

Moving Matters: The Challenges and Solutions to Creating a Life in the UK

JULY 2019



TogetherintheUK is a Community Interest Company which aims to help people who have come to the UK live an inclusive life by sharing insights from those who have made a similar journey.

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About this report

News about migration makes the headlines every week in the UK and represents one of the most important and debated topics in our community. Supporting migrants in the UK is a widely researched area, yet we do not know enough about what migrants themselves need to create their new lives in the UK.

This report reviews the existing, published evidence about the challenges and needs of migrants and adds to the evidence base using insights from interviews, a focus group and views online through social listening.

Our research confirms the challenges experienced by migrants and fills the knowledge gap of how migrants in the UK want to be supported. We analysed insights using a novel, psychology-based approach to ensure our recommendations can be applied in an evidence-based manner that could really make a difference.

This report is structured around three research questions:

1. What challenges do migrants face when moving to the UK?
2. How do migrants currently solve these challenges?
3. What kind of support would migrants like?

We conclude the report with a series of recommendations based on validated frameworks. These recommendations aim to provide insights to a range of people and institutions working with migrants on how migrants want to be helped.

Foreword

TogetherintheUK was formed in 2015, its purpose is to help people find out about living in the UK through sharing really useful information through story telling. Over the last three years, we have been sharing stories from a wide range of people about what it's like to immigrate to the UK and what helps. This research report takes us to a new level – we have looked at the literature on migration, we have listened to what people have said about immigrating to the UK online and we have interviewed people to find out about their experience. We have then synthesized these insights into one coherent whole, telling a story of what it's like to make a new life in the UK.

This is an important piece of work because if we are all to live together well and make the most of the increasing diversity in our population, then we need to understand each other. We need to salute the courage of people who choose to come here and make a new life in another culture. We need to understand what the challenges are and what people's preferences are, so they can be supported effectively.

I know you will enjoy reading this report, particularly the quotes and the insights from the participants in the research. It shines a light on UK society, its quirks - who would have thought that carpets were offensive to some people? And it shows us how people work hard to create their new lives and how they want to know the British a bit better.

Teresa Norman

Chief Executive

TogetherintheUK

Acknowledgements

Our research has only been possible due to our generous and kind participants who were willing to share their stories with us. We would like to thank the migrants who took part in our interviews and focus groups who have trusted us with their stories.

Summary and recommendations

Our research has shown the joys and sorrows of making the difficult transition to create a new life in a new culture and a different country to the one you were born in. It has shown that migrants' experiences are unique: not all migrants felt like they had challenges, and those who have challenges vary in content, context and severity. No same person had the same combination of challenges, and no same person had the same experience, but we could identify some patterns. Challenges evolve over time e.g. the culture shock upon arrival may be different to the potential future struggles of settling in at work. We have learnt that above all else, trust matters. Trust is a firm belief in the reliability of who you turn to when you need support. The reliability of our support networks makes an enormous difference to the quality of our life.

Summary of findings

- The main difficulties are around employment, accommodation and forming social networks. This is often due to language difficulties. However, we recognise that in real life these problems are not easy to separate, and that the same challenge may impact different parts of one's life
- Most migrants experienced negative emotions at one time or another, notably loneliness, sadness and stress (although to different severities)
- Some migrants have information needs, and they are often successfully resolved. Providing information is only one part of a complex problem. In some cases, too much information exists
- It can be difficult to make friends or socialise with English people
- Some specific populations of migrants may struggle more than others. These include the elderly, children, those who are not as fluent in English, those with lower levels of education, those who work during unsociable hours, those with disabilities, and vulnerable migrants (e.g. refugees and asylum seekers)
- Migrants used specific sources of help for specific challenges. Everyone relied on social networks for help. Far fewer relied on the internet, even fewer relied on local services

- Voluntary and local associations are critical in supporting migrants. There are many examples of good practice
- Migrants had universal preference for trusted, face-to-face support, often from friends and family who have been in a similar situation. Trust was the most important factor

Recommendations

- We need to tailor the content and channel of support to the individual and reduce 'overwhelming' volumes of information, and make an effort to overcome language barriers
- We need to grow and build local, peer support networks and communities to address loneliness and overcome cultural and language barriers as migrants prefer asking friends and family for help
- We need to provide better and timely emotional support to help migrants cope
- We need to support migrants into better employment opportunities and address underlying causes - language and cultural barriers. This is likely to provide social networks and promote integration
- We need to provide additional support to understand and help migrants with additional needs (e.g. vulnerable migrants, the elderly, children or those with complex needs)
- We need to collaborate with and support existing charities and organisations, learn from each other, and share best practice
- We need to empower migrants by listening to their preferences for support. We can do this by co-producing research and support systems alongside migrants. By doing what is right and not what is easy, we can put migrants at the heart of our work

Background

Introduction

Our population is growing in number and diversity. Between the years of 2001 and 2015, the population of the UK grew by 4.1 million. More than half of this growth was due to immigration^{1,2}. During this period, the number of people who identify as a minority ethnic increased by 4.7 million, and this excludes many people who are from an ethnic ancestry².

The reasons for migration are varied, individual and complex– in many cases, there can be multiple motives for moving to the UK^{3,4}. These may include perceptions of safety, good human rights, employment opportunities⁵ or simply the desire to seek new adventures, friends or cultures^{4,6}.

Despite the motivation and purpose, migrants may face challenges when settling into the UK and rely on others for support. In this report, we look to understand what these challenges are, what support systems are used, and the support that migrants value.

Research need

Everyone benefits when migrants feel settled in a community. When people from other countries integrate into our communities, it can alleviate some of the negative outcomes associated with migration and encourage positive effects. We know that integration can help some of the following challenges migrants face:

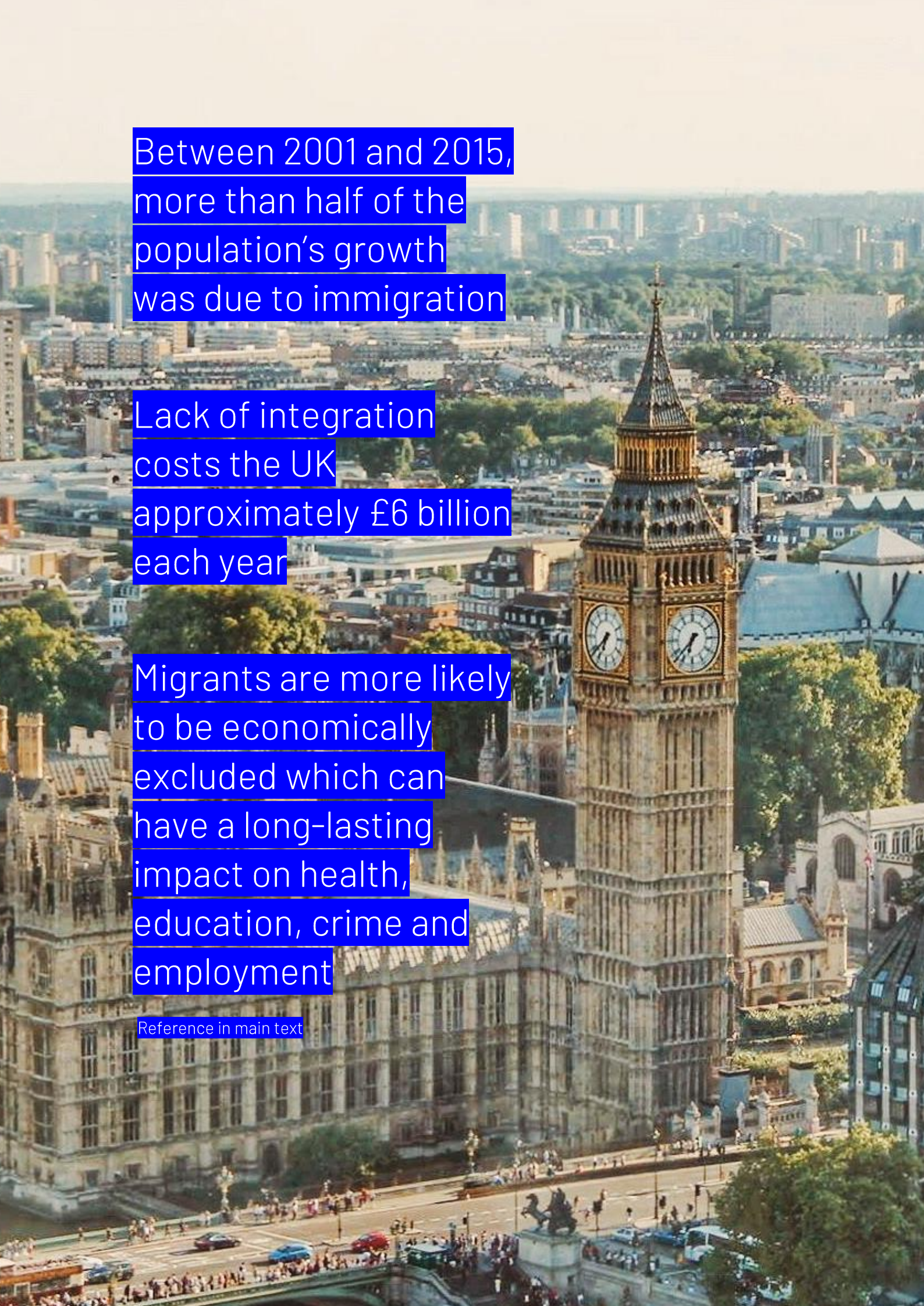
- Migrants are more likely to be economically excluded which can have a long-lasting impact in different areas of life³
- Children from economically excluded families are associated with poorer school performance, unemployment, criminality and worse health³
- 41% to 51% of Black, Pakistani, Chinese and Bangladeshi households have a relatively low income compared with 19% of White households^{3,7}

- People from Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups are three times more likely than white British people to be unemployed. For young Black men aged 16-24, over one in three are unemployed³

However, the impact of migration goes beyond migrants themselves, and affects all of us in the local and wider community. The Casey review (2016) summarises that:

- Lack of integration costs the UK approximately £6 billion each year, specifically through long-term unemployment (£1.5 billion), recruitment and career progression (£0.7 billion)(Social Integration Commission, 2014 via Casey, 2016)
- Lack of integration has a large financial impact on health and wellbeing costs. Suicide related costs are £1.7 billion, cardiovascular diseases costs £1.2 billion and health and social care among the isolated £0.7 billion (Social Integration Commission, 2014 via Casey, 2016)
- Communities that have many interactions with people of different backgrounds have reduced anxiety and prejudice, better employment, trust and social mobility³

Previous literature focusing on specific ethnicity groups and local communities have found a range of challenges migrants face when settling into the UK including but not limited to: problems relating to accommodation, employment, language, culture and education. We build on a recent review on the challenges and information needs of migrants worldwide, but focus on migrants moving to the UK and use a behavioural science approach (the 2018 review 'Immigrants' information experiences: an informed social inclusion framework' did not include many UK-based studies)⁹. By understanding challenges and discussing solutions led by the migrant voice, we can unlock the benefits of integration for migrants and natives through building more effective support and influencing policy.

An aerial photograph of London, England, featuring the prominent Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) and the Houses of Parliament in the foreground. The city's dense urban landscape, including various buildings and green spaces, extends into the background under a clear sky.

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education, crime and
employment

Reference in main text

Aims of research

Our research aims to understand the challenges and support systems used by migrants when moving to the UK. By understanding the needs, experiences and preferences of migrants, we believe we can develop better ways to help migrants and natives. We aimed to answer three key questions:

- What challenges do migrants face?
- How do migrants solve these problems and why?
- What support do migrants value and prefer?

Conceptual frameworks

We used various frameworks to understand, analyse and apply migrant perceptions, beliefs and preferences. Although there are many existing qualitative studies that identify challenges experienced by migrants, we take a novel approach by using psychology-based frameworks to emphasise the context that underpins the challenges of migrants.

Conceptual framework for adjusting

The conceptual framework for adjusting helps us to understand the link between stress caused by challenges and how migrants cope over time¹⁰. Research that investigates coping strategies and how they affect each other can be used to improve and develop support effective programmes for migrants.

How we cope with challenges is personal: the same challenge may get different reactions from two different people. When someone faces a stressor/challenge, they judge (appraise) the situation to assess the level of distress or threat, and whether the individual thinks they can handle the stress. There are then different ways an individual could cope or change to manage the situation: they may attempt to alter the situation to solve a problem, change their feelings or emotions, or re-assess the situation altogether. This process means that an individual can adapt to the new environment.

When designing our research, we specifically asked broad questions to consider all three types of coping (emotional, problem-solving and appraising) to understand

what type of solution might be most appropriate in certain situations. This framework also highlights the importance of providing tailored support to migrants, and that there is no 'one size fits all' solution.

Conceptual frameworks for applying insights

Analysing insights allows us to investigate the beliefs, motivations and behaviours (information seeking) of migrants. We used a combination of three behavioural science frameworks when considering the ideal support for migrants and writing recommendations for this report:

- EAST (Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely)¹¹
- MINDSPACE (Messenger, Incentives, Norms, Defaults, Salience, Priming, Affect, Commitment and Ego)¹²
- COM-B (Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation)¹³

This novel approach emphasised the need and significance of understanding migrants' context when understanding challenges and developing better solutions. Relying on these frameworks will allow us to implement evidence-based practice way, increase our chance of effectively supporting migrants' lives and reduce our chance of reverting to poorer systems of support.

Methodology

Our research was conducted in distinct, consecutive phases:

1. Literature review
2. Social listening
3. Focus group
4. Interviews

Literature review and social listening

The first phase was to conduct a literature review as part of a gap analysis. We looked at policy and published academic papers reporting on migrants' experiences and challenges in the UK. Our literature review focused our research strategy going forward.

We decided to focus on adult migrants who were in employment. We excluded children (defined as under 18 years of age) and vulnerable migrants (e.g. refugees, asylum seekers) because we found much of the recent research focuses on these populations, and recognise that these populations may have additional or specific needs^{5,6,9,14-18}. We did not exclude elderly migrants but recognise that this demographic may also have specific preferences and needs¹⁹. We did not exclude participants based on what country they moved from, or where they moved to within the UK. We did not focus on migrants who had moved within specific dates or who had been in the UK for a specific amount of time as we wanted to explore whether challenges and solutions to these challenges related to the time of immigration.

Following the literature review, we decided to conduct social listening to find conversations occurring in the digital space. Potential sources were identified on the web.

