

# Migration and Care Workers

## Scottish Government Debate

S5M-22708

15 September 2020

### Introduction

Age Scotland welcomes the opportunity to brief Members of the Scottish Parliament ahead of the debate on Migration and Care Workers. We are extremely disappointed with the UK Government's immigration policy proposals which we feel will have an adverse impact on adult social care in Scotland.

### Key concerns:

The social care sector in Scotland is already under immense pressure.

- In the past year, 38% of care services reported having vacancies, which is unchanged from the previous year.<sup>1</sup>
- The main reason care services found positions difficult to fill was not having enough or appropriate applicants.<sup>2</sup>
- These vacancies are happening in the wake of ever-increasing demand as our population lives longer, and with multiple long-term health conditions.
- Age Scotland's "Waiting for Care" Report found that 4 in 10 older people in Scotland waited longer than they should for care they are entitled to, and need.

### Key statistics

#### 10,000 European Union nationals

These vital staff provide essential, round-the-clock support to older people and those with disabilities in Scotland.

#### 75% of social care users are aged 65 years and over

Older people are more likely to use social care, demonstrating its importance in helping people stay well and independent in their own homes for as long as possible.

#### 4 in 10 older people have waited longer than 6 weeks for care

Our research into waiting times found that older people assessed as having 'critical' or 'substantial' needs waited more than the national guidelines. This is based on 14 Local Authorities who were able to respond to our Freedom of Information requests, highlighting the need for more regular data recording.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/5532/Staff%20vacancies%20in%20care%20services%202018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/5532/Staff%20vacancies%20in%20care%20services%202018.pdf>

- These combined pressures will be further compounded by an immigration system that does not support the needs of the care sector.
- Lack of care provision has a direct impact on the NHS, with an average daily cost of £248 for each delayed discharge, costing the NHS in Scotland £122.5 million annually.

## UK Government's proposed immigration system

The UK Government's newly devised immigration system fails to recognise the urgent needs of our ageing population, these proposals are likely to have an adverse impact on care providers who are already under enormous pressure, struggling to recruit and retain appropriately skilled staff.

Many care providers already rely on relatively low-paid workers, including around 10,000 European Union nationals, who provide essential, round-the-clock support to older people and disabled people. These workers are far from low skilled and Age Scotland finds the lack of recognition of their valuable skills to be insulting.

The UK Government's proposals lack the necessary flexibility and fails to recognise social care as a 'shortage occupation', which we believe will damage an already fragile sector.

## The Human, Health, and Financial Cost

Age Scotland's research found that 40% of older people are already waiting too long for the care they desperately need.<sup>3</sup> Monthly figures also released by Information Services Division (ISD) before the pandemic struck showed high levels of delayed discharges due to Health and Social Care reasons. For each day someone is stuck in hospital due to a lack of social care package in place for them it costs the NHS £248.<sup>4</sup>

Age Scotland research conducted last year that found 474 people died whilst waiting to be discharged in 2018. Of these, 423 people were waiting for health and social care packages to be put in place.<sup>5</sup> This just highlights the tragic human cost to lack of social care in the community, leading to people being stuck in hospital at the end of their life.

Restricting the ability of care workers to come to Scotland could tip social care into a full-blown crisis, with a serious impact on the health and quality of life for those who rely on support. We know that for every day an older person is stuck in hospital they lose 5% of their muscle strength, meaning that just three weeks in hospital can age a person by 30 years.<sup>6</sup>

## Better retention of staff

Age Scotland does recognise that we can't rely on immigration alone to fill vacancies. More people from all backgrounds need to see social care as a fulfilling career, with better pay and status across the profession. This is particularly important given the intense pressure the sector has faced over the last few months because of the pandemic. The Scottish Government's efforts, thus far, to help

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/our-impact/policy-and-research/political-briefings/waiting-for-care/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Health-and-Social-Community-Care/Publications/index.asp#2631>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/latest-news/2019/september/almost-500-scottish-people-died-in-hospital-while-waiting-to-be-discharged/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/latest-news/2019/october/older-patients-stuck-in-hospital-beds-age-30-years-in-just-3-weeks-says-new-report/>

recruit and retain staff before the pandemic was certainly welcome. However, these efforts must be continued and concerted and not reliant on single recruitment drives.

## Want to find out more?

As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people's lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland.

Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

### Further information

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