

# **Empowered participation:** lessons from conducting research into the lived experiences of displaced children and young people

Ekaterina Aleynikova, Jasmin Rostron, Amy  
Ashlee, Aiya Abdalla, Heidi Smith

# Centre for Equalities and Inclusion -

ONE

What we do:

- Qualitative team - providing evidence and insight where statistics may be unable to do so
- Working to implement recommendations of the [Inclusive Data Taskforce](#) (IDTF) through understanding the lived experiences of different statistically under-represented groups, whose views are less likely to be included through traditional data collection methods.

# Centre for Equalities and Inclusion - ONS

## IDTF Recommendations:

- Create an environment of trust and trustworthiness
- Take a whole system approach
- Ensure that all groups are robustly captured across key areas of life
- Ensure appropriateness and clarity over the concepts being used
- Broaden the range of methods and create new approaches to understanding experiences
- Ensure the accessibility of outputs

ONS commissioned this research to NIESR and REUK. Research findings will be published on ONS website in early 2024.



# Project Background

- This presentation reflects on the use of participatory and peer research methods in our research exploring the lived experiences of displaced children and young people living in England.
- This research was conducted as a partnership between NIESR, REUK and the Centre for Equalities and Inclusion at the ONS.
- Our research involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with displaced young people, aged 14-19, and their parents/carers.
- The project started in November 2022, with data collection conducted between January and March 2023.
- This presentation will focus on our learnings from using participatory & peer research methodologies, rather than the findings of the research.

# Participatory and peer research

## What they are

- Active engagement and collaboration between researchers and participants
- *“It aims to empower people to affect positive change by participating in research on their own communities.”* (The Young Foundation, 2023)

## Key considerations

- Addressing power imbalances associated with traditional research approaches
- Co-ownership of research
- Including communities who may have been marginalised
- ‘Epistemological privilege’

## Value for research

- Validity, relevance and social impact of research findings

# Our approach: key principles

In all our research activities, we aimed to follow these key principles:

1. Involving young people with lived experiences in all stages of the project
2. Ensuring participation is a meaningful experience for the young people
3. Investing in peer researcher development and support
4. Facilitating peer to peer support and feedback

# Recruitment and remuneration of peer

- Recruitment through own networks and networks of young people with lived experiences of forced displacement
- Remuneration of peer researchers for their work on the project

# Peer researcher training

Grounded in REUK's work on Global Evidence for Refugee Education (GERE), we developed a tailored, hybrid training programme, including:

- Online and in-person modules on qualitative research, interviewing skills, research ethics and safeguarding
- Discussions of the roles of peer researchers, including strategies for looking after own well-being
- Interactive training and interviewing practice
- A collaborative learning environment



# Research design

We aimed to co-design this research with young people with lived experience, through:

- Experts by Experience – displaced young people in the same age group as research participants – guiding research focus and priorities
- Peer researchers being involved in designing and testing the research tools

# Collaborative analysis

- Initial analysis through interview fieldnotes
- Analytical reflections in regular meetings and debriefs
- Collaborative analysis workshop

# Continuous mentoring

Continuous mentoring on the project focused on skills development and well-being support, through:

- Interview practice during data collection fieldtrips
- Debriefing after interviews
- Initial analysis reflective fieldnotes
- Peer researchers observing interviews
- Regular meetings for peer researchers to share experiences and reflections
- Regular check-ins and access to support from a well-being support worker from REUK

# Impact of the research

- The value of peer research methodologies is highlighted by the impact they have not only on the **quality** and **depth of the data** collected, but also on the **peer researchers themselves**

# Next steps

- Undertaking inductive thematic analysis in NVivo
- Writing up our research findings based on several key thematic areas identified through analysis
- Conducting a thorough peer review process, involving:
  - Peer researchers
  - Experts by Experience
  - Experts by Profession
  - NIESR and REUK research teams and ONS colleagues
- Research report published on ONS website, alongside accessible outputs



K.Aleynikova@niesr.ac.uk  
J.Rostron@niesr.ac.uk



Refugee Education UK

Amy@reuk.org



Office for  
National Statistics

Heidi.Smith@ons.gov.uk

# References

## Sources:

World Health Organization (2013). Research for universal health coverage: World Health Report 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/whr/2013/en/>

Cargo, M., & Mercer, S. (2008). The value and challenges of participatory research: Strengthening its practice. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 29, 325-350.

Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'participation': Models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269-283.

*What is peer research?* (2023) *The Young Foundation - Peer Research Network*. Available at: <https://www.youngfoundation.org/peer-research-network/about/what-is-peer-research/#:~:text=Peer%20research%20is%20a%20participatory,research%20on%20their%20own%20communities> (Accessed: 05 June 2023).