Focus group

We recruited 7 people to attend a focus group in London in December 2018. The focus group asked people to discuss and prioritise their challenges and solutions when moving to the UK and brainstorm potential solutions. Participants were

recruited through a range of methods including social media, charities based in the community, through international university groups and through word of mouth (snowballing recruitment). The focus group primarily focused on younger migrants who moved here to study. The 90-minute focus group was tape recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. The focus group was conducted in English (although translators were offered).

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English in December 2018 after the focus group. Interviewer (KA) encouraged individuals to share their experiences including specific challenges faced and how they solved these challenges. We also asked individuals what their ideal support system would be, using various insights frameworks as a scaffold for discussion (see appendix for discussion guide).

Recruitment method for interviews included snowballing, social media and printed flyers. All participants were sent an information sheet before the interview, and consent was obtained for all participants.

10 participants were recruited and interviewed over the telephone in December 2018. All interviews were recorded and manually transcribed, with all identifiable data removed. Although telephone interviews may not capture facial expressions and gestures that can be important cues, this method gave us the flexibility to interview participants at a range of times, regardless of location. The mean length of the interview was 26 minutes (range 17 – 38). Interviews were conducted in English.

Analysis

Two researchers (KA, TV) developed the coding framework for all qualitative analysis using Excel. The coding framework was based on previous analyses found in the literature review and insight frameworks mentioned in the Background section of this report. Qualitative data was thematically analysed. Given the weaknesses of social listening methodology, we focused primarily on the primary data collected, weighting this more than the data from social listening. The social listening data was then used to complement this.

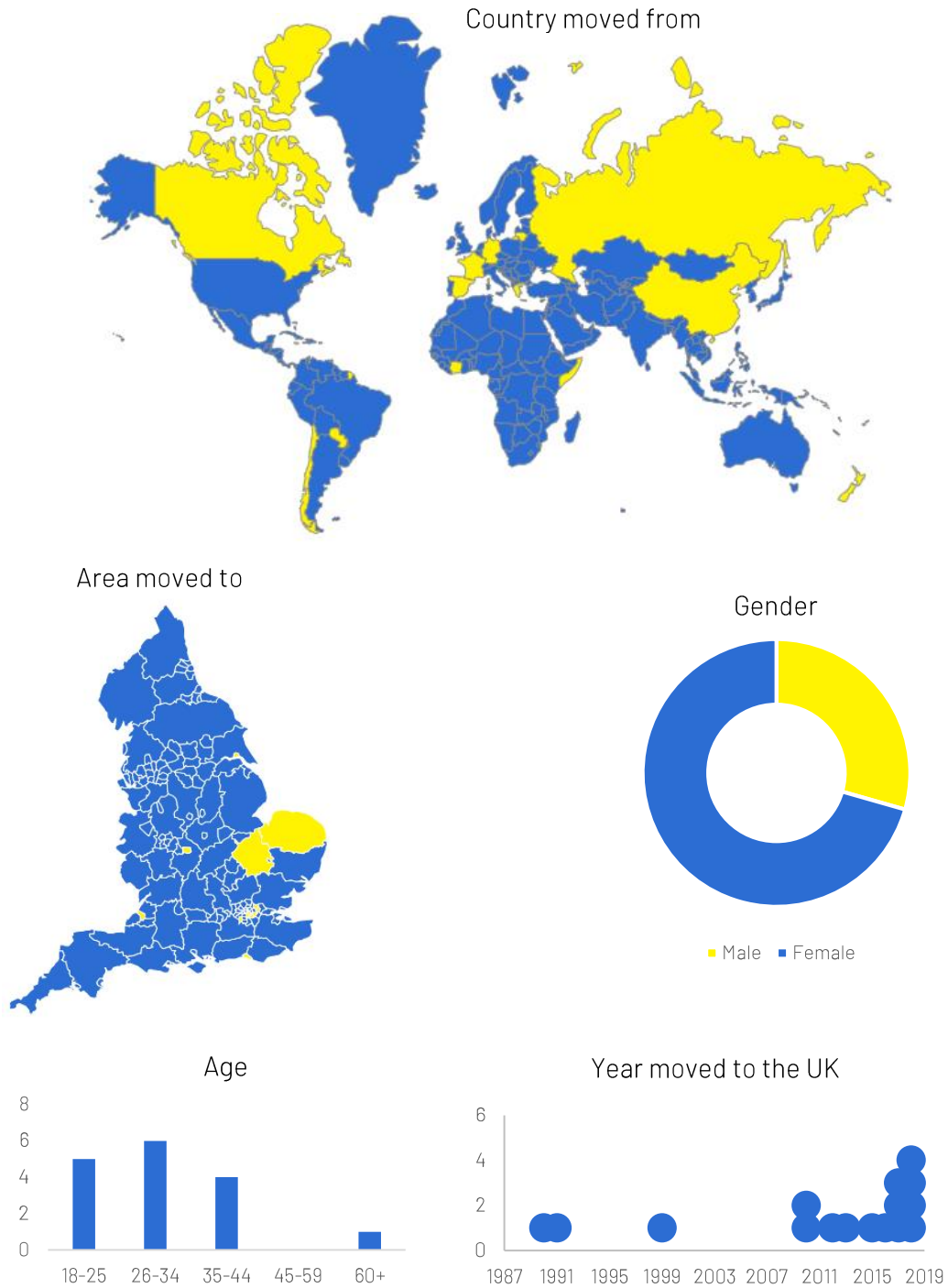
Limitations

Regarding the primary qualitative research, we recognise there are limitations that may prevent our research from being generalizable, notably our small sample size. Although we used a variety of recruitment methods for our focus group and interviews, the majority of our participants were recruited by word of mouth which lends itself to bias as certain 'types' of people may be recommended, especially given our limited sample size. The majority of our participants were students, came here to study, or are now professionals, which may have meant they were more familiar with the research process than the general migrant population – we found that migrants with lower skilled jobs were more challenging to recruit, but recognise this makes up a large proportion of migrants. All participants were offered translators so the research could be conducted in their native language, but all participants opted for an English interview. This means that some linguistic 'nuances' may have been missed. As we did not target a specific ethnic minority, we were not able to act as co-ethnic researchers, so may not have the benefits associated with being "insiders." This includes having 'insider knowledge' to make sense of someone's local context, communicating in the native language and recruitment ^{20,21}, although the impact of the benefits have been debated in previous published literature and may have been achieved through researchers of ethnic minorities ²². Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study means that we are unable to truly assess how challenges, preferences and needs change over time.

Results

Participants/demographics

Ten participants were interviewed (9 female, 1 male), 7 participants took part in our focus group (3 female, 4 male). See appendix for full break down of participant details.



Results: challenges

All of our participants faced at least one challenge however, the severity, frequency and type of challenge varied for each individual. Every participant had their own unique obstacles, combinations of challenges and solutions, each in their own contexts which led to different coping mechanisms.

As well as the context of the new environment, the context of where migrants are from matters. We found that someone's conceptual scheme can influence what challenges they face, to what intensity, and how they resolve the problem – for example, someone who grew up in Singapore would have a different conceptual schema from someone who grew up in Germany, so they may perceive new environments and potential challenges differently.

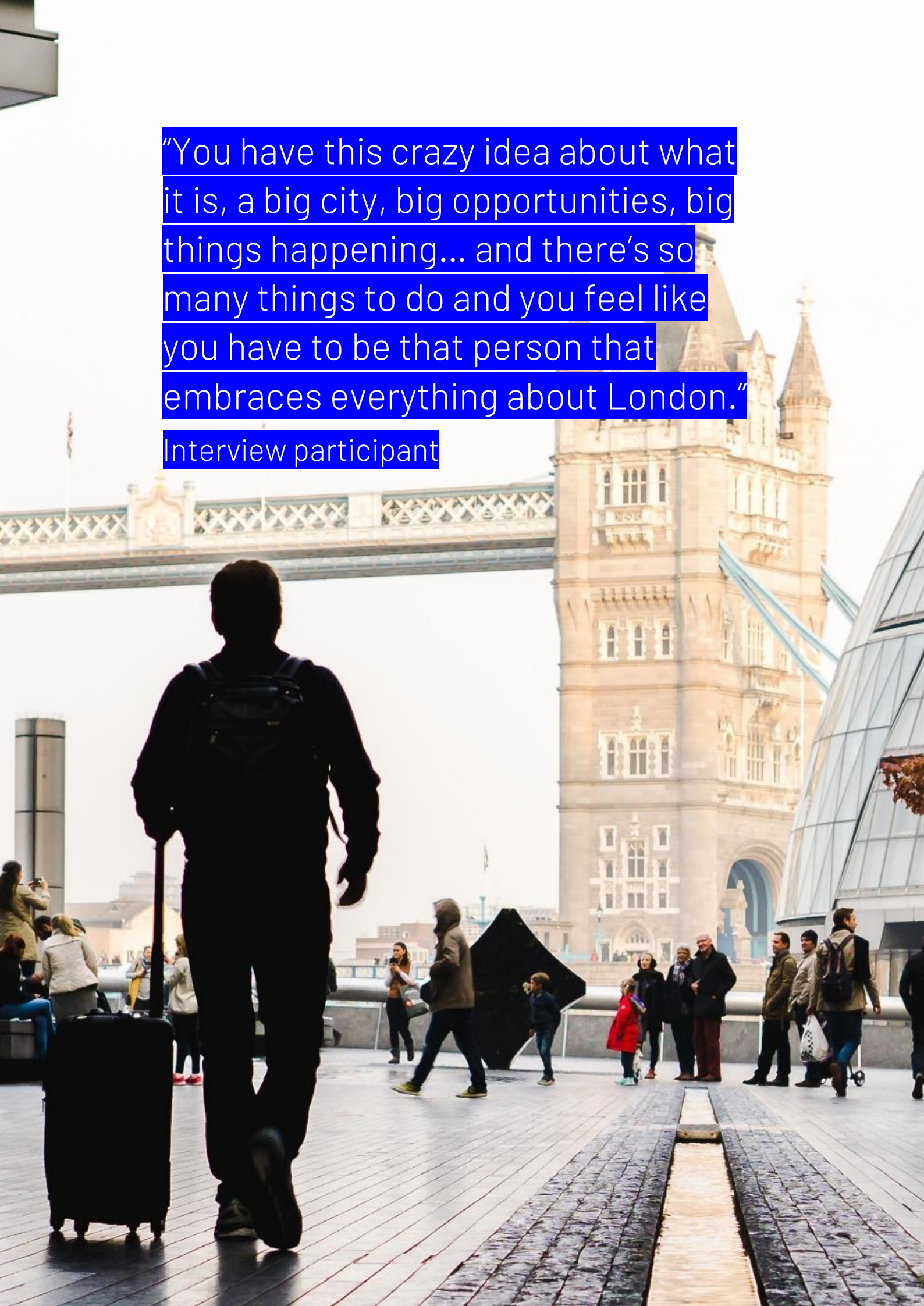
Similarly, the context of where someone moves to affects the support available, the challenges they face, and the experience they have. By interviewing participants who moved to different locations across the UK, we discovered that London had the perception of being much scarier than other cities because of its size, density and level of activity, although migrants faced challenges regardless of where they moved:

“Obviously Brighton is a lot smaller, everything is in walking distance, your house, your friends, the university, everything. So yeah, moving to London was a little bit scarier.” Interview participant

“I think that it just feels intimidating when you first come here you're like, “Oh, London!” And then you have this crazy idea about what it is, you know like a big city, big opportunities, big things happening, you know, and it's expensive and there's so many things to do and you feel like you have to be that person that embraces everything about London and you need to experience everything and know everything and I don't know, like, grab everything that London offers straight away and ride with it.” Interview participant

"You have this crazy idea about what it is, a big city, big opportunities, big things happening... and there's so many things to do and you feel like you have to be that person that embraces everything about London."

Interview participant



In fact, in some cases, migrants felt more settled in London. For example, because of a set routine (possibly because of employment), or because it was easier to find social support in London, or because it was perceived as being more multicultural.

Another commonly identified barrier is poor or low English skills identified in our interviews and in the literature. In our social listening, we also found that some struggled with accessing interpreters, and relied on family members (often children) for help. Those with poorer language skills have additional challenges that can affect all aspects of a newcomer's life, and can also be a barrier to accessing support:

"The issue with that was the fact that I couldn't speak English at all, and my first language is French. So I had to try and find a college to go to and eventually from there forge my English, make it better. So it would be a lot easier to find a job around London. And at first, I mean, again, the language barrier was the big issue." Interview participant

One participant from our focus group said he "felt overwhelmed" and didn't feel comfortable to respond or interact with other people and wasn't able to share his thoughts or feelings.

