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INTERNATIONAL
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AN EXPLORATION OF DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED BY EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN IN TYNE AND WEAR

**UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ICOS**

“Brexit! Get out! Get out of here!”

Part 2 Report: Qualitative Findings

January 2022

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Contents

Executive Summary	5
Key Findings	5
Findings from Discussions with Eastern European Women	5
Findings from Discussions with Service Providers	6
Challenges in Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women	8
Recommendations	9
1. Introduction	11
1.1. Background to the Research	11
1.2. Research Aim and Objectives	12
2. Research Methodology	13
2.1. Qualitative Approach	13
2.2. Data Collection Methods	13
2.3. Recruitment and Sampling	13
2.4. Qualitative Data Analysis	14
3. Qualitative Findings	15
3.1. Findings from Focus Groups with Eastern European Women	15
Part 1. Intersecting Racist and Sexist Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women	15
Part 2. Challenges and Barriers in Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women	20
3.2. Service Provider Findings	25
3.2.1. Part 1. Socioeconomic Issues Faced by Eastern European Women Living in Tyne and Wear	25
3.2.2. Part 2. Challenges and Barriers in Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women	34
4. Discussion	38
4.1. Key Findings	38
4.2. Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women	38
4.3. Hate Crime Towards Eastern European Women	39
4.4. Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women	40
4.5. Impact of Brexit on Eastern European Women	41
4.6. Impact of Covid-19 Restrictions on Eastern European Women	41

4.7. Socioeconomic Challenges for Eastern European Women	42
5. Conclusion and Further Research.....	42
6. Recommendations	44
7. References.....	45

Executive Summary

This report is Part 2 of a wider research project undertaken by the University of Sunderland (UoS) and International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS). This report outlines findings from focus groups with Eastern European women and semi-structured interviews and a focus group with service providers working with Eastern European women in Tyne and Wear, UK. The purpose of this research was to follow up on previous survey findings with Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear, which are published in the [Part 1 report](#). The overarching aim of this research was to gain knowledge and understanding on two aspects of the lived experience of Eastern European women in Tyne and Wear, including their experiences and concerns in relation to hate crime and discrimination, and their wider needs in relation to local services.

Key Findings

A total of N = 6 Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear participated in three focus groups. Women who took part in focus groups ranged from age 24 to 41 years of age (M = 33 yrs.). In addition, a total of N = 4 voluntary sector service providers working with Eastern European women in Tyne and Wear participated in two semi-structured interviews and one focus group.

Findings from Discussions with Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups with Eastern European women are presented in two main parts relating to their experiences of racist and sexist discrimination, and sexual harassment, and the barriers and challenges their encounter in accessing services.

Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women

Findings highlight Eastern European women, living in Tyne and Wear, face racist and sexist discrimination, sexual harassment and hate crime, in their employment, educational, and personal and public lives. Findings show that Eastern European women experience:

- frequent, intersecting racist and sexist discrimination, and sexual harassment, and victimisation at work,
- precarity in employment opportunities, which are compounded by financial commitments and caring for children,
- intersecting racist and sexist discrimination and harassment, in educational settings, perpetrated by both peers and educators,

- frequent racist discrimination and harassment in public, including both verbal and physical abuse (hate crime), which is often motivated by anti-immigration sentiment, which has increased since the Brexit referendum,
- frequent and distinct intersecting sexist and racist discrimination and sexual harassment in public life, which is often linked to pervasive sexist stereotypes.

Challenges and Barriers in Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women

Findings also highlighted that Eastern European women experience challenges in accessing health care and support services. Key findings show that Eastern European women:

- face barriers and challenges in accessing health care and support services, due to issues with identification documents and being refused and/or charged for services,
- lack of knowledge about their rights and eligibility, in terms of health care and support services and avoid using health care services,
- have concerns about the impact of Brexit and eligibility to access health care and support services and welfare,
- face challenges accessing health care and support services due to language and communication barriers, which is compounded by a lack of adequate interpretation services and translated literature,
- provide/receive translation and interpretation informally to/by family members and friends, which causes difficulties and discomfort.

Findings from Discussions with Service Providers

Service providers discussed their work with Eastern European women in Tyne and Wear. Key findings highlighted Eastern European women face socioeconomic challenges, discrimination and hate crime, barriers in accessing health care and support services.

Socioeconomic Challenges for Eastern European Women

Findings from service providers highlight Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear may lack of family and social networks, and related emotional and practical support, and also experience high levels of poverty. Key findings indicate that Eastern European women,

- face high levels of social isolation due to migrating to the UK without family and social support networks,
- lack social and family networks to draw support from during difficult life events, crises, and trauma,
- lack access to support networks resources, such as informal childcare and transport,
- lack support networks and resources to seek support from services when living in abusive/ domestic violence environments,
- lack essential social and language support, previously provided by community organisations and support groups, due to Covid-19 restrictions,
- have limited employment opportunities, resulting in low paid and precarious employment,
- experience high levels of poverty and deprivation, which is compounded by the European Union Settlement Scheme and no-recourse to public funds, and the economic consequences of Covid-19,
- face digital poverty and lack of access to digital technologies.

Discrimination and Hate Crime Towards Eastern European Women

Service providers highlighted Eastern European women face discrimination from employers and services service providers, and also discrimination and hate crime in their social and public lives. Key findings indicate that Eastern European women:

- experience racist discrimination in the provision of services and are treated differently by some service providers,
- distrust statutory services, when facing violence/abuse and/or destitution, due to discrimination by services in the past,
- experience racist discrimination from employers, resulting in precarity in employment and a lack of employment opportunities,
- are frequently targeted for discrimination, harassment, and abuse, in public, due to being women and vulnerable in other ways such as having children and/or disabilities,

- face anti-immigration sentiment and discrimination in all areas of their lives, which has increased since the Brexit referendum,
- experience racially motivated hate crime, which has increased in frequency and severity since the UK Brexit Referendum,
- often do not report harassment, abuse, and hate crime, as it is perceived as a normalised a part of their daily lives,

Eastern European Women and Domestic Abuse and Violence

Service providers raised concerns about Eastern European women experiencing domestic abuse. Concerns for women have increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Service providers expressed concerns that:

- Covid-19 restrictions, such as lockdown, had increased Eastern European's women risk of domestic abuse and violence, trapping some women in abusive situation without access to support services,
- Eastern European women were more reluctant to report or seek support for domestic abuse, due to Covid-19 being perceived as a priority for the police and other service providers,
- Brexit, the EU Settlement Scheme, and policies such as 'no recourse to public funds' have increased Eastern European women's risk of domestic abuse, violence and exploitation.

Challenges in Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women

Findings from discussions with service providers highlighted several challenges and barriers for Eastern European women, living in Tyne and Wear, in accessing health care and support services. These challenges were predominantly related to language and communication barriers. Key findings from service providers that Eastern European women:

- lack access to appropriate and adequate interpretation services and translated written materials,
- face language barriers when dealing with statutory services, such as the police and health care,
- experienced additional challenges in communicating with services during Covid-19 due to lack of face-to-face support and service provision,

Disparities in Knowledge Between Led-By-And-For and Generic Women's Services

Interviews with service providers also highlighted disparities in knowledge between led-by-and-for women's minority groups organisations and more generic women's organisations. Findings highlight:

- a lack of knowledge amongst statutory services and generic women's organisations on the distinct issues, such as certain forms of domestic, violence and exploitation, faced by Eastern European women,
- led-by-and-for minority women's organisations have a better knowledge of the issues faced by Eastern European women, especially those associated the Brexit, the EU Settlement Status Scheme, and policies such as 'no recourse to public funds',
- led-by-and-for minority women's organisations are able to provide more holistic and appropriate support to Eastern European women and act as a valuable intermediary for women seeking service and/or support, building trusting and supportive relations with women and referring them to appropriate support services.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on findings from Parts 1 and 2 of this research:

- i. Research team to gain funding to undertake further research into Eastern European women's access to health and other support services and identify potential solutions to the issues faced by Eastern European women living the UK.
- ii. Health care, support, and other public service providers to provide more widely information translated in various languages. This is particularly important for local/community-based services, such as domestic abuse, family planning and women only services.
- iii. Educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, and other educational settings to raise standards in terms of monitoring and reporting discrimination and hate crimes towards the Eastern European community and supporting victims of hate crime and discrimination.
- iv. Local authorities and regional/community decision makers to provide funding and clear pathways to support for Eastern European migrants, in areas such as housing, welfare, employment, education and residency.

- v. Public services, including local authorities and the NHS, to establish strong links with local/community service providers that support minoritised groups to coordinate a more effective and efficient response to the needs of women migrants.
- vi. Funding bodies, public bodies, local authorities and service providers to consider translation and interpretation costs in the procurement of services to avoid exclusion of minority and marginalised groups.
- vii. Health care, support and other public services to receive training on the eligibility of services for EU citizens including healthcare, support services, housing.
- viii. Non-public bodies procured to provide a public service to meet the same standards as statutory services.

