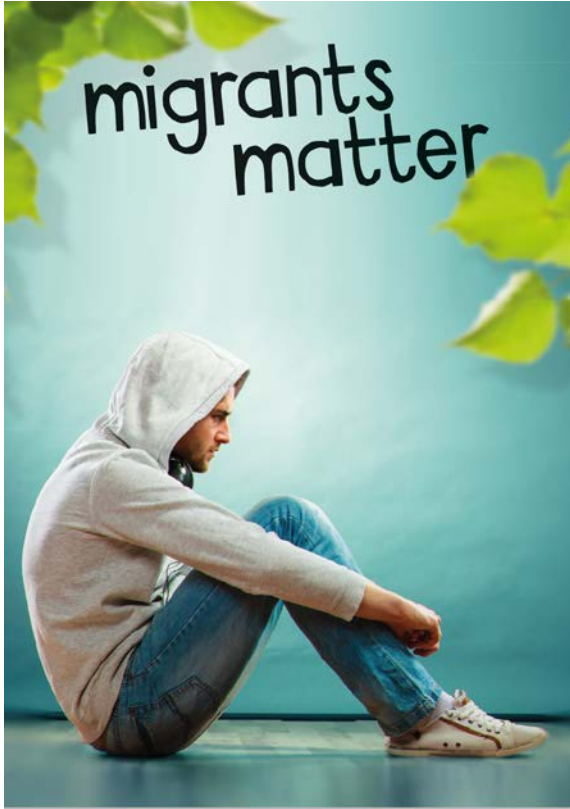


# migrants matter

**REPORT OF A PEER RESEARCH PROJECT ON EU MIGRANT  
MENTAL HEALTH IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS**





# MIGRANTS MATTER

Report of a peer research project on EU migrant mental health in the Scottish Highlands

## ABSTRACT

The Migrants Matter project was funded by See Me through the Highland Change Network. It investigated the experience of individuals who have migrated from elsewhere in the EU to the Highlands of Scotland and how this experience may have impacted on their mental health and wellbeing. The project partners were interested to know more about the attitudes of migrants to mental health and about their experience of accessing mental health services both in the country of origin and here in the Highlands.

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# MIGRANTS MATTER: REPORT OF A PEER RESEARCH PROJECT ON EU MIGRANT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND

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## BACKGROUND

The Migrants Matter project was funded by See Me through a Highland Change Network which included: Birchwood Highland; HUG Action for Mental Health; Highland Council; NHS Highland; The Samaritans; and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). The project involved a collaboration between Birchwood Highland leading on the project, HUG Action for Mental Health and the University's Rural Health and Wellbeing Research team (RHW) overseeing the project from the academic point of view, with support from Highland Council.

The purpose of the research was to investigate the experience of individuals who have migrated from elsewhere in the EU, and specifically the new accession member states, to the Highlands of Scotland and how this experience may have impacted on their mental health and wellbeing. The project partners were interested to know more about the attitudes of migrants to mental health and about their experience of accessing mental health services both in the country of origin and here in the Highlands.

## METHODS

A peer research approach was taken to the project – this meant that individuals who had experience of migration and of mental illness worked alongside academics to design and undertake the study. Three methods were used: an online survey, focus groups and individual interviews. Results from the focus groups and interviews are presented in this report; with the results of the survey given in Appendix 1.

Between November 2015 and mid February 2016, peer researchers from the Migrants Matter project undertook three focus groups and 8 interviews with a total of 20 migrants who now live in the Highlands of Scotland. Some of the peer researchers were migrants to the Highlands, including from an accession new member state of the EU, while others had personal experience of mental

illness. One focus group was in a remote rural area, the other two were in the Inverness area. All four interviews were conducted in or around Inverness. A schedule of potential questions and suggested prompts was produced by the peer researchers and is included in Appendix 2. Interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, coded and reviewed by the peer researchers.

The migrants who participated in this study had experience of living in different parts of the Highlands: in remote rural island settings, small villages and towns, and in the city of Inverness. The countries they originally came from included: Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Spain and Finland. One migrant had arrived only five months prior to participating in the study, another had been here for almost five years and the remaining migrants had been in the Highlands for between eight and 23 years.

## RESULTS

Results from focus groups and interviews are presented in three themes:

- i. Attitudes to and experiences of mental illness
- ii. The migration experience
- iii. Experiences of migration which impact health and wellbeing.

### Attitudes to and Experiences of Mental Illness

Many of the interviewees gave us their opinions of the current attitudes towards mental illness in their countries of origin. Many explained that these attitudes influence their current thinking on mental health. Many individuals were unaware of the symptoms of mental illness and were uncomfortable discussing the topic and defensive at any suggestion that they might have personal experience of it, as illustrated by the quotes below:

*People are ashamed, they are afraid to talk about this topic, or even to mention it.*

*I wouldn't say it's like keeping a secret, like 'don't tell anyone', I wouldn't say it's a taboo, it's not a taboo, it's just absolutely not part of..., to talk about it it's not part of everyday life.*

*There's a huge taboo around this and conversations are uncomfortable. There are plenty of nasty jokes about psychiatric hospitals or schools for people with learning disabilities. So the general attitude is that if someone is different, they should be feared or at least laughed at. I know about several situations when someone required hospital treatment and it was always shrouded in great secrecy, you were not allowed to talk about it.*

*I think this is statistically proven that we (Lithuania) have the highest suicide rates in the world. People are not used to talk about things, they keep everything to themselves and then they finish their lives. It's something almost cultural.*

*It's not only Poland it's all Eastern Europe if they hear mental health problems or mental issues, or psychology, or anything with 'psycho' on the front they will just say 'no, not for me'*

*... I think maybe it's from communist times when this was like 'under the carpet' problems. And people are scared that they lose their jobs.*

Migrants were aware of negative experiences of people with mental health problems and, for one, this discouraged her from speaking about their own mental health problems:

*From what I heard of somebody that had mental problems, I don't know anything very detailed about him but I remember my parents speaking about him, that he got ill and went into hospital and, you know, they're not treated very well. They're just locked in a room.*

*I had seen what had happened to other people with long term health issues and I never spoke about them I kept them to myself.*

Most of the migrants claimed to know little about the symptoms of mental illness and mental health services. They explained this as being related to the fact that mental illness was not openly discussed in their country of origin and people with mental illness did not participate in the community:

*We never see them, we never talk about it.*

*I don't know, for instance, what schizophrenia is. I wouldn't recognise myself if I had it.*

As well as lack of exposure to people with mental illness in their country of origin, some migrants believed factors about life there meant that mental illness was less prevalent. Factors highlighted by a migrant from Romania included the weather and sunshine, the busyness of daily life, or the lack of support, as below:

*I don't think it's really a big problem in Romania cause you know we don't have the same dull weather like you have here. We have lots of sun.*

*Well people are so absorbed in making ends meet, they don't have time, they feel sorry for these people but they don't really do anything about it.*

*People don't have time to get depressed because they are always busy, they have to work the land. I don't remember anyone say oh they can't get out of bed today because they are depressed. The pigs need fed, the cows need fed and you know they can't get depressed.*

Others suggested that mental illness was not so prevalent in their country of origin because of the resilience of people and their attitude to life:

*We are tough people, we don't moan or complain.*

*You can't just say, "Oh, I can't do this"... It's about being a macho.*

They suggested that other migrants would be reluctant to admit to having problems in general and especially mental health problems because of their negative associations with mental illness:

*People's reaction would be then, "What problems, I'm not crazy".*

*Most people who are depressed don't admit it.*

*In general, people wouldn't say that loudly in case someone hears and thinks they are freaks or they are just making up stories on how you can be depressed, you know.*

*Maybe it is just that nobody wants to show their weakness so if they are not well and not right they don't want to show that just in case fingers will be pointed.*

These attitudes informed help seeking behaviour for migrants in the Highlands:

*I think the biggest thing is people don't go to ask for help.*

*Like in this country, when people are struggling they would look for help, they would go and say, 'look I have no money, I need help'. In my country, people will be trying to cope themselves and then they just explode.*

*Because you never know how this could affect your future. If you actually seek professional help about your problem, let's say for a woman, what will happen if you have a child? How it may affect your life with all the social services involved and things like that.*

*It's also shame and sometimes lack of awareness of mental health problems, a difficulty to name the problem, and lack of knowledge that the problem requires professional help and not for instance, drinking.*

*I think that's most of us think that you came here yourself and you've got to deal with it, sort out your own problems.*

Dealing with problems with alcohol was specifically mentioned as a common experience for male migrants. When asked to elaborate on why this may be the case, the following explanation was given:

*Because you lose your fear about speaking properly. You can speak openly, you drink and you can say whatever comes out. You feel more at home.*

The fear about not expressing themselves correctly in English, compounded when trying to express feelings, was highlighted as a barrier to help seeking and is presented further in the section about language later in this report:

*And sometimes, even if someone would like to ask for help, if they don't have access to help in Polish or at least through a trusted interpreter in a safe environment, it's then difficult to ask for this help. So even if you are ready to ask for help, there's still a lot of barriers you need to overcome.*

*It's quite difficult to talk about mental illnesses in any country, maybe in some countries it's not so difficult but in many countries it is difficult. People think it is embarrassing and they do not want to talk about that. Usually they go when they really feel bad, so I think talking to someone in a foreign language, and then if there is an interpreter there as well, that's already two people to tell your problems to.*

One migrant talked about difficulties in using language translation when accessing mental health services:

*There are no interpreters face to face. I think that when you talk about mental health issues it is hard enough to talk to strangers when it is very personal and then you have to do it over the phone and each time it is someone else. You cannot properly hear the person too well and passing the phone back and forth and it is not helping, and after 2 appointments they would probably give up and not come back.*

When there was less of a language barrier, migrants spoke positively about mental health services in Highland:

*The people here are the best part of it, they listen and they understand. There just are not enough of them.*

*I think people are treated better here, and the system is better, and people get lots of support and medication for their mental illnesses.*

In terms of awareness of how to access mental health services and delivery of services, there seemed to be a range of experience:

*The first point of contact would be probably the GP.*

*I've been here a long time so I more or less know where to go. But if someone, let's say just arrived, they would struggle.*

*I knew that everything needs to be sorted through your GP... the GP's is the main thing. Probably there might be other options but I just didn't know.*

*I was so bad first of all went to the GP and was referred to someone else who was not very good to be quite honest and I couldn't still talk about it.*

*GPs could be more aware of it and perhaps more alert to things.*

The last comment above was in the context of a discussion about what could be done to support migrants who are starting to experience poor mental health, without recognising their symptoms. Other suggestions on what might help the experience of migrants coming to the Highlands are included later in this report.



## The Migration Experience

Migrants were asked what it was like for them when they first came to the Highlands and to compare that with their current experience of living here. Most migrants had come straight to Scotland from their country of origin and described their initial experience as intimidating:

*It was a huge culture shock to come here to start with.*

*I was living in a strange place, you know, surrounded by strangers.*

*I wasn't scared of living in the country but the feeling that you were going somewhere you didn't know, I was sure that I had a job and accommodation but still that feeling... The first year was hard, I was missing my family a lot and sometimes even crying. It was Christmas and you had to work and things like that, so it was very difficult.*

*Yes, it was like elation that I had in the first two months and then the reality started.*

*When you don't have a bank card, you are not getting your money, so basically any place you go it's like, 'oh you don't have a residence here, you don't have an address, and this and that, and they just send you away. 'Just get this paper and come back'. But how can I get this paper?*

*Communication is much more difficult, change of the environment, feeling inferior is also common. People do experience critical comments.*

*First of all it was about going somewhere away for experience, just after I graduated from uni and I thought it would be great to learn the language and experience something new and exciting... But then I started working, found new friends, and just stayed and stayed and stayed. And after a few years I even stopped thinking of going back.*

Some individuals were supported by their employers or by friends or family members who had previously migrated here. Others got support from church communities. There was a general appreciation that the initial experience of migrating was difficult and the type of support migrants received during that period could influence how well they then settled in:

*Of course it's not easy. Of course it's not.*

*I think it is a very, very difficult experience, something that before making the decision, you usually don't appreciate. And I thought that in my case I would be fine, I spoke English, I knew the country so I thought that would be an adventure, it was but at the same time it was really difficult.*

*It was a little bit easier for me because I came after my friends so I had company here. He was showing me everything around, helped to get things with NI, so it was a bit easier.*

*That was the other thing. When I came here I didn't know anything ... And I think people coming here should be given the information.*

*Apparently we were entitled to some tax refunds but we didn't know that. Because we were seasonal workers we could get some of the tax back. Yes, there should be somebody when someone comes here who doesn't know anything.*

*I think that happens to a lot of people, they join their family, their uncle or sister, so they are kind of set up ... A couple of my friends they got really good help from their bosses, the owners of the businesses they worked for, that would be really helpful.*

*I did get support from Church, you know, from the church I was going to and a few people from the church, I used to meet with them.*

*I must say that it was something that really helped me in my homesickness, and missing my family which was left behind my mum and my sister and everybody, I found the church that we belonged to very helpful.*

*I think again where you end up is very important. How you start your life somewhere because if it is a negative experience and then you get very discouraged.*

*So, what I think it all is, the adaptation process, it is difficult, it's hard and consists of various elements. Put all together it just means a big effort, strain on your body, strain on your mind and everything so obviously it impacts on your mental health.*

Support to migrants, whether for help with the 'practicalities of life' or in overcoming homesickness and adjusting to life in the Highlands was positively highlighted:

*Everybody who comes from another part of Britain or from another country in Europe or wherever from needs a helping hand, practicalities of life because that is the main thing and then the rest can follow.*

*I realise that I'm very lucky, my situation is good, I have a lot of friends, through the church I belong to, through the university, through different organisations and groups. So because I have so much social support, even if something unpleasant happens, I can balance this up, I know not every Scottish person thinks like that, or all British people, it was just that particular individual who had a problem with me and other people can be nice to you.*

Language was identified as one of the most difficult barriers for migrants when they came to the Highlands. This was not simply a lack of vocabulary but difficulties in using the language to communicate thoughts or feelings:

*For me the most difficult thing when you go to live abroad is the language. It's a barrier, aye. It's the most difficult thing, to pick up the language, even the local language, it is one of the biggest barriers if you cannot say what you really think.*

*I think that a lot of people feel frustrated because other people think they are stupid because they have difficulties with the language or they cannot sort their own problems because they don't know where to go and then people assume that they are not too clever and they are getting frustrated because it is just a language barrier.*

*So I had a little bit of English because I studied some English in school. I had the words but no grammar. I just didn't know how to tie it together.*

*I needed to learn everyday language. My English was at the Cambridge Advance level and in some situations the language I used was too formal. So I needed to learn to use simpler sentences.*

*I might just use a slightly different tone or whatever, a different phrase which might be misinterpreted, or misunderstood slightly.*

*They've got enough language to do their shopping and check their bank account and get to work and then they only suffer when something bad happens and then they get frustrated and unhappy.*

*You cannot describe yourself, your feelings, as you do it in your language.*

Local expressions and common turns of phrase were found to cause some confusion:

*Yes, the language is a big thing. Like here when people say hello, they say, 'hi, how are doing, what's up'. It's different at home. We never ask 'how are you'. We ask when we really mean to ask. It was the weirdest thing for me ever, it was very hard. I was like, 'why is everyone asking me, what's wrong.'... So at first it was like, 'what's that about?'*

*I'd like to tell you about a situation that happened to me. When I came to Scotland I was waiting for a bus at a bus stop and a man approached the bus stop and said, 'Hello, hen'. I replied to this with the male equivalent, ornithologically, but he was really shocked hearing this and couldn't understand why I said this and asked, 'What did I do to you that you call me names?' I then understood that there is no male equivalent to 'hen' and that it means something completely different but they forgot to tell us this at school. So yes, it was difficult, because in that situation I offended that person and I didn't want to because he was a nice man.*

It was suggested that some groups of migrants rely on the language skills of one individual while others found their work environments encouraged and helped them to speak English:

*They may have only one person who speaks English and they depend on that person and they don't learn the language and they become even more isolated.*

*At work we had a rule 'English only', so it was a good practice.*

The subject of employment came up in a lot of discussions about the experience of migration. As mentioned previously, employers could be a source of support when migrants first arrived but many went on to discuss issues about being over qualified for their work, suspicion from employers and managers, and the pressure to work harder than local people in order to prove themselves. Many of the migrants who participated in this study were educated to degree and masters level and were over qualified for their current employment:

*Even if you have a qualification and you have experience you have to work twice as hard than the locals to get to the same position. Because they don't really trust you until they see what you can do.*

*I was treated with some kind of suspicion, I needed to prove myself quite a lot, whatever I did that was slightly different was scrutinised very closely.*

*Most of my friends I think they are slightly depressed because they do jobs under their qualifications and so they are not too happy.*

*When someone sees a diploma from another country, they think it is fake or wrong.*

*I think that a lot of people who came here, they were very ambitious people with high standards and when they get the job which is not satisfying them because they are over qualified for it ... then it might be that they can get depressed easier than if they stayed in their own country.*

Many of the migrants worked in hospitality despite having degrees in subjects such as chemical engineering, maths, history or teaching. One interviewee had been recruited as a graduate through a student agency for a job as a waiter in Highland. The migrants did not identify this as discrimination but described it more in terms of being treated differently or as 'unnecessary unfriendliness', as in the quotes below:

*Sometimes there are funny situations with people ... treating you different, not openly hostile but sometimes it can make you feel, 'what is she doing here?'*

*I wouldn't say it's prejudice or discrimination, they are just not sure.*

*Maybe not directly discriminated or something but every day you read articles in newspapers and there is so much hate, if someone has done something, it's like, 'oh, these immigrants again...'*

Discrimination was described more clearly by the landlord of one of the interviewees who had been warned of the dangers of renting property to Polish tenants. Her work colleagues had suggested she was 'crazy' for renting her one bedroom flat to a Polish woman and said "Soon in that 1 bedroom flat you are going to have 10 people living in there and they are going to wreck this place". A more common experience described by the migrants who took part in this study was lack of awareness of how to access housing and this was compounded by the experience of mental illness:

*I cannot remember the details, and am not sure what kind of mental health diagnosis I would give to myself back then, but it was hard. Each day I didn't know where I'd stay overnight, who of my friends would agree to put me up. I stayed with different friends for 2-3 weeks not to make their situation with their landlords difficult... I was homeless. Yes, it was hard.*

The peer researchers had an expectation that the ex-pat community of migrants would be a source of support and were surprised when this notion was rebuffed by some interviewees. When asked if her ex-pat community were close together, the answer below was given by one participant:

*No they are not. There is a certain way to be competitive in a negative way. That everybody is doing well and they just want to put the person down, they are not supportive if they are successful. There is a lot of envy and jealousy around. And if somebody knows something that would be helpful to another they won't share because why would I want this person to be better off than me.*

The lack of support from the ex-pat community is explained further in the following quotation:

*Some people know things but still will not share the information with you... I think it's the aftermath of communism, people were afraid of spies everywhere, and if you are slightly better off than the rest, they will think you got it from illegal sources, at the expense of others.*

*There is a lot of envy and jealousy around. And if somebody knows something that would be helpful to another they won't share because why would I want this person to be better off than me.*

*But when you think about Inverness it is a small town and you have 8000 Polish people living here. It is like patchwork as we come from different parts of Poland and people from the south are different from the people in the north. I know it is the same country but it is like you take someone from London and someone from Orkney, it is the UK but they are different people.*

*I don't have that many friends really. I know a lot of people but I would not call them friends. I think that if someone is Polish that does not mean that I have to be friends with that person, it is about the person not their country of origin.*

In contrast, aspects of Scottish community and civic society which were found to offer kindness and support, if being a little reserved at first:

*I find Scottish people very kind.*

*Scotland is heaven ... the strength which you get is from people ... and different views on the world*

*I know that there all kinds of flaws but it almost like a perfect society, a perfect kind of system.*

*I love Scotland, I love living here. I appreciate a lot of things here ... the sense of community; the respect for the law that you have; the fact that... you are treated the same way, there is no room for any kind of inequality or discrimination or things like that. The fact that you go to the council and there are all the procedures and rules and you have to be treated fairly ... and you are, you are treated the same way, there is no room for any kind of inequality or discrimination or things like that.*

*Invernessians are quite quiet and reserved ... My neighbour across the road she is a lovely person. I moved in there in 2008 and it took her 3 years to say Hi to me.*

## Experiences of Migration which Impact Health and Wellbeing

Migrants were asked to reflect on the impact of their experience of migrating on their mental health and wellbeing. They described a dramatic impact, linked to the stress of adapting to a new country, and the difficulties arising from negative experiences of overwork:

*It changes your life dramatically.*

*If you are coming here with your family and you have to set up everything like schools for children, bills and everything, then it's definitely stressful.*

*It was difficult because there was not too much support for me so I became very anxious very uptight and very afraid.*