On top of knowledge of the language, there are some context-specific, subtle nuances and interpretations of language that some migrants struggled to understand. For example, some migrants found it difficult to recognise sarcasm:

"One main difference is sarcasm, which I found funny at first because I wouldn't catch on. I'd have to ask "are you being sarcastic, or not?" and it took about four months before I was able to be cheeky in my comebacks." Social listening

Or found that native speakers tended to make some things appear more pleasant than it really is ('sugar coating'):

"They tend to... They tend to tell you about all the good things." Interview participant

Colloquialisms and slang were also challenging:

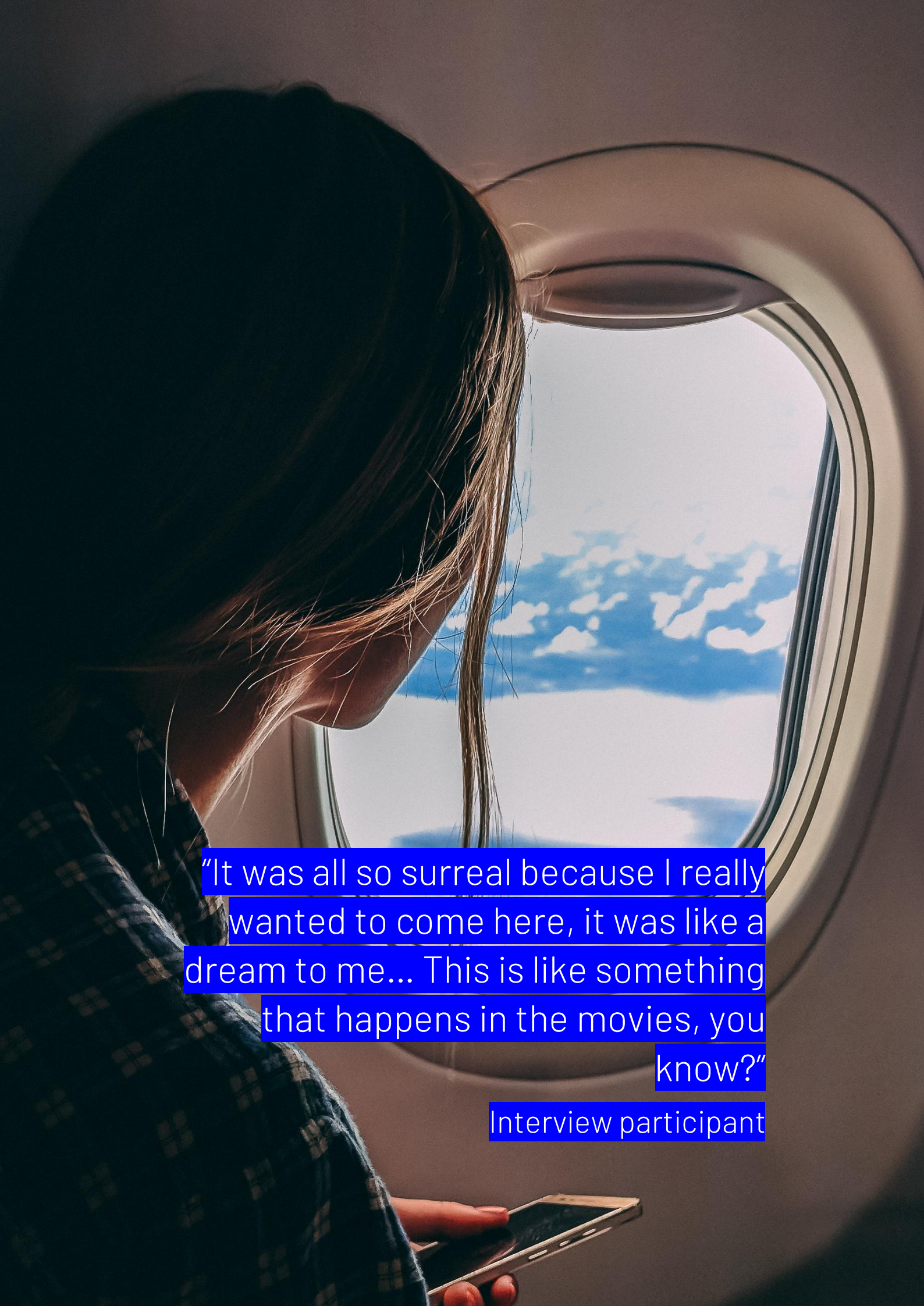
"Mint, cheeky, gutted, knackered, skint, steaming, bugger off... I remember when I went into one of my first restaurants in the UK and the toilets said 'Lads & Lasses' on them without any pictures, explanations or any other clues that would help me decide if I go left or right." Social listening

Even when participants spoke fluent English, they had worries about the impact of their accent and how it would be perceived:

"I was very anxious about not understanding what people were saying, and I experienced this only with British people, because when you speak with foreigners they also have the same fears and they speak like, "how to say?" They don't judge you from how you speak. And when you speak with native speakers in English, you feel like, "Oh my god, they will see, or hear, these big mistakes in pronunciation." So, this was really difficult. Even now, still sometimes with new people I feel a bit embarrassed like, of the way how I speak. And like, when I ask, "Oh, can you please repeat?" and the person repeats, and I still don't understand." Interview participant

Regardless of the different causes of challenges, we found the following themes across our interviews:

Theme	Subtheme
Health and wellbeing	Social isolation
	Mental health
	Accessing health services
Community	Native
	Migrants
Accommodation	Accessing accommodation
	Living standards
Employment	No subthemes
Travel	No subthemes
Education and parenting	No subthemes
Money and income	No subthemes
Other	No subthemes

A woman with long dark hair is seen from the side, looking out of an airplane window. She is holding a smartphone in her hand. The view through the window shows a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The interior of the airplane is visible, including the window frame and the ceiling.

"It was all so surreal because I really wanted to come here, it was like a dream to me... This is like something that happens in the movies, you know?"

Interview participant

We also noted that not all participants had a negative experience – in fact, there were many stories of excitement, joy and anticipation.

Emotion	Quote
Stress	<i>"It was definitely a stressful thing, like the situation itself."</i> Interview
Fear	<i>"People are scared."</i> Focus group
Anticipation	<i>"it was all so surreal because I really wanted to come here, it was like a dream to me, but at the same time it was so surreal. This is like something that happens in the movies, you know?"</i> Interview
Surprise	<i>"I was literally like what is going on?"</i> Interview
Happy	<i>"I found London incredibly welcoming and I'm having a great time"</i> Interview <i>"It was a new challenge. New, exciting things happening, that was all really good."</i> Interview
Sadness	<i>"I felt like no one understood what I was going through having moved to a foreign country."</i> Interview
Guilt	<i>"I felt I was giving people a lot of hard work"</i> Social listening
Anger	<i>"Clearly I was inconveniencing everyone around me. I was both outraged and embarrassed"</i> Social listening

We found that migrant's emotions were varied over time, but that even those who had visited the UK before migrating experienced challenges. This emphasises the emotional challenges migrants can face even if they have prior information and experience – being informed about life in the UK may not make it emotionally easier, and information alone is not sufficient to provide emotional support.

Health and wellbeing

Everyone struggles with health and wellbeing at some stage of life, whether one moves to another country or not. We approached the topic from a holistic view, health is multi-dimensional. Migrants are noted to be more vulnerable to health difficulties and may have additional barriers accessing health care systems. In our interviews and focus groups, nearly all participants noted challenges around health.

Mental health

Mental health problems are the biggest health burden worldwide ²³ and when the wider effect is accounted for, the total cost to the UK every year is £77 billion ²⁴. Mental health difficulties can affect any of us, regardless of whether someone is in a new environment or now. Research has found that migrants may be particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges, especially vulnerable migrants including asylum seekers and refugees ²⁵.

Our research has found that the stressors and challenges of moving to a new environment can be either a cause or a catalyst for mental health challenges. The severity or burden of the problem can vary between individuals:

"I had moments where I literally felt so suicidal... I didn't realise how susceptible I was to these mental health challenges until the first few months or even the first year I came here. That was actually one of the first times I realised that you know what, I am prone to these challenges and these thoughts and everything." Interview participant

"I think it was January last year maybe, it was awful, there was like, no sun, it was really hard at work and everything was just not so good, and I think I've never been so sad in my life." Interview participant

"I think it was January last year maybe, it was awful, there was like, no sun, it was really hard at work and everything was just not so good, and I think I've never been so sad in my life."

Interview participant



Furthermore, we believe this could be a 'hidden' problem as some people do not outwardly express their emotions:

"I was always trying to find a way to hide my emotions. I didn't want to put it out there. Even when I went through certain things, I wouldn't really put it out there." Interview participant

Our findings align with the literature that lists immigrants, those in poverty and the unemployed as particularly at-risk groups. It is worth noting that immigrants have a higher rate of unemployment and low income than the general population. We are aware that some migrants may have preconceived perceptions about mental health, or an additional stigma may be associated with mental health, which could make supporting migrants more challenging⁵.

We recognise that the cause and triggers of mental health difficulties are different for everyone, and different types of support are needed to help individuals. However, the impact of poor mental health is something that can be addressed by policy makers, community organisations and those in the voluntary sector.

Social wellbeing

In recent years there has been a greater recognition of the impact of loneliness in the population (see Hawkley and Capitanio, 2015 for review). Individuals suffering from loneliness have poorer health outcomes including depression, fatigue, worse immune systems, worse sleep and an increased use of A&E. The cost to the UK is £32 billion every year (The Eden Project Initiative). £5.2 billion is due to the use of health services, and £12 billion due to disconnected communities and a loss of productivity.

Nearly all of our participants mentioned loneliness as a challenge when moving to the UK, even if they knew some people before arriving here:

"When you're moving to a new place, I think it can be tricky to get involved in social activities or meet new people." Interview participant

"Because I had just moved and felt alone as well, even though I had family here." Interview participant

The context of loneliness matters, but loneliness was common regardless of where in the UK someone moved to. Firstly, the extent of loneliness often depended on where someone came from. What sort of culture they were used to changed their perception of native people:

"You sometimes feel really lonely. Because being Latin Americans, we are like, we like to hug and touch each other, you know, it's different. British are so... distant. You know? For me, they are cold."
Focus group participant


Secondly, moving into a university or student accommodation for some people was less isolating than moving to London to work, although for others, employment created a new social network.

"I found it easier to fit in at uni compared to moving to London, even if moving to London was more isolating. I found it really lonely at work." Interview participant

"I felt like no one understood what I was going through just having moved to a foreign country, doing a very intense masters and having all of these challenges. I felt really alone." Interview participant

There were many potential barriers that prevented people from making friends here including language difficulties. This can prevent people from expressing themselves and building relationships with people in the community:

"I would say [the biggest challenge is], not being able to express myself the way I wanted to. Let's say I'm having a chat with someone, or I'm trying to explain something, and at the time it was kind of hard, because I knew what I wanted to say but I didn't know how to put it out there, because the issue with translating from French straight away is that the base of the language is very different, so if I wanted to translate what I wanted to say into English, it wouldn't make any sense. So, in some way that would keep myself from saying what I wanted to say, and also how I felt



"I felt like no one understood what I was going through just having moved to a foreign country... I felt really alone."

Interview participant

about certain things. So, it was difficult in life, putting it out there, and if I hadn't thought of it straight away, I would literally walk away and, by myself, I guess. That was one of the toughest challenges I had to go through, I guess." Interview participant

Even when someone had connections, some people found it difficult to schedule time to meet due to busy diaries:

"Like you have to plan to meet your friends two weeks in advance because this, that, or the other and this time everybody has a lot more work and at that point some people are doing Master's, some people are working." Interview participant

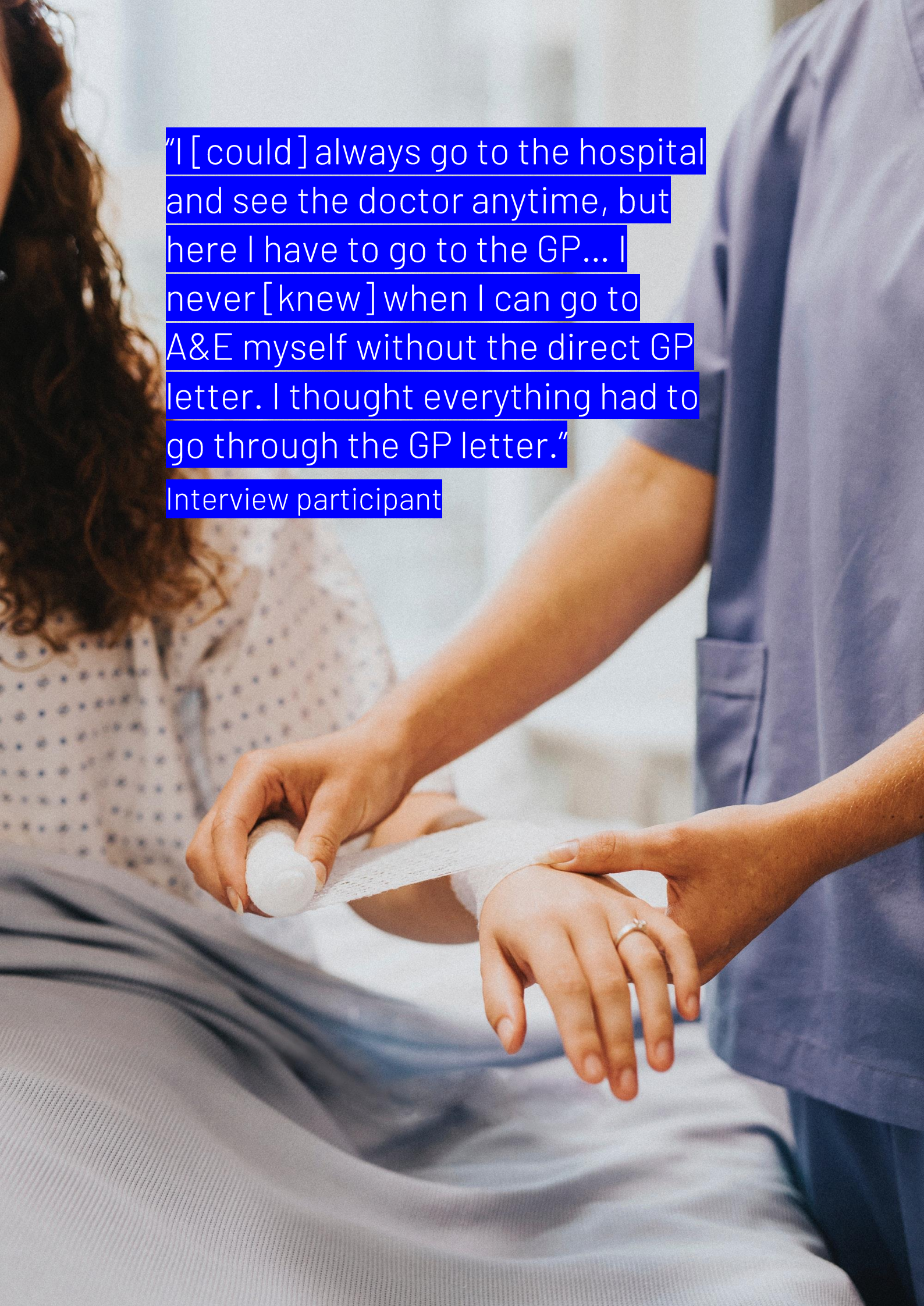
Although our sample size is small, loneliness has a recognised and widespread problem in the migrant community⁵. We recognise that when tackling loneliness and social isolation, understanding local context and an individual's situation is key to addressing specific barriers.

Accessing health services

Even to the native population in the UK, understanding and accessing health care systems can be challenging. Barriers to accessing healthcare can be greater in migrants who do not have the familiarity with national health services, or the language skills to find out. We found that migrants from countries with very different healthcare systems may not understand how to register or access services:

"It's challenging because I'd have to know what the system is like here... to know what the health provision is like, and the dentist. All that is new to me." Interview participant

*"The medical service, it's very confusing for me. You have to sign up with like one, but you have this list of online of places, so you can go where ever you want, but you have to click on every one to check times, how many doctors there are, opening hours and all that other stuff. I think it's a bit confusing because every page is different."
Focus group*



"I [could] always go to the hospital and see the doctor anytime, but here I have to go to the GP... I never [knew] when I can go to A&E myself without the direct GP letter. I thought everything had to go through the GP letter."

