others have also noted the anomaly of those who are more marginalised displaying lower levels of discrimination than those with more social capital. The literature calls it the ‘integration paradox’ (Schaeffer and Kas 2023:1384) whereby “immigrants and their descendants who appear to have greater access to mainstream middle-class society, as indicated by their education or labor market success, often report experiencing more discrimination”, (Schaeffer and Kas 2024: 1384). In our dataset 71% are earning less than £20,000 per year, compared to the IMA data where only 22% earn less than £20,000 per year.



However, when we examine experiences of discrimination by ethnicity group or individual nationality group, we can also see some differentiation in reporting. For example, those who self-identify as Roma report a 38% experience of discrimination along with those in the Black/African/ Caribbean cohort similarly a 36% experience of discrimination. At the level of nationality, we can see subsets such as those from Angola (50%), Guinea Bissau (41%), Latvia (50%), Poland (39%), Portugal (37%) and Romania (32%) all showing higher levels of discrimination than the wider cohort. Although these cohorts are small, it points to the benefits of inclusion and diversity in data collection on this topic.

Promoting Effective Implementation

As noted above, some of the complaints concern the private sector (e.g. those concerning employment and generally housing), others concern the public sector. The second duty of the IMA is to promote the effective implementation of citizens' rights: 'we help citizens to understand their rights and we help public bodies to understand where things are going wrong so that they can put them right'.²⁷ This is not so much about rights enforcement via traditional dispute resolution routes but about ensuring public bodies deliver on the WA commitments in the first place. So, what stands in the way of EU migrants understanding their rights? Much of it concerns a lack of awareness of those rights (section 4.1). Migrants also do not really trust public bodies to deliver the rights and protections in a non-discriminatory manner (section 4.2). There are lessons to be learned by those bodies too. As one Roma participant wrote: 'I don't think anything will be done if I make a complaint, being from the Roma community I am discriminated against.'²⁸

Lack of awareness

A prerequisite of taking any action is knowledge of rights. Three related issues arise from the data. Firstly, people are unaware of what their rights are (respondents reported very low awareness of their rights with 63% reporting they had not heard about citizen's rights under the Withdrawal Agreement). Secondly, they are unaware of the body set up to protect those rights. 86% of the survey respondents said they were not aware of the IMA before completing our survey. Only 5% said that they have made complaints to the IMA (a figure which might reflect the 'integration paradox' below and the general reluctance to complain, report issues etc). 62% said they would be willing to make a complaint to the IMA. For those from a Roma background the figure increases to 96% in terms of those who report a lack of awareness of the IMA, with nobody in this group reporting ever having made a complaint to the IMA. However, a higher percentage - 75%- said that they would be willing to make a complaint in the future. Of those who said they would not complain to the IMA (25%) reasons were given such as:

I do not know how

I don't speak English

I don't think anything will be solved

²⁷ See footnote 5.

²⁸ Romanian, Female.

I don't want to cause any problems with my application

Thirdly, EU migrant workers are experiencing multiple issues at the same time, what the literature refers to as ‘problem clustering’, (Genn, 1999; Clements, 2020: 5) with problems having a cumulative effect. This makes it difficult for the clients to know how to address these difficulties.

Compounding this lack of awareness of rights is a lack of understanding of English language and potentially also a lack of digital skills, both necessary to make a complaint to the IMA. Further, living in rural Norfolk and Bedfordshire, well known as recognised advice deserts, means that routes to enforcing rights/entitlements are limited (Sandbach 2004; Wilding 2021:3). The other issue concerns the question of trust in public bodies.

Trust in Public Bodies

The survey data indicates that trust in public bodies is relatively high, with only 5% of people reporting having ‘no trust’ in public bodies compared to 47% of the IMA’s cohort (table 3). While more research is needed to understand this discrepancy, it may again be a result of the ‘integration paradox’: people with more social and economic capital have more security and therefore can express more fully their dissatisfaction with public bodies or express their experiences of discrimination with less fear of reprisal.