*I think it is a very, very difficult experience, something that before making the decision, you usually don't appreciate .... So at the end of the day, your brain just feels overworked, swollen because of the constant effort. So it took about a year. So I would say that's the kind of thing you don't appreciate it will happen and your body, your brain just becomes overworked and starts struggling... So, what I think it all is, the adaptation process, it is difficult, it's hard and consists of various elements. Put all together it just means a big effort, strain on your body, strain on your mind and everything so obviously it impacts on your mental health.... First of all it affected my physical health ... I was starting to be depressed on top of that. Actually when you think of it, it was not surprising, you know, it was difficult.*

*Those who move over here with their family or friends have some support and their ability to cope is greater. But people who come here without knowing anyone here experience an extremely high level of stress and the time before they establish new relationships or become part of a social group, is the most dangerous for them.*

*If you don't speak the language, don't know who to ask for help, or if you have got conned previously... It unfortunately happens, people get conned, when they look for accommodation or a job or are promised an easy life with a great social welfare system and what not, so once someone has been conned, they become disillusioned and afraid to ask for help because it's difficult then to trust anyone.*

*There is a lot of talk about migrants milking the system, some I'm sure do, but there are a lot of people who come here and don't even want to use the system unless they really need to... this is our work ethos ... And this is also a reason why people overwork or get the burn-out syndrome. People work too much, beyond their capacities without paying attention to their emotional needs, without contacting other people, ignoring first symptoms of illnesses, which leads to their health deteriorating.*

*That is where my mental illness problems come from, from the anxiety of trying to fit in.*

*I love the summers but the darkness ... so by February I felt physically craving sun, sunshine.*

After some time, some of the migrants described how they started to feel more settled:

*It is much easier than in the beginning, I do feel that I'm part of the community now, I've acclimatised a lot, and if I was to leave Scotland I would miss the people and places a lot. I feel I belong to the Highlands already.*

*I think people get used to me, they don't notice my accent as much, they know who I am.*

*I've lived here for almost 5 years. And have got used to it, I know what the craick is. You know the stuff. I call it home.*

Although the sense of being more at home in the Highlands was described positively, it was often said to be accompanied by more negative feelings of being less at home in their country of origin and a sense of in-between-ness. Despite web-based technology and affordable flights being highlighted as ways to help individuals keep in contact with their families back in their country of origin, they increasingly feel less at home there:

*That's no-one's fault. That's just another barrier... But I don't think my mentality is like the people at home... The thing I don't like is that when I go home and people ask and I say, I think I can now say this, that I live abroad, people are like, 'Oh you are lucky, you've got lots of money'... Yes, they think I have 3- 4 times more than them from just my waiter job but I pay different bills and eggs and bread cost like 3-4 times more expensive than at home.*

*It is hard sometimes. You know, you go home, which is not your home anymore, because you will never be who you were. And here you will never be who they are. So it's like, ok, what's happening now?*

*You're homeless, basically... And everywhere you are judged ... And you are lost basically.*

*Here you are an immigrant and there you are an emigrant... In our country we have a very, very bad stigma...If I went back, I would have practically a zero chance to get a job ... That's a very bad feeling sometimes, you think like, 'I can't go there' so I have to stick here.*

*The feeling in-between, I don't think I'm the only one, there's only a couple of people I know who are like 'no, I'm definitely not going back and they don't regret that they came here ... but most of us, they are thinking, thinking ... they might think they made a mistake coming here ... Yeah, most of us are definitely going to stay because we have jobs and cars and flats and these kind of things but a lot of people are thinking what if I never came here and stayed in Poland, or any other country.*

Some migrants described the sense of not being wholly settled in the Highlands as being compounded by negative comments in the media and the prospect of the UK exiting from the European Union:

*I do feel more like this is my home, the country and the place itself, Inverness, I feel at home most of the time. But there are instances that you start doubting in, it's not like you transition and it's complete, it's not.*

*And I'm panicking a bit and thinking what will I do? Where will I go? What if Britain leaves the European Union?*

*Because you build up your life and then what? Will we need to leave?*

*It's again like the whole fuss about Britain leaving the EU. You again are living on edge, like 'what can happen?'.*

*Will we need to go away and never come back?*

*Yes, that's scary. ... It is scary, it's scary. And you know if something like that happened, you'd be like, 'I don't feel safe anymore'.*

*Like with myself, where do I go now, who should I tell now, who is going to hear me. If I have these concerns who should I address them to?*

*Yes, you have a house and you don't think like they are going to kick you out. Maybe not all of us.*

The peer researchers asked the migrants what they thought would have helped them in adjusting to their lives in the Highlands. The provision of information was identified as being important but some suggested that this was of limited use if it was only in written format, even if it was provided in the language of their country of origin. Basic practical information as well as information about mental health support and services were highlighted:

*It would be good to talk to somebody, you know, to have an appointed person to go and ask questions.*

*There should be someone. Not like read a paper but like to talk to someone.*

*When you read and you have a limited language you don't understand. Even if it's in your language you don't really understand the system.*

*I think people coming here should be given the information.*

*I think for a lot of things it would be difficult for a local person to know where to go. But I don't know, if there was such a thing as a welcome institution or pack, like when you move into a new house, that would be nice!*

Two individuals highlighted the need for support for migrants in recognising symptoms of mental ill health because, as was highlighted earlier in this report, lack of awareness of symptoms is likely:

*Not just, 'here is the number, call if you have any problems.' ... Yes, because people don't realise that they may have a problem.*

*Something similar to the CAB, a service, to tell you where to go to, what formalities you need to do, what to remember about... If there was something like a 'Welcoming Officer', someone who could help make you your first steps, explain the system... And maybe if they noticed that the stress levels are really high in someone, they could maybe refer them to get some exercises or CBT or something else available... If there is someone new arriving I always suggest they register (with a GP) asap... So I tell everyone I can about this. There is also something else, when people come here, they come with the intention to work as much as they can, 60-70 hours a week, and they assume they will not have time to see a doctor and they pay no attention to their physical health either. They plan to survive like that for a year or two, to save some money, whether to buy a home or to pay for a surgery for their family member... so people come here with a conviction that they would not need any healthcare.*

The idea of a social group which would provide an opportunity for discussion about mental health problems and which could then be used as a voice for the needs of migrants with mental health



problems was welcomed. Ways in which to overcome reluctance of migrants to speak about mental illness were identified:

*Yes, I think that's the community that you've left behind that you are missing here so much. So even if they can't help me with the problem, they'd know where to go. I think it'd be very, very, very good to have a community like this or a group to talk about things.*

*I think so because you can only expect that the numbers are going to grow and these people are more vulnerable than the locals to mental health issues.*

*As soon as you get together with people your spirits lift up a bit I think. Well, that's for me and I think if you are in a situation where you feel you are a bit down and you hear some other people going through the same thing, you don't feel so alone anymore and you feel you have somebody to speak about your problem...I think maybe even going to the cinema together, that might help. Yes, social, going for a coffee or going for a walk in a forest um, I dunno, joining a club, going to the gym, run, I think all this helps, definitely I mean I see for myself when I run I just feel so good, you know and I think it's a great way of helping with your mental health, going out for a run and, again, if you're doing it in a club then you're chatting to people and you're out and about.*

*I think in certain age groups there is still like a taboo, so if you called it a psychologic group or something they just wouldn't come .... A meet group or a buddy group.*

## Conclusions

This report has presented the findings from a peer research project conducted in the Highlands of Scotland with migrants from other areas of the EU. It has identified three clear themes from the qualitative work in relation to: i) attitudes and experiences of mental ill health, ii) the migration experience and iii) the impact of migration on health and wellbeing.