Interview participant

Some individuals also found it difficult to know when it was appropriate to rely on GP referrals or access A&E:

"In [my country of origin], I can always go to the hospital as an outpatient and see the doctor anytime, but here I have to go to the GP... We don't have GPs... I never [knew] when I can go to A&E myself without the direct GP letter. I thought everything had to go through the GP letter." Interview participant

Some migrants we interviewed commented that registering with a GP was one of their priorities when they came here, and that this was the first thing they recommended to other newcomers to the country. Many of these participants recognised this as part of their "strategy" when moving, and many 'experienced' movers noted this. However, in 2007, Spencer *et al.*, 2007 found that only 33% of migrants knew how to register with a GP, so it possible there is still a need to address this information gap.

Community

Native

How migrants interact with and feel about their local, native community is important to how welcome someone feels, and what kind of support they would be able to access.

In general, the literature suggests that migrants have a desire to meet native people and to socialise with them¹⁹ but do not feel welcome or able to. There can be many barriers why a migrant may find it challenging to integrate into their local community. For example, poor English language ability may prevent someone from feeling comfortable to express themselves or ask for help:

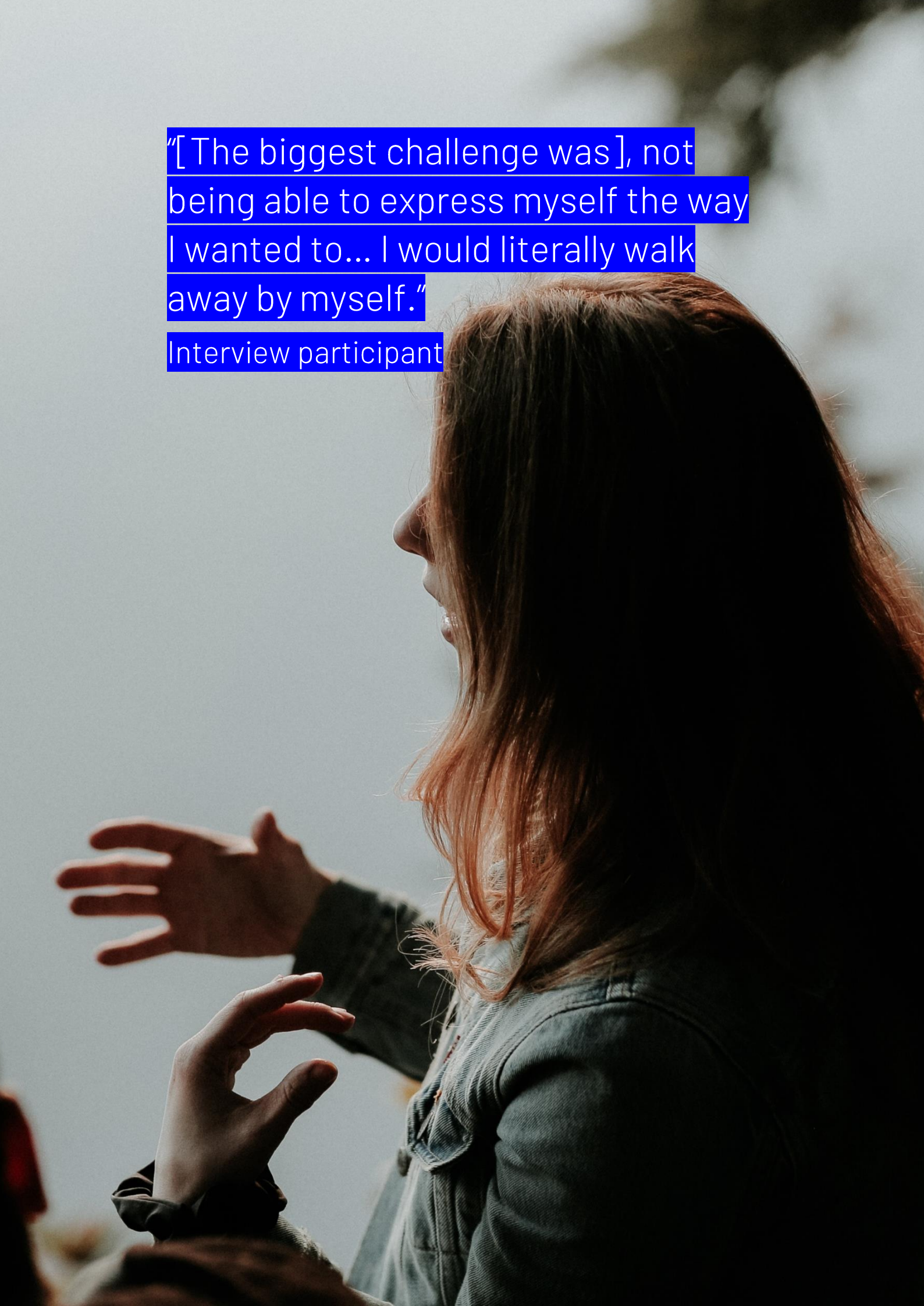
"[The biggest challenge] I would say, not being able to express myself the way I wanted to. So, let's say I'm having a chat with someone, or I'm trying to explain something, and at the time it was kind of hard, because I knew what I wanted to say but I didn't know how to put it out there, because the issue with translating from French straight away is that the base of the language is very different, so if I wanted to translate what I wanted to say into English, it wouldn't make any sense. So, in some way that would keep myself from saying what I wanted to say, and also how I felt about certain things. So, it was difficult in life, putting it out there, and if I hadn't thought of it straight away, I would literally walk away and, by myself, I guess. That was one of the toughest challenges I had to go through, I guess." Interview participant

As well as a lack of English vocabulary, the phrasing of English can also be of concern to migrants. From the social listening, we identified concerns over how native English speakers would perceive certain phrasing or translations from another language:

"I come across as rude sometimes... I still phrase things the German way sometimes. I am straightforward and don't really know how to sugar-coat things in English. I have an obvious language barrier.

"[The biggest challenge was], not being able to express myself the way I wanted to... I would literally walk away by myself."

Interview participant



Which makes people think I'm stupid on some occasions." Social listening

We spoke to migrants from across the world, but the general perception was that native British people were not very open to socialising with migrants (although we found that this did depend on people's personal schema) and were perceived as unhelpful and rude. Nearly all migrants we spoke to mentioned this as a challenge, also supported by findings in our social listening:

"Integrating into the community, I found that really hard, not with international students or international people in general, but the British community in general." Interview participant

"It took my time to realise it takes time for them to open and to be friendly. As a Latin person, we are overly friendly, I guess, sometimes. So I actually felt that distance. In part was good, but in part I felt a bit lonely sometimes." Focus group participant

"That the people here are kind of... There's a personal space here that you cannot get too near? They are all very reserved... And very... cold, not warm people." Interview participant

For some people, particularly those from South America, Asia and Spain, their conceptual schema was different which had an isolating effect on them:

"Another thing that [another participant] mentioned is the fact that you sometimes feel really lonely. Because being Latin Americans, we are like, we like to hug and touch each other, you know, it's different. British are so... distant. You know? For me, they are cold (laughs)." Interview participant

Many interviewees mentioned experiences of prejudice against either themselves or friends which could also prevent someone from asking for help. Some migrants we spoke to also felt like where they came from had different connotations, so native people may have treated them differently:

"I know I'm Greek and not German, but if you know, you're German,

there are different connotations with it, and if you're Greek there are other connotations with it, I suppose, I don't know. So yeah, the identity crisis doesn't really leave you, you do feel a bit like, "Ah, I am 'the other' here." Interview participant

One participant acknowledged that ignorance towards other cultures was the root of the problem, rather than intentionally causing offence:

"There were things I would consider racist or rude, but they were just ignorant. I had to come to the understanding that they were not malicious, just ignorant. There was someone in my flat who once sat down crossed legged and said it was the "Japanese way" which is sort of offensive – stereotyping Japanese... We had a lecturer who asked what does it mean to be British, and someone proudly talked about imperialism. It really shocked me – how the west or certain British people perceive colonialism." Interview participant

"A lettings agency asked me to provide a British guarantor, a GP's secretary told me flatly "we do not take Romanian patients" and a bank clerk said to me: "we don't accept Romanian customers "
Social listening

Overall, we found that migrants were less likely to spend time with the native population. In one study, migrants spent relatively limited time with British people: during the first six months in Britain, half spent no leisure time with British people, falling to a third after six months. After two years, one in four still spent no social time with British people, less than one in five spending most of their time with them²⁸. In our social listening and in the literature, some migrants found certain 'British pastimes' (most notably drinking at the pub) to be a barrier²⁹.

The Spencer study was in migrants with poor working conditions (often working unsocial hours), which emphasises the importance of employment when integrating into the community. Integration through work opens doors to improving language skills, practical and emotional support, and more time with the community. Spencer noted that poor English ability may be a cause and a result of this lack of contact, and that often the limited contact with British people was not from choice.

Migrant

From the literature, we found that how newcomers perceive communities from the same country as them varied depending on the individual and often the area they are from and move to. Some studies have alluded to some migrants feel a sense of shared history or culture which can draw them together^{19,28}, whereas others did not identify with their experience. Some individuals felt like fellow migrants would provide a community of common understanding and shared experiences:

“You have a good time and you’re embracing it but you don’t really have that sense of community that you would if you were surrounded by people that come from the same place as you.”

Interview participant

Like Sordyl and Spencer, we found that some found it easier to socialise with other migrants in general, compared to people native to the UK, regardless of whether the community was from their own country. We also found that specific populations or cultures were perceived as more approachable than others.

“Integrating into the community, I found that really hard, not with international students or international people in general, but the British community.” Interview participant

“If I needed anything I knew that I have friends who can support me and it’s like that because everybody was a foreigner in my group, everybody was staying in the same boat, so we understood each other well and it was really supportive, like being in a family, and we became close very fast for this reason.” Interview participant

In the literature and social listening, there are reports of negative attitudes towards other migrant communities. This can be for a multitude of reasons, including historical reasons, a perception of unfair competition for jobs, stereotyping, among other reasons^{19,28}.

Accommodation

The physical space where someone lives is critical to someone's emotional, social and physical wellbeing, and can influence employment opportunities. Because of the central part it plays in our lives, it is important to economic migrants of all ages³⁰.

Accessing housing

For economic migrants, finding housing was universally recognised to be one of the biggest challenges. A lack of contacts was notably one of the most difficult aspects, as well as the cost of living and securing a guarantor:

"I had an issue from the council... I couldn't pay [rent] on time and so on, so they seized my property, so I had to move." Interview participant

"You find a lot of places but they're really expensive, or don't have the feeling you could live there." Focus group participant

This was a particular problem for London, likely due to the high demand for properties, high rent and high cost of living. This trend may be similar in other urban areas in the UK (notable as the majority of migrants move to urban rather than rural areas).

"London is very spread out and it's very expensive to live close the places you need to go. I think that's the worst thing – the cost of living... you can get cheap, nice or safe, but you can only get two of them." Social listening

For many students, universities or educational institutions provide student housing, which can be a source of friendship and support. However, when accommodation was not arranged by the university, we found it was often pre-arranged before UK arrival through friends, family, or contacts from their home country, similar to case studies in³¹.

Housing quality and living standards

On the whole, we found that while some migrants were unhappy with their housing condition, the majority were satisfied with the quality of living. This is akin to Spencer who found two-thirds of migrants in his study considered their living conditions to be good, and a further 26 per cent said it was at least adequate. Only 6 per cent said their conditions were poor²⁸.

In our research, an individual's satisfaction with their housing related closely to what housing they were previously use to in their country of origin and their income relative to their rent:

"With housing, I guess the lifestyle I had in New Zealand was upper middle class. So I never had to worry about not having a flat. Here, because London is very expensive, it's making adjustments, like, OK, what are the luxuries I can't go without? I need my own bathroom, or I want a house, or I want to be with people." Focus group participant

This was a particular challenge in London, particularly former professionals who were now students in London:

"Housing is a big issue, in my case it was a bit difficult as well because I was a professional back I Chile, I was working. I used to live in my own flat, by myself, I never shared with anyone else in my life. Here I have a limited budget, that means I need to make some adjustments. I realised I needed to share a flat with other people, especially the bathroom. I finally found student accommodation but it's really, really, really expensive." Focus group participant

From our social listening, we found that many migrants struggled with the changes in housing features. For example, some migrants found the carpet to be 'dirty' as 'bugs love living under the carpet', the lack of basements made some people feel 'cramped' and 'cluttered.' Others noted the lack of air conditioning and found it 'infuriating' to dry clothes without a clothes dryer.

"I think that's the worst thing - the cost of living... you can get cheap, nice or safe, but you can only get two of them."

Social listening



Nearly all of our research participants mentioned accommodation in one way or another which reflects the importance of the home environment in relation to all aspects of our lives. Who migrants with, where, the quality of living and how much it cost impacted on the mental (and sometimes physical) wellbeing of migrants. One participant also flagged that securing accommodation was required as proof of address when setting up a bank account for employment purposes.

