



Picture of a Pandemic

**Experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic amongst
Perth & Kinross' minority ethnic communities**

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Introduction

2020 was a year unlike any other. In the past year, many people's lives have changed dramatically. Evidence from experts such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that minority ethnic communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic across a range of areas.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's UK Poverty Report 2020/21 makes clear that minority ethnic communities are amongst the hardest hit by the economic and health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Existing inequalities have been exacerbated by the events of 2020. Across the UK, minority ethnic individuals are disproportionately represented in the lowest paid and least secure sectors; those hit hardest by the pandemic. The economic impact of the pandemic has pushed many of those who were already facing in-work poverty, further into poverty. Covid mortality rates in Scotland further suggest that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted the health of minority ethnic communities, with Irish, Pakistani and Chinese communities facing the highest mortality rates.

At PKAVS Minority Communities Hub, we believe that people of all backgrounds should have opportunities to flourish and contribute to a fairer, more equal Perth & Kinross. We operate an assets-based support model which incorporates one to one casework for individuals with the most complex situations, opportunities for community members to shape and participate in a range of sessions and programmes, and strategic involvement in local decision making. The Minority Communities Hub's thematic structure is shaped around local needs and the strategic national priorities set by the Race Equality Framework and Action Plan for Scotland, and covers five key themes:

- Housing and Income
- Employment and Education
- Health and Families
- Participation and Representation
- The EU Settlement Scheme

In order to understand the ways in which the events of the past year have impacted minority ethnic communities in Perth and Kinross, we conducted an extensive engagement exercise in March 2021, drawing inspiration from best practice elsewhere to ensure community members were able to share their experiences in a way which worked for them. A representative sample of local minority ethnic community members participated. The response to this exercise paints a picture of the experiences of Perth & Kinross' minority ethnic communities leading up to and during the covid-19 pandemic, which we hope will inform responses to new and emerging needs. That being said, minority ethnic communities are not homogenous, and neither the survey findings, nor this report, capture the breadth of experiences in our communities.

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In this report, we outline the findings of this consultation thematically. These findings are complemented by the experience and knowledge of our team, who have been delivering frontline support throughout the pandemic, and the nature of the casework which has been requested of us by community members in 2020/21, to give a snapshot of the experiences, assets and needs identified by communities as we enter recovery and renewal.

A Snapshot of 2020

The Minority Communities Hub offers holistic casework for situations of a complex nature. In the past year, demand for this casework has increased by 140% in comparison to the previous year. Key areas of rising demand are income, housing and employability. Referrals from partner services have increased over 360%, demonstrating a rise in demand from minority ethnic community members for services across the board. Key areas where this support is being requested are housing, and education & social services.

Another important trend to note is the growing demand for crisis support, and the increasing severity of many of the cases for which the Minority Communities Hub offer support. Cases involving serious matters such as exploitation and destitution have increased steadily over the course of the past year.

We asked all participants in the engagement exercise to rate how well the last year had gone for them. Responses indicated that overall, the year has been a challenging one for many. The majority of participants rated their year 5/10 or lower. The lowest scores were, understandably, from those who had lost income or employment during the past year, and those who reported struggling with their health or their family situation. The reasons for this are explored in more detail in each section of the report.

The most frustrating year. You cannot visit your family in Poland, and even here, because of the restrictions, I haven't been able to see people.

I stopped watching the news.

I was expecting a better year!

Most feedback on how well 2020/21 had gone for community members was on the negative side, however there were also individuals for whom the last year had gone quite well - a small number who had been promoted, or were preparing to buy a house for the first time. This is a reminder that minority ethnic communities are not homogenous, and although communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, this doesn't mean that every community member has been impacted, or impacted in the same way.

Migration

Whilst not all members of minority ethnic communities have experienced migration, for many of Perth & Kinross' newest residents, migration is a key feature of their experiences, loaded with expectations.