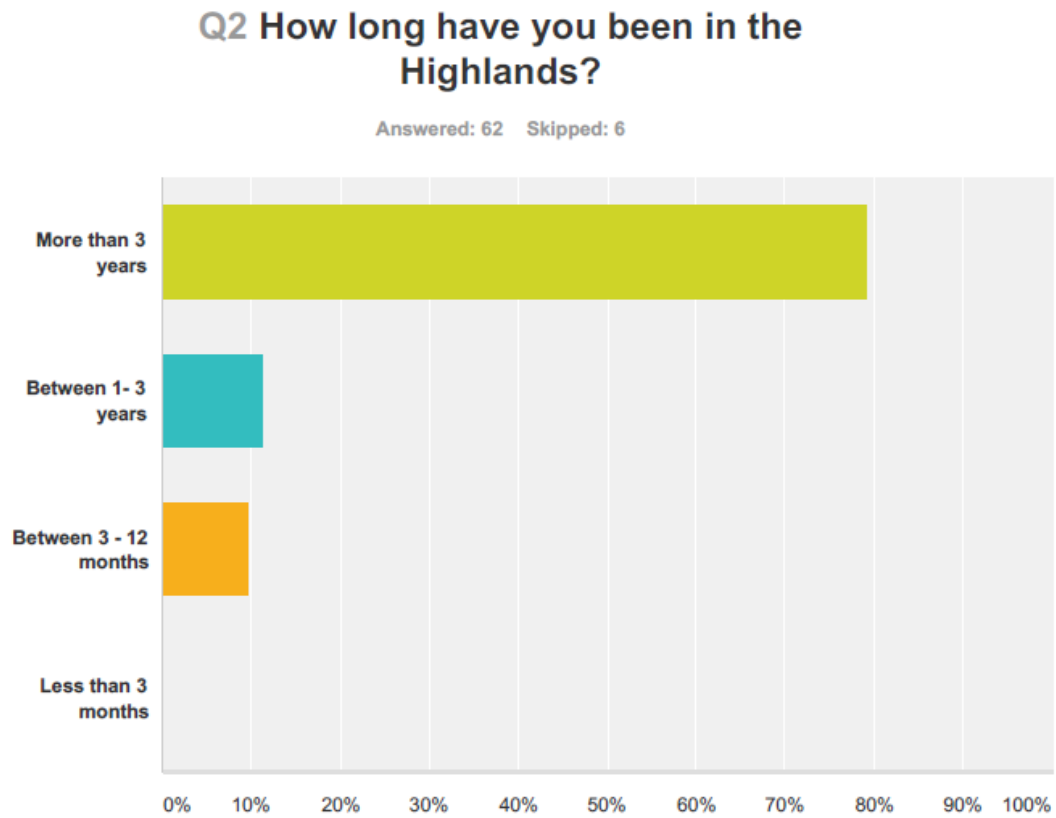
The work has highlighted the importance of understanding attitudes to mental ill health in country of origin, if we are to provide appropriate support to EU migrants living in Highland. A lack of awareness of symptoms of mental ill health among the migrant population was highlighted in the interviews. A reluctance to ask for help was reported by participants, many of whom also related issues of language and translation to an unwillingness to access services.

Some suggestions for improving the experience of migrants arriving in Highland have been suggested, including a migrant mental health peer support group. Work-related stress was repeatedly mentioned by research participants and may be one area that could be effectively targeted in order to improve migrant wellbeing.

This piece of work was small-scale and exploratory in nature. Nevertheless, it has highlighted some key themes which could be explored further and it has demonstrated the potential of the peer research process to engage effectively with a potentially sensitive topic and hard-to-reach population.

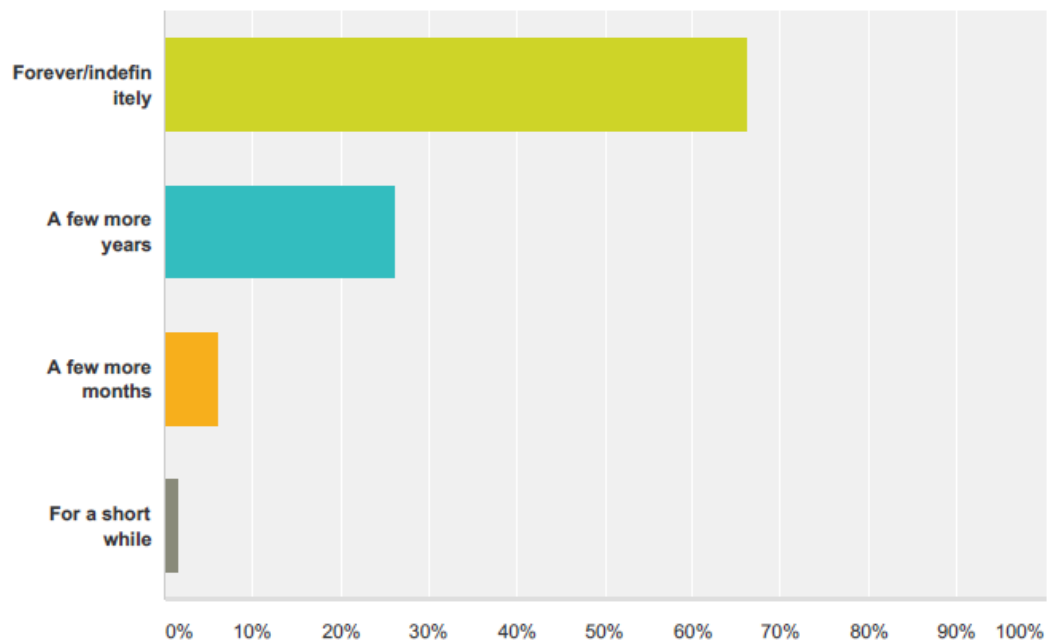
## Appendix 1: Survey Results

N.B. The findings from closed answer questions only are reported here



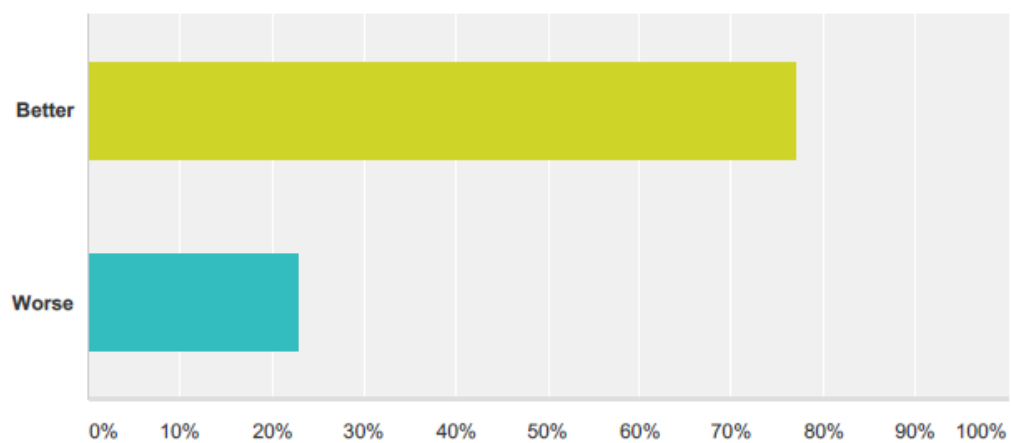
### Q3 How long would you like to stay?