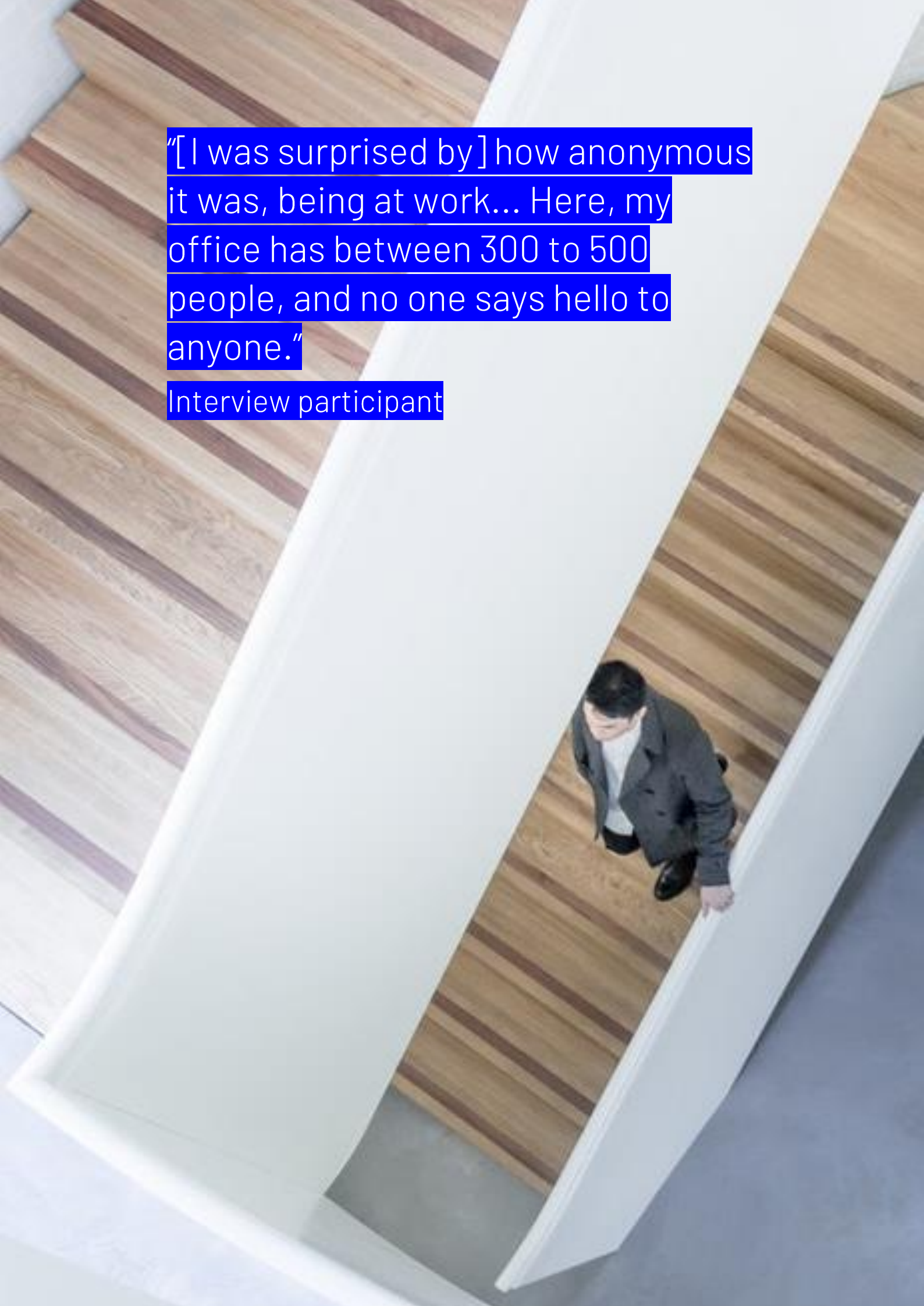
We realise that our sample may be skewed in this aspect as many participants were well-educated, employed in the city and fluent in English. A high number of migrants in the UK may have a very different experience regarding accommodation: some are homeless, many are agricultural workers or au pairs.

Employment

At a first glance, employment levels in the migrant community may not seem like much of an issue: there are more male migrants in employment compared to non-migrant males in the UK (83% vs. 79%)³². However, the employment rate of migrant females is lower than non-migrant females (64% vs. 72%) and unemployment is a particular problem for certain ethnicities – the employment rate for Asian women is less than half of that of UK-born women³². Drozdowicz also reports that one in three employed eastern European migrants felt overqualified for their jobs, over half felt like their skills did not match their job level, and two in five faced serious work-related issues such as exploitation, withholding of pay, and abuse. Since 2005, on average, UK-born workers are paid more than their migrant equivalents, likely due to the higher number of migrants working in lower skilled jobs³²⁻³⁴. Unemployment and lower wage do not affect all migrants equally – it is a particular problem for migrants from eastern Europe and Pakistan, migrants aged 50-64 and those with poor English skills^{30,32}.

Existing research has listed multiple barriers that explain why some migrants may find it difficult to access, secure and develop within employment: poor language skills, a lack of understanding of workplace culture or the UK environment, weaker job searching skills (such as writing cover letters and CVs, interviewing) among others including prejudice and discrimination^{19,30,35}. Perceptual barriers also limit career opportunities for migrants, with one in five migrants having low confidence to seek appropriate employment³⁰.

Most of the participants in our research spoke some English, were educated to a degree level and were under 50 years old. These factors may mean our participants had an advantage securing employment compared to other migrants, although we did find evidence these challenges in the literature and in the social listening:



"[I was surprised by] how anonymous it was, being at work... Here, my office has between 300 to 500 people, and no one says hello to anyone."

Interview participant

"Another challenging aspect to it is finding jobs. In a city like London you are competing with many well educated and experienced professionals from all over the world, so if you don't have much language skills, something unique to offer, or even have the right contacts, you may spend a long time trying to find the right one"
Social listening

"You have skills and qualifications? Doesn't matter. Employers only care about personality. I've gone to interview after interview with the person not asking ONE question about skills or qualifications. They're only interested in having somebody "fun" to have around the office. Somebody "bubbly"." Social listening

Our research specifically picked up on language barriers. Many of our participants chose to pursue education before employment to further their language ability:

"The issue was the fact that I couldn't speak English at all, and my first language is French. So I had to try and find a college to go to and eventually from there forge my English, make it better. So it would be a lot easier to find a job around London." Interview participant

Many of our participants who had found employment noted difficulties understanding or adapting to a different workplace culture, although this could be workplace specific and depend what work culture someone has experienced previously:

"I've never had a career in Europe... [I was surprised by] how anonymous it was, being at work... Here, my office has between 300 to 500 people, and no one says hello to anyone. That was really weird in the beginning. And also how generally competitive everyone is at work, a lot more than I expected. I think it's more London specific, but yeah, very competitive and very anonymous in the work environment. We all work together, we're not randoms on the street, but you're being treated like you're a random on the

street while you're standing at the copy machine." Interview participant

"In Sudan... it's not uncommon for doctors to give plain orders to nurses "Do that, do the other." If that were to be seen here, it would be perceived as very, very rude. My start in the NHS, and in the UK generally, would have been easier if someone sat down with me and explained to me what I've just been saying." Social listening

The 'anonymity' felt in the work environment relates closely to the common challenge of loneliness and social isolation experienced by migrants in the UK. Although our research did not uncover many problems surrounding employment, we want to emphasise the magnitude of this challenge to the majority of migrants as documented in our literature review. Furthermore, the impact of unemployment can be devastating to the individual, and is associated with depression, psychological disorders, cancer, family breakdown and mortality³⁶⁻³⁸.

Travel

By interviewing participants who migrated to and outside of London, we were able to understand region specific problems, including those that relate to travel.

By comparing experiences inside and outside of London, we can determine that London was perceived as particularly challenging, either when people moved here from abroad directly, or when people moved from another area of the UK. Knowing the lines of The London underground system presented as a challenge, and the delays:

"[Another difficulty was] trains being late. First time I took a train to Stansted I nearly missed my flight because it was late. I was shocked." Interview participant

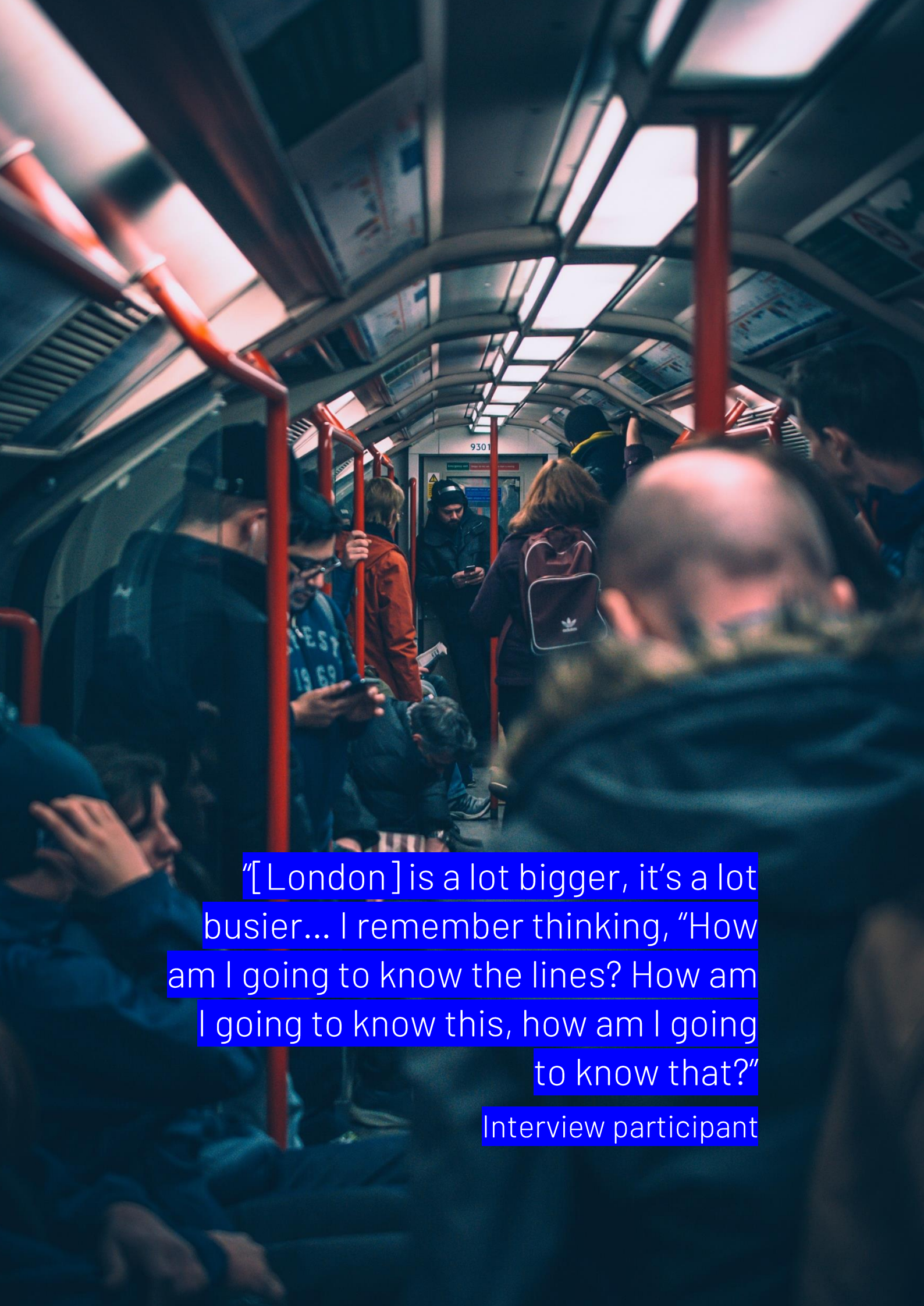
"[London] is a lot bigger, it's a lot busier, and you know, you need to get your head around going on the tube. I remember thinking, "How am I going to know the lines? How am I going to know this, how am I going to know that?" Interview participant

People were also frustrated that travel times in London were often longer than in other parts of the country, or from their country of origin:

"I thought in the beginning about moving to London, was that everything takes very long to get anywhere. Like, if you want to get anywhere you will have to count, like, an hour there and an hour back, just to be safe." Interview participant

Participants often attributed the challenges of travelling to the size of London:

"You realise some of your friends live in one place and some in another place and you need half an hour to meet and things like that. So that was, at that point, when I first moved to London, that was the big thing, that it was bigger, the tube, where your friends live, where you work, where you study, all of that." Interview participant



"[London] is a lot bigger, it's a lot busier... I remember thinking, "How am I going to know the lines? How am I going to know this, how am I going to know that?"

Interview participant

People were also overwhelmed with how crowded London is, which had a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing. They often felt claustrophobic:

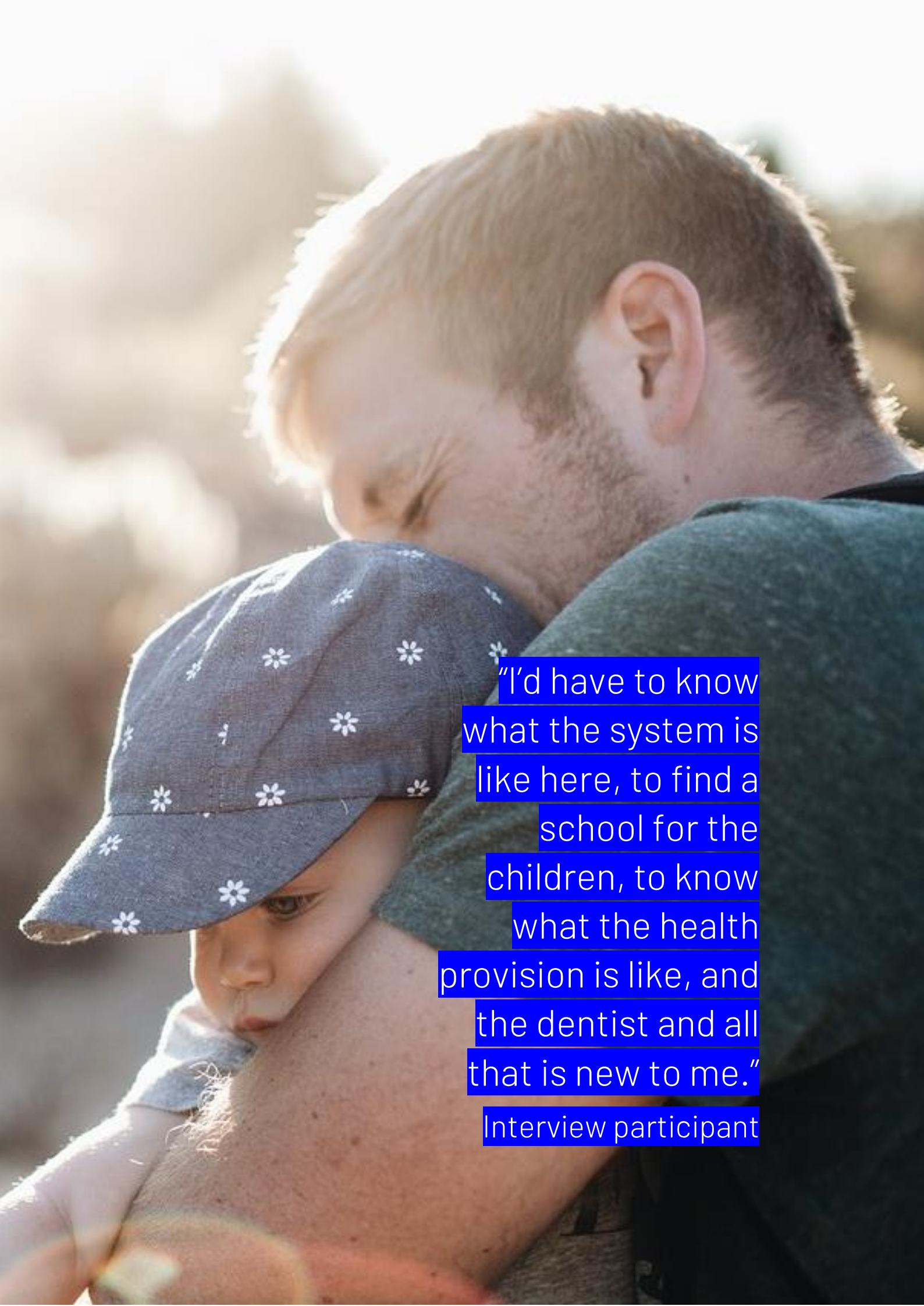
"It's always so packed, especially during rush hour, so waiting certain times just to enter the tube... I was like oh my God, every morning, every evening... Ok..! If you're not familiar to it, you're not use to it, it's new, but it's a bit challenging... In the beginning, everything comes together, queueing, and the commute. Oh my God, so many people all the time. A combination of all." Interview participant