New Arrivals

25% of those who took part in the engagement exercise migrated to the UK within the last year. Their experiences of migration were heavily impacted by the pandemic and the associated restrictions.

Here are some of the things participants told us about their experiences of migrating to Perth & Kinross:

There were a few comments about my ethnicity and I found a few people were making assumptions about me."

"I was expecting more travelling and exploring Scottish nature and normal stock in shops, but it hasn't happened. Mostly I went to the shop especially to big supermarkets. I couldn't find what I need and it's annoying me that you should go to another shop for basic food and stuff.... And last thing which made me crazy when I moved to Scotland was closed library and inaccessible Perth City wifi. I was without internet at my new home and without computer and printer and it really devastated me and my friends too. It's normal that library is first place where people go first for help, internet and others services. Same with free city wifi."

"I have been in Scotland since 2007 with the whole family and my expectations regarding my professional career, life and leisure have been met."

"I wasn't expecting anything. I came to work."

Many participants also told us that they struggled with not being able to return to their home countries this year to visit loved ones. This has impacted the mental wellbeing of many in the community. Our work with individuals and families has indicated that for those who did choose to visit family overseas at Christmas time, the late change in guidance and the cost of the self-isolation

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hotels subsequently introduced has been an insurmountable barrier to returning to their homes in the UK. On the other hand, for those who have not travelled but need to renew ID cards or other official documents which require travel, not being able to do so has been a significant barrier to getting on with normal life.

EU Settlement Scheme

The deadline for applications to the EU Settlement Scheme is 30 June, with late applications accepted only under specific circumstances. 85% of those eligible for EUSS who took part in the survey had already submitted their application. The enquiries we receive about this scheme are increasingly complex, requiring more resource and technical skills to complete, and taking longer than simple applications.

There is a need for as much awareness raising as possible around this scheme in the coming months to ensure that all those who are entitled to apply are able to do so. There are also concerns about accessing proof of rights following a successful application, and in which situations this will be necessary.

We are seeing an increasing number of people without the required documentation – especially those whose ID is out of date and they cannot afford to replace it, where a trip overseas is often required, which is further complicated by Covid restrictions.

For those who arrive in the UK between 1 January 2020 and 30 June 2021, there is no straightforward entitlement under the EU Settlement Scheme. We foresee a key gap in terms of individuals arriving in this timeframe who will not have access to legal means to remain in the UK and will therefore not be entitled to various kinds of public support.

Local employers continue to employ people from the EU who are being brought to the UK, or given work in the UK, by agencies post-31 Dec 2020. This is likely to become an issue come 30 June as these individuals will not have a residency status. There is a growing sense that this particular group of EU nationals are not aware of this. A growing number of individuals are also arriving in Perth & Kinross unaware that joining family members are required to apply from their home nation before travelling to the UK.

Work

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, minority ethnic communities are traditionally over-represented in sectors which are less secure and less well-paid, such as food production and social

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care. Even within these sectors, according to a recent study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, minority ethnic workers are less well-paid than their counterparts. This is reflected in Perth & Kinross in the over-representation of migrant workers, and especially Eastern Europeans, employed in food production, agriculture, tourism and hospitality. This context is crucial to understanding the experiences of communities during the pandemic.

Feedback around employment in the engagement exercise demonstrated a wide range of experiences during the pandemic, linked by key themes. Comments made by participants included:

"I now need to care for my mum 24 hours a day. I would love to come back to work - information on how I could do this would certainly help me."

"Without Hope."

"I feel lucky to work for a company that allows me to work from home."

10% of survey respondents had been made redundant within the last year, and overall 24% had either lost work or had their conditions changed, with many comments indicating a reduction in hours, pay or both. In contrast, only one person who answered this question had been placed on furlough, compared to 16% of the population as a whole, according to UK Government figures. This is reflective of the higher rates of insecure work within migrant communities when compared to the wider population, which is notably prevalent amongst the migrant population specifically.