Answered: 65 Skipped: 3



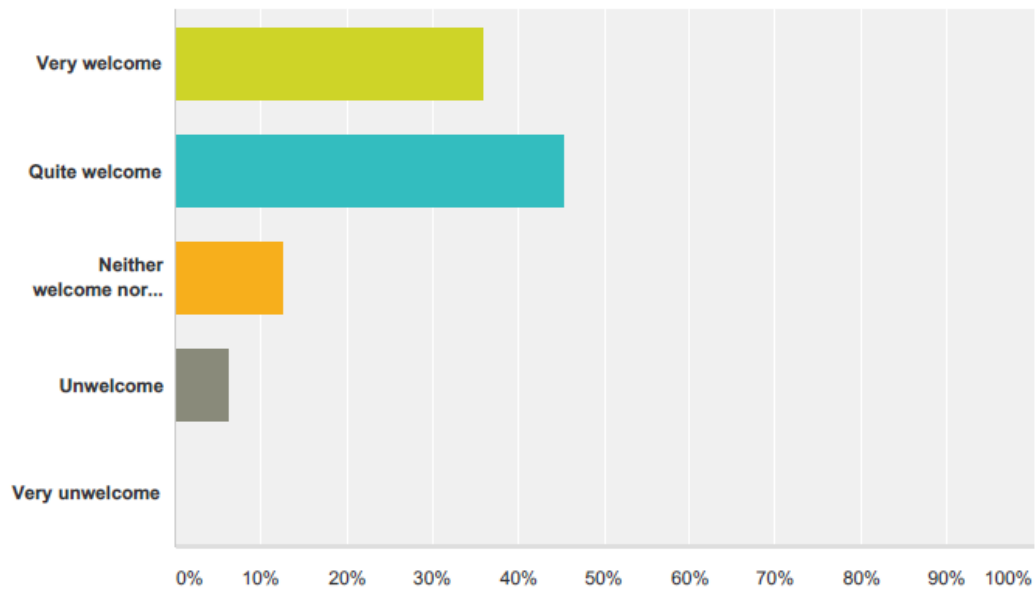
### Q4 Is being in Highland better or worse than you expected?

Answered: 61 Skipped: 7



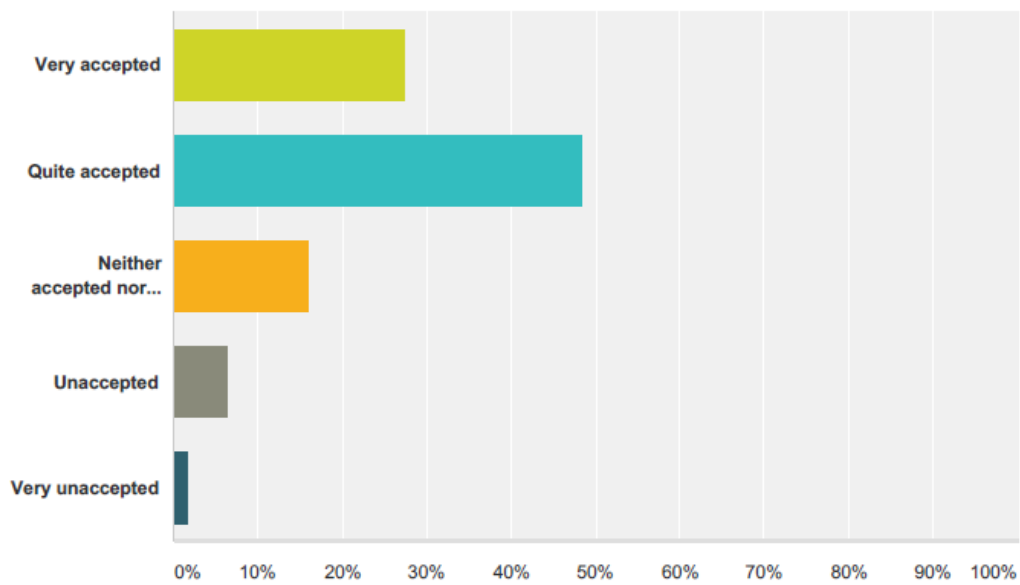
### Q5 How welcome have you felt in Highland?

Answered: 64 Skipped: 4



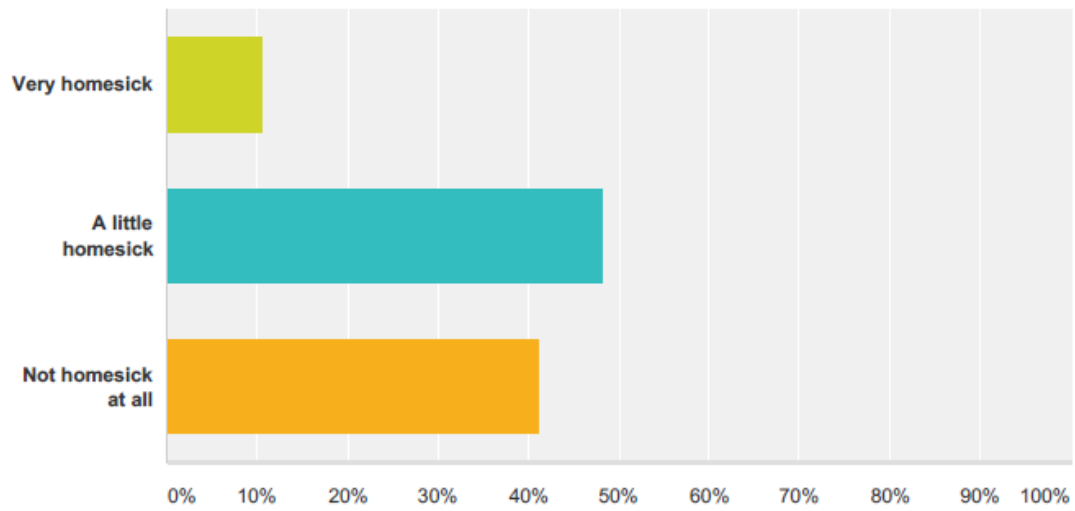
### Q6 How accepted do you feel in Highland?

