

# Navigating the Health Care System as a migrant

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# Background

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) report 2023 published 3,805 HIV diagnoses in England in 2022, which represents a 22% increase from 2021. Of these diagnoses, 36% were among people who had previously been diagnosed abroad. Among the 1,361 people previously diagnosed abroad, 49% reported Africa as their region of birth.

However, the data doesn't tell us if people remain in care and there are many barriers to engagement, which migrant populations face. Challenges related to exploitative work contracts, visas, housing, and lack of knowledge of the healthcare system negatively impact access to healthcare services, including HIV and SH, and overall QOL.

Africa Advocacy Foundation (AAF) collaborated with HIV Prevention England (HPE) to co-deliver training to those who recently arrived in England from overseas.

# Aims and Method

Enhance the capacity of people on work visas to access in healthcare services and address barriers to accessing healthcare

Address knowledge gaps on rights to work in the UK

Increase knowledge of Sexual health and contraception

Run 6 sessions over 3 weeks, delivering the same session twice weekly, to allow flexible attendance.

AAF recruitment and registered participants in advance by WhatsApp and Email.

# Session 1: An overview of the health system in the UK

Included how to access different areas of care, such as GP, dentist, maternity care, A&E, opticians, detailing which services required referrals and which services require payment.

Some challenges raised by attendees included:

Rumours within migrant communities that it is difficult to register with a GP, which puts some people off trying.

Lack of awareness that you can register with a different GP if you move address / aren't happy with the care you receive.

Challenges with being asked to register online and a lack of awareness that you can request for provisions to be made if you are finding it difficult to access services, i.e. registering in person if you don't have easy access to the internet.

People avoiding health care, including A&E because they are not aware that it is free to access.

# Session 1: An overview of the health system in the UK

Difficulties in booking / attending appointments, one person led to being removed from the patient list. Lack of knowledge about how to contest these decisions.

Lack of awareness that there is financial support available for people who cannot afford to pay for their prescriptions.

A lot of confusion about NHS dentistry and what is paid for and what is covered by the NHS.

Lack of knowledge about what is discrimination / where to get help. One shared a story about a nurse disclosing her HIV status in front of her sister without consent.

## Session 2: Rights to health care and rights at work

Specifically in the context of work, an overview of the equality act was provided, e.g. reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, such as being allowed to attend HIV appointments during work hours.

Were also joined by an employment lawyer who talked about rights at work, including contracts, and the right to switch visa sponsor.

Some challenges raised by attendees included:

Accounts of individuals made to sign contracts under duress, without having chance to review the contract and not being provided a copy after signing.

Some people not provided enough working hours resulting housing and food issues. anecdote shared challenges trying to adhere to HIV medication without food.

Some people are being overworked and underpaid.

People unsure on what health conditions they need to disclose to an employer – the occupational health form asks about health and medication.

People unsure about which recruitment agencies are legitimate, lack of knowledge about CQC registration.

## Session 3: HIV and sexual health services

Discussed how to access sexual health services, HIV prevention, and living with HIV in the UK, including when a person needs to share their status and what to do if they experience discrimination based on their HIV status.

Some challenges raised by attendees included:

Lack of information around changing medication when they start treatment in the UK.

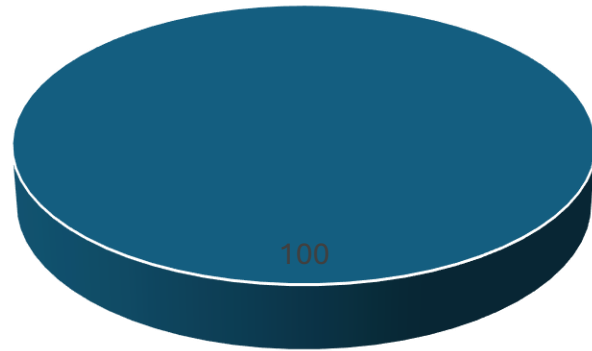
Challenges with attending sexual health services due to wider issues relating to work and housing.

Lack of knowledge about when a PLWHIV should share their status and when they don't need to share their status. Some clarification needed about whether they need to share if a HCP asks if they are taking any medication

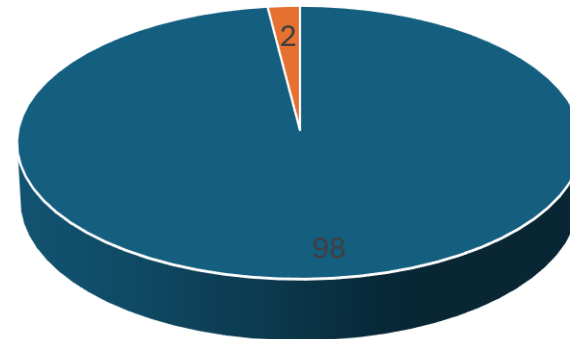
Interest in ordering online / at home test kits.

Some interest in learning more about PrEP.

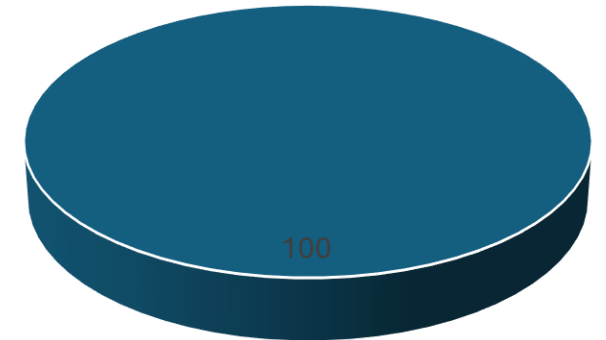
# Results



- Increase Knowledge of confidence health care systems



- Increase understanding of their rights to healthcare
- Unsure of their rights to healthcare



- Increase confidence in using primary care services



# Results

## Challenges highlighted included

Complexity of access  
and registration with GP  
services

● Lack of knowledge  
around rights at work,  
contracts, and disability  
Act.

Vulnerability that leads  
to risky behaviors,  
desperation, and  
underground existence

Lack of awareness  
about the availability of  
financial support for  
prescriptions

Navigating sharing HIV  
Status with Employers

Limited knowledge  
about access to SH  
services and  
Contraception.

Avoidance of  
healthcare services  
because not aware of  
free access

Lack of confidentiality  
in healthcare setting,  
disclosure of status  
without consent

Multiple  
social/economic  
factors as a result of  
unmet expectations

# Conclusion

Need for streamlined guidance for those on Limited or restricted visas.

Need for partnership working with recruitment and employment agencies, to ensure processes are legalised and transparent.

Sexual health won't be prioritised if other aspects i.e. finances, housing, and non-hostile political environments are unaddressed.



# Thank You



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