The experiences of frontline Minority Communities Hub staff throughout the pandemic reflect this disproportionate level of redundancy rather than use of the furlough scheme, and the insecure nature of work for many in our migrant communities. 30% of those who sought employability support from the Hub in the past year were jobseekers or those facing unemployment, as opposed to those in work and looking to make a change or seeking advice about an employment situation. This is an increase of 10% compared to the previous year. There has been a marked shift in the urgency with which many service users are seeking new employment.

Of all those who responded to the consultation, Polish respondents were the most likely to have been made redundant, and half as likely as any other group to have been able to find a new role since being made redundant. However, Romanian and Bulgarian respondents were the most likely to have had their pay or conditions changed, and only 14% were in the same role without any changes compared to this time last year. It is also notable that whilst, as referenced above, 24% of respondents had either lost work or had their pay or conditions changed within the last year, this reflected 28% of EE respondents compared to 12% of all other respondents.

Emerging Needs

The main support need identified by consultation respondents was help identifying available roles and where to find them. This is reflective of a need for capacity building work, to improve system consciousness amongst local minority ethnic communities, in particular the newest arrivals, and support people to identify opportunities.

Other types of employability support which were popular with community members included:

- Access to free IELTS provision (International English Language Tests) relevant to career choice and goals.
- Employability coaching with an emphasis on identifying and communicating skills, goals, and aspirations.
- Employability 'nuts and bolts' training opportunities such as CV development, interview skills, etc.
- Information and support relating to self-employment and starting a business.

The prevalence of insecure work in our region, and the disproportionate levels of our minority ethnic communities taking roles in these fields, is more evident than ever – as are the challenges which accompany this. There is a clear need for a strategic approach to both upskilling communities themselves, and initiatives to make the 'essential worker' roles we have relied so heavily upon more sustainable and secure for those carrying them out.

This includes, but is not limited to, a need to work closely with migrant worker communities to increase knowledge and awareness of their rights as employees to be kept safe, paid well, and provided with a level of job security, building their capacity to advocate for improved arrangements. A key part of building this capacity is the continued provision of English language learning opportunities, including revisiting attempts to provide opportunities in partnership with key local employers.

Housing and Income

Experiences related to housing and income often go hand in hand, and have been a significant challenge for many since the start of the pandemic. The disproportionate financial impact of the pandemic, and of poverty more generally, on minority ethnic communities is well documented. The findings of the survey, and the Minority Communities Hub caseload reflect this reality.

The Minority Communities Hub have seen a 50% increase in requests for complex casework on housing and income related matters in the past year. An increasing number of requests for support from services have been received, reflecting the levels of demand they too are facing. This caseload

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represents individuals supported, and does not reflect larger local incidents such as the Covid-19 outbreak at a food production plant, during which several hundred individuals were supported to access one-off crisis payments as part of a multi-agency response.

Income

30% of the people who took the survey identified that their income had reduced in the past year. When broken down by ethnic group, 36% of Polish respondents' income had reduced; 23% of Romanians & Bulgarians; and 12% of those identifying with one of the remaining ethnic groups. Other feedback suggested that for some community members, in addition to a reduced income, their bills had increased, in part due to spending more time at home this year.

Other feedback indicated challenges with access due to cost barriers, such as not being able to take part in sport and wellness opportunities, reflective of the broader experiences of people who experience poverty. However it was indicated that these barriers compounded community members' feelings of loneliness and isolation, describing feelings of being 'alone in a foreign country,' and unable to connect with local people, particularly amongst the newest arrivals.

Food security has been a consistent concern for those we have supported, with a 50% increase in the number of foodbank vouchers issued, with many further individuals signposted to the increasing number of community food sharing initiatives in the region.

10% of those we spoke to had claimed benefits for the first time in the past year, and 4% required an increase in the amount they receive. Many of those we supported directly, especially Eastern European migrant workers, had never been unemployed before the pandemic, and many identified challenges with accessing the support they are entitled to. Barriers which were identified in both the survey and casework included technical barriers, such as the habitual residency test and 'No Recourse to Public Funds' status; system consciousness e.g. not knowing where to go for help or even what help is available; and the confidence and language skills to access help once it has been identified.

