Office for National Statistics

Article

Experiences of displaced young people living in England: January to March 2023

Experiences of young people who have been displaced and their parents or carers, including their arrival in the UK and their access and engagement with services.

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1 . Main points

You can watch our video Experiences of displaced young people living in England which covers the main findings. Subtitles for the video are available in English, Arabic, Pashto, Spanish and Ukrainian.

- Displaced young people and their parents and carers who were not proficient in English upon arrival said language was one of the most difficult problems they faced in terms of making friends and settling into life in the UK.
- Participants described experiencing long waiting periods for decisions to be made about their futures in the UK, which caused stress and worry.
- Among those in this study, people receiving accommodation in hotels, such as those receiving asylum support, described poorer living conditions and limited or no access to basic facilities.
- Participants expressed feeling a lack of choice over their accommodation, describing staying in temporary hotel accommodation for much longer periods than expected and having to move to new accommodation or cities across the UK at short notice.
- Young people experienced stress and anxiety about lessons and exams because of the challenge of adapting to new systems and language barriers and suggested schools could show increased flexibility by letting them use their phones for translations, providing translated copies of the curriculum and allowing extra time in exams.
- Participants found that language barriers and a lack of clarity on how to navigate health systems affected their access to health services, with booking systems perceived as complex and a lack of available translation services for appointments.
- Current and past experiences, including war, conflict and leaving family behind, were said to affect young people's mental health; participants described self-reliance to manage their emotions, working hard to remain positive but felt more support is needed for displaced young people's mental health.

Many participant interviews were conducted in a language other than English, so attributions for these quotes say "translated interview". Some details have been removed from quotes to protect the anonymity of research participants. Countries of origin have not been disclosed in quotes or attributions because of the diversity of the sample and associated disclosure concerns, with the exception of Ukraine, where the sample size is larger. This article contains themes that some may find distressing.

2 . Background to the research

In 2021, the Inclusive Data Taskforce (IDTF) published a report which included recommendations on how to improve the inclusivity of data and evidence in the UK. The IDTF identified the need for more data and evidence on the experiences of children, naming migrant children as a priority group that are "missing" from statistics or "largely invisible" in existing data. The report highlighted how children's voices may not be heard, as their data is often collected from people other than children themselves. It recommends collecting information directly from children as the default approach where appropriate. The IDTF encouraged innovative and flexible approaches to data collection to enhance our understanding of the experiences of groups and populations which are currently under-represented or missing from existing data sources.

In the year ending September 2023, over 90,000 people applied for asylum in the UK, with accompanied children accounting for over 13,000 of these, according to the Home Office article: How many people do we grant protection to?. The most common nationalities of child asylum applicants in the UK in the year ending September 2023 were Iraqi, Afghan and Iranian, according to the Home Office's asylum applications dataset (XLSX, 9.7MB). Until the schemes closed in 2021, over 11,000 children were resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) since 2014 and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) since 2016, according to the Home Office's immigration data tables. These children were primarily from countries bordering Syria and the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as described in GOV.UK's VPRS and VCRS factsheet.

Since 2021, over 11,000 children have been resettled through the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), Afghan Relocations Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan routes not recorded, and over 1,000 through the UK Resettlement Scheme. This information can be found in the Home Office's asylum applications dataset (XLSX, 9.7MB). Additionally, there have been 197,500 arrivals of Ukraine Scheme visa-holders in the UK as of 8 January 2024, according to the Home Office's Ukraine scheme visa data publication. Moreover, over 135,000 people have arrived through the Hong Kong British National Overseas (HKBN(O)) route since January 2021, recorded by the Home Office's Safe and legal routes to the UK article.

The rights and entitlements of young people arriving in the UK differ depending on their immigration statuses, which are generally determined by their route of entry and whether they are accompanied or not. The circumstances of the participants in this research are complex and variable and they have, therefore, been attributed by either their route of entry or current immigration status. This approach ensures participant experiences can be situated and contextualised while avoiding any potential disclosure concerns. Participant quotes have also been attributed by whether they are a young person or a parent or carer; for young people, they are attributed by their gender and banded length of time since they arrived in the UK. Explanations of the specific rights and entitlements of families with the following immigration statuses and routes of entry are provided in Section 9: Glossary and details of the sample can be found in our accompanying dataset.

