

RESEARCH WITH PARENTS: METHODOLOGY

Given the dearth of research on ECEC for refugee and asylum-seeking children in the UK – and in particular the lack of studies that include the voices of refugee and asylum-seeking families – UNICEF UK partnered with Refugee Education UK to conduct exploratory research. Following a review of the literature, the study used a qualitative research design involving semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with refugee and asylum-seeking parents and expert practitioners. Between February and May 2023, 25 research activities took place: two focus groups, three interviews with parents and 20 interviews with practitioners (referred to as key informant interviews). This section outlines the methodology, ethics and safeguarding process and potential limitations for this part of the research.

Focus groups

Two focus group discussions were organised with 12 mothers of children under the age of five who were newly arrived in the UK (within approximately two years). These focus group discussions were semi-structured and designed with open-ended questions that allowed mothers to freely articulate and explore their views.

The first focus group (FG1) was held with five mothers living in asylum accommodation in London awaiting an outcome on their asylum claim across four countries of origin. A community organisation that provides conversation classes and practical support for asylum seekers recruited participants using a purposive approach, and the discussion was held at the organisation's premises. Childcare was arranged for the duration of the focus group, and a relaxed and informal space was created enabling mothers to check in on their children when needed. The focus group was carried out in English but to accommodate the varying levels of language skills and confidence within the group, the facilitator asked questions at a slow pace that allowed parents to translate on their phone and, on occasion, translate for each other (where languages were shared).

The second focus group (FG2) was organised with seven Ukrainian mothers living in London through Refugee Education UK's connections with Ukrainian networks. As with FG1, participants were recruited using a purposive sampling approach. This focus group took place on Zoom, as requested by the mothers. The focus group was carried out in English and Ukrainian, with a Refugee Education UK staff member translating questions asked by the facilitator from English into Ukrainian. Participants then chose whether they wanted to respond in English or Ukrainian and, when Ukrainian was chosen, the REUK staff member translated key points on the Zoom chat so the facilitator could respond and probe as necessary.

Interviews with parents

To provide more detailed accounts of individual experiences, three semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents who had been in the UK for longer periods of time, for approximately 10 years or more, and who had received status through the asylum system. These parents are referred to in the findings section as PIs (parent interviewees). Sampling for these interviews used a snowballing approach, with practitioners interviewed recommending parents to approach for an interview. Two of these interviews took place online, and one in person. The interviews with parents were more fluid than the focus group discussions; while a list of open-ended questions were prepared, the interviewer left space for participants to tell a story of their ECEC experiences and direct the conversation to issues that were important to them.

Interviews with key informants

Finally, 20 semi-structured key informant interviews (referred to in the findings sections as KIs) were carried out with practitioners with relevant expertise in either the refugee sector, ECEC sector, or across both sectors. Of these interviews, 18 were single interviews and two were joint interviews, with the initially identified participant requesting the inclusion of others whom they felt had valuable insights to share. The majority of interviews took place online, but two took place in person: one at Refugee Education UK's offices, and one at a nursery. These interviews were semi-structured, but questions were adapted in advance of and during the interview to respond to the category of participant and their experience and expertise.

Research sample

A total of 38 individuals participated in the research study: 15 refugee and asylum-seeking parents, and 23 key informants. The 15 parents were from seven countries of origin: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Ukraine, two countries in west Africa that have been anonymised, and one country in Central America that has been anonymised (see Table 2). They comprised four immigration statuses: asylum-seekers (n=5), those that had been granted indefinite leave to remain and subsequently became British citizens (n=2), Homes for Ukraine (n=7) and Limited Leave to Remain (n=1). The vast majority of participants were female (87%), with two male participants. Two fifths of participants (n=6) stated that they did not have a partner with them in the UK or were single parents. The majority of participants (80%) lived in and around London, with one participant in each of the following regions: East, South East, and Yorkshire and the Humber. Seven of the parents had experience of accessing ECEC, with six accessing nurseries or pre-schools, and one accessing childcare through a childminder.