1. Introduction

This report is Part 2 of a wider research project undertaken by the University of Sunderland (UoS) and International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS). The aim of this research was to gain knowledge and understanding on two aspects of the lived experience of Eastern European women in Tyne and Wear, including their experiences and concerns in relation to discrimination and hate crimes, and their wider needs in relation to local services. The research comprised of a survey with Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear to investigate their experiences of discrimination and hate crime and the challenges they experience in accessing health care and support services. Survey findings are presented in the previous [Part 1 report](#). Subsequently, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were carried out with Eastern European women and service providers working with Eastern European women, within Tyne and Wear, to further explore survey findings from Part 1 using a qualitative approach. Findings from focus groups and interviews are presented in this Part 2 report.

1.1. Background to the Research

Almost 1% of the population of Tyne and Wear were born in Eastern Europe (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2021). The majority (around 6,000 individuals) were born in Poland, with smaller numbers from Hungary, Latvia, Romania and Russia (around 1,000 from each country), and fewer than 500 individuals from other Eastern European countries (ONS, 2021). Further, Home Office Statistics on the European Union Settled Scheme (EUSS) indicate that most applicants to the scheme in Tyne and Wear are originally from Romania or Poland, with a significant minority also from Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Slovakia (Home Office, 2021). It is likely that over half of these numbers represent women (Guereno-Omil, Pavlova-Hannam & Hannam, 2019). Additionally, there is some evidence that women may experience greater difficulties satisfying the conditions for settled status, compared to Eastern European men. This is because Eastern European women are less likely to be in full time employment and more likely to be on zero-hour contracts, than Eastern European men, because of having less flexibility for work due to being disproportionately responsible for childcare (Duda-Mikulín, 2020; Guereno-Omil, Pavlova-Hannam & Hannam, 2019; Shutes & Walker, 2018). Research shows that Eastern European women face hyper-precarity due to these gendered patterns of employment (Duda-Mikulín, 2020), which also increases their vulnerability to domestic violence and abuse (Guereno-Omil, Pavlova-Hannam & Hannam, 2018 and Shutes & Walker, 2018).

Currently, there is a lack of research into the needs and experiences of economic migrants as compared to asylum-seekers and refugees (Marshall et al, 2020). Moreover, research into the needs and experiences of Eastern European women has largely been undertaken with Polish women, with fewer studies into the experiences of other Eastern European women. Existing research with Eastern

European women, living in the UK, has focused on employment and economic wellbeing (Khattab & Fox, 2016; ; Přivara, Rievajová & Yüceşahin,, 2019), discrimination (Fox, Moroşanu & Szilassy, 2015; Rzepnikowska, 2019; 2020), the impact of Brexit (Duda-Mikulín, 2020; Lumsden, Goode & Black, 2019; Benedi Lahuerta & Iusmen, 2021; Martynowska, Korulczyk and Mamcarz, 2020; Radziwinowiczówna, Kloc-Nowak & Rosińska, 2020; Sotkasiira & Gawlewicz, 2020) and on women's health / maternal health (Richards et al, 2014; Crowther & Lau, 2019). However, whilst this body of literature is growing, there are gaps in the research in terms of how Eastern European women access services other than health services, their experience of mental health support, the experience of non-Polish Eastern European women, and the experiences of Eastern European women living in the North-East of England. Therefore, more research is required to inform responses to the needs of the local population, both in terms of policies and practice, and to add to the wider body of knowledge.

1.2. Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this research project was to understand the lived experiences of Eastern Europe women living in Tyne and Wear, in terms of discrimination, hate crime and access to health care and support services. The exploration of this aim was underpinned by the three main objectives below:

1. Investigate the prevalence and frequency of discrimination against Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear, in terms of the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act (EA) 2010
2. Investigate the prevalence and frequency of hate crime against Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear, according to the definition of hate crime by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)
3. Examine the barriers and challenges faced by Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear, in terms of access to health care and support services

In addition, Part 2 of this research project sought to follow-up on survey findings from [Part 1 report](#) to gain a more in-depth understanding of the issues faced by Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear from the women themselves and service providers, working with Eastern European women, in Tyne and Wear.

2. Research Methodology

The overall methodology for this research project was a mixed methods design, using quantitative and qualitative methods, including a survey and focus groups/interviews with Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear and service providers working with Eastern European women in the region. Mixed methods designs are endorsed for research that aims to inform policy and praxis (Brannen, 2005). Quantitative data facilitates the generalisability of qualitative data, and likewise qualitative data can play an important role in clarifying, describing, and interpreting quantitative results, as well as grounding the findings in the experiences of participants (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007).

2.1. Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was employed for Part 2 of this research project to undertake a more in-depth exploration of the survey findings from [Part 1 report](#) and further examine Eastern European women's experiences of discrimination and hate crime and the barriers they face in accessing services. Qualitative research is advocated for understanding and valuing the perspectives and experiences of participants (Hammersley and Campbell, 2012). It is especially valuable when gathering data from marginalised, vulnerable and/ or hard to reach populations, who have traditionally lacked the power to make their voices heard through traditional academic research (Edwards and Brannelly, 2017). In addition, qualitative research provides knowledge into stakeholders' experiences of a phenomena within the local contexts in which they are embedded and identifies gaps in the research (Nyanchoka, Tudur-Smith, Porcher, et al., 2019).

2.2. Data Collection Methods

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were selected to collect qualitative data from Eastern European women and service providers, working with Eastern European women within Tyne and Wear. These methods were selected to further explore survey findings from [Part 1 report](#) of the research and gain a more in-depth, detailed, and rich understanding of the experiences of Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear and their experiences of discrimination, hate crime and access to services.

2.3. Recruitment and Sampling

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to recruit Eastern European women and service providers. Non-probability sampling is a practical and pragmatic strategies advocated in exploratory research (Brough, 2018). It is a sampling method that allows for subjective judgements, drawing on past research to select an appropriate sample for the research, which aims to draw out the intricacies of the sample being studied.

For the recruitment of Eastern European women to participate focus groups, a convenience sampling method was utilised. Convenience sampling is particularly useful when recruiting hard-to-reach, minority, or marginalised groups for research studies (Valerio, Rodriguez, Winkler, et al., 2016). Eastern European women who took part in the initial survey (Part 1) were invited to participate in focus groups where they would have the opportunity to share their experiences of discrimination, hate crime and accessing services further. In total 25 women responded to the initial invite and were provided with research information. A final sample of N = 6 Eastern European women, living in Tyne and Wear, consented to the research participated in three focus groups. Women who took part in focus groups ranged from age 24 to 41 years of age (M = 33 yrs.).

For the recruitment of service providers to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus groups, a purposive sampling method was utilised. Inclusion criteria were developed in the selection of service providers within Tyne and Wear who had experience working with Eastern European women. Twenty voluntary and statutory service providers within Tyne and Wear were approached and invited to take part in the research. In total, four voluntary and two statutory organisations responded and were provided with further information about the research. A final sample of N = 4 service providers from 3 voluntary organisations, within Tyne and Wear, participated in two semi-structured interviews and one focus group. Two service providers were from led-by-and-for (minoritised communities) voluntary women's organisations and one organisation was a generic women's voluntary organisation who had experience working with Eastern European women. No statutory agencies were included in the final sample.

2.4. Qualitative Data Analysis

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams and a Dictaphone. Recordings were listened to in their entirety and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were the main units of analysis. Data were analysed using a six-stage thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved an in-depth line-by-line reading of the transcripts during which sections of text delineated with codes to attribute meaning. Subsequently, a master list of codes was created, and these codes were refined into preliminary themes using a constant comparative method. Preliminary themes were further refined into master themes and sub-themes via further comparative analyses.

3. Qualitative Findings

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews, with Eastern European women and service providers were undertaken between July and October 2021. Results from the focus groups and interviews are presented in the sections below. Firstly, themes from focus groups with Eastern European women are presented followed by themes from interviews and focus group with service providers.

3.1. Findings from Focus Groups with Eastern European Women

Women were asked about their experiences of discrimination and hate crime, and about their experiences in accessing health care and support services. These findings are illustrated themes and supported by excerpts in the sections below. Themes and sub-themes are presented in two main parts, namely:

1. Intersecting racist and sexist discrimination towards Eastern European women in employment, education, and public life.
2. Barriers in accessing services due to discrimination and language/communication barriers.

Part 1. Intersecting Racist and Sexist Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women

Findings show that Eastern European women, living in Tyne and Wear, face intersecting discrimination, including harassment, victimisation, and physical and verbal abuse, motivated by race and/or nationality and sex. This discrimination affects every area of Eastern European women's lives, including their employment, educational, and personal and public lives. These findings are presented in themes and sub-themes in the sections below.

Theme 1. Discrimination and Harassment in Employment Towards Eastern European Women

Eastern European women face intersecting forms of racist and sexist discrimination and harassment in employment, which is often a normalised part of their working lives. This theme is presented in two sub-themes relating to direct and indirect forms of discrimination and harassment of Eastern European women in the workplace, and lack of recourse for women experiencing discrimination and harassment at work.