Answered: 62 Skipped: 6



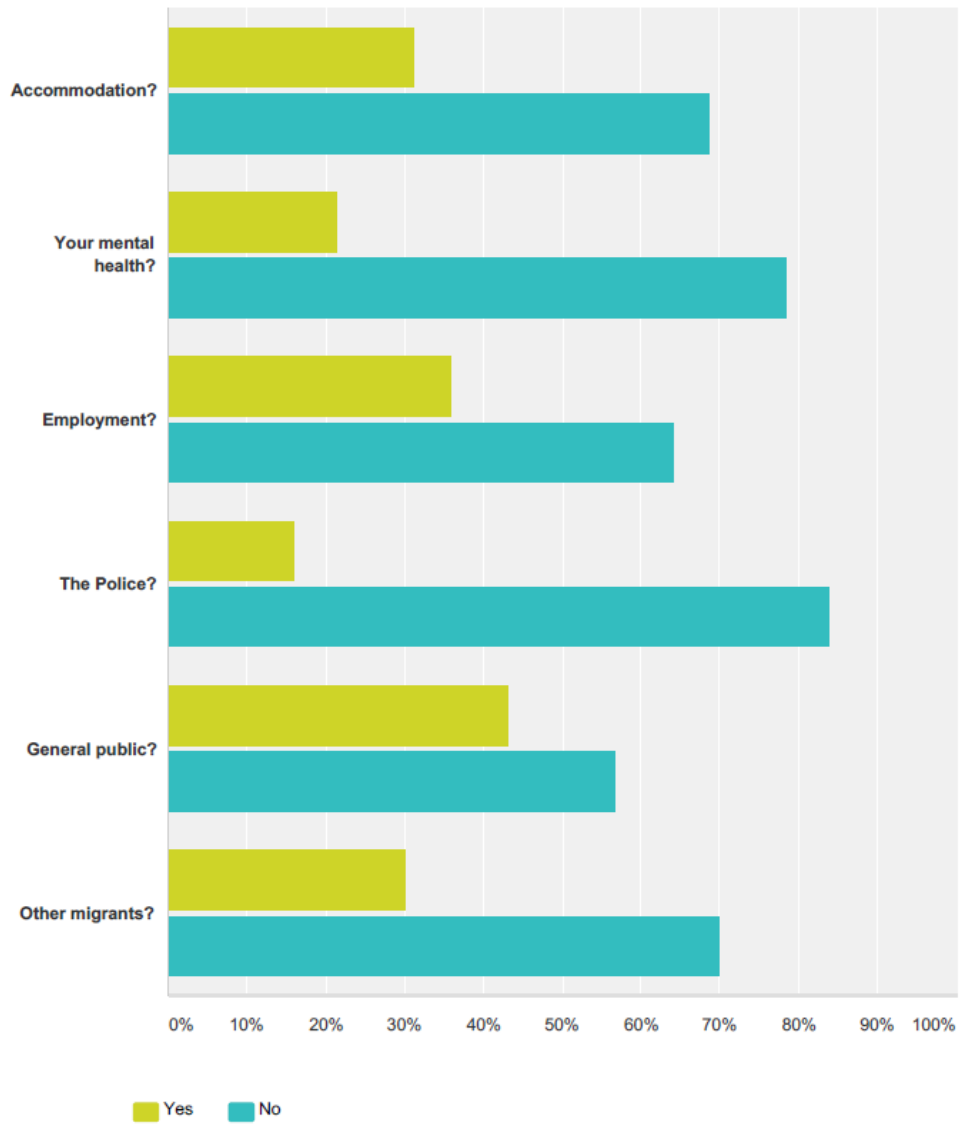
## Q7 How much have you been affected by homesickness?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 12



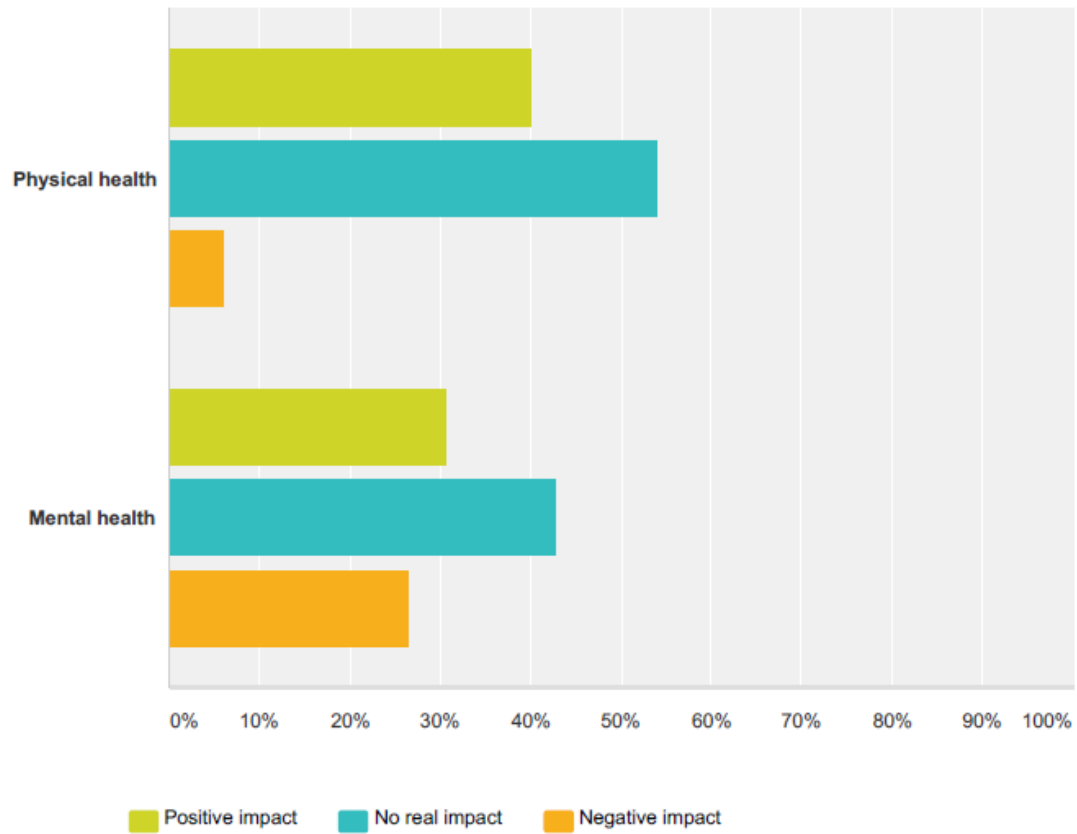
## Q8 Have you experienced prejudice in relation to:

Answered: 53 Skipped: 15



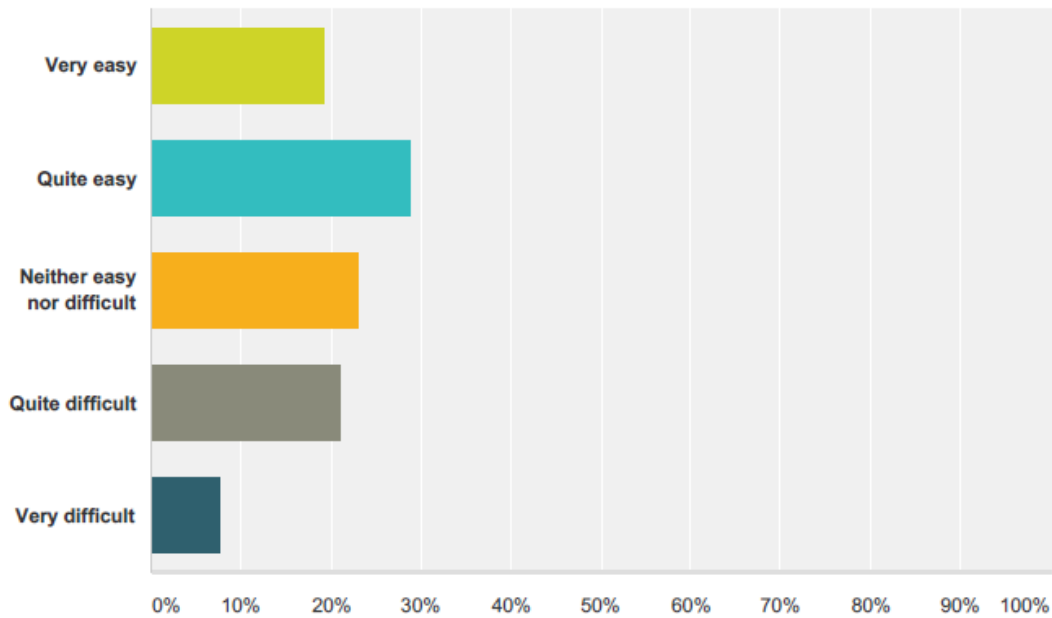
## Q9 How would you say living in Highland has affected your health?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 18