The Minority Communities Hub has supported more people subject to 'No Recourse to Public Funds' status in 2020/21 than ever before, due to the impact of both Brexit, and Covid-19 regulations on the process of applying for residency status and a National Insurance Number.

Housing

33% of respondents reported that their current housing does not meet their needs. The reasons given for this included:

- Overcrowding
- Housing which was not suitably adapted for the needs of a person with a disability
- Housing conditions, for example being unable to afford to lay flooring or carpets.
- Rent which is too high to be affordable on a long-term basis.

Middle Eastern, Romanian and Polish respondents were most likely to indicate that their housing does not meet their needs, whilst South Asian and Chinese community members were most likely to indicate that their housing does meet their needs.

Despite the moratorium on evictions, the Minority Communities Hub's caseload has included five times the number of homelessness cases in the past year compared to the previous year. These reflect a variety of factors, including informal housing arrangements, and accommodation linked to employment, which individuals had to leave when made redundant, such as in local hotels. These crisis situations have required targeted multi-agency responses, and a complex holistic approach covering employability as well as income and accommodation support.

Emerging Needs

There is a demonstrable ongoing need for support to access and navigate welfare and financial systems. There is also a clear need for support around managing debt, which many families have incurred over the course of the pandemic. With an increasing number of individuals facing crisis during this period, we expect to see the long-term impacts of this emerge in the coming years.

54% of survey respondents were keen to participate in training and support to increase their financial resilience, e.g. support to understand and manage their finances better, and to be prepared for, and deal with, crises if and when they arise.

As with income, there is a clear need for support to navigate housing systems, particularly in relation to the processes for homelessness applications, and entitlements and processes around social housing more generally. Across both areas, for those with Pre-Settled Status under the EU Settlement Scheme the entitlements are becoming more complex and these individuals require increasing levels of support to access both housing and welfare entitlement. Continuous shared learning locally is essential to meet this need.

In supporting people to move to areas where employment opportunities are available, it has become clearer than ever that access to affordable housing within the areas where migrant workers are employed is limited. This further complicates support provision. When combined with a lack of system consciousness and limited English language skills, this lack of options also creates an

environment where exploitation on small and large scales is more likely. We have witnessed the impacts of this over the past year, most recently with a serious incidence of exploitation of migrant workers in Eastern Perthshire.

Health and Family

Health

Health has been a key focus for communities in the past year as they adjust to the changes brought by the pandemic. 61% of people who participated in the engagement exercise said they were worried about either themselves or a family member catching Covid-19, and the impact it would have on them.

Qualitative answers, however, suggested that a more pressing concern for many were the longer term health conditions or other situations such as pregnancies which they felt had not received the attention required since the pandemic began. Many respondents indicated that they had not felt confident accessing healthcare, or when they had, their experience was not a positive one, and they felt the cause of this was the focus on Covid-19.

50% of respondents said they had difficulty accessing healthcare over the past year, with 32% saying they were able to access it 'rarely' or 'not at all' when they needed it. Whilst the lack of translation services was identified by some as a barrier, this was not solely down to language; there was only a slight difference between the answers of those who answered the survey in English compared to other languages, suggesting other barriers to access.

Mental Health

Those who participated in the engagement exercise were asked if they had experienced any of the following in the past year:

- Low mood
- Loneliness
- Worry
- Stress
- Difficulty sleeping.

72% of respondents had experienced at least one of the mental wellbeing symptoms listed. 67% recorded more than one symptom, and 54% reported 3 or more. Given the difficulties there usually are in talking openly about mental health and the stigma associated with this, this is a very

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significant response.