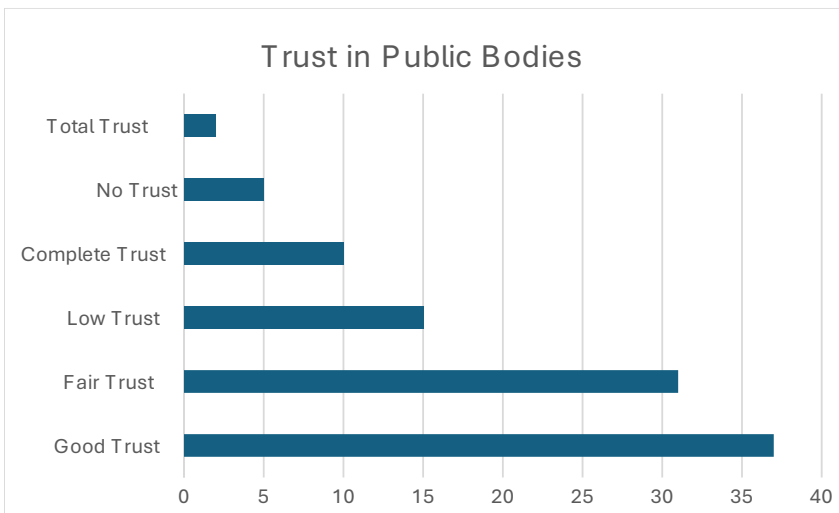


Table 3 Trust in Public Bodies (n= 374)

While trust in public bodies is said to be relatively high, the answers to survey questions about whether people ever felt a public body had discriminated against them on the grounds of their nationality suggested a more nuanced position: 1 in 3 (of 363) reported perceiving discrimination. The survey also asked the respondents to identify which public authority they felt had discriminated against them. Based on our analysis, the three most cited public bodies were: the Local Authority, the NHS and the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions), (table 4). The outcomes are different from the IMA survey where the Home Office was identified most frequently as the public body with which people felt they experienced most discrimination (followed by the local authority, followed by the NHS). Further research is needed to understand which services individuals are interacting with and



facing difficulties in respect of accessing entitlements. Our previous research has identified, for example, issues with accessing entitlements to housing with local authority housing advice workers reporting that they had not received adequate training to be able to understand the new statuses and related rights under the EUSS (Barnard et al, 2024: 64) This lack of training can lead to rights/ entitlements being denied. In what follows we provide an overview of what EU citizens reported of their experiences.

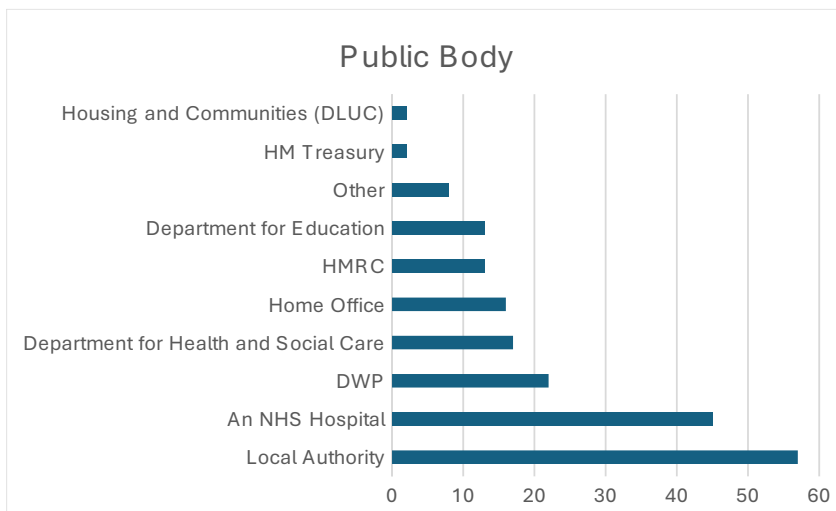


Table 4 Public Bodies and Discrimination (n=103- with individuals able to nominate more than one public body).

110 people left qualitative free text comments on issues they had experienced when facing public bodies.

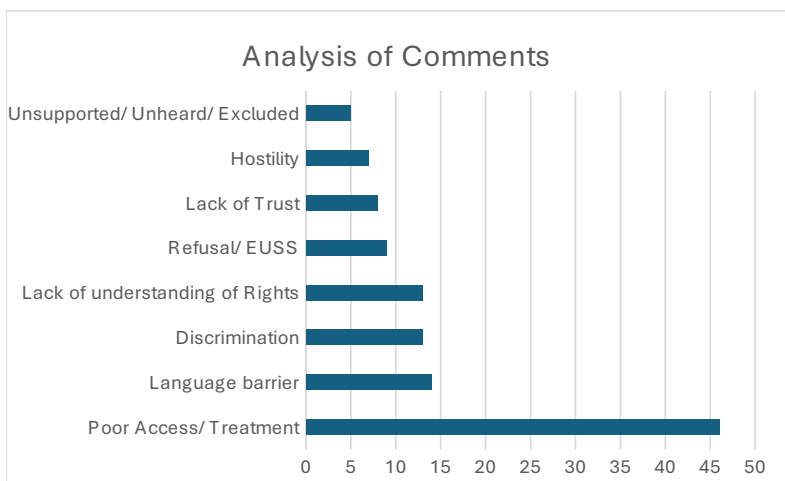


Table 5 Analysis of qualitative comments undertaken by the researchers.