The 23 key informants comprised four categories: research and academia (R&A), voluntary sector programmes (VS), early childhood educators (ECE), and local government (LG). Key informants' expertise spanned the refugee sector (n=5) and the early years sector (n=8), and the intersection of the two sectors (n=10). Most

key informants had either national or local level expertise and three key informants had expertise at a global level.

Table 2: Disaggregation of parent sample (n=15) by country/region of origin

Country/region of origin	Number of participants (parents)	Percentage of participants (parents)
Afghanistan	1	7%
Bangladesh	2	13%
Central America (anonymised)	1	7%
West Africa (not specified)	2	13%
Syria	2	13%
Ukraine	7	47%

Graph 1: Number and disaggregation of children under the age of five represented by parents (n=18)¹

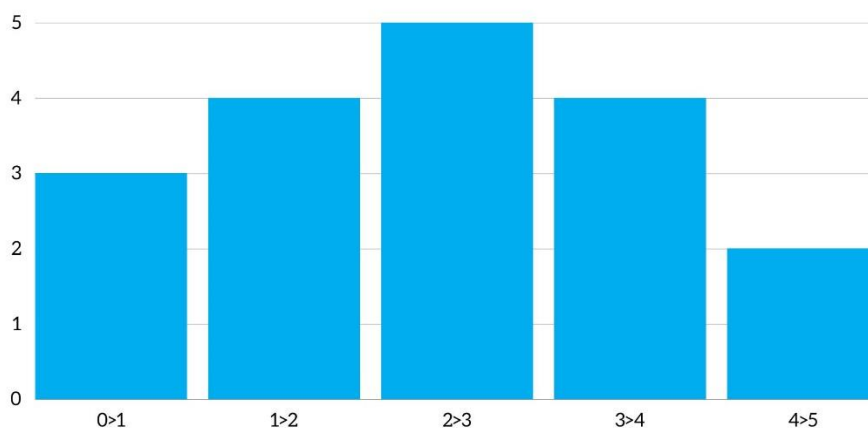


Table 3: Disaggregation of key informant sample (n=23) by category of role

Category of role	Number of key informants	Percentage of key informants
Research and academia	9	40%
Voluntary sector programmes	7	30%
Early childhood educators	3	13%
Local government	4	17%

Analysis

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by REUK researchers. This enabled the researchers' familiarity with the research data and the development of an early coding framework. FG2 was transcribed by an REUK staff member who speaks Ukrainian, and Ukrainian excerpts of the transcript were translated by the same staff member into English.

An early coding framework was developed following transcription of a random selection of transcripts, and uploaded onto MAXQDA. This detailed four key areas for coding, which align to the presentation of findings: environmental factors affecting refugee children's early years; the value of ECEC for refugee children; access to ECEC; and experiences of ECEC. Three researchers were involved in coding, and each researcher added to the coding framework on an iterative basis. REUK's Research Manager cleaned and quality assured coded data, before the full dataset within each code was analysed for recurring and prominent patterns. In total, 23 research activities were coded (which included single interviews, joint interviews, and focus group discussions). A total of 1,042 segments of transcripts were coded, shared across the four areas of the coding framework, with more than 50% of coded segments falling under 'access to ECEC' (see Table 4 in Annexe 4).

Ethics and safeguarding

The research adhered to both UNICEF UK's and REUK's safeguarding policies and procedures, and involved a risk assessment being completed in advance of data collection with refugee communities. Key ethical considerations of informed and voluntary consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and minimising of distress and discomfort, were at the centre of the research design and implementation. The research design was informed by REUK's ten years of research experience with refugee and asylum-seeking communities, and an ethics review was carried out by UNICEF UK's research team. Researchers were particularly mindful of the potential embarrassment or upset that could be caused if research activities made individuals feel like inadequate parents. The focus group and parent interview questions were open-ended and participant-led, and they were not focused on individual caregiving practices.

Limitations of the research

The research findings are largely based on experiences in southern parts of England, with most of the parents participating based in and around London. While efforts were made to include experiences in northern parts of England and in other major cities, recruitment of parents was challenging and it was not feasible during the timeframe of the study. It is therefore important to recognise a likely London- and southern England-centric bias within the study findings.

ⁱ Please note that some participants had two or more children under the age of five.