One identified cause of anxiety in the past year was the uncertainty surrounding the UK's departure from the EU, and what this means for EU migrants living here. Many community members have questions about their entitlement to health services, welfare, housing, and more. This is evident amongst the many people we support through casework as well as our EU Settlement Scheme project.

Family

Families who were home schooling children during the pandemic described this in some ways as a positive experience; in particular those who were able to spend more time at home with their children without detriment to their finances. However, people described challenges around access to learning materials, either due to the need for digital skills or devices, or because of the language skills required to keep up with their child's online learning. For families whose children have additional support needs or learning disabilities, the past year has presented a significant challenge, and a strain on them personally. Whilst almost everyone reported experiencing some kind of difficulties with home schooling, only 10% sought extra support from their child's school or any other services, suggesting barriers to engagement with services which are preventing equal access.

The Minority Communities hub has collaborated more with Children and Families services in 2020/21 than in previous years. This is in part due to the increase in enquiries about schools caused by repeated lockdowns. Another factor is the growth of the settled Eastern European community over the past few years, with an increasing number of families with children settling in Perth and Kinross direct from Romania and Bulgaria in particular. These families often bring preconceptions about the role of children and family services, particularly social work, based on previous experiences in the country from which they have migrated.

Emerging Needs

When asked what would make access to services easier, responses included:

- Information from the local authority for new arrivals about local services, including but not limited to healthcare.
- Information, such as the leaflets which are currently available and service websites, in languages spoken by the local community.
- Greater access to in-person support for those who need it as things start to open back up.
- Information about services provided via employers/in the workplace.

In relation to health specifically, feedback included concerns that the focus on the pandemic has detracted from support available for other conditions, and impacted the level of communication

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and information available. People struggled with the waiting times to see a GP during the pandemic, and felt that care was not provided at the same standard as they received pre-pandemic.

The mental health needs of local minority ethnic communities are both complex and specific, and further work is required to understand and address them. We have, however, identified a clear need for mental health services, and in particular counselling, available in community languages. This has been a clear gap for many years, and has come to a head this year. We have offered a telephone befriending service in community languages since the first lockdown; a high proportion of those accessing the service would meet the threshold for more formal mental health interventions but feel unable to access them due to language barriers.

A clear need has been identified around raising the profile of children and family services generally and social work specifically. Preconceptions and fears around the role of these services are not unique to Eastern European communities but are particularly pronounced amongst these communities locally. There is a need for some engagement and awareness-raising around the role of social work and other children's services. It would be especially helpful to reach out to communities to generate and embed a greater understanding of the benefits of working with these services, and the support which they can provide to reduce the number of families missing out on the full range of available support.

Community and Voice

Scottish Elections

We asked some specific questions about the Scottish elections, in part because the 2021 election was the first since the change to the law giving all those with the right to reside the vote. This was welcomed, with 72% of those who took part in the engagement exercise planning to vote. Of those who were not planning to vote, or who had not decided whether or not to vote at the time of the survey, the primary reasons were not knowing whether they were in fact eligible to vote; and feeling they did not know enough to make an informed decision about who to vote for.

Very few respondents reported being disinterested in the outcome, or feeling that it did not impact them when given those options. This speaks to a wider issue of access to information which is often mistaken for lack of interest in participation.

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Local Voice

Local voice is an umbrella term, representing opportunities to get involved in conversations; access to decision-makers; and the capacity of communities to take part in the decisions which impact them.

Responses to the consultation indicated that Minority Ethnic Communities, disproportionately Eastern Europeans, in Perth & Kinross do not feel heard by decision-makers. They indicated a level of disillusionment with local systems, and a lack of interest generated by feelings of not being heard or valued. Comments included:

"To be honest, I think nobody really care"

"Nobody will listen to me anyway."

"I am not in a position to speak on such matters as our voice is not taken into account."

When asked if participants feel they have opportunities to have their voice heard about key issues locally, 31% said they felt heard or that the opportunities were available. Some felt that opportunities were there, however work would be required on their part to get involved, such as one person who said;

"We are part of society. We live here. If someone wants to, it is enough to dig deeper and read more, learn about the possibilities and the possibilities are full, you just have to want to."