"My personal space in London has been invaded constantly. They just keep going in my way. I just can't walk a straight line. In New Zealand, I can walk down the street without being uninterrupted by anyone. Here, people are constantly in your face." Interview participant

In our interviews, and more commonly in our social listening, there was also evidence around the use of roads or, dependent on where a migrant was from. Some people felt unsafe to cycle on the roads, while others thought streets were poorly signed, and found it difficult to adapt to cars driving on the other side of the road from what they were used to:

"Valencia, I could walk or go by bicycle everywhere. Here I am afraid of taking a bicycle in case of a bus." Interview participant

"For those, like me, coming from an environment where vehicles drive on the right side of the road... It is hard to get used to. Even once you think you have managed to internalise the "look left, look right" automatism, a near miss with a taxi reminds you that you have not." Social listening



"I'd have to know what the system is like here, to find a school for the children, to know what the health provision is like, and the dentist and all that is new to me."

Interview participant

Education and parenting

Unusually, the majority of our participants moved to the UK to study and then continued to remain in the UK³⁹. Our participants reported a mix of positive and negative experiences depending on the quality and quantity of support the educational institution provided to international students. We also heard some challenges that may be not specific to migrants, but rather to students e.g. finding specific buildings on campus.

One interviewee commented on the different style of teaching, and the benefits and challenges arising from language:

“In Russia I did Marketing and here in the UK it was Marketing Communications, but a lot of things that I already know, but, for me it was like studying terminology in English. So, overall it was useful, and writing in English, making notes in English, it was something really new and different for me.” Interview participant

We recognised that parents of younger children may face additional system related to the education system in the UK. These include challenges:

- supporting their children academically⁴⁰
- communicating with teachers or educators⁴¹
- accessing information about schools⁴¹
- understanding applying to schools⁴²

There are multiple causes for this including language barriers, cultural differences and a lack of understanding of a different education system altogether⁴³.

Furthermore, Polish migrant parents may lack information about the process of applying for secondary schools and colleges⁴⁴. We interviewed one parent who said:

“It’s challenging because I’d have to know what the system is like here, to find a school for the children, to know what the health provision is like, and the dentist and all that is new to me.” Interview participant

Money and income

Struggling to afford living in the UK been widely reported in the migrant literature: Drozdowicz found that over 20% of migrant respondents are 'struggling', or 'really struggling' on their current income. In our focus group, the majority of participants agreed that they found it difficult to manage their finances:

"For me, the money is a big issue. Like, every time I think I can manage to survive till the end of the month, and then I can't... Like, this month I will do it, but no." Focus group participant

The high rent (particularly in London), cost of travel and living expenses (groceries, socialising) were the main causes rather than poor 'money management.' One focus group participant felt like the standard of living in the UK was lower and more expensive compared to their country of origin:

"The food quality is quite... special. And still kind of expensive for what it is... It's really rubbish, for the price, like, sometimes it doesn't taste so good." Focus group participant

There were some reports of difficulties of opening bank accounts – some people found it challenging to navigate the bureaucracy:

"Visas, residence permits, N.I numbers, bank accounts, council, water and gas bills. I think I spent a couple of months at the start just going from institution to institution and sitting on the phone with companies to register for services. The funny thing is, that you cannot get a bank account before you get an NI number, you cannot get an NI number before you register for some bills. You cannot pay your bills on Direct Debit before you get a bank account." Social listening

We note that many non-migrant Londoners may also find managing finances a challenge, although migrants may have additional challenges with fewer support services. The level of (disposable) income relates to issues of employment and can have a significant effect on mental wellbeing.

"The money is a big issue. Every time I think I can manage to survive till the end of the month, and then I can't... Like, this month I will do it, but no."

Focus group participant



Other

Nearly all our participants reported how the weather had a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing, regardless of whereabouts in the world their country of origin was:

“And the rain, that was another thing, there was so much rain here. So, obviously, [back home] we had like, a season for the rain that was only for a few months of the year that we had rain. So I’d never really had the experience of like, walking in water and being wet and everything, so that was interesting.” Interview participant

“I come from Valencia, which is like a little city, really sunny, next to the sea... But now, being night at 4... it is a bit hard for me.” Focus group participant

Additional challenges were found in the literature that were not found in our qualitative research, possibly due to our bias in sampling. We note that some migrants (especially refugees) may struggle to access legal advice⁴², information on immigration status and right to work in the UK²⁸.

Results: solutions

Although the majority of our participants felt challenged at some point, they all managed to find a way of overcoming their barriers, finding solutions, answers and help. Many participants also noted that often challenges resolved themselves over time (likely to be re-appraised as part of coping), and that sometimes no action was needed – only some adjusting time was needed. Drozdowicz, 2013 noted that migrants seek help and advice at a ‘crisis point’, when all other support sources have been exhausted.

From reviewing the literature and from our primary research, we identified specific barriers migrants may face when seeking help. These include:

- Poor language skills³⁰
- Negative perception or attitude of support (e.g. they do not know this support is available, they may have not had to use this support in their country of origin, they may have low confidence approaching³⁰)
- Lack of confidence⁴⁵
- Previous habit of normal behaviour (for example, relying on word of mouth, personal contacts)³⁰
- Guilt; feeling like a burden (from our own interviews – *“I didn’t want to be a burden to someone else”*)

Some participants felt like they had an innate ability (or had particular personalities) to cope or adapt to challenges. For migrants who relied on problem-solving mechanisms, like Weishaar’s research participants, they felt like their confidence, determination and will helped them cope¹⁰:

“I think perhaps it’s just my personality and the way I deal with problems. I think it was definitely a stressful thing, like the situation itself. So I think it’s the strategies I had in place.” Interview participant

“I don’t know if the drive is the right word... but the drive to solve problems is quite important, and not to give up easily” Interview

participant

"It's because I'm a problem solver. I ask. I ask around, what I don't know I ask, so I get information. Once you get information you can proceed." Interview participant

*"So, no matter what I'm going through... I found a way to channel it."
Interview participant*

Also, like Weishaar, some migrants felt like they were responsible for themselves and had to cope on their own:

"At the end of the day, if you want something bad, you work hard for it. So, the way I see it, there's no shortcuts. Yeah, but all I wanted to do was work hard, bring myself, keep my head up, and keep trying until I get where I want." Interview participant

Migrants who had moved several times felt like they were at an advantage because they knew what information and actions needed to be taken, and where to get help:

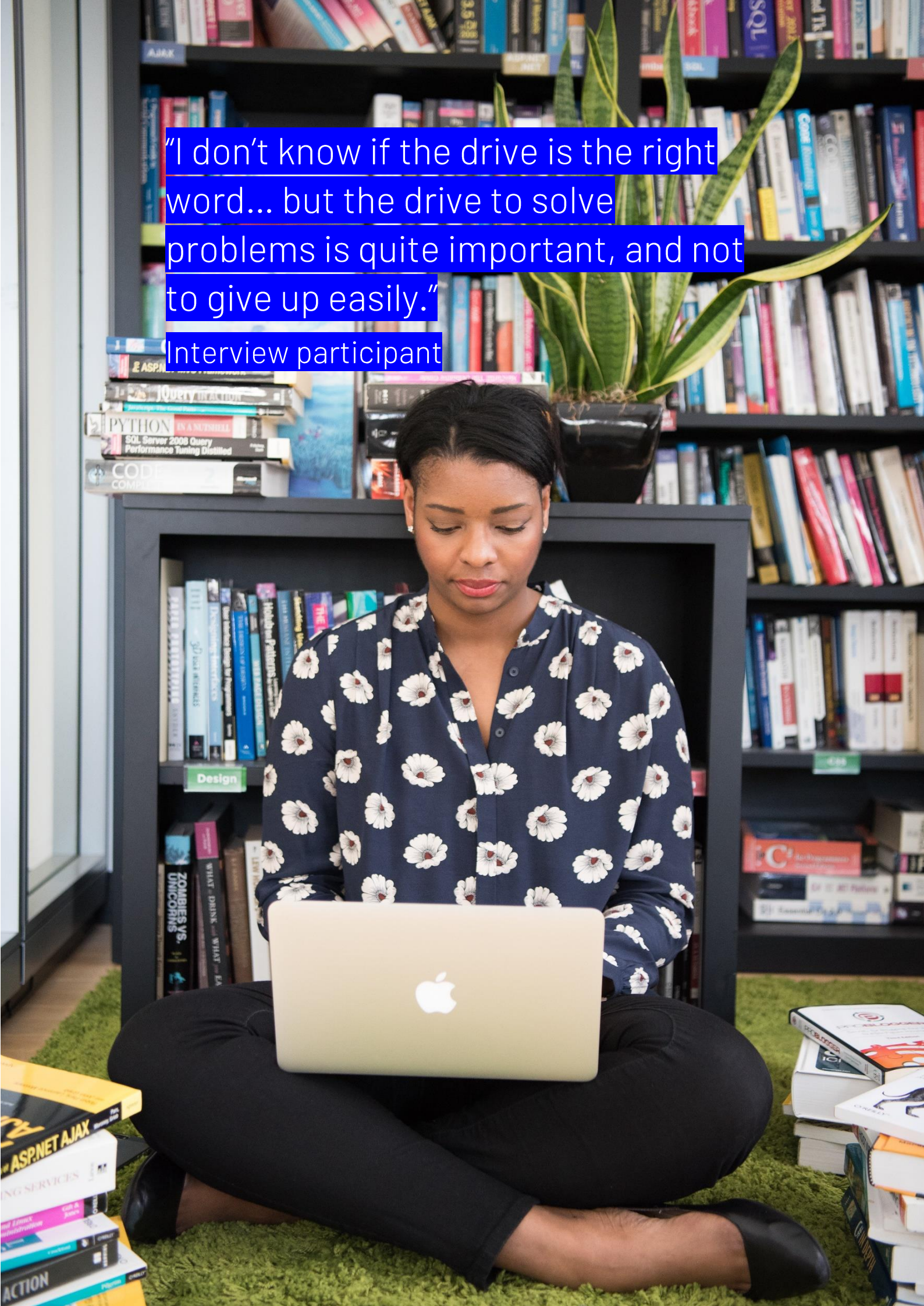
"Nothing was difficult for me because... I [have already] moved, I already experienced this moving out from home. Like, living by myself." Interview participant

Many migrants we spoke to agreed with migrants in Weishaar's research that certain personality traits support emotional-regulating and appraisal-orientated coping¹⁰. Our interviewees thought that their open-mindedness, sense of humour, flexibility helped them adapt to life in the UK. This could have helped them develop informal networks (friends, colleagues) who could provide information or support, or help them develop a positive outlook despite stressors:

"I guess my personality of being very open, very friendly and always in good humour, allowed me to go straight through." Interview participant

"I don't know if the drive is the right word... but the drive to solve problems is quite important, and not to give up easily."

Interview participant



In the literature, Gill and Bialski noted that confidence, English fluency and being proactive are traits more likely to be associated with highly skilled migrants, who may find coping with challenges easier for emotional and practical reasons³¹. This may have also influenced our findings, and we may have spoken to individuals who generally coped easier than other migrants.

The following sections describe different channels or methods that migrants used to solve their challenges. We found that in many cases, the appropriate channel was very dependent on the specific challenge and context. The importance of context should not be underestimated when designing support for migrants, and we acknowledge that this factor that is often overlooked. Context includes issues such as trust, vitally important to people who are new to their environment. Nearly all participants who we spoke to, regardless of age, country of origin and when they moved, said that trust was the most important factor. This is a core reason why many migrants choose to trust their friends and family advice first and foremost over any other method.

Friends and family

Akin to published research, our participants listed friends and family as their most valued, trusted and frequent source of help^{9,46-48}. Close personal connections are able to give personalised, tailored support, both practical and emotional, and provide a trusted, non-judgemental space where one can be open about their questions and fears, and some may have been in a similar situation before^{10,49}:

"I guess you kind of just link up with people that you know and trust, that was the main thing, we trusted them, people you trust."

Interview participant

As in the literature, our research participants said their friends and family were able to provide practical support or information on employment, accommodation, socialising, finance (including borrowing money), travel, accessing medical services and so on^{9,30,46,48}:

"I was lucky as well, one of my best friends is living in London, so I thought I would stay there for a week, turns out to be three weeks, and then luckily found a place, but by then I was pretty exhausted."

Interview participant

"I was homeless for a while, but again there were a few friends that helped me" Interview participant

Close social networks were also shown to be important for developing language skills^{9,41}:

"I had this friend that whenever we had a conversation, if I got things wrong, they would correct me straight away, and that is something that I really appreciate, because they don't pretend I'm getting it right when that's not the case, I feel like they've got my back, like I can trust those guys around me. So, for me that was a very big step for my language skills." Interview participant



"You kind of just link up with people that you know and trust. That was the main thing - we trusted them."