### Q12 How easy do you find it to talk about mental health issues?

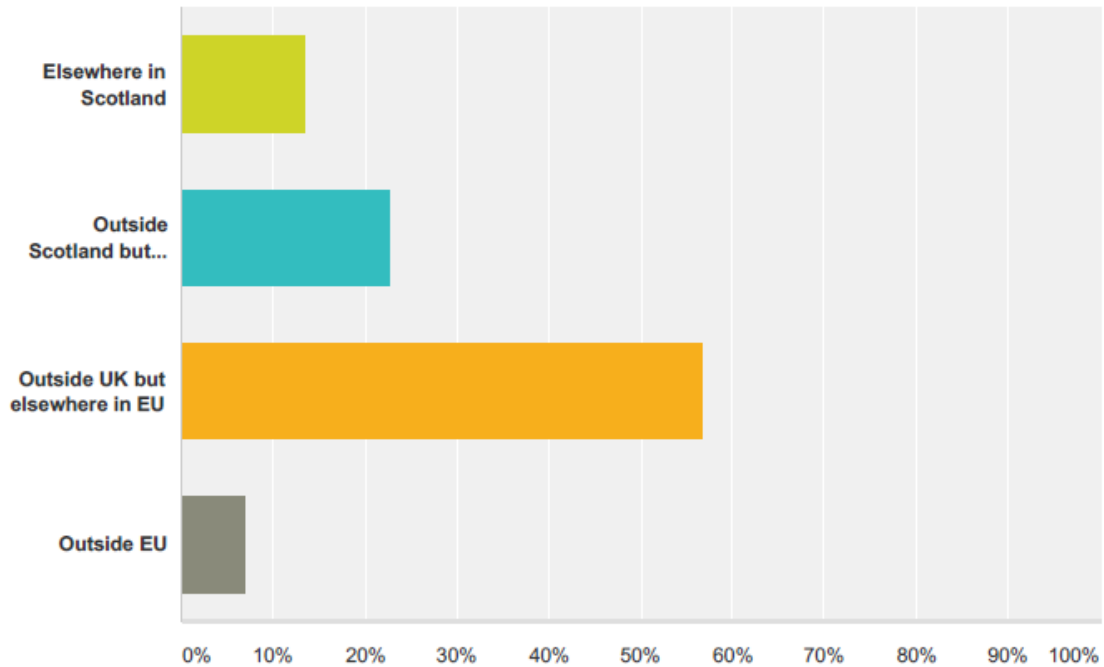
Answered: 52 Skipped: 16





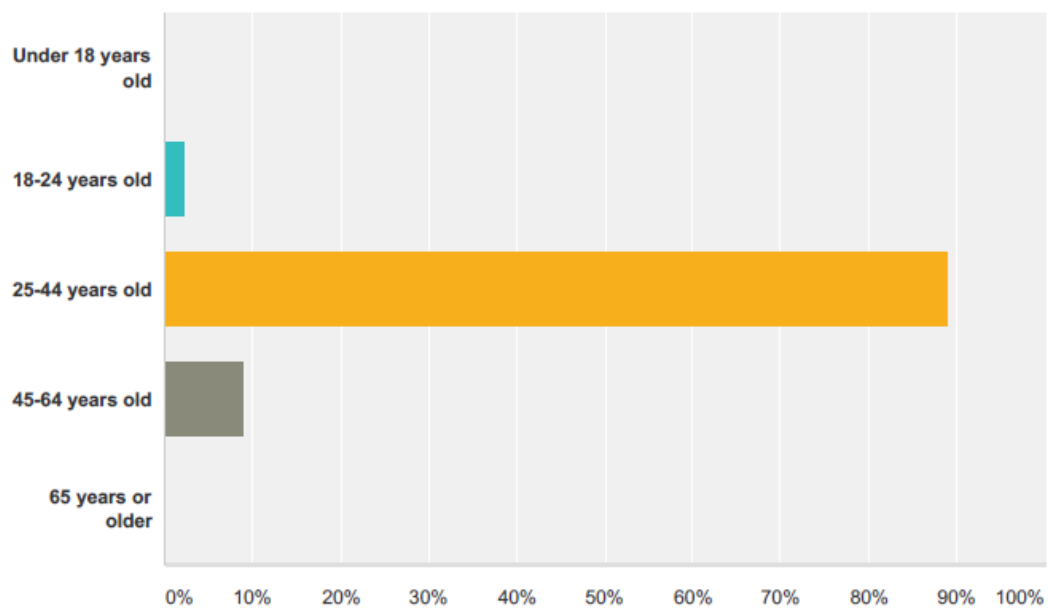
## Q17 Where did you live before coming to Highland?

Answered: 44 Skipped: 24



## Q18 What is your age?

Answered: 45 Skipped: 23



## APPENDIX 2: POTENTIAL QUESTIONS & SUGGESTED PROMPTS

- *Use an ice breaker type question to suit context if you think this is appropriate*

**1. Can you tell us where you were born and (briefly) how you ended up in the Scottish Highlands?**

**2. In your country of origin, can you tell us what it is like for people who become mentally unwell?**

*Prompts:*

- *Mental health services*
- *Attitudes to people with mental illness / stigma*

**3. How would you compare attitudes to mental illness elsewhere and in the Highlands?**

*Prompts:*

- *How easy is it to talk about mental health?*
- *How widely available are services to health people who have poor mental health?*

**4. Thinking about your own experience, or the experience of others you are aware of ...**

**How does migrating to a new country affect mental health and wellbeing?**

*Prompts:*

- *Prejudice and discrimination*
- *Homesickness and not feeling 'at home'*
- *Difficulty accessing services*
- *Over qualified for employment*
- *Cultural influences*
- *Language*

**Do you remember what it was like at the beginning when you arrived; and then what was it like; what is it like now?**

**What would have helped then?**

**5. HUG are hoping to set up a group of people who have experienced mental health problems to raise awareness of the issues faced by migrants.**

**What do you think would help to make this group work well?**

*For Peer Reviewer to complete*

*Date and time:*

*Venue:*

*Number of people:*

*Additional information about context and / or how things went:*