For this research, the categories used to describe participants' immigration status or route of entry are:

- Ukraine humanitarian schemes – includes participants who arrived in the UK through the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine), Ukraine Family Scheme or were granted leave to remain through the Ukraine Extension Scheme

- other bespoke resettlement schemes – includes participants who have arrived in the UK through schemes including the ACRS, VPRS, UK Resettlement Scheme and Hong Kong BN(O) route

- refugee status – includes participants who have been granted refugee status either as dependents or main applicants within their family's successful asylum claims or other young people who have arrived through an undisclosed resettlement route

- seeking asylum – includes participants who are dependents or main applicants of an asylum claim and receive asylum support

- other or unknown status – includes participants who did not disclose or were not aware of their immigration status or route of entry to the UK or whose immigration status falls into a category which, if identified, would pose a disclosure risk

Despite the differing entitlements and experiences of young people arriving through different routes, Marcos and others' systematic review suggests that there is increasing concern for the well-being and outcomes of refugee and asylum-seeking children more generally. Vizard and others' report (PDF, 467KB) states that children in recent migrant families have been found to be at higher risk of poverty compared with children from UK-born or long-term resident families. Asylum-seeking or resettled refugee children are also estimated by the Education Policy Institute to be nearly a year and a half (17.3 months) behind non-migrant children across all GCSE subjects. Furthermore, according to our own statistics, approximately 60% of refugees resettled between 2015 and 2020 under the VPRS and VCRS aged 0-to-24 years rated their health as very good, compared with 75% in the non-migrant England and Wales population.

Research from the Children's Commissioner for England (PDF, 630KB) identified a need for research to draw out the impact of important differences in children's circumstances and experiences on their well-being. Therefore, this work aims to explore the lived experiences of a diverse sample of displaced young people who have arrived in the UK through various routes of entry, including their perspectives of, and experiences with UK immigration systems, housing, education and healthcare. The Home Office's Indicators of Integration framework 2019 (PDF, 4.2MB) identified these services as important markers which represent the context in which integration can take place. Therefore, effective engagement with these services is deemed essential to the integration process for displaced young people and their families.

The young people in this research:

- described having been displaced from their home countries for reasons including, but not limited to, conflict, poverty and experiences of perceived discrimination
- are aged between 14 and 19 years, as scoping research identified 14- to 16-year-olds as often missing in data collection activities, and young people aged between 17 and 18 years better capture young people's aspirations for the future and engagement with services while they begin accessing support services for themselves, and 19-year-olds include those who had been held back a year and were still in school or further education
- were all accompanied by at least one parent or family member upon arrival in the UK, as scoping research suggested that more recent research had been conducted with unaccompanied young asylum-seekers and a particular gap in evidence existed around accompanied young people and their circumstances
- were living in England at the time the interview took place, though we have reported on their experiences "in the UK", as some participants lived in other UK nations before arriving in England.

In this research, we use the terms "displaced young people" or "young people" to refer to the 57 14-to-19-year-olds who have been displaced from their home countries and took part in this research. When we use the term "parents and carers", we refer to the 33 research participants who are parents or carers of the displaced young people who took part in the research. When we use the term "participants" we are referring to both young people and their parents or carers.

In preparation for this work and throughout the duration of the project, we have engaged with colleagues from across government, civil society organisations and academia, and consulted those with lived experiences of displacement. This ensured that the research was shaped by feedback from these experts, covering important areas relevant for policy and practice. For further information on methods and sample, please see Section 10: Methodology.

3 . Arriving, settling and adjusting

Pre-arrival and arrival context

Although participants were not asked directly about their experiences prior to arriving in the UK, those who did comment on this referred to war, violence and perceived discrimination in their home countries, resulting in them leaving to seek safety elsewhere.

> My dad and us, we have suffered a lot in [our] country. That's the reason why we literally came here, 'cause there's lots of problems, the government, everything. We're good now.

(Young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for five years or more)

Complicated displacement journeys sometimes involved living in various other countries prior to coming to the UK. This tended to be associated with a sense of optimism about their future in the UK, particularly when compared with conditions experienced elsewhere. Participants highlighted particular opportunities afforded to them in the UK in comparison with the countries they had been displaced from, such as better education and access to health care.

> We are deprived of the simplest things, deprived of schools, contracts, doctors if we go [back]. Deprived of anything, anything that seems to be available to us or has gone out of our reach…We have seen everything here that compensated us for leaving our country. We don't even remember our country with fondness.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, other or unknown status)

However, displacement also carried a sense of loss for those who may have had more resources in their home country compared with the UK. Nonetheless, participants were grateful for the safety provided to them here.

> My situation in my country was quite better than here. My house was much, much better, my car, my friends, my everything, even my finance resources, everything was really good there, but just because of, like, some safety, we came here. We couldn't bring anything here. So, like, we had to start over here again.

(Young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Initial experiences

Initial reactions to arriving in the UK were often positive. Participants welcomed the opportunity to come to a place of safety where they could think about their futures.

Those who arrived through resettlement schemes particularly noted feeling initially welcomed by government or charity support workers, the local community, or local hosts (such as Homes for Ukraine hosts). Young people reported that kindness was offered to them and their families which they especially appreciated after experiencing displacement.

> Honestly, the experience has been good. It's a nice feeling and we have only seen good things. Since we arrived, they welcomed us very well, treated us well and provided us with a transfer to our accommodation. Then they treated us very well.

(Translated interview, young person, male, refugee status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Despite these positive experiences of arrival in the UK, participants noted how differences in language, culture and community between the UK and their home countries meant a period of adjustment was needed and it could be difficult to process these significant changes. Increased length of time in the UK and improved English language proficiency were described as helping young people to adjust.