Sub-theme 1.1. Forms of Discrimination and Harassment in Employment for Eastern European

In employment Eastern European women face both direct and indirect forms of racist and sexist discrimination and harassment and sexual harassment. This includes direct racist discrimination and harassment, for instance,

“When I started there, I had, ‘she's a Polish, she can't speak English.’ They called me Polish assassin” (P2)

“A colleague of mine, a senior member of staff, said ‘why don't you apply in such and such a place? Cause they employ the likes of you, there are plenty of foreigners and they like them” (P3).

Moreover, Eastern European women also being treated differently of their race/nationality and female sex,

“He was undermining me, belittling me and I was his like a punch ball for everything. Even when I wasn't there. Because I was foreigner, and I was a woman” (P1)

“On the Polish side, people are used by their employers. The women are fired because of their pregnancy. There are plenty of stories like that” (P2).

In addition, Eastern European women also described experiencing sexual harassment whilst at work,

“It was sexual harassment too involved [...] I got a sexual harassment from him because he was talking about his penis [...] talking about penis, that nobody wants to hear it, nobody. He start conversation always when nobody was in the room. I said to him, ‘I don't want to hear it. You can share it with your friends. I'm not your friend,’ and I'm not. I don't want to hear it. Yeah, and he was continuing that conversation. I didn't answer. At the end I report him. And it's happened a few times” (P2)

Women highlighted that these instances of discrimination and harassment worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown periods, when their movements were restricted to work and home,

“The worst attacks happened during the pandemic. At this time, when I could really go only to the work and back to the home” (P1).

Sub-Theme 1.2. Lack of Recourse for Eastern European Women Reporting Discrimination at Work

Eastern European women reported that discrimination and harassment at work is a normalised aspect of their working lives and often goes unreported due to fears of consequences. For instance, one Eastern European woman stated,

“I didn't say anything because of the fact that it happens so often. You just get used to it” (P3).

In instances where discrimination and harassment were reported, Eastern European women stated they received little support from management or human resources. For example,

“I was complaining because there were like ten grievances, only from me, about his behaviour and he only got a verbal warning. I was constantly the victim” (P1).

“He was talking about his penis. I complained they said he was joking” (P1)

Moreover, reporting discrimination and harassment has led to further victimisation, discrimination, and harassment for Eastern European women,

“He started conversation talking about his penis, always when nobody was in the room. I didn't answer and I report him. It happened a few times. Every time I was complaining. It never went resolved. Never he was told off” (P1).

“He came when nobody was in the room. That was his tactic. I started crying and he said it's my fault. I said he shouldn't talk with me without witness. He said, ‘I will talk with who ever want, nobody gonna do anything’... and no one listen, nothing happened.” (P1)

“He said that he is gonna pour acid on her face. He went on the garden leave but then he came back work and the girl had to leave” (P2)

Furthermore, Eastern European women also felt they had no options to seek recourse externally, in terms of legal representation for a tribunal, due to being discouraged to do so by legal professionals. For instance,

“I wanted to go to the tribunal, but any of the solicitor said that I can't win. Even though it was obvious that it was bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, because I'm foreigner” (P1).

To escape situations of discrimination and harassment in the workplace, one Eastern European woman reported that she was driven to seek alternative employment. However, due to precarity in employment opportunities, financial commitments and caring for children, she was unable to leave her current employment,

“Even when I have a witness, the main boss still didn't want to resolve that situation. So, the moment that I got any kind of job, I just ran away because I can't afford to be without work. I have two kids and I'm a single parent. So, I couldn't be without work. so, I just found anything. Just literally anything.” (P1)

Theme 2. Racist and Sexist Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women in Education

This theme relates to racist and sexist discrimination in education towards Eastern European women. One Eastern European woman described experiencing persistent racist and sexist discrimination in education since childhood, at school through to further and higher educational settings,

“Most of my experiences with discrimination and racism have happened when I was a student. “It was really bad at school. Boys would often call me, ‘Bulgarian Bitch, Bulgarian Cow, Russian Bitch’ [...] You should go back home” (P4).

Acts of discrimination and harassment in education were described to have been perpetrated by educators as well as peers,

“Most of all my experiences I would say have been in education. One of the lecturers was clearly racist. She always had a problem with me. She said that I speak high voice and wear weird clothing” (P4).

“I remember there was this incident where this boy who would constantly say racial things about me and you know everyone would laugh” (P4).

Furthermore, more indirect forms of discrimination in education, such as persecution and being singled out/ treated different to other students, were also reported,

“The teachers made comments such as, ‘you do well for being a Bulgarian.’ I was like, ‘What do you mean?’ He was like, “you do well, you look nice.” Just really inappropriate” (P4).

“The final experience I had was during my masters. There was a senior lecturer, who was quite racist towards me. Everything I did was a problem. So, for example coming a minute late, she would give me a bad look going to the toilet. Yet when [name of another student] did it, who was middle class, white, English, there wasn't any problems. Just problems with me as well and another student who was from a black heritage” (P4).

Theme 3. Racist Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in Public

Eastern European women also reported they experience intersecting discrimination and harassment in public motivated by racism and sexism. These findings are presented in three sub-themes below.

Sub-Theme 3.1. Verbal and Physical Racist Discrimination and Harassment Towards Eastern European Women in Public

Eastern European women discussed receiving racist discrimination, harassment, and abuse and hate crime in public. Two Eastern European woman described particularly distressing instances of verbal and physical harassment and abuse in public, motivated by racism and anti-immigration sentiment,

“Probably the most traumatizing was two years ago when I was on my way home, and we were speaking foreign language. There was a group of people who kind of have a hover around the train station. And yeah, there was the whole, ‘Brexit - get out! Get out of here!’ Then there's something flying and hit me. It was a bottle of water it was I. I thought it was a bottle of something else like bodily fluid. So, that kind of shook me 'cause they were all men and about six of them” (P3).

“Sometimes I wear the scarf. The first time I wore it in [City Centre in North East of England] someone threw an egg at me. Then the next time I wore it someone was shouting at me. It was group of guys in a car, but it was the red light. They kept on shouting, and it felt like they like they're overpowering me, so I didn't know what to do. I was just standing there doing nothing and they were like enjoying themselves, seeing me like being quite upset” (P5).

It was considered that racially aggravated verbal and physical abuse in public, and anti-immigration sentiment, had increased in frequency and severity since the UK Brexit referendum,

“When Brexit was happening, they were very much, you know, ‘no more foreigners coming in,’ ‘we can’t have more foreigners in this country” (P3).

“I’m on my way home, at the bus and I get, ‘go back where you came” (P3).

“I feel like it [Brexit] made some people feel more like empowered. They feel like they’re going to have the right now to be this way towards some people. So, some people were showing it more. They felt like it might be a more OK to be harassing people” (P5)

One Eastern European woman described that the increased racism and anti-immigration sentiment in public had resulted in her considering leaving the UK,

“The impact [of Brexit], it has been massive for me and my family. I mean if I could go back home tomorrow, I’ll be packed on be gone” (P4)

To avoid racial discrimination and harassment in public one woman described that she did not speak in certain public places, such as on public transport,

“People can actually realise that I’m not from here when I start speaking. It’s about my accent. Say you are you are on the metro. I prefer to not say anything because I know that if I start talking there then I would just hear some abusive language straight away and then to use something against nationality” (P6).

Sub-Theme 3.2. Racist and Sexist Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Towards Eastern European Women in Public

In addition to direct racism and anti-immigration sentiment, Eastern European women also face distinct intersecting sexist and racist discrimination and sexual harassment in public life. It is considered that these forms of discrimination and harassment are related to pervasive sexist stereotypes associated with Eastern European women. For example, two women related their experiences of these sexist stereotypes and associated abuse and harassment,

“His neighbours said to him [women’s partner], ‘you know, Eastern European women are good looking but most of them are prostitutes” (P4).

“They use, ‘you Polish’, ‘Polish prostitute’ and I remember my little boy was asking, ‘what does that mean?’ I said, ‘Listen, don’t listen, just ignore them” (P2).

Moreover, Eastern European women also described being targeted for sexual harassment when socialising in public venues, due to their race/nationality,

“I’ve been to nightclubs and have been out and they think we’re easier targets, we’re more vulnerable. So, we’re more likely to go with somebody to get a drink. They think we’re all poor, so one drink will impress us a lot more. People

have said to me, 'Whereabouts you from? Isn't it like, 20 pence a pint there? Oh, you're lucky here? Look, I'm rich' [waves hand with money]" (P4).

"They think that we have lower standards of view, so we will accept anything in anybody. We don't have any standards, so accept anybody" (P3).

Another Eastern European woman reported avoiding socialising in certain public venues and changing the way she dresses, to avoid sexual harassment in public places,

"I'm not going for clubbing pubbing, anything like it anymore. I hated it, every time. I felt so uncomfortable and especially by sexist men. I'm not wearing the makeup, wearing my glasses, the hoody, men's clothes, 'cause that's not making my attention" (P2).

Sub-Theme 3.3. Lack of Recourse and Voice for Eastern European Women Experiencing Discrimination and Harassment in Public

Racist and sexist discrimination and harassment, and sexual harassment, in public, often goes unreported and is normalised through acceptance of it being part of daily life for Eastern European women. For instance, two Eastern European women stated they had not reported abuse and harassment in public and diminished the significance of these acts,

"I didn't report it because I honestly I thought it was just I don't know. Some kids doing, you know, playing. I didn't think of it as that" (P3).