Analysis of this free text of the comments reveals various themes (table 5). Firstly, people report poor access or treatment by public services as the leading reason for feeling subject to discrimination. This was particularly pronounced in experiences with the NHS.

*I have been treated worse by the NHS on several occasions as an EU citizen.*²⁹

*It is very difficult to register with a dentist, and phone appointments are not good enough, most of the time.*³⁰

*Problems with GP, bad treatment.*³¹

The next theme identified was that of language, with interviewees saying they felt they were/could be taken advantage of due to their lack of language skills.

*Because of the language barrier most of the time I am getting refusals to be helped.*³²

*Because I don't speak English and they might take advantage.*³³

*I think sometimes they might take advantage because I can't speak the language.*³⁴

People also mentioned discrimination and perception of worse treatment than British nationals as another issue leading to low trust in public bodies.

*I think some public services don't treat me as they treat English people.*³⁵

*There's still signs of discrimination towards foreign citizens.*³⁶

Other issues include the perception of a hostile environment against non-nationals, and a lack of understanding of rights both for rights holders but also by those providing public services and finally others identified feeling unheard, unsupported and excluded by public bodies.

*I don't know how to explain...I don't speak English and sometimes I am not sure if I fully understand my rights.*³⁷

*The British government and the governing bodies do not explain our rights, and that is, they do not keep lists of their laws and rights, so they take advantage of the lowering of the laws*³⁸

It is apparent from previous interviews with frontline local authority workers and from EU citizens directly that more training/ more resource to help for example housing officers, social workers and others to understand the rights of EU citizens protected by the WA would support more positive interactions between EU citizen's and public bodies charged with implementing rights under the WA. Additionally, as one respondent pointed out above, more awareness amongst EU citizens themselves of their rights might support better access to entitlements.

²⁹ Polish, Female.

³⁰ Portuguese, Female.

³¹ Lithuanian, Female.

³² Latvian, Female.

³³ Portuguese (Guinea Bissau), Female.

³⁴ Portuguese (Cape Verde), Female.

³⁵ Portuguese (Angola), Male.

³⁶ Portuguese, Male.

³⁷ Portuguese, Female.

³⁸ Latvian, Female.



Conclusion

Drawing on survey data (n 397) on the experiences accessing citizen's rights and the EUSS for those more marginalised (broadly defined) in the East of England, this article offers a more nuanced insight into the experiences of a subsection of EU migrants in the UK post Brexit. We used the IMA's annual survey as our 'benchmark' to understand these same issues at a UK-wide level. Broadly the EUSS is considered a great success – 8 million applications and 6 million status holders across 6 years. For the many it has and continues to be a success. However, for some there are still issues in accessing proof of their rights under the EUSS - in our data this is particularly pronounced in the context of those from the Roma community. This speaks to the IMA's role in monitoring the implementation of rights under the WA. There are individuals still navigating the online platform, or the (now) complex requirements of submitting a late application as we move further from the deadline and the requirements around what is accepted to prove reasonableness for a late application becomes stricter. There are also issues around the move to eVisas (Barnard and Costello, 2024). The lessons that can be learned from the EUSS experience could inform the roll-out of further digital systems in the UK immigration landscape. Further, our research also has implications for the second limb of the IMA's duties promoting effective implementation in the everyday. Almost 1 in 3 of those who participated in our research reported experiencing discrimination/ a perception of discrimination in their interactions with public bodies.

Further to this, our initial exploratory work has identified a larger issue in the context of awareness of citizen's rights. Article 159 of the Withdrawal Agreement (WA), states that an independent monitoring authority is required for a minimum duration of '8 years after the end of the transition period'. The IMA now enters its fifth year, beginning in December 2020 and while it has achieved some remarkable outcomes, it is clear there is still work to be done with those more marginalised and vulnerable. More generally for the EU and the EU delegation to the UK there is also a recognised need to reach this same group who are unaware of the rights secured for their Brexit citizens. The UK now hosts the largest EU diaspora, globally. Further, a lack of awareness of rights is an access to justice issue. The integration paradox tells us this group is already unlikely to report issues. Compounding this, many are unaware of their rights in the first instance, or unaware of who can help them enforce these rights and entitlements. Funding small grassroots organisations such as PBIC and GYROS who work on the coalface of these issues to engage with their clients in a manner that works for them (i.e. multilingual) is a beginning (although at time of writing it is unknown if such funding will continue). There is also a perceived failure by the public bodies to deliver on the entitlements under the WA. There is much more work for the IMA to do there too.

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