> It’s not your country, first of all, you know. Then it takes a long time for you to get used to here and, like, feel like it’s your home now…And it’s just hard to find friends again, find, you know, your places, your city. Everything takes long. So, you need to be very patient about it.

(Young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

For those who arrived during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, lockdowns and associated restrictions made it even more difficult to settle and adjust to life in the UK. This was particularly true for participants who were placed in hotel accommodation with limited access to facilities and resources.

> That was a very hard time. We were not sure how to deal with the situation. We didn’t even know how to handle simple things like the TV, etc. We were living in two rooms, my parent in one and the children in the other. We were not allowed to go out. We had to call the officials whenever something was needed.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Official processes

Experiences of settling in the UK differed depending upon the route of entry. However, participants generally shared frustrations over lengthy waiting periods for official processes in the UK to conclude. For those who arrived through the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, differences in the amount of time taken to complete visa processes between families were described as particularly frustrating by both those who had been displaced and the receiving host families.

> Our visa, for example, [our host]...she called someone [at the council] to speed up, well, the process, because we were, roughly speaking, everyone received the visa. Well, our friends went, so, someone received it, roughly speaking, in a week or two, and we waited there for five months.

(Translated interview, young person, male, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

Participants who were supported by the Home Office while moving through the asylum process described waiting a long and uncertain amount of time for decisions to be made regarding refugee status, as well as a perceived lack of communication and clarity about their situations. The insecurity of their status and uncertainty about what the future held was described by people in these circumstances as making it very difficult to feel settled. This was said to cause stress, fear and worry for young people and their families.

> It's just being an asylum-seeker, that's what limits my thinking, what limits my opportunities, you know? That's what's hard, always thinking about when I'm going to get that ID, when I'm going to be a normal citizen here, or a normal resident, like, when?

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Waiting for the outcome of asylum applications was also said to have a knock-on effect for services, such as housing, where participants reported remaining in hotels without being able to access suitable accommodation. Additionally, those receiving asylum support who were not permitted to work and had no recourse to public funds discussed both challenging financial and mental health implications. Enabling people seeking asylum to work and improving the mechanisms through which refugees can find and apply for employment opportunities were cited as being crucial for displaced families to feel as though they had agency and were contributing members of UK society.

> My dad's…not been working for a year now. He's a [skilled professional] and he used to work in companies all his life. It's really difficult now, he's just at the hotel, not doing anything…All he wants is to work, like, that would be beneficial for the country as well, right? So, why are you not giving us the right to work? What's the point? And we've been for a year now, like, I don't get the position from the Home Office. Actually, it doesn't make sense. Like, instead of giving us, like, eight pounds per week, right, which is ridiculous.

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

The support received in navigating immigration processes, such as asylum or visa applications, also appeared to differ between participants, depending upon their route of entry to the UK. Generally, those who had arrived through official routes, including the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes or other bespoke resettlement schemes, described receiving support to navigate complex processes from host families, charities and other organisations, while those seeking asylum described receiving less support. Although they described the processes as slow and uncertain, in the wider context of displacement, participants expressed gratitude for the efforts to provide families with safety in the UK.

> Truly, the fact that I feel safe. To finally be able to breathe and know that [my son] is safe, especially here…the biggest fear was that he would grow up and that he would have to face a society where all his life you have to be very scared.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Participants discussed requiring more flexibility from official processes, including an increase to the amount of time that services provide financial support. A need for increased sensitivity and support from migration officials was also mentioned.

> Maybe the Home Office should be more nice, because we tried to get my travel document and they said we need to go back to [our home country] to get that. It's like you telling Ukraine to go back to Russia and get their passports, it's like the same thing. So, they could be nicer about it and more understanding.

(Young person, male, other bespoke resettlement scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

Family context

Existing family ties in the UK could be important in shaping experiences of arrival, potentially providing a sense of "unity" and "home" in a new country. Those with family members already living here described this as easing the transition.

> Getting easier, it was family I think, because I have here my cousin and my mum's sister, like, family group.

(Young person, male, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

For those displaced because of war, reuniting with family fostered a sense of gratitude for having a safe family unit and being able to reconnect again.

> Thanks God we reunited with the other family members…here. And we live here, thanks God safe, and safety is by God.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, other or unknown status)

Participants also described missing aspects of their home, such as being surrounded by family and friends, and felt sad for those they had to leave behind. In some instances, young people described the difficulties of being separated from one, or both, parents.

> Our life in [my home country] was very good. It's good here as well, but it was better [there]. There were relatives all around.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Those who arrived under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes discussed forming close relationships with their hosts, with some describing them as feeling like family or best friends. Specific types of practical support received from hosts upon arrival included completing applications for higher education, finding employment, sorting out benefits and learning English, all of which were appreciated.

> I often feel that we are like relatives. It's amazing. It seems I've known them all my life. I mean, I, they are my best friends.