Interview participant

Migrants found helpful, supportive individuals through a range of places, usually at places they would normally spend time in – for example, migrant parents made social networks through other parents at the school waiting area; international students found other students for advice; employed migrants sought help from other colleagues⁹:

“That’s how I started making friends. Parental waiting areas are a pool of people whom you can make friends with.” Interview participant

“I remember as well, one of the students, she was an international student, she was Polish as well, she saw that I was obviously distressed, and she obviously helped me which was really good.” Interview participant

“When I started to work my director supported me a lot, but she is this kind of personality, she really makes people feel good, and I always felt like, when I was coming into the office it became my family, so I can say that maybe it’s rare, but I had a really good experience being here.” Interview participant

“Also, at my workplace as well, they also have different social groups that you can join, sports and yoga sessions and... yeah, that was helpful.” Interview participant

Although it did not come across as strongly in our research as in the literature, some migrants found social outlets, such as religious organisations, shops and volunteering, to be a source of helpful individuals and a way of starting a social network:

“[My boyfriend] brought me to his church, so I met some of his church friends, which was good, that’s actually how I got my new flat, was through one of our mutual friends at work.” Interview participant

“I volunteer as well. So once a month, I volunteer at the tea diner at

church and that's quite cool, it's a really good way to meet people as well..." Interview participant

Some migrants found it easier to connect and find support from the international community:

"There were girls who spoke also the same language with me and like, mainly I communicated with foreigners, but also, to have and to know people who can speak the same language, it also helps. If you need anything or, for example, if you need to take something to Moscow, bring something from Moscow, and somebody is going, it also was amazing as an opportunity." Interview participant

This is partly why some students found it easier to settle into the UK – because other international students and communities were easily available:

"[It's about] finding people who think similarly, finding allies." Interview participant

"Because I became friends at the university, so if I needed anything I knew that I have friends who can support me and it's like that because everybody was a foreigner in my group, everybody was staying in the same boat so we understood each other well and it was really supportive, like being in a family, and we became close very fast for this reason." Interview participant

Friends and family were universally seen as the key to integrating into the community and were essential for providing practical and emotional support. Family members nearby or back home provided emotional support when needed through text-based messaging, calls or videos. As one focus group participant summarised:

"At the end of the day, you need to rely on people." Focus group participant

Digital sources

In specific circumstances when friends and family were not able to help, some migrants looked online for support. This would usually be for specific problems and purposes, such as employment, travel (e.g. through TfL Journey Planner or City Mapper), accommodation (e.g. through Spare Room, Gum Tree), accessing health services (e.g. finding a GP), and for areas where specialist knowledge is needed such as banking, finance and the law. For challenges where more specialist knowledge was needed, migrants used search engines such as Google to find their answer. Furthermore, a recent literature review (not specific to Britain) noted that digital sources were generally used in preparation before arrival rather than once they had arrived with the exception of keeping in touch with friends and family⁹.

Generally, migrants were satisfied with the answers from the internet, however, one participant specifically mentioned difficulties finding a GP:

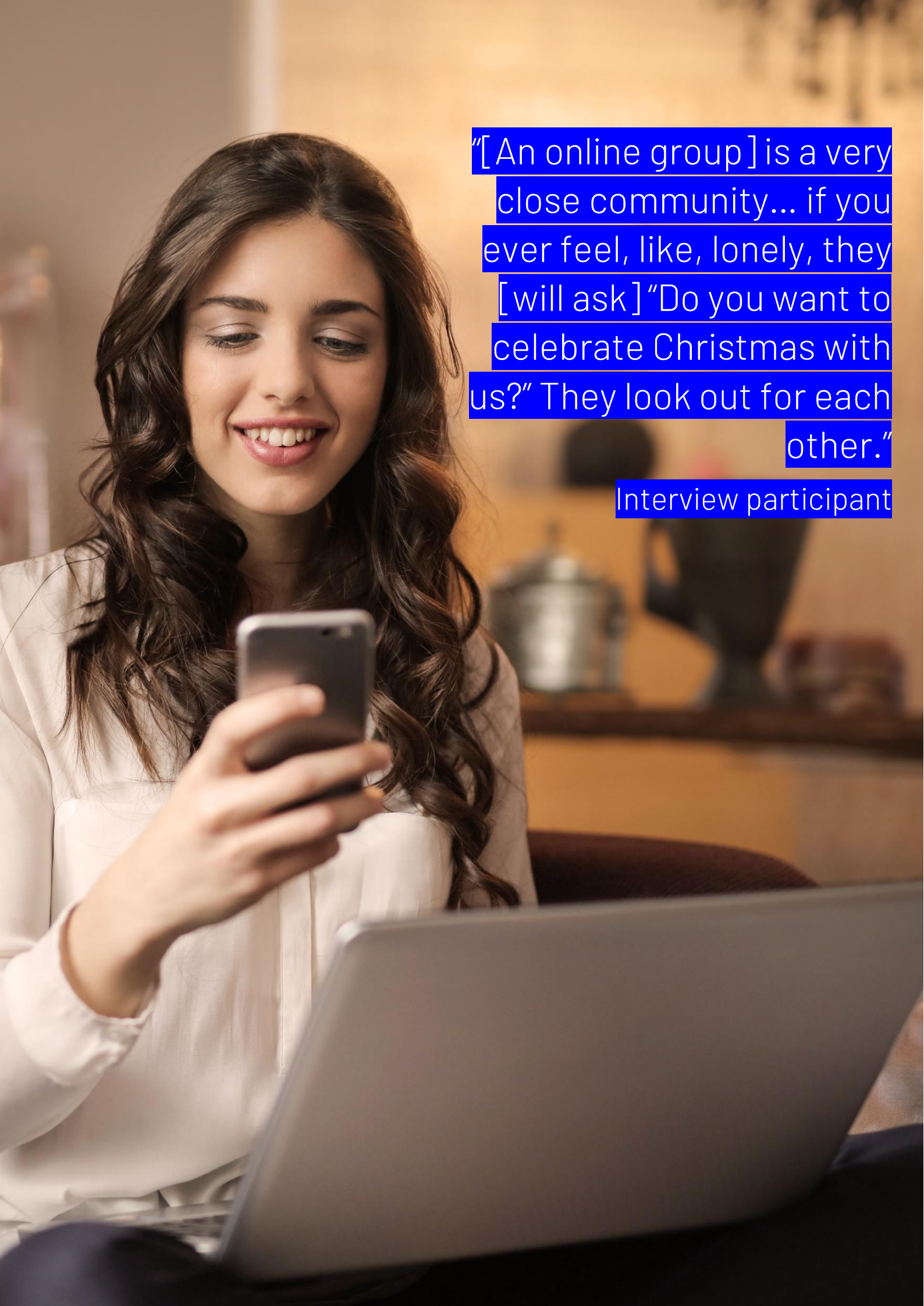
“The medical service, it’s very confusing for me. You have to sign up with like one, but you have this list of online of places, so you can go where ever you want, but you have to click on every one to check times, how many doctors there are, opening hours and all that other stuff. I think it’s a bit confusing because every page is different.”

Focus group participant

Migrants also specifically looked up group activities to meet people:

“There’s this website where you find groups of your interests and then you go out with those people, like for example, it can be for a (...), it can be, like going to, I don’t know, art gallery, or whatever, I’m interested in cinema and so I went to like, a short movie festival, like, a small one, and there were lots of people that share the same interests and like, everybody was kind of not working.”

Interview participant



"[An online group] is a very close community... if you ever feel, like, lonely, they [will ask] "Do you want to celebrate Christmas with us?" They look out for each other."

Interview participant

Some participants used social media specifically to develop their social network, either by becoming part of online migrant communities (such as through the Facebook group Kiwis in London):

"But [Kiwis in London] is a very, like, close community... if you ever feel, like, lonely, they [will ask] like, "Do you want to celebrate Christmas with us?" or something. Things like that, where they all like, look out for each other, which is very sweet." Interview participant

Or by searching for local group activities they could join:

"I actually tried ad hoc looking at Facebook for different sports group within Southwark. I play Ultimate Frisbee, so I was looking for groups that did that, but based on time and location it didn't really fit, so I kind of gave up. That's something I was looking to because Ultimate tends to be an all seasons sport, and it's a really good way to meet people too... But yeah I would say that's about it." Interview participant

Digital devices, such as smart phones, have many advantages including availability and low cost. However, it should be noted that not all migrants have access to the internet or are able to use digital support (e.g. due to financial restraints)⁹. Migrants with more education, greater language fluency and more experience migrating or using technology are better suited to these solutions³¹. There are still challenges regarding content online, for example there can be too much information which can be difficult to sift through, information can be outdated and/or inaccurate, and digital interventions may not necessarily overcome language or literacy barriers⁹. Offline channels may be particularly suitable to certain groups of migrants, such as low income migrants, and those who worked in certain sectors such as agriculture²⁸.

Advice agencies

Through our research, we found many formal organisations offering support and information to migrants. These organisations come from the voluntary sector, the private sector, and includes initiatives from local councils.

Two of our participants contacted local government associations or councils for support with mixed reviews. Councils were seen as sources of information for specific services such as accessing schools for children, housing, and registering for healthcare services. The participant who moved several decades ago felt positive about their experience, however, the participant who moved more recently felt dissatisfied:

"Yeah, well I've got issues with property, (...) because of the council. Again, with that, they took a lot longer to get back to you, and I didn't feel like waiting around for them to call me back so I thought, you know, I'm going to go out there and do it my way." Interview participant

One parent migrant also sought advice from the school and the library who signposted them to the appropriate service. This migrant moved over a decade ago when digital information may have been less accessible. However we acknowledge that libraries even today are generally perceived as welcoming spaces that can provide social interaction with other migrants and native people to find information and develop skills⁹.

In the private sector, agencies were used to find accommodation and employment with mixed reviews:

"Every job in London I've had or if I'm like, about to start a new job, I've like, used agencies for all of them, which is amazing, it's really helpful, and was like, yeah, I would never, not ever not use an agency to get a job." Interview participant

"These [recruitment] agency workers are salespeople. They're absolutely horrible. Extremely difficult to get work through them - totally incompetent organizations." Social listening

In our research, the satisfaction of using agencies varied person to person – specifically, job agencies may be more suited to highly skilled migrants. Housing agencies were described as a “rip off” during the focus group and in social listening, and many participants preferred to use other methods of securing accommodation (e.g. through contacts or room sharing websites).

Despite the efforts of organisations that support migrants, there are several hurdles in place that prevent migrants from fully utilising the resource. A survey conducted by Drozdowicz found that under 17% of migrants sought help from mainstream advice agencies (voluntary and statutory) and were not satisfied with the help they received³⁰. A study focusing on Poles in Lambeth found that migrants do not know about the organisations and services in the local area, hindered by the lack of informal networks formed in the community¹⁹.

We recognise the variation of needs and provision of services across different councils and boroughs and emphasise the need for tailoring support to local context. However, satisfaction with council services has been reported to decrease according to Kougievetopoulos, 2014.

University

Generally, international students saw their university as a source of information on a vast range of topics including mental health, employment and finance:

“Universities are really good at making sure you have all the information you need, if you need psychological support or if you need any support at all, accommodation, etc.” Interview participant

“I did get in contact with the mental health unit at my uni... But I also got financial help as well which was also helpful from the finance unit. I think those were my two main sources of help.” Interview participant

The major advantage that some international students had was that the university would provide accommodation, which led to a key support network:

“So, because I became friends at the university, so if I needed anything I knew that I have friends who can support me and it’s like that because everybody was a foreigner in my group, everybody was staying in the same boat so we understood each other well and it was really supportive, like being in a family, and we became close very fast for this reason.” Interview participant

Universities provided this information through often through ‘welcome sessions’ or had dedicated departments for providing this support. However, the quality and quantity of support received by students highly varied. Some students felt like there was ‘competition’ from home students for support, some felt like they were specifically for younger students or undergraduates, and some were dissatisfied with the quality of support.



"I became friends at the university. If I needed anything, I knew that I have friends who can support me... everybody was a foreigner in my group, everybody was staying in the same boat."

Interview participant

Results: ideal support

During the final section of our interview, we explored the support preferences and needs of migrants. Participants of our research highlighted that the ideal solution depended on the exact problem – both the content of the problem and the context – so the solution should be problem specific. Most notably, particular challenges that needed addressing were: overcoming language barriers, finding accommodation, securing employment, understanding how the health system works (when and how to access GPs, A&E, the dentist), how to access schools. In the literature, finding and securing employment was highlighted as a need for migrants¹⁹.

In this section, we utilised the behavioural insight frameworks fully to collect enough information to make evidence-based and effective recommendations. In particular, we noted the need to streamline, reduce or distil the vast amount of information to ensure to ensure information is tailored and accessible. Participants noted an overwhelming amount of information existing, primarily online. A common suggestion was to streamline the amount of information available, for example by an “integration of resources, valuable information... with less technical information” (focus group).

We acknowledge the lack of migrant studies about migrant preferences in the published literature so sought to understand this further as a step towards co-producing a solution. Co-production “is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them”⁵⁰.

Context

Context is often the ‘forgotten ingredient’ when creating or scaling up solutions and is often the reason why interventions fail. We found that this area was particularly lacking, so emphasised this discussion point during our interviews and considered this throughout the analysis.

All participants emphasised the importance of trust when seeking help. They felt like they needed to trust the source enough to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings and questions:

“I think what is really important is non-judgemental... just being able to be as open as possible about your problems, and just being able to discuss them in a way that you feel comfortable to do so.”