"I didn't report it. I feel like it's something just small." (P5).

Further reasons for non-reporting of harassment and abuse in public included avoiding further trauma from the reporting process,

I didn't want to think about it anymore. I didn't want to be like affected by it even more than I was, so I just tried to forget about it" (P5).

Furthermore, one Eastern European woman stated she did not report abuse and harassment received in public due to concerns about not being taken seriously, especially in terms of racist abuse,

"The police don't take us seriously. Someone called me a Bulgarian Bitch for example. They're like 'oh, I'm sorry.' They just don't take it serious. Because we are seen as white, they think you're not really being discriminated against" (P4).

Part 2. Challenges and Barriers in Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups also highlighted that Eastern European women experience challenges in accessing health care and support services. This is due to a multitude of reasons, including being refused access to health care and support services due to lack of identification and residency status. Moreover, Eastern

European women also face challenges relating to language and communication, which creates barriers to accessing health care and support services. Issues in accessing healthcare and support services have been further compounded since Brexit and during the Covid-19 pandemic. These findings are presented in themes and sub-themes in the sections below.

Theme 1. Eligibility for Health Care and Support Services

Eastern European women face barriers and challenges in accessing health care and support services due to a variety of factors linked to their eligibility to access services. These challenges include issues with identification documents when attempting to access services and being refused and/or charged services by certain providers. These issues are presented in two sub-themes

Sub-theme 1.2. Issues with Identification Documentation in Accessing Services for Eastern European Women

Eastern European women discussed experiencing challenges in accessing services due to issues in obtaining and providing identification and eligibility documentation. This is particularly a challenge for newly arrived migrants to the UK. For example, as described by one Eastern European woman,

“It wasn't so easy at the beginning. We wanted to rent a house or a flat. We had to provide a lot of documents and obviously we didn't have references and it's difficult if you are from a different country to provide it” (P6).

“You need to have some history before you can get a debit card in the bank. You just cannot have it straight away. So, it could be frustrating at the beginning when you try your new life in a different country where you don't have the same rights” (P6).

Eastern European women also described facing challenges when accessing essential health care services due to requests for identification and eligibility documentation. Often women did not view this as discrimination due to their migrant status, so rarely challenged these requests:

“When I went to the hospital, I had my blue card insurance card, but then they kept on saying but you are from Europe, not from England, so you have to give us all these documents. I kept on giving it to them and I never thought this would be discrimination. But then I told someone else and they're like no this is not acceptable. It shouldn't be happening but to me. I just thought it is just because I'm not from here. I didn't know if I didn't even know my rights. I thought, I'm still not from here. I might be different” (P5)

“I cut my finger, so I was in the hospital. I went to ER. So, they did provide me with emergency support. But then afterwards, just like all the admin paperwork and everything. The thing is, I wouldn't call it discrimination. I think there's just confusion because I felt like they I don't know. I was like oh it wasn't their fault, but I kept on being asked just because I wasn't British or like from UK” (P5)

Sub-Theme 1.2. Lack of Knowledge About Eligibility for Services

Eastern European women also face challenges in accessing essential health care and support services due to a lack of knowledge about their rights and eligibility. For instance, one woman stated,

“With the health system, what you need to know, it's quite difficult to know what rights you have” (P6).

Another woman claimed that lack of knowledge around eligibility and concerns about receiving charges had resulted in avoidance of health care and support services,

“I didn't want to go to my GP 'cause I didn't know if I'm eligible to get support here. I was asking everyone; can I use? Can I go to the GP? Do I have to pay for it? Is it just for emergency? I realised I actually don't know how the system works” (P5).

“Back home I would go to the GP, if I had some issue, but here I didn't want to go because I didn't know if I would have to pay for it. It was just minor things, so thankfully it wasn't anything major. If it was something, which could affect my health more, I would just try to go back from where I'm from, because like I'm more certain about my rights there than here” (P5).

Furthermore, Eastern European women also raised concerns about the impact of Brexit and eligibility to access health care and support services and welfare. One woman discussed concerns raised in her community about the rights of Eastern European women post Brexit,

“They are really worried because they keep on getting different information from different places. They keep on asking if you're going to be deported. Even if they have the status, they keep on asking because they don't know about their rights” (P5).

Theme 2. Communication and Language Barriers in Accessing Services for Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups with Eastern European women also highlighted the challenges they face in accessing health care and support services due to language and communication barriers. This theme is presented in three sub-themes.

Sub-Theme 2.1. Lack of Interpretation and Translation Services

Eastern European women described that health care and support services tend to lack adequate interpretation services and there is also a shortage of translated documentation, advice, and literature,

“The language is quite difficult because there is no support in terms of interpreting” (P6).

“Some GP surgeries, when I tell them they need an interpreter, they're like we don't do such stuff. We don't provide interpreters” (P5).

In addition, Eastern European women reported that requesting interpretation services when accessing health care and support services can often result in delays in appointment and treatment times,

“It takes way longer to get support if we do end up arranging an interpreter. It can take a week until they can actually find someone” (P5)

Moreover, where translation services are organised, one Eastern European woman reported instances where the interpreter did not attend their scheduled appointment:

“Once my client was at a GP and she actually called me because she didn't know what the GP was telling her. So, she was trying to communicate somehow, but they couldn't because the interpreter didn't come to the appointment” (P5)

Sub-Theme 2.2. Family and Friends Providing Interpretation and Translation Services

Eastern European women stated they are frequently encouraged by service providers to bring a friend or family member to interpret for them. For example, one woman reported,

“So, they either don't provide them [interpretation services] or just to tell you can you bring someone with you to interpret” (P5).

Moreover, due to the lack of translation and interpretation services Eastern European women reported they often seek support from family and friends in interpreting and translating health advice. However, this was cause for concern for some women, especially in terms of confidentiality, and sensitive and private matters. For example, one Eastern European woman described feeling uncomfortable about family members and friends having knowledge about their private health issues,

“Say it's a private matter and but just because you have no one else to translate for you, you bring someone. Having an interpreter, it's confidential. I think if you don't know the person, but if you bring someone, but then everyone knows your health issues” (P5).

In addition, another woman discussed issues concerned with accessing domestic violence services and the implications of having a family member attend to translate for them, in terms of the lack of impartiality,

“If it's a domestic violence, sometimes you don't want to your family to be involved in it because they could take sides. So, we would want to have someone who is impartial in this situation” (P6)

Furthermore, particularly difficult situations reported by Eastern European women were regarding children accompanying their parents to health-related appointments. In certain circumstances, it was felt that this could be traumatic for both the child and parent. For instance,

“They often take kids to the GP or for medical appointments to translate for them because of lack of any other support in terms of interpreter. It could really affect children in many ways if they hear things they shouldn't. If you imagine that someone could have cancer and that's a really, really difficult situation that you have to talk with your children to talk to your doctor” (P6)

Sub-Theme 2.3. Providing Interpretation and Translation Services for Family and Friends

Likewise Eastern European women also reported that they provide translation and interpretation support for their own family and friends when accessing health care and support services. Whilst this was perceived as an essential means of support, it was also described as being a difficult and sometime uncomfortable situation. For instance:

“I was going with my friends to the dentist. That's a very strange situation. When you sit there, and you have to explain everything. It's quite specialist language and it's quite difficult because a lot of people have a fear of the dentist” (P6)

“She was panicking before the surgery because she had a bad experience before. It wasn't a great experience for me 'cause you don't usually do that. So, it was quite difficult. You try to support each other because you know that if something happened people could support you” (P6).

Moreover, concerns were also raised about the impact of providing translation and interpretation for friends and family accessing health care and support services on their own mental health and wellbeing. For example,

“If you, do it [interpretation] for your own friends or family it could also affect you and your mental health. So, it's also for not only for people who don't have access to these interpretations, but also people who help” (P6).

3.2. Service Provider Findings

Service providers discussed their work with Eastern European women in the community and the barriers and challenges encountered in undertaking this work. Moreover, service providers also discussed the discrimination and hate crime observed towards Eastern European women, and the barriers and challenges Eastern European women face in accessing health and support services. Findings from service providers are presented in two parts relating to:

1. Socioeconomic issues faced by Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear
2. Challenges and barriers in accessing health care and support services for Eastern European women

3.2.1. Part 1. Socioeconomic Issues Faced by Eastern European Women Living in Tyne and Wear

Findings from service providers highlight Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear face several socioeconomic issues. These issues include a lack of family and social networks, and related emotional and practical support, and high levels of poverty. Both Covid-19 and Brexit have negatively impacted on Eastern European women, in terms of social support and levels of poverty.

Theme 1. Lack of Family and Social Support Networks for Eastern European Women

Discussions with voluntary service providers highlighted Eastern European women often lack family and social networks, which results in a lack of both emotional and practical support. Voluntary services could however support Eastern European women to develop new friendships and support networks with each other. This theme is presented in two sub-themes.