(Translated interview, young person, female, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

Language

Language was recurrently described by participants as one of the most challenging aspects of their experience of settling and adjusting to life in the UK. Young people arrived with varying levels of English proficiency, some with no understanding at all and others having studied it extensively in their home country. For those with lower proficiency, learning English was a strong priority.

Having little or no comprehension of English was said to affect young people's ability to understand what others expect of them, express emotions and thoughts, and feel connection with others. Young people noted that making friends was very difficult without being able to speak some English and that being unable to make connections and build relationships because of language barriers had a considerable negative impact on their well-being and sense of belonging. Further discussion on young people's relationships can be found in Section 5: School and education.

Interviewer: “How did you feel about not being able to communicate here in English?”

> I don’t know, I felt like I didn’t fit in…I felt like crying and going home and locking myself in.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for five years or more)

Additionally, lower English proficiency also led to practical problems explaining their needs to others.

> I didn’t know English. I had an extremely low level of it, so talking was incredibly difficult, so, we communicated with my host family using a translation tool. It was hard, and my mum, she doesn’t know English at all. So, I at least tried to speak, but she could only communicate with a translation tool.

(Translated interview, young person, female, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

Those who had been in the UK for a shorter period sometimes described avoiding talking to others because of frustration at being unable to express their own or interpret others’ feelings and thoughts. After becoming more comfortable in their surroundings and overcoming the initial discomfort of language barriers, communicating with others was described as easier. This in turn helped them develop their understanding of English and general confidence.

Several specific barriers were said to make young people’s experiences of learning English more difficult. Linguistic challenges, including regional accents and the use of slang and abbreviations by others, were identified as hindering comprehension and undermining confidence in learning English.

> Understanding slang is very hard…Slang is difficult to translate because we don’t usually use slang in essays or something similar. You can’t find it in the books, that is why it’s hard, and the same is with abbreviations. It is hard to understand abbreviations in written chats. Again, it has to do with language.

(Translated interview, young person, female, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

Participants described approaches they used to help overcome language barriers and improve English proficiency, such as:

- using mobile phones to translate basic phrases
- pointing and gesturing to communicate without words
- reading
- watching videos on YouTube or social media
- watching British television

Those making good progress with English described how interpreters who were initially provided by migration officials, schools, or health services to aid comprehension and improve access, were no longer required.

> Yes, I had translators at first…but now I don't need translators anymore because I understand on my own…In the beginning, I thought it would be difficult to understand, so I needed a translator.

(Translated interview, young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Other ways young people could be supported to overcome language barriers included opportunities to practice and have lessons with people of a similar age and with others whose first language was not English. They felt that this enabled them to practice speaking without fear of judgement. Attending English classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was given as an example.

> I was in that course, and it was for foreign language and foreign students. That course was really helpful for me. Why? Because it was like, we were all the same, we all, like, came to another country and leave our country, you know, leave our culture, leave our language, leave our friends, family. We all miss our country and everything there, but, so, we understand each other, and we were trying to help each other, and that was quite nice for me because I got the confidence to speak in English.

(Young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Additional barriers to learning English and examples of where young people have benefitted from increased support provision are discussed further in Section 5: School and education.

Sociocultural connectedness

Although participants described their interactions with people in the UK as broadly positive, this varied somewhat. For example, while some reported surprise at having not experienced prejudiced behaviour towards them, there were also accounts of isolated incidents of perceived discriminatory treatment or repeated negative encounters with specific individuals or groups. The latter included perceived discrimination in relation to their race or religion in a range of different scenarios, for example by neighbours, when seeking healthcare, in shops and by strangers in the street.

> Because one day I went to, like, the city near [the town where I live] and there was a woman and she shouted some not good words and she said, like, 'I don't like you, and you are wearing a hijab.' I felt very upset, but I said to my husband, 'No', I went back to [the town] because I feel like it's my home because the people are really kind…They always say, they say, 'You are like us and we love you, we love you, family.

(Parent or carer, other bespoke resettlement scheme)

Incidents of discrimination between ethnic groups or people from different regions of the same home country were also mentioned, with instances of bullying or racism reported by young people within school settings. Further discussion of these experiences can be found in Section 5: School and education.

Participants discussed a need for people in the UK to have greater empathy for displaced people and demonstrate increased compassion for them. Young people wanted others to help displaced young people feel comfortable and safe and be as supportive as possible. Particularly in relation to language barriers, young people described the need for others to be patient and supportive with those who are less confident speaking English.

> Be sympathetic. We don't know what has happened with them, to them, when they have recently come to the UK. We want to make sure that they get as much support as they need. How do I put it into words? I want people to be supportive to them, to make them stable, and to help them to learn to live in the UK. Many people don't know the language, so they struggle. I have seen people in a hotel supporting them but giving them support earlier than they need so they don't take a wrong step…So they don't feel like people aren't supporting them and so they feel stressed and lonely.

Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for less than one year)

Participants living in the UK for comparatively shorter periods and those living in smaller towns often described feeling more isolated and alone. Generally, school was an important context for young people to form social connections and friendships, and forming friendships outside of school was potentially more challenging. This is also discussed in Section 5: School and education.

> In the city that I live in, I have no friends…It doesn't matter, wherever they are from, I just want friends. In the city I am in, when it's the weekend or holidays, I get very homesick. There is no one to spend time with. If you don't work, you will spend the whole day sleeping. This is very tiring. When I am on vacation, I keep wishing that college starts again so I can go back. I have classmates, I have studies, I have everything there.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Young people felt there was a need for more opportunities for meeting up and forming connections with others, such as through organised activities and places to meet. This was raised particularly by those living in smaller towns.

> Yes, for example, in small towns, like villages, I feel it's essential to have community centres. I feel that people here are not very sympathetic to it, but it's essential to have a community centre and a large shopping area.

(Translated interview, young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Young people emphasised the importance of having friends nearby to provide a sense of "home", as well as using public spaces such as parks and shopping malls to make and strengthen connections with others.

> Yes, there are actually a lot of parks next to my house and, like, you play and I enjoy communicating with other people, make sure you know others. Yes, I feel I'm enjoying.

(Young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for three to four years)

Participants living in larger cities generally described a better sense of sociocultural connectedness in comparison to those in more rural areas, which was sometimes linked with ethnic and cultural diversity. Living among people who they identified as being culturally similar, or who spoke the same language as them, was identified as important in feeling comfortable interacting.

> The place we stayed [originally]…no one spoke the language, so it was really, really difficult. But here in [our current city], you have a lot of mixed people, anywhere you will find people who speak Arabic, people who can speak with you. But [where we were] it was hard to interact with the people.

(Young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for five years or more)

Interacting with people from the same home country or with a shared cultural background was also described as important in maintaining a sense of connection to young people's heritage. Participating in activities together, such as dancing, cooking and eating traditional foods, wearing traditional clothing and celebrating religious events was cited as helping to maintain cultural connections. Participating in traditional and religious activities was also said to facilitate conversation around topics of mutual interest and keep alive culturally significant practices, which was felt to be important.

> I was saying that for me it's very important to be, you know, attached to your culture. You should never forget where you came from.

Young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for three to four years)

Attending places of worship was described as important for making connections and establishing relationships, both with those from the same country and with others.

Young people described sharing traditional elements of their cultures as a way of connecting with others, especially other displaced young people, and expressed interest in learning about other customs and ways of life. In turn, participation in and celebration of cultural activities and traditions held by people of other ethnicities and backgrounds contributed to a feeling of mutual respect.

> Here I have met people from [my home country]. I have also met people from various [other] countries...I am surprised by the variety of people I have met in one place from different countries…and I have learned something or other from different cultures…The truth is that it feels good because you learn new things, some might say that they have had a difficult life, but you learn that some people have had a more difficult life and even so they try to get up, so that's when you gain.

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for three to four years)

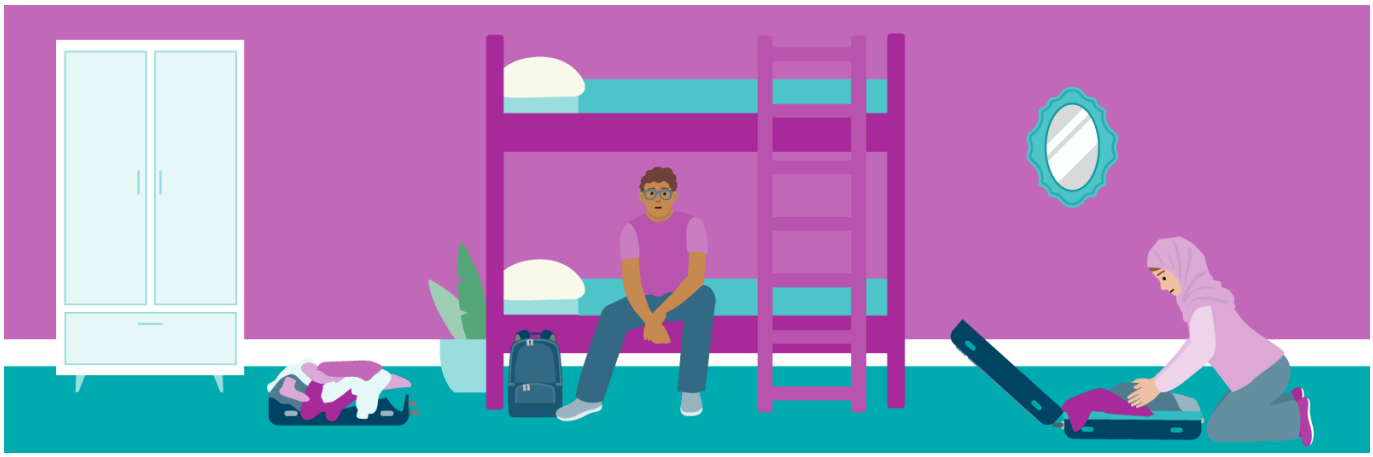
Alongside learning about other cultures, interacting with other displaced young people was described as a way of overcoming isolation.