Interview participant

Many people wanted a trusted community to rely on:

“A community I think is very important, is quite nice to have, in a support.” Interview participant

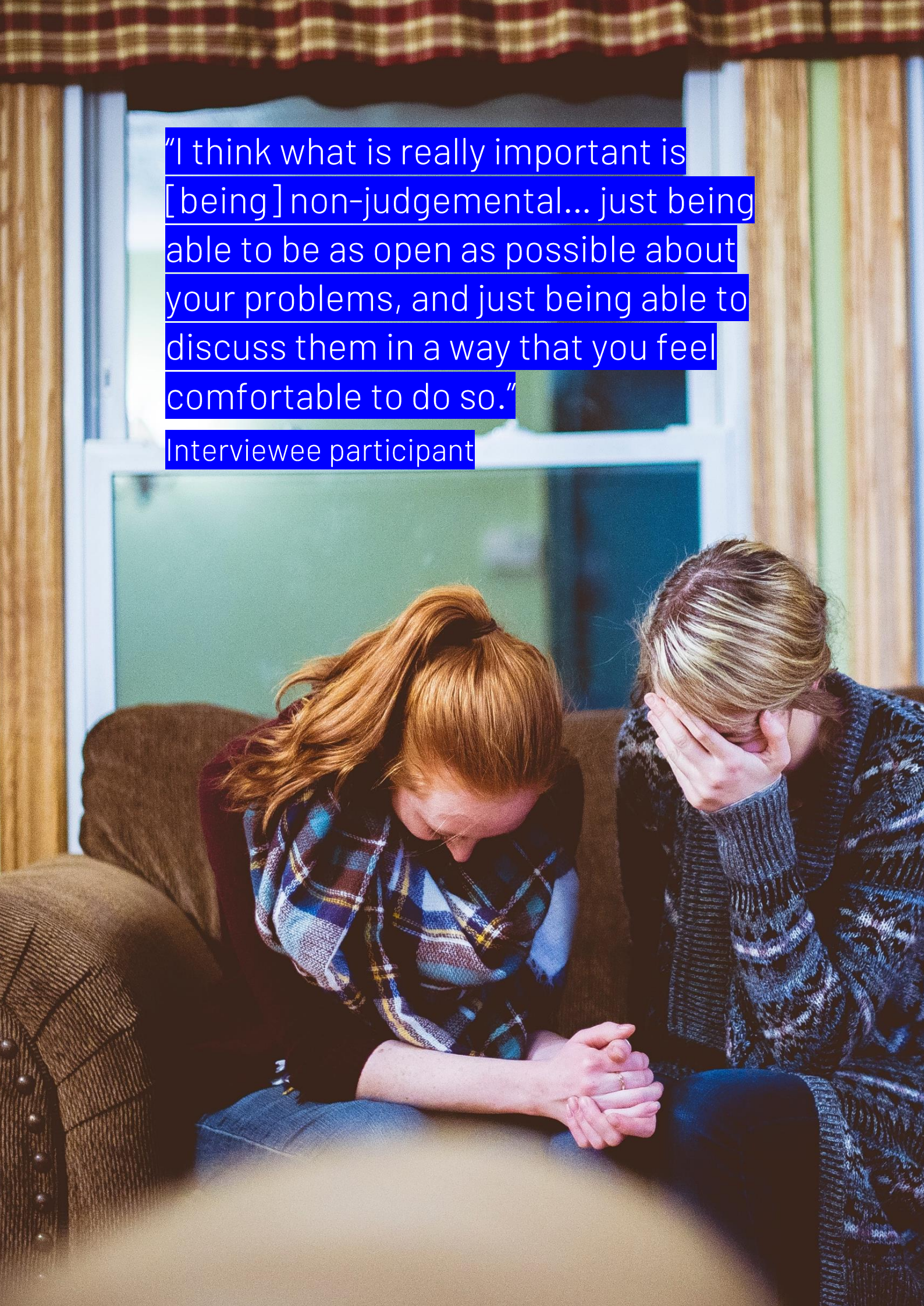
And some participants highlighted they would prefer information from people who have had a similar experience to themselves as they would understand the specific context of the problem and the solution needed:

“Ideally those people who have had loads of experiences with dealing with people in my situation... they would be able to give me the appropriate help.” Interview participant

Those who do not speak English are of greater need^{3,19}. At the focus group, participants unanimously agreed that English-speaking migrants find it easier to ask for and find support as most information is in English. This affects whether someone can ask for the information they need, and whether they fully understood answers²⁸. Language ability also influenced their social network with British people, and how they were treated by them²⁸. Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups, particularly men, have the lowest level of English proficiency of all BAME groups³.

"I think what is really important is [being] non-judgemental... just being able to be as open as possible about your problems, and just being able to discuss them in a way that you feel comfortable to do so."

Interviewee participant



Channel

We wanted to know where migrants look for support to leverage social norms as a way of providing support.

Underlying the channel of support is the context – in this case, trust. People's preferred channels of support were always the most trusted, the most non-judgemental, and places where people felt comfortable to be themselves.

Face-to-face support

All participants said social and face to face support was their ideal solution, whether this was at an event, in a physical space, or at university.

The possibility of events to bring migrants together was discussed at the focus group. Participants recommended "activity-based" events, such as cooking or sports, rather than focusing on being "new" which could create "awkwardness." Participants highlighted that events may appeal to certain personalities – those who were more outgoing, confident, and that "shy people may be less keen." They noted that the success would depend on how the event would be advertised or promoted. Among participants, it was widely agreed that friends and family were ideal support, especially those who had been through a similar process and who could provide emotional support:

"I would speak to my friends. A lot of them have been through the same thing as myself." Interview participant

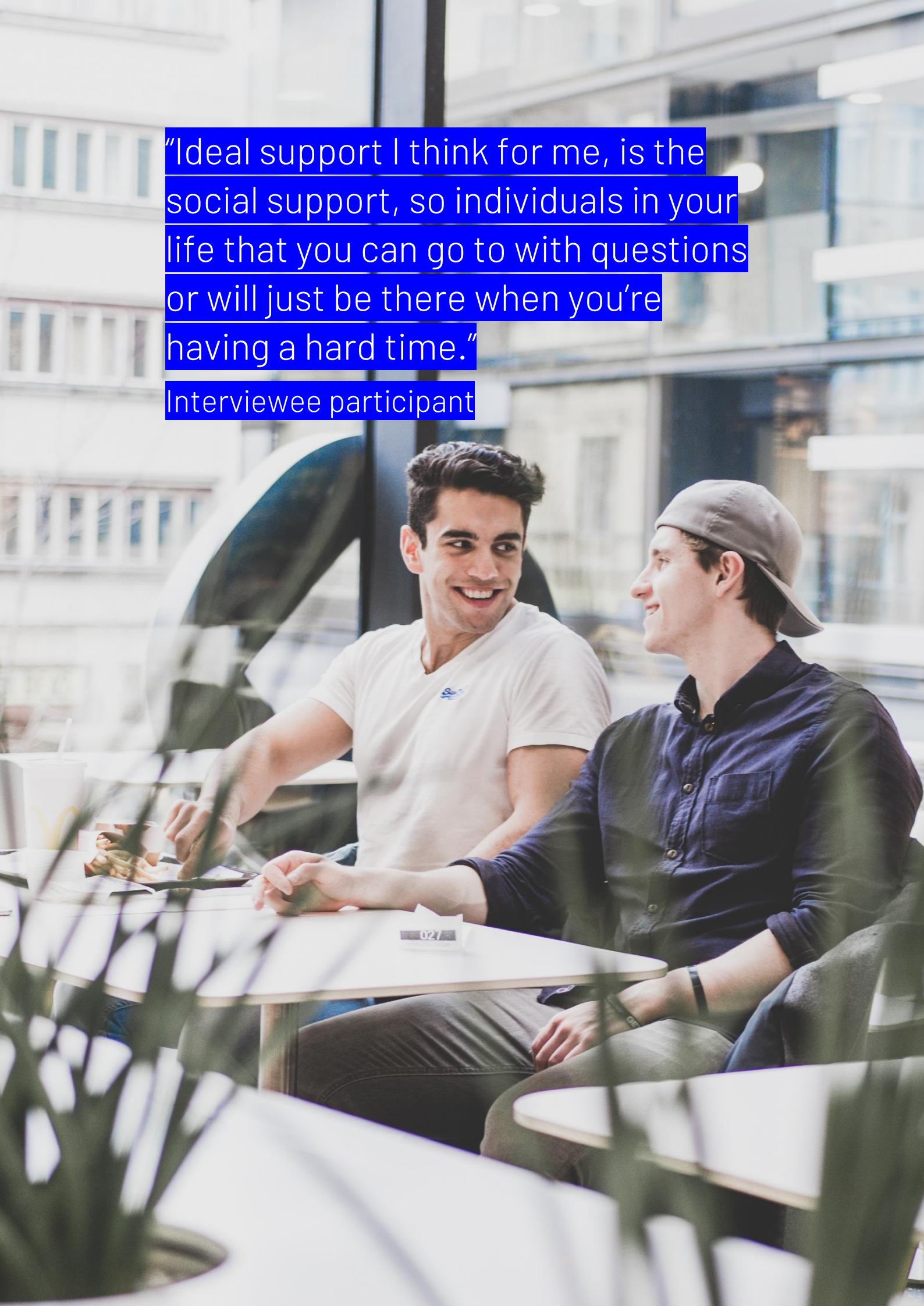
"Ideal support I think for me, is the social support, so individuals in your life that you can go to with questions, or will just be there when you're having a hard time." Interview participant

Some migrants suggested a physical space or building where migrants could drop in when needed and discuss problems face to face:

"If there was an actual centre for people who have just moved to the UK that sort multi-functional [space] where they have lots of services in different areas. For instance, people who have perhaps even challenges with, even the language" Interview participant

"Ideal support I think for me, is the social support, so individuals in your life that you can go to with questions or will just be there when you're having a hard time."

Interviewee participant



“They are able to direct you to the appropriate help, just in one place. So finances, accommodation, language, and yeah, just general ins and outs of settling or moving to a new country.”

Interview participant

Face-to-face solutions bring many unique advantages to migrants that resonate strongly with their needs. Reflecting on how migrants currently solve their solutions and the insight frameworks, it makes psychological sense why migrants prefer this method: the trust needed to discuss problems truthfully relies on building a close-knit relationship; having a one-to-one conversation allows information to be truly personalised and tailored in terms of content and delivery; relationships form communities of networks, one of the strongest motivators for reaching out for support.

Digital

With the rise in technology, some participants (just under half) felt like this could be leveraged to provide support, however, overall, this gave mixed feedback and was not a commonly suggested solution to challenges. Online communities were the preferred digital solution.

The main concern about digital solutions were about whether it would be more difficult to create trust online:

“[Being open, non-judgemental and being able to discuss problems] – that’s why, for example, I think Facebook might not be right.”

Interview participant

However, others felt like it was possible for online communities to exist in such a way, such as Kiwis in London (a popular Facebook group among migrants from New Zealand or elsewhere), although this was an exceptional case. When online platforms were suggested, participants suggested making questions anonymous:

“I wouldn’t want to get out of my way, so maybe an anonymous forum, where it’s more I have my username that isn’t traceable through any other of my social media, and then you have the community answering your requests that, yeah, that might not want

to be putting on Facebook or anything like that.” Interview participant

It should be noted that even when digital solutions were suggested, the desire for a community and trust remained a priority.

One focus group participant suggested an app that could overcome the overwhelming amount of information on the internet by signposting or creating a checklist of key activities or information. The participant said the app should be “Able to signpost to other support as needed.”

Print

In our research, one participant suggested that local services such as schools and libraries could produce printed materials, such as a printed information pack containing useful information or resources. Notably, this participant moved several decades ago. This could however be useful for participants who do not have access to digital sources.

Conclusion

Policy and academic papers show evidence that the voluntary sector, local communities and councils strive to improve the lives of migrants in the UK. The livelihood and wellbeing of migrants are clearly, and rightfully, on the local and national agenda. Qualitative research (interviews, focus groups) voice the beliefs, concerns and ideas of migrants and allow us to understand their perspective and needs.

Our review found that although challenges faced by migrants can be themed, there are no clear boundaries or categories of challenges, so we must be wary when we look at challenges in isolation. Challenges in migrants' lives greatly overlap and affect one another: what we label as unemployment problems, securing accommodation challenges and poor mental health may all be different lenses on the same one problem or cause for an individual (e.g. a problem of language). Whilst we were able to identify broad (overlapping) challenges that can be addressed individually, we suggest more can be done to address the 'roots' of the challenges to truly empower and support migrants.

Our research identified a trusted community as pivotal to integration. Place-based, community-led, peer support networks can be used to overcome the challenges migrants face. Validated and evidence-based frameworks can be applied to insights as a scaffold to co-produce and evaluate potential novel solutions for migrants – the co-production element is essential to a successful intervention. It is paramount that all trialled solutions are rigorously evaluated to ensure positive outcomes for migrants are truly met. We emphasise that it is crucial to go above and beyond listening to the migrant voice, but to champion it all the way through implementing services for migrants – migrant voices should be at the discussion table at all times.

Based on our research, we suggest there is a need for providing tailored, peer-led support for migrants in local communities. From our insights, we believe that a well-designed, co-produced, migrant-led support, if rigorously developed, tested and evaluated, could make a real difference to migrants' lives. This is needed so our society can then realise the benefits of the increasing diversity of the population.

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Appendix: discussion questions for semi-structured interview

In/exclusion criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Adults (18 years or over)	Children (17 years or younger)
Lives in London OR Greater London	Lives outside London or Greater London
Speaks at least conversational English OR a language that can be facilitated via native translator	Speaks only a language which we can't find a translator
Migrated from a country outside of the England, to any part of England	Did not migrate from a country outside of the England

Discussion guide

Exploring challenges

- Tell me about what brought you to the UK.
- What challenges did you face?
- Which challenges do they think are the most important to consider? Why?
- What additional areas do they think are also important to cover?
- How did this make you feel?
- How did you react to your feelings?

Exploring solutions

- How did you solve these problems?
- Was it easy or difficult? Why?
- Why did you use these methods?
- How good was the information? (E.g. trustworthy, accurate, detailed, up to date?)
- How often did you use this support?
- If multiple support sources are mentioned: which one do you think is the best? Why?
- What would your ideal support look like?

Appendix: demographics of participants

Data has been aggregated and de-identified to protect participants' identities. Some missing data due to incomplete data collection forms.

Countries of origin: Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, France, Germany, Greece, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Lithuania New Zealand, Paraguay, Russia, Somalia, Spain, New Zealand

Study method	Frequency
Focus group	6
Interview	10

English ability	Frequency
Fluent	13
Native	3

Employment status	Frequency
Student	5
Employed	11

Native language	Frequency
English	4
Spanish	4
French	1
Hokkien	1
Greek	1
Russian	1
Mandarin	1
Lithuanian	1
German	1
Cantonese	1

Age group	Frequency
18-25	5
26-34	6
35-44	4
44-59	0
60+	1

Year of arrival to UK	Frequency
1990	1
1991	1
1999	1
2010	2
2012	1
2013	1
2015	1
2016	1
2017	3
2018	4

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TogetherintheUK is a Community Interest Company which aims to help people who have come to the UK live an inclusive life by sharing insights from those who have made a similar journey.