Sub-Theme 1.1. Lack of Family and Social Support Networks for Eastern European Women Living in the UK

Service providers reported that in their work with Eastern European women in Tyne and Wear has highlighted women often migrate to the UK with little support, leaving their family and social support networks behind. It was reported that this results in Eastern European women struggling with difficult life events, crisis, and trauma without these essential support networks. For example, one service provider described working with an older Eastern European who had suffered a bereavement of her spouse, resulting in her being isolated in the UK, with limited English language skills,

“I’m just working with a lady who came here about seven years ago with her husband, she in her 60s, and her husband passed away not long ago. So, she’s

been left completely on her own, without language skills, without any sort of support network, and didn't have anyone to turn to for help.” (S1)

In addition, another service provider highlighted that a lack of support networks adversely affected Eastern European women living in domestic abuse situations, in terms of having access to the necessary resources, such as childcare and transport, to seek support from statutory and support services,

“The women I support, a lot of them don't have any family at all in the in the UK. The women I've supported, they only had their abusive partners and their children. So, in terms of helping out with childcare, that wasn't really an option, and they still had all the demands of getting children to school, when they might not have access to a car” (S3).

Sub-Theme 1.2. Facilitating the Development of Support Networks for Eastern European Women

Service providers discussed the importance of facilitating the development of social support networks as a fundamental factor in their work with Eastern European women. The provision and space for women's groups in community-based organisations are instrumental in building these support networks for Eastern European women,

“We have women from mostly Poland, however all ages, so the youngest person who attended was 18, and the oldest was 66, so it's a group that welcomes women from all ages, and it's great because a lot of women met new friends, got to know each other, it's really nice to see, new networks are being built” (S1).

Moreover, service providers highlighted that women's community groups foster building Eastern European women's language skills and reduce loneliness and social isolation. However, the provision of these essential groups was adversely impacted by Covid-19 restrictions such as lockdown. In addition, existing support networks for Eastern European were also severed due to Covid-19 restrictions such as lockdown and social distancing,

“For many of the women we worked with, they might have been very reliant on friends or other members of the community to provide them with support. Maybe they could speak better English, or they were taking children to school, or providing that community support. It was a lot of distress that support was going, once the lockdown was there, or that they couldn't do that without getting into trouble.” (S2)

All service providers described having to limit or stop face-to-face contact and peer support during lockdowns. Whilst alternative means of provision were utilised, including online and telephone, not all women were able to access this, especially online support groups. Service providers considered that online support groups were limited in ability to reach Eastern European women and a poor substitute for face-to-face contact.

Theme 2. Experiences of Poverty and Deprivation for Eastern European Women Living in Tyne and Wear

Service providers raised concerns about Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear experiencing high levels of poverty and deprivation, which had worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. This theme is presented in 3 sub-themes in the sections below, relating to issues concerned with a lack of employment opportunities, income poverty and digital poverty.

Sub-Theme 2.1. Lack of Employment Opportunities for Eastern European Women

Lack of and limited employment opportunities for Eastern European was an issue discussed by service providers. This includes low paid and precarious employment, in hospitality and production sectors, which were adversely impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in job loses for Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear,

“Many people started being furloughed [at the beginning of the pandemic]. They started being dismissed from work because there was not a lot of work. As we know, and it was very often the Eastern European community, because they work in hospitality and production, kind of low-skilled jobs, so we were seeing a big rise in Universal Credit applications, the need for Universal Credit applications, job searching.” (S1)

Moreover, service providers described the Eastern European women were also more likely to be in high-risk employment during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as in frontline caring and cleaning roles,

“There were some women that had been in some form of employment but were no longer able to be part of that employment. We found that a lot of the women that we work with from Eastern European communities were in sort of, more care based employment, so working in care homes, cleaning jobs, and that actually there was a real, they felt that they couldn’t continue with that work because there was a real fear about how they would be vulnerable to Covid, so they were no longer having that income to get the support that they needed.” (S2)

Furthermore, one service provider highlighted Eastern European women are discriminated in terms of employment opportunities, due to assumptions from employers and potential employers about their English language skills and abilities,

“This person really wanted to take part in fire warden training, they said to her ‘oh no, you can’t do it’, ‘why not?’, ‘well, your English is not that good.’ She said ‘well, I think it’s good enough, I think I can do it.’ ‘Oh, we don’t think so.’ So, I had to complain for her to access this training, and she did it, she passed it no problem. It’s just like opportunities being taken away, taken away from them” (S1).

Sub-Theme 2.2. Income Poverty and Lack of Financial Support for Eastern European Women Living in Tyne and Wear

Service providers highlighted Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear experience poverty due to a lack of income and financial support, and reported providing support to Eastern European women, living in Tyne and Wear, in terms of food provision.

“I know that all the women I support they’ve been very short on funds and relying on food parcels, yeah, that’s been a common theme throughout all the women I’ve supported from Eastern Europe. I’d say they were relying on food parcels at some point.” (S3)

Service providers stated that factors associated with Brexit and the EU Settlement Scheme had contributed to significant income poverty and lack of financial support for some Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear,

“Recently I’ve been working with an Eastern European woman who has pre-settled status and she’s staying in a refuge with her six-month old baby, and basically she has no access to benefits because they’re not counting her pre-settled status as recourse to public funds. They said she’s not eligible for Universal Credit.” (S1)

Moreover, service providers reported that income poverty had increased for Eastern European women during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting increased need for provision such as emergency support, in terms of food vouchers and parcels, mobile phone top-ups and gas/electricity top-ups,

“We did a lot of emergency support related to Covid. We gave out food vouchers, a lot of data top-ups, tablets for people to, for example, attend the women’s group or English language classes. Things like electricity top-ups as well and gas” (S1).

“We set up an internal food bank. That was something we found to be a real issue during the pandemic, and this was something all of our Eastern European clients we were working with were saying. At the beginning of the pandemic, a lot of their local food banks had closed. So, what we did was set up an internal food bank which took into account women’s different cultural needs” (S2).

Sub-Theme 2.3. Consequences of Digital Poverty for Eastern European Women Living in Tyne and Wear

Digital poverty was an issue raised by service providers, for Eastern European women, both prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and in the aftermath. In the longer-term, lack of access to digital technologies has inhibited Eastern European’s women ability to gain settlement status, as the processes dictated by the EU Settlement Scheme are largely undertaken online. For example, one service provider reported,

“We know that the EU Settlement Scheme was largely tech-based and needed some form of digital access. Many of the women we work with from Eastern European communities, they didn’t have that access to smart technology, and

they weren't confident about how to use it, so a lot of it was support around applying for the Settlement Scheme" (S2).

Moreover, since the Covid-19 pandemic digital poverty for Eastern European women has also resulted in lack of access to community-based support groups and provision. For instance, most community support groups and provisions were unable to be undertaken face-to-face, meaning a reliance on digital technologies that many Eastern European women did not have access to,

"You're assuming that people have Wi-Fi and a laptop, or if not somewhere to go when they can access that, and so it's a lot of barriers for a lot of people, but I guess particularly if you already have those things missing" (S3).

Service providers reported they set up remote or online support during lockdowns, although this was not without difficulty. For instance, service providers utilised various methods to continue service provision and support such as via telephone, video calls, social media, and email. Whilst these methods were deemed vital during restrictions such as lockdown, some women did not have access, resulting in some service providers having to provide Eastern European women with access to technologies.

Theme 3. Hate Crime and Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women

Service providers highlighted Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear experience hate crime and discrimination. However, often these acts go unreported and, in some instances, have become a normalised aspect of Eastern European women's lives. This theme is presented in three sub-themes relating to Eastern European women's experiences of discrimination and hate crime, and issues associated with Brexit and increased anti-immigration sentiment.

Sub-Theme 3.1. Discrimination by Employers and Services Towards Eastern European Women

Service providers highlighted Eastern European women face discrimination from employers and services such as housing, health, or social care. According to service providers, acts of discrimination towards Eastern European women have become a normalised aspect of their lives due to lack of recourse. For instance, one service provider stated that Eastern European women tend to try to ignore discrimination at work due to job precarity and the associated fear of losing their job,

"Quite often women, especially women, they're just trying to ignore it, just like 'I just need to get on with it because I'm going to lose my job, what am I going to do?'" (S1)

A further service provider stated that Eastern European women also experience discrimination in provision of support services, such as refuges, which is perceived to be motivated by their race/nationality,

“The issue is she’s also experiencing problems within the place she’s staying at, at the refuge she says that there’s discrimination towards her, she’s being treated differently by staff, so it’s quite worrying to hear that. You know, she’s supposed to feel like she’s getting support there, but she has to turn to us” (S1).