> When I came here, I had no friends. I was in English class and there was a girl…from some other country. She was also new in this country and our English was pretty weak. I introduced myself to her and she became my first friend. When I started talking to her, it encouraged me to talk to others as well.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other bespoke resettlement scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

4 . Housing and neighbourhood

Choice and control



Participants discussed having limited housing options, which could be experienced as a lack of choice or control over where they lived. Those housed in temporary accommodation, such as hotels, particularly described being moved between accommodation and sometimes between towns and cities at short notice. A perceived lack of choice or agency over when and where these moves took place meant uprooting their lives with little notice.

> Well, first I arrived in London, and in London, I stayed in a hotel for three days. And then they moved us to [a different city] and I was there for 12 days I think, more or less, then after [that city], they moved us to [another city].

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Within the private rented sector, participants described various barriers to finding appropriate accommodation, including prohibitively high costs and a lack of suitable properties given their physical needs.

> My dad has a problem with his back, and he's finding it hard to go up, down the stairs. He said that he's looking everywhere for a new house, but it's really hard to find one, yeah, at the moment.

(Translated interview, young person, male, other or unknown status, living in the UK for five years or more)

The lack of availability of suitable accommodation, particularly in popular locations, was said to make securing rental property more difficult, resulting in spending a long time searching.

> Finding a dwelling was very hard…I got probably 30 rejections. They refused me in all the apartments I looked at…In other words, there is not much choice of housing either. More precisely, I didn't have a choice.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme)

One parent described how they found a suitable private rental property that was over the housing benefit limit, and despite offering to pay the difference in advance, their application was refused. They said that this led to them feeling like they had no options or control over where they could live. Others mirrored this sentiment, stating they had little opportunity to have a say about their accommodation type or location.

> They chose it for us. Here, normally within the process you can't, you are just sent to where they say.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Participants in council accommodation with refugee status or who arrived through bespoke resettlement schemes described housing that did not always accommodate the size of their families well and were waiting for larger properties to become available.

In hosted accommodation under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, some participants described losing their accommodation unexpectedly. Participants cited instances where hosts changed their minds about providing housing, forcing them to look elsewhere, or where host arrangements cancelled at the last minute, leaving them without accommodation.

Parents and carers with sufficient financial resources and those permitted to work expressed having more housing options to appropriately accommodate their needs. For example, some were able to purchase a property in the UK and be selective about the specific location.

> When I finally purchased my current apartment, then I chose a little bit further away from those areas that I think is more like bars and drunk people after seven or eight.

(Parent or carer, other bespoke resettlement scheme)

Quality and impacts

Participants described mixed experiences and perceptions relating to quality of their accommodation in the UK. Housing described as of poor quality was said to have a profound emotional and physical impact on displaced young people and their families, with some describing living in unsafe and unclean conditions, which they had to resolve at their own expense.

> So, the state of the house was, like, so bad. It was horrendous. It was really scary as well. It looked like them horror movies house…The balcony was, like, filled up with mud and it was kind of, like, flooding if that makes sense.

(Young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for five years or more)

Those housed in hotels and council properties also described a range of health and safety concerns, such as faulty home appliances, intermittent access to gas or electricity and having no hot water or heating. Some young people described having no internet and relying on public Wi-Fi outside of their accommodation to complete their homework.

> It was, like, soon as we got into that house, we all, like, literally cried. It was really, really bad, really, really bad…No electricity, no proper things, no phones, no nothing. The only thing we were using, like, electricity, was my mum's old phone...Food was a struggle, definitely. Fridge, a lot of struggle. The fridge is broken, sometimes the oven is broken, the gas [was] not working properly...The showers, was really, really hard. It was, like, do you know the little shower heads, we didn't have that at all. So, we just needed to fill the bucket up from kettle and just you know wash our hair and stuff like that. And it was really, really hard for us to do that.

(Young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for five years or more)

There were positive accounts of housing quality among those who received support from the government, city councils or social workers to find suitable accommodation, with some describing fully furnished accommodation, and in some cases, fully stocked fridges and cupboards when they arrived.

> When we came, the house was ready. The government had bought carpets, dishes, beds and all these things. There were no problems in the house.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, other or unknown status)

Issues identified with hotel accommodation provided to asylum-seekers also included antisocial behaviour from other residents, such as drug dealing and noise.

> Actually, it’s quite, like, from the last two hotels, I don't like them because there are people surround us, they are not nice…Day by day, I know that they do something illegally, bad stuff and they sold drugs, they are mean and their noise…It's so noisy and it affect my studies.

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Additionally, there were examples of entire families having to share a single hotel room, which was said to affect young people’s school or college studies, as well as their quality of life. It was suggested that hotels should have a quiet area where young people could study more easily, as they felt hotel rooms were not a conducive study environment.