Others felt very positively about participating in local life, such as the individual who said:

"I live here and I want to be able to influence what is happening here. I can always count on someone for linguistic help"

On the other hand, some indicated very negative interactions with local decision-makers and services which made them unwilling to try to engage again in future:

"I do not feel that information is freely available. if cases are reported to the Council, they are often ignored and there is no solution. Local authorities should have better contact with the residents of the neighbourhoods and the city."

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Key themes in the responses were:

- The information needed to participate in local conversations and decisions is not made available.
- Feeling that no one would care or be interested in the views of minorities
- Viewing participation only as voting in elections or contacting their elected representatives.
- Identification of the language barrier as a barrier to participation in local decision-making.

These findings were especially stark. The qualitative data indicated a breakdown of communication between decision makers and minority ethnic communities. There is a clear and demonstrable need for work to establish trust and understand communities on their own terms.

Community Connections

When asked if they felt connected to their local community and neighbours, answers reflected a clear gap in who respondents saw as their 'community' and their 'neighbours'. The majority of participants recognised their geographical neighbours as very different from their 'community,' taken to mean those with a shared language and/or culture.

One of the key takeaways from this section of the engagement exercise was the number of Eastern European individuals in particular who felt that contact and connection with their neighbours had reduced significantly during the pandemic, in contrast to the general perception locally that people are closer to their local geographical community. We heard stories of communities coming together during the pandemic, for example members of the local Polish community creating a system to shop for those shielding. However, when we asked people about their geographical neighbours, they had not felt any closer to them, with some feeling their neighbours actively avoid them in a way they did not used to. For example, one respondent said "the neighbours I talk to most of the time avoided me," and another said "I am a Pole, I will always be treated worse here."

This is reflective of our experience of a developing local narrative around EE communities not abiding by Covid guidelines and therefore being actively marginalised. In rural communities popular with migrant workers in particular, a rising tension has been identified as these perceptions add to a pre-existing undercurrent.

Conclusions

The findings presented above contain a wide range of rich information which can be drawn upon to indicate emerging needs within minority ethnic communities in Perth and Kinross. Some key conclusions are presented below, outlining the main themes and prescient issues.

Access

Barriers to access are a theme across all areas, coming across particularly clearly in finance, housing, and issues of voice and representation. Addressing barriers to access is the first step in seeking solutions to many of the issues and inequalities raised in this report.

Those barriers take multiple forms, for example:

- Lack of access to information about what support is available and the services people are entitled to, exacerbated by the expanding use of digital means to communicate information.
- Limited information and service provision available in languages other than English, for example translations of consultations and engagement exercises; and the use of interpreters to deliver support as a standard practice, especially for conversations about entitlements and for first points of contact.
- Cultural expectations or previous experiences related to some services, which can make individuals reluctant to engage. A clear example of this is the reluctance of many of our Eastern European community members to engage with social work, which often means they miss out on the support available for their family.
- System consciousness, i.e., that many community members are not confident of where they can seek support with specific issues, or what support may be available.

A harder to define factor in access to services is the feeling that services are “for me” or “not for me,” linked to the way they are promoted or talked about. Minority Communities Hub service user feedback suggests that greater use of translation and interpretation at access points, and taking the time to promote services via channels used by diverse communities, make a difference in how welcome people feel. An example of good practice are Perth and Kinross Council’s Welfare Rights Team, who regularly share information about available support and changes to benefits in multiple languages via their social media channels. Although the numbers reached with this information may seem low, the message given to communities is that this is a service where they will be welcomed and treated with respect and dignity.