Furthermore, one service provider stated that Eastern European women with children and no-recourse to public funds, are advised to return to their country of origin by statutory child social services, as opposed to receiving adequate and essential support,

“We’ve worked with a lot of Eastern European women who have had Child Social Services involvement. They have had no recourse to public funds but they have children, and we have regularly advocated that Social Services need to provide financial support under Section 17 of the Children Act, but what we’ve seen increasingly is women being told actually, the best thing you can do is have a voluntary removal from the UK, return back to your country of origin, and that’s all we can do for you” (S2)

Consequently, Eastern European women, who are facing destitution and/or violence/abuse, tend to distrust statutory services in being able to provide them with support they may need in a crisis,

“Often when that happens, we’re told by women, ‘It feels like it’s easier not to deal with us, and actually if we were anyone else and we were experiencing violence and we were experiencing destitution, we would get that support, we wouldn’t be told to go back to our countries of origin where there might be less support available there.’” (S2)

Sub-Theme 3.2. Hate Crime Towards Eastern European Women

According to service providers Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear also face both verbal and physical racially aggravated discrimination, harassment, and abuse, which frequently constitutes hate crime. Service providers interviewed gave descriptions of several particularly serious racially motivated hate crime incidents towards Eastern European women

“Bear in mind, she was with a one-year-old baby, she used to have rocks chucked at her. Every time. And she was, you know, being called, ‘Polish bitch, go back home.’ and this happened on multiple occasions. When she reported it to the police, they said they can’t do anything” (S1).

“It’ll be strangers, it’ll be neighbours, and often it’s children. So, it’s antisocial behaviour that will, let’s say start with some verbal abuse, or things being chucked at someone’s house, and then the kids will come back again, back again. Then it will turn to sometimes violence, sometimes just awful, awful things. There was a family in [local area] who had their car smashed up recently by a group of children, just because they were Polish” (S1).

“She had hate crime and damage to her property. She mentioned spray paint and things but damage to her property, and she fled from that area” (S3).

Moreover, service providers also highlighted Eastern European women were targeted for discrimination, harassment, and abuse because they are women and/or vulnerable in other ways such as having children and/or disabilities,

“I haven’t come across men on the street having rocks chucked at them, or being shouted at, it’s often women who come to me with this. Someone will see a man; children will see a man and they will not try to confront anyone because they’re worried. Again, a woman, a vulnerable person, especially with a child, or a disability, they will go for it. It’s an opportunity for them” (S1.)

“Neighbours were, you know, name calling and verbal abuse. But I think it was more directed to him than her” (S4).

Furthermore, service providers felt that high instances of anti-immigration sentiment often helped to motivate acts of discrimination and hate crimes towards Eastern European women. For instance, one service provider reported discrimination and hates crimes towards Eastern European women, which were clearly related to anti-immigration sentiment,

“People get asked [at work], ‘When are you going back home, do you have your ticket back yet?’ And they think it might be funny, but when people experience that kind of bullying or harassment on a daily basis, it has a big impact on their wellbeing” (S1).

“And property damage, things like having rocks, bricks, eggs, chucked at people’s houses, group of children gathering and just, you know, with sticks, shouting at ‘the house, at the household to, ‘Get out, to go back to your own country,’ happens very often” (S1).

Finally, service providers claimed that harassment, abuse and hate crime, towards Eastern European is normalised and perceived as a part of their daily lives, often goes un-reported to the police,

“It will sort of be very casually said, ‘Oh I was walking down the street with my child, and someone shouted something at me, or spat at me, or mentioned something about Brexit’, and it’s really casually said. When we have those situations and we’ve encouraged women to report that to the police and to support them to report that to the police. There’s a lot of disillusionment and feelings that nothing’s going to change if they report it to the police” (S2).

Sub-Theme 3.3. Impact of Brexit on Racist Hate Crimes Towards Eastern European Women

Service providers considered that Eastern European’s women’s experiences of racially motivated hate crime had increased in frequency and severity since the UK Brexit Referendum. For instance, one service provider stated that the Brexit referendum campaign and associated media and Government narratives about migrants contributing to job shortages and financial instability in the UK had increased hate crime towards ethnic minority communities,

“Socio-economic deprivation plays a really big part in everything. It’s something that communities feel that other communities are causing job shortages, and financial turmoil. That is something that’s often pushed by the media. It’s pushed by the Government. It was a massive push behind the campaign around Brexit and I think that has definitely fed into levels of hate crime across multiple different communities” (S2).

A further service provider considered that Brexit coincided with increased rises in racist and anti-immigration hate crime towards ethnic minorities living in the UK,

“Brexit plays a big part in it, we obviously saw a big rise in hate crime with Brexit and when I speak to clients, when I speak to people from different ethnic minorities, they just feel they’re not, they don’t feel welcome here anymore” (S1).

Another service provider reported that Eastern European women also feel they are treated different by services since Brexit, and feel unwelcome in the UK,

“We regularly get women telling us that actually they don’t feel like they are getting the same service since Brexit, there’s a lot of feeling that they’re not wanted in the UK, so we regularly get those disclosures.” (S2)

Finally, whilst service providers interviewed from the voluntary sector discussed the impacts of Brexit on racial discrimination, harassment and abuse towards Eastern European women, generic service providers lacked knowledge about the negative impacts of Brexit on Eastern European women.

Theme 4. Domestic Abuse Towards Eastern European Women Living in Tyne and Wear

Discussions with service providers raised concerns about Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear experiencing domestic abuse. This theme is presented in two sub-themes relating to issues concerned with Covid-19 and domestic abuse towards Eastern European women and the impact of Brexit on their access to support and resources to escape domestic abuse.

Sub-Theme 4.1. Covid-19 and Domestic Abuse Towards Women

Service providers reported that Covid-19 restrictions had significantly increased the incidence of domestic abuse, which was reflected in an increase in referrals for support for women experiencing domestic violence,

“Yeah, we got quite a lot the beginning, so at the time of Covid starting I worked at [local statutory services] and early help as outreach worker for [organisation], and my caseload went through its roof. Right, because then we got two or three services that can’t do what they want to do” (S4).

Moreover, service providers reported that Covid-19 restrictions, such as lockdown, had meant that women were being trapped at home with their abuser. For instance, two service providers reported,

“We had a lot of women coming forward with domestic abuse issues, domestic violence issues during the lockdown... it was difficult because they were stuck at home with their abusers.” (S1).

“For people living with the perpetrator, the perpetrator would be in the house more” (S3).

Moreover, service providers stated that women were more reluctant to report or seek support for domestic abuse due to Covid-19 being a priority for the police and other service providers,

“What we saw and what was getting fed back from the women was this feeling that there wasn’t accountability. That perpetrators could do what they wanted during lockdown. That the focus wasn’t on domestic abuse and violence. That the focus was on this global pandemic and actually it would be okay for perpetrators to do that. That wasn’t the police’s focus. That was sort of the feelings that we got fed back from a lot of the women that we work with” (S2).

Furthermore, whilst demand for domestic abuse services was increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, the reduction in face-to-face contact and closure of some services meant that service providers found it more difficult to make referrals for support, even when Covid-19 restrictions were lifted,

“A lot of services weren’t working at full capacity, statutory services weren’t working at full capacity and there was this feeling that ‘actually they don’t have time to deal with my issues right now,’ or ‘it’s not as important.’” (S2)

“Everything’s backlogged, everything takes twice as long at the moment, referrals, people getting back to you, so I think it’s even more difficult.” (S1)

Sub-Theme 4.2. Brexit and Domestic Abuse Towards Eastern European women

Service providers also highlighted that Brexit had created specific problems for Eastern European women. This issue was discussed in terms of the types of abuse they were experiencing, and the support available to them. One service provider pointed to associations between difficulties imposed by the process of the EU Settlement Scheme and women experiencing domestic abuse,

“We’ve found that there’s been connections between the EU Settlement Scheme and experiences of abuse. So, for example many of the women that we’ve had referred into [our organisation] have had difficulty in applying for the EU Settlement Scheme because of experiences of violence or abuse. For example, immigration abuse, they’ve had their passports restricted so they haven’t been able to apply for the settlement scheme, or maybe they’ve been in and out of refuges, so they haven’t been able to prove the documentation of living in the UK.” (S2)

Moreover, there were concerns raised by service providers about the increased risk to Eastern European women experiencing domestic abuse who have ‘no recourse to public funds’ and/or ‘no settled status’,

“Brexit is going to create a whole new category of women that have no recourse to public funds, women that have absolutely no status in the UK, and we know that that’s going to escalate the risk and the violence they’re experiencing because, there’s this perception that they have no status in the UK and therefore they have no right to safety and protection, from perpetrators and from services that regularly turn women away from refuges or from mainstream support” (S2).

3.2.2. Part 2. Challenges and Barriers in Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women

Service providers highlighted several challenges and barriers for Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear accessing health care and support services. These challenges were predominantly related to language and communication barriers. Moreover, a disparity in knowledge about the issues faced by Eastern European women between service providers led-by-and-for minoritised women and more generic women’s services, was also highlighted. These findings are presented in themes and sub-themes in the sections below.

Theme 1. Language and Communication Barriers in Accessing Health Care and Support Services

All service providers interviewed felt that interpreting services were the biggest barrier for EE women accessing services. This theme is presented in three sub-themes, including barriers to accessing quality interpretation services and the difficulties encountered by women when they do access interpretation services.