> It’s just stuff like living with your parents and having GCSE year and you need to, you need, like, to study, you need a space for you to revise whenever you want. But living with them in the same room is actually a bit of a problem. You can’t revise whenever you want and you can’t sleep whenever you want, and stuff like that.

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

There were examples of flexibility in the accommodation provided which were appreciated by participants, such as making further rooms available to families where it was needed.

> When we first arrived at the hotel, we were provided with one room for four people, but then [my family member] asked them for a separate room, and they provided him with the room.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, refugee status)

Location of accommodation was also felt to be important in determining its perceived suitability. Some young people reported living a long distance from their schools or colleges and had to endure long or multiple costly bus journeys to attend. This happened, for example, when they had been rehoused after being enrolled at a school local to their previous accommodation. They were reluctant to relocate to a school or college nearer to their new home as they were concerned about disrupting their studies or connections they had formed.

> And it was a bit difficult because I had to change locations, I had to take another bus, and now the school is further away than it was before. It was a bit difficult.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for five years or more)

Those who lived within walking distance of important amenities, such as schools, GP surgeries and places of worship noted the convenience of their housing location. By contrast, those housed in rural locations found it more difficult to be far from amenities, such as places to buy food, and relied on public transport to access everything they required.

> We had to stay in a hotel outside the city without the opportunity to come to the town, buy food…We can live without cooking, but give us a place to buy food. We had nothing there, only a hotel and a gas station with many cars.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme)

Limited access to food and appropriate food storage and cooking facilities for young people and families living in hotels was also described as challenging. Participants often described having no access to kitchen amenities to prepare food themselves, so all their food was prepared by hotel staff. This was particularly difficult for those who were living at hotels on a longer-term basis.

> We don’t have access to a refrigerator. I don’t have a microwave…For safety issues…We’re putting the milk or the yoghurt, because it has to be, like, in cold conditions, so what we’re doing is putting them in front of the window because it’s kind of cold. So, yeah, that’s what we’re doing because we don’t have a refrigerator…And this is our status since a year ago. It’s enough, it’s more than enough, you know? And we’re supposed to be, legally, we’re supposed to be just for a couple of weeks at the hotel, but now we’ve been here for a year and two weeks as well. How long more is it going to take?

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Participants described varying experiences of the food provided by hotels. Those describing it as being of poor quality felt compelled to purchase unhealthy, but affordable food from fast food chains. One participant described how they had taken part in a hunger strike, refusing to eat the hotel food until it was changed.

> Initially the food was good, but later on they started giving us expired food. The people took pictures of the expired food and lodged complaint.

(Translated interview, young person, male, refugee status, living in the UK for one to two years)

In other cases, participants felt the food provided by their hotels was good quality and culturally appropriate.

> The menu includes...food [from our home country]. The food and the fruits are all [from there]. The rice, the soup, salad and [other dishes] are all made of [foods from our home country].

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Those living in hotels who had access to cooking facilities noted the benefits. One young person reported having access to the hotel kitchen to cook their own meals after their sibling lost a lot of weight at a previous hotel. Another young person described how their family attended a community centre where asylum-seekers from different countries took it in turn to cook for one another on a weekly basis.

Neighbourhood and community

Participants described experiences of support and kind gestures demonstrated by individual neighbours, with examples including looking after parcels for each other and offering to help with food shopping.

> You know, we came here, we don't have a car. I have neighbour here every month come ask me, ‘Would you like to go to supermarket?’ He picked me to supermarket when he finished his job to buy some shopping to my house. He told me, ‘You have family. It's not easy to carry heavy things.’ Yes, this is what happened to me, then I really, really appreciate for this man. Every two weeks, three weeks he ask me, ‘You want something to, to buy, to help?’ because our big store Tesco in [the town where I live] is far from my house. This is very, very good.

(Parent or carer, refugee status)

Having neighbours nearby who shared a similar background was important for some participants. Despite experiencing poor conditions and limited access to facilities, some young people who had been initially housed in hotels discussed feeling a sense of loss at no longer being surrounded by people who had come from the same country as them or who had shared experiences.

> I’m happy and sad at the same time. I’m happy because the house is nice, but I’m sad because all my friends were left behind…Because there were large number of [other people from my home country].

Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Others discussed forming positive relationships with neighbours from different backgrounds and having shared important cultural celebrations with them or exchanging gifts or food.

> And on New Year's, because we Latinos usually make lots and lots of food, so, my mum prepared meat, rice and salad. She called the neighbour because she is very good to us, and the next day she gave my mum a scarf, she also gave my grandmother a scarf.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for five years or more)

However, not all experiences with neighbours were described positively. Some participants reported a lack of connection or closeness, which was sometimes attributed to cultural or language barriers.