Community Cohesion and Voice

The responses to the engagement exercise around voice and cohesion were disheartening at best. They present a picture of communities and individuals who want, or have at some point wanted, to participate in local life and decision-making, many of whom have been put off by difficult to

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navigate systems; lack of accessible opportunities; and an overall feeling that their voice is not valued. In contrast to the prevailing narrative, many of those who participated in the engagement exercise have felt further away from their neighbours than ever during the pandemic.

The clear distinction drawn between 'community,' i.e., those with a shared culture or language, and 'neighbours,' i.e., those close geographically, suggests the need for an approach to cohesion which recognises that for some Perth & Kinross residents, their community is about more than place.

Poverty and Work

Minority ethnic individuals in the UK are far more likely than the general population to be facing in-work poverty, as well as multiple barriers to accessing higher-paid employment. We see this play out in Perth and Kinross in the prevalence of minority ethnic workers in food production, agriculture, and the tourism and hospitality sectors, where work is traditionally less well-paid, and less secure than in other sectors.

Income and work are significant concerns for many of those who took part in the engagement exercise, and who have been supported by the Minority Communities Hub within the last year. Disproportionately high rates of redundancy and loss of income continue to compound existing inequalities. There is an inextricable link between the availability and accessibility of well-paid work, and the levels of poverty within minority ethnic communities.

Income and work cannot be separated from immigration status, which has a direct impact on individuals' entitlement to claim benefits, or in some cases to work at all. There is a marked increase in the complexity of entitlements with the introduction of the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and other changes to the immigration system. As the majority of Perth & Kinross' minority ethnic population are EU migrants, it can be expected that complex issues linked to entitlements, and the poverty created by "No Recourse to Public Funds" restrictions, will continue to increase in Perth & Kinross after the 30 June EUSS deadline.

Housing

Housing is closely linked to income. The concerns around income and work also contribute to reduced options for housing, creating a need for affordable and practical housing options.

Despite the best efforts of a range of partners, including statutory and third sector services, there is an identifiable gap between the needs of migrant worker communities, and the availability of affordable housing, including social housing options. This is a particular issue in Eastern Perthshire, where the majority of the jobs filled by migrant workers take place.

The systems and processes around housing in both the private and public sectors are challenging to navigate. Feedback suggests that this is a crucial factor dictating who is able to access adequate housing solutions.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Mental health appeared as a key emerging need in responses to the engagement exercise. The experience of the Minority Communities Hub suggests that there is a great deal of stigma related to talking about mental health in many of our local minority ethnic communities, making the number of individuals reporting mental ill-health all the more striking. These responses suggest two things:

- That mental health and wellbeing needs within local communities have reached a significant level during the course of the pandemic, with an associated need for investment in appropriate service provision.
- That a combination of these levels of need, and the increasing openness with which mental health and wellbeing have been discussed throughout the past year are factors in a changing attitude which may lend itself to greater mental health and wellbeing input with local minority ethnic communities.

A key need which has been clearly identified is the provision of counselling in community languages. At the moment, options for this in Perth & Kinross are limited, and referral partners working nationally are oversubscribed, leading to long waiting lists and the associated deterioration in circumstances for individuals who are struggling.

Final Thoughts

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, minority ethnic communities are not homogenous. This report sets out the experiences of those individuals who took part in the Minority Communities Hub's recent engagement exercise, along with those who have accessed the service in 2020/21. This cannot, and does not seek to, represent the diverse experiences of the approximately 11% of Perth & Kinross' population who are part of minority ethnic communities. It seeks to highlight the key emerging needs of these communities, and in doing so does not capture the many assets of the community, and the great benefits brought to Perth and Kinross by those who choose it as their home.

However, the findings of the engagement exercise and the experience of the Hub over the past year present a clear picture of emerging needs within our minority ethnic communities. At a time when our communities are beginning the long journey of 'building back,' it has never been more important to include and be led by the voices so often marginalised by our society.

It is our hope in presenting this information that it will better equip local services and decision makers to offer support and co-design solutions with our local minority ethnic communities, who have been disproportionately affected by the wide-ranging economic, social and personal impacts of this unprecedented year.