Sub-Theme 1.1. Barriers in Accessing Interpretation and Translation Services for Eastern European Women

Availability of interpreters, quality of interpretation, and availability of translated written materials, for Eastern European women were a concern for service providers,

“It helps when there’s information provided in their own languages, like even leaflets, such as domestic abuse, such as health care. I think when people see it in English, they have no idea what it’s about” (S1).

Service providers discussed having issues with the provision of translation and interpretation for Eastern European clients and problems in general for services in providing this,

“I think some women have a problem with translation and interpreting, it’s quite difficult for them to access interpreters” (S1).

Moreover, confidentiality was reported by service providers as a concern for many Eastern European women, particularly considering the limited number of Eastern European interpreters available in the local area,

“We regularly get women talking about like, fear of confidentiality and interpreters potentially being a part of the community. The Eastern European community, particularly in [local city], are very close-knit, and there is a fear that actually that

information might get out to the wider community, and we find that actually impinges on women disclosing the full extent of the abuse that they're experienced" (S2)

"For example, I had an appointment with a lady yesterday and she had a PIP [Personal Independence Payment] tribunal and she said, 'The interpreter I had for my PIP tribunal is actually the one who interprets for my counselling sessions.' This happens quite often" (S1).

Sub-Theme 1.2. Difficulties When Accessing Interpretation Services for Eastern European Women

Further barriers and difficulties relating to using interpretation and translation services for Eastern European women included the difficulties of introducing another person to the professional relationship when women are accessing health care and support services. Service providers spoke about these difficulties, highlighting the negative impacts on these relationships and on the women themselves,

"If ... you've sort of got to a point where you feel like you're able to engage with an external service and recount your experiences, not only are you then having to recount your experiences to a professional that you've never met before, who doesn't speak your language, but you're then having to do that to an interpreter that you haven't met before." (S2)

"We had this three-way phone call going on, and the interpreter would come on the line and then I have to wait for the woman. In terms of like how smoothly that ran, I found that very difficult, especially when you're asking them quite personal things. And then the interpreter was male, and you just wonder what is actually being translated to that woman and does the woman feel comfortable with me, let alone like this male interpreter also on the call" (S3).

In addition, one service provider discussed the challenges faced by women with language barriers when dealing with statutory services such as the police,

"The police are pushed for time, and I think like that language barrier, particularly it might come through, they're 'in the moment' incidences, where the woman has got heightened anxiety, she's got the language barrier, she's got male police officers standing in front of her and she doesn't know that system" (S3).

Furthermore, service providers discussed the benefits from Eastern European women receiving support from a professional who can already speak their language. For instance,

"That has been great because they've actually been doing it [counselling support] online with a Polish counsellor instead of doing it through an interpreter. That's been really good. The counsellors on the programme said they prefer just giving them a Polish counsellor because going through an interpreter is more difficult. First, they have to explain their issues to a stranger, then it gets passed on to a counsellor, I think that's a barrier itself [...] I think it helps that the service is being provided in their own language" (S1)

Sub-Theme 1.3. Impact of Covid-19 on Communication Barriers for Eastern European Women

Service providers considered that it was more difficult to compensate for language differences over the telephone or online. One service provider stated that communication with service-users who had language barriers was more difficult to carry out over the phone during periods of lockdown due to Covid-19 restrictions.

“Covid has been especially hard because we have had to do telephone conversations. I think when you have somebody one to one, you can see how they're interacting, you can see their body language and you can kind of get a bit more feel to everything than just trying to get over that language barrier” (S4).

Another service provider reported that telephone support was limiting for women with language barriers and made it difficult to build supportive professional relationships with these women,

“You want to build that relationship, particularly if there is a language barrier. I think a lot of that is lost on the telephone and you kind of just become one of maybe another three agencies” (S3).

Theme 2. Disparities in Knowledge Between Led-By-And-For and Generic Women's Services

Interviews with service providers also highlighted disparities in knowledge between led-by-and-for women's minority groups organisations and more generic women's organisations. This is presented in three themes below.

Sub-Theme 2.1. Lack of Knowledge on the Issues Faced by Eastern European Women Amongst Generic and Statutory Services

A key theme in interviews with service providers was the lack of knowledge about the distinct issues faced by Eastern European women. One service provider stated that often statutory services do not have knowledge about the issues facing Eastern European women living in the UK, which can lead to non-identification of issues such as certain forms of domestic and violence and a lack of appropriate support,

“We find that actually for many of the women that we work with from Eastern European communities, we observe the same sort of patterns of violence that we would maybe observe in other communities, so for example we see honour-based violence being perpetrated, women being subject to honour-based violence, being subject to forced marriage, but often when we're engaging maybe with statutory services, that identification and that risk is not assessed properly because it's not seen to be a type of abuse that would happen within those communities and they're not given the necessary support that they need” (S2).

Moreover, there was also a disparity highlighted in the knowledge held by generic women's organisations, in terms of the distinct issues faced by Eastern European women, compared to led-by-and-for minority women's organisations. This was

especially prevalent in terms of issues associated with Brexit for Eastern European women.

Furthermore, it was considered that led-by-and-for organisations were able to provide a better and more appropriate and effective support for Eastern European women.

“From our experience as a by-and-for organisation, having someone that looks like you, that speaks like you, that understands your culture, is going to make you be, to feel more comfortable to access and engage in your support, and at [our organisation] we don’t have any Eastern European staff members and I definitely think that if we did, our levels in terms of the communities, the Eastern European communities that we work with, would increase” (S2).

These organisations often acted as a valuable intermediary for women seeking service and/or support, building trusting and supportive relations with women and referring them to appropriate support services.

“I realised that many women actually, at first they would message me over Facebook, they’d be like ‘would you be able to help me with this? I’ve got this kind of problem’, maybe because I’m a trusted person in the community, and they don’t know where to look for support. So, I would kind of direct them, I would refer them” (S1).

4. Discussion

A total of N = 6 Eastern European women and N = 4 staff from three voluntary sector service providers working with Eastern European women, from within Tyne and Wear participated in semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Findings from Part 2 of this research provide substantial support for the findings from the [Part 1 report](#).

4.1. Key Findings

Discussions with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted:

- Eastern European women face frequent intersecting racist and sexist discrimination, sexual harassment, and hate crime, in their employment, educational, and personal and public lives,
- Eastern European women experience challenges in accessing health care and support services, due to language barriers, lack of interpretation and translation services and eligibility concerns,
- Eastern European women face socioeconomic challenges, such a lack of social and family support networks, high levels of poverty and employment precarity
- Eastern European women experiencing discrete challenges in terms of domestic abuse due to the EU Settlement Status Scheme and policies such as ‘no recourse to public funds’, and concerns have increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.2. Discrimination Towards Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted Eastern European women face frequent, intersecting racist and sexist discrimination, and sexual harassment, and victimisation employment, education, and public life. Existing research shows that discrimination towards Eastern European migrants has always existed within the UK (Lumsden, Goode and Black, 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019). However, racist and xenophobic discrimination towards Eastern European migrants in the UK has increased since the 2008 recession and subsequent anti-immigration legislation such as the Immigration Acts (2014; 2016) and initiatives such as Operation Vaken, popularised for controversial ad-vans carrying the message, “In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest” (Home Office UK, 2013; Hattenstone, 2018). In addition, discrimination and hostility towards Eastern European migrants is considered to have been further exacerbated by the Brexit referendum and associated increased anti-immigration sentiment within the UK government, media and general public (Lumsden, Goode and Black, 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Benedi Lahuerta and lusmen, 2021). As this

research focuses on the experiences of Eastern European women, existing research also highlights the intersecting oppressions female migrants living in the UK face due to their sex, immigration status and race/nationality, alongside other aspects of their identity including, age, religion/belief and sexuality (Integration up North, 2015). Moreover, migrant women, living in the UK, are more likely to face discrimination, inequalities, and exploitation than to migrant men (Integration up North, 2015).

Furthermore, findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted that in addition to discrimination in employment and by employers, Eastern European women face precarity in employment opportunities. Employment discrimination and precarity is compounded by caring for children and lack of social and family support networks. Research shows that women migrants, living in the UK, face greater barriers in accessing the labour market (Bloch, 2004), and are more likely to be working in occupations, in which they are exposed to discrimination, abuse, isolation, poor health and safety practices, and potential for unfair dismissal (Integration up North, 2015). Moreover, research has highlighted Eastern European migrants living in the UK face increased discrimination at work, with work-based discrimination linked to increased stress, decreased life satisfaction and increased intention to leave the UK (Rzepnikowska, 2019; Martynowska, Korulczyk and Mamcarz, 2020).

