

Special Session
Right to the City

Migrants' service access

Alan Brown

[Research Professor of Chonnam National University Center
for Regional Development]

The report investigated the right to the city through the lens of public service access of migrants in a self-declared Human Rights City, Gwangju. The achievements and limitations of Gwangju in ensuring public service access for migrants were assessed through in-depth semi-structured interview undertaken with migrants from diverse countries, jobs, and with different visa statuses. The report was situated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which serves as a shock which could expose shortcomings in public service provision for migrants. Finally, the report provided recommendations for what actions should be taken by the Gwangju and Korean governments to enhance the right to the city of migrants. The report uncovered the following implications. First, migrants experienced a high level of service access irrespective of their visa status. Second, migrants reported high levels of satisfaction with health care and administrative services. Third, main barriers to service access were lack of information and linguistic difficulties. Fourth, to overcome linguistic barriers, responsibility should be shared by both providers and beneficiaries. Fifth, different levels of services were offered based on visa status, resulting in service gaps. Sixth, both state and non-state organizations played a crucial role in ensuring service accessibility.

Based on the above implications, the following recommendations were made: First, the information gap between government and migrants needs to be closed. Second, to ensure migrants are able to navigate the systems when accessing services, there should be brochures available at all government offices and health care providers giving step-by-step instructions on how to use them. Third, Korean language programs should be made more accessible to migrants. Fourth, the Gwangju government could more actively collaborate with migrant community groups or migrant-support NGOs to become a bridge between themselves and migrants. Fifth, the National Health Insurance system should be expanded to include unregistered migrants, who are unreasonably shouldered with higher healthcare costs despite being the most vulnerable while paying taxes when they are paid. Sixth, public welfare provision should be reassessed to ensure that it doesn't favor only certain groups of migrants. Seventh, to reduce discrimination, all public officers and health care workers who deal with migrants should receive training on how to deal with them. Eighth, immigration reforms to give migrants the option of continued residence in Korea should be instituted.