4.3. Hate Crime Towards Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear face frequent racist discrimination and harassment in public, including both verbal physical abuse (hate crime), which is often motivated by anti-immigration sentiment and has increased since the Brexit referendum. Research shows that Eastern European migrants are experiencing increasing rates of racist and xenophobic hate crime (Virdee and McGeever, 2018). In recent years, discourses on migration from Eastern European countries have become increasingly hostile within the UK (Harris, Gawlewicz and Valentine, 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019). Whilst Eastern European migrants already experienced racial and xenophobic hostility prior to the 'Leave' vote, the prevalence and severity of this type of hate crime has increased since the referendum (Benedi Lahuerta and Iusmen, 2021). Existing research shows that Eastern European migrants, living in the UK, face hate crimes, including verbal abuse (Rzepnikowska, 2019; Lumsden, Goode & Black, 2019; Benedi Lahuerta & Ismusen, 2021), harassment (Benedi Lahuerta & Ismusen, 2021) and property damage (Rzepnikowska, 2019; Benedi Lahuerta & Ismusen, 2021).

Moreover, findings from this research also shows that Eastern European women face frequent and distinct intersecting sexist and racist discrimination and sexual harassment in public life, which is often linked to pervasive sexist stereotypes. Eastern European women are frequently targeted for discrimination, harassment, and abuse, in public, due to being women and vulnerable in other ways such as

having children and/or disabilities. Moreover, Eastern European women often do not report harassment, abuse, and hate crime, as it is perceived as a normalised part of their daily lives. Likewise, a recent study by Lumsden, Goode & Black (2019) described that racist hostility towards Eastern European migrants, living in the North of England was routine, normalised and so much an everyday occurrence, that it was often not recognised by victims as a hate crime (Lumsden, Goode & Black, 2019).

4.4. Accessing Health Care and Support Services for Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted Eastern European women, living in Tyne and Wear, face barriers and challenges in accessing health care and support services. This is primarily due to language barriers and a lack of interpretation/ translation services. Moreover, Eastern European women have experienced additional challenges in communicating with services during Covid-19, due to lack of face-to-face support and service provision. These findings reflect those from existing research, which has highlighted language and communication barriers are a key difficulty for Eastern European migrants living in the UK (Sime, 2014; Crowther and Lau, 2019). Existing research with health care professionals has also reported concerns about the lack of effective communication between health care professionals/workers and Eastern European women, which were linked with concerns about a lack of health education and maternal and infant health (Richards *et al.*, 2014).

Findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers also highlighted that Eastern European women lack of knowledge about their rights and eligibility for health care and support services and face issues with identification documents, being refused and/or charged for services and being treated differently by service providers due to their race/nationality. Both Eastern European women and service providers reported concerns about the impact of Brexit and eligibility to access health care and support services and welfare for migrant women. These findings reflect existing research by the NHS, which has also highlighted that vulnerable and/or marginalised migrant women living in the UK, including Roma women, victims/survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence and pregnant women have been routinely refused health care and GP registration due to inability to provide ID, proof of address or immigration status (NHS England, 2018). Furthermore, previous research, which focused on the specific issues faced by Eastern European women, living in the North East of England, in accessing health care services and resources, reported that Eastern European women's health needs, including maternal health and wider determinants of health, were often not being met, due to cultural barriers, discrimination, mobility and disempowerment (Richards *et al.*, 2014).

4.5. Impact of Brexit on Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers showed that Brexit, the EU Settlement Scheme, and policies such as 'no recourse to public funds' have increased Eastern European women's risk of domestic abuse, violence and exploitation. Research has highlighted that since leaving the EU, access to housing and welfare for Eastern European migrants, living in the UK, is dependent on being in work or education (Imkaan, 2020). Therefore, for some Eastern European women migrants their residency is reliant upon their partner, which affects their ability to leave abusive relationships or access the support, services, and resources to help make those decisions (Imkaan, 2020), or to access welfare benefits (Schutes & Walker, 2018). Moreover, research shows that women with irregular immigration status are particularly at risk of discrimination and exclusion from rights and services and are more likely to be in a position of dependency and vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse (Amnesty International and Southall Black Sisters, 2008; Integration up North, 2015).

Moreover, findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted concerns about Eastern European's women's eligibility for health care, support services and welfare. Existing research also highlights post Brexit uncertainties for Eastern European migrants, living in the UK, including concerns about their social rights, entitlements and legal rights, resulting in Eastern European migrants feeling uncertain about their futures in the UK (Duda-Mikulin, 2020). Gaining permanent residency is a lengthy process, requiring documentation, such as payslips, bills and P60s, which women migrants who are homemakers, not in employment or in precarious employment, may have difficulties in obtaining, and thereby be more likely to have difficulties in securing permanent residency (Duda-Mikulin, 2020).

4.6. Impact of Covid-19 Restrictions on Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted the negative impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on Eastern European women. It was reported that Covid-19 restrictions, such as lockdown, had increased Eastern European's women risk of domestic abuse and violence, trapping some women in abusive situation without access to support services. Moreover, findings indicated that Eastern European women were more reluctant to report or seek support for domestic abuse, due to Covid-19 being perceived as a priority for the police and other service providers. Recent research indicates that Covid-19 has widened existing gaps in marginalised women's access to care, particularly for ethnic minority and migrant women living in the UK (Germain and Yong, 2020). Migrant women who already faced difficulties in accessing support services, i.e., disabled and sexually exploited women and women with 'no recourse to public funds' (i.e., usually unable to claim most state welfare/benefits, even if married to a British citizen) have been disproportionately disadvantaged by Covid-19

restrictions (Imkaan, 2020). Moreover, Covid-19 restrictions, including lockdown, have resulted in increased difficulties for migrant women to escape abusive and/or exploitative situations or to access the support services they need to help make this decision (Imkaan, 2020).

4.7. Socioeconomic Challenges for Eastern European Women

Findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers highlighted the socioeconomic challenges faced in Eastern European women. Services providers raised concerns about Eastern European women experiencing high levels of poverty and deprivation. This is due to several factors including limited employment opportunities, resulting in low paid and precarious employment, the European Union Settlement Scheme and policies such as '*no-recourse to public funds*', and the economic consequences of Covid-19. Existing research highlights that many EE migrants are 'under-employed' or 'over-qualified' for their work roles (Khattab & Fox, 2016; Příkladová, Rievajová & Yüceşahin, 2019), and further that this mismatch between academic qualification and employment can disproportionately impact EE women due to their roles in the family (Aziz, 2015; Duda-Mikulín, 2020). Crettaz (2018) found that EU migrants were more likely than UK citizens to experience in-work poverty, although this research did not explore the experiences of migrants from different parts of the EU.

Moreover, findings from focus groups and interviews with Eastern European women and service providers also showed that Eastern European women face high levels of social isolation due to migrating to the UK without family and social support networks. This affects Eastern European women's lives in many ways such as a lack of social and family networks to draw support from during difficult life events, crises, and trauma, lack access to support networks resources, such as informal childcare and transport, and lack support networks and resources to seek support from services when living in abusive/ domestic violence environments. Moreover, this situation has been compounded further by Covid-19 restrictions preventing access to essential social and language support, previously provided by community organisations and support groups.

5. Conclusion and Further Research

Results from this research have highlighted Eastern European women living in the UK face systematic and structural discrimination in all areas of public life due to their race and/or nationality. In addition, Eastern European women also face distinct and intersecting sex-based discrimination, including maternity/pregnancy, alongside discrimination due to other aspects of their identity including age, disability, and sexuality. This research has also highlighted Eastern European women are victims of frequent hate crimes, including verbal and physical abuse, threats and harassment, and damage to property.

Furthermore, this research highlighted Eastern European women face challenges and barriers in accessing health care, support, and other public services, due to language barriers, entitlement to services due to immigration status, residency and proof of ID. In addition, Eastern European women have experienced further uncertainty about their futures in the UK, in terms of access to welfare, health and support services, since the Brexit referendum and continue to face this uncertainty with the UK's departure from the EU.

More recently the Covid-19 restrictions, including lockdown, have further restricted Eastern European women's access to health care, support and other public services, placing marginalised, minority and women vulnerable to abuse and exploitation at increased risk. The precarity of Eastern European women's access to health care, support and public requires further research, in light of both the UK's departure from the EU and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on findings from Parts 1 and 2 of this research, including a survey with Eastern European women living in Tyne and Wear and qualitative interviews and focus groups with Eastern European women and service providers working with them:

- i. Research team to gain funding to undertake further research into Eastern European women's access to health and other support services and identify potential solutions to the issues faced by Eastern European women living the UK.
- ii. Health care, support, and other public service providers to provide more widely information translated in various languages. This is particularly important for local/community-based services, such as domestic abuse, family planning and women only services.
- iii. Educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, and other educational settings to raise standards in terms of monitoring and reporting discrimination and hate crimes towards the Eastern European community and supporting victims of hate crime and discrimination.
- iv. Local authorities and regional/community decision makers to provide funding and clear pathways to support for Eastern European migrants, in areas such as housing, welfare, employment, education and residency.
- v. Public services, including local authorities and the NHS, to establish strong links with local/community service providers that support minoritised groups to coordinate a more effective and efficient response to the needs of women migrants.
- vi. Funding bodies, public bodies, local authorities, and service providers to consider translation and interpretation costs in the procurement of services to avoid exclusion of minority and marginalised groups.
- vii. Health care, support, and other public services to receive training on the eligibility of services for EU citizens including healthcare, support services, housing.
- viii. Non-public bodies procured to provide a public service to meet the same standards as statutory services.

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