> Unfortunately, the communities here have their customs and traditions because no one of them has a link with another family, not a cultural link, nor a religious link, or customs or whatever. Yes, our neighbours are friendly, but there is no relation between us and them because our customs and traditions don’t match. Just greeting, hello, hello.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, other or unknown status)

Others described specific negative events, for example, being frequent witnesses to domestic violence occurring on their road and the ongoing impact this had on their family.

> I have a neighbour who I think beats his wife, so the police took him away, but they released him after a few days, and he did the same thing again. So, it's like, I can't leave the window open because I hear everything.

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Participants reported mixed perspectives and experiences relating to safety in their local areas, with safe neighbourhoods being described as peaceful and quiet. Feeling safe was also linked to feeling a sense of freedom living in the UK, which for some contrasted to their experiences in their home country.

> Well, I have a calm life, I am not scared of anything, and no one bothers me. People mind their own business here. They live their own life. Here it is very calm, and no one interferes in our lives. I don’t have that fear, day and night, that someone will catch us and harm us. Here, I am so relaxed. Now I can focus more on my studies and on the things that I love and am passionate about. I am able to do those things. And that is why I see this place as the safest place.

Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Some young people living in cities and towns perceived their neighbourhoods as unsafe, reporting incidents such as thefts, knife crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and damage to property, as well as too much traffic or rubbish in the streets.

> And once I was at the bus station and, well, a person came by and asked me for money and I told him I didn't have any, so he left. But he came back angry, he thought I was telling him something, but then he was threatening me and it was at night, so it was, like, I don't know, and since it's dangerous here, with the knives and all that, then it was, like, I don't know, I felt like he was going to stab me, but apart from that, he calmed down and left.

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

There were reports of feeling scared to be outside at night in their neighbourhoods, either enlisting others to watch out for them or taking longer routes home to feel safe.

> I have a lot of roads leading to my home. One is scary and I'm afraid to go along it in the evening. There is a river and a road near it, I'm afraid someone will jump on me. I go around, it's a long way, but I know it is safe.

(Translated interview, young person, female, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for less than one year)

Young people made various suggestions for making their communities safer and felt that displaced young people should be housed in areas, alongside neighbours, where they would feel safe.

5 . School and education

School, learning and attainment

Young people discussed significant barriers they experienced in school which were attributed to lower English language proficiency. Understanding teachers in lessons was described as difficult and being able to articulate a need for support was often challenging. Progression in any subject was said to be more arduous because of language difficulties, with exams and revision potentially provoking further stress and anxiety.

> Right now, it's bad because the GCSEs are coming up and I can't speak English fluently. I can speak it, but not very well, and I can't write it, and as in GCSEs, you have to write, so it stresses me out too much. I feel like leaving school just because of that.

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Some young people felt they had received inadequate language support and were being rushed into taking exams they did not feel ready for. Some mentioned achieving low GCSE exam results and consequently having to undertake English language college courses to be accepted into sixth form. Parents and carers also discussed concerns over the lack of flexibility in providing additional time during tests to young people who are learning English.

> They give children tests that need to be finished during a lesson, for example. The time given to a Ukrainian, the same exact time is given to a Brit. The Ukrainian needs additional time to translate this task. He spends half the lesson thinking about the translation before solving or making it.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme)

Focusing on improving English proficiency was said to better enable young people to study other subjects moving forward. Some schools were reported to excel at providing tailored support and flexibility to young people who were struggling with general English language and grammar. This included partnering young people with English-speaking students to improve communication, allowing them to attend fewer subject lessons to focus on improving their language proficiency and the provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes, which were reported to be available in some schools but lacking in others.

> In seven months we were able to speak English. Like, from zero. When I came to England I didn't even know what ‘hello’ meant. I only knew ‘yes’ and ‘no’. That's it. And then we had a really, really good teacher…We were sat in her class for seven months. We didn't even go to lessons. In these seven months, she taught us everything, literally everything we needed.

Young person, refugee status, living in the UK for five years or more)

Additional suggestions for addressing language barriers faced by displaced young people included:

- having the opportunity to receive class materials in advance of lessons to improve familiarity with the language and translate these materials where necessary
- making a translated version of the curriculum available
- permitting the use of phones in school for translation purposes

> In my opinion, it would be very nice if we could have access to a well-translated curriculum, because, for example, here there is a programme called BBC Bitesize, and it is almost impossible to deal with it if you translate it using automated translation. Because terminology gets confused.

(Translated interview, young person, male, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for less than one year)

Young people's needs and preferences varied for how they were grouped in schools and allocated to classes, including year groups and sets. For some young people, having to repeat studies they had already passed in their home country was described as an additional source of frustration. Being placed in lower sets than they were used to because of lower language proficiency could have a negative impact on well-being, grades and ultimately their ability to apply for preferred higher education institutions.

> Well, actually here I was put in the lower set and that was really hard for me. When I was in [my home country]…I was like in the top set there, but here I felt like I was stupid and that it was my fault.

(Young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for five years or more)

However, other participants spoke about the negative impact of joining an age-consistent year group and trying to keep up with the curriculum while learning English. Some young people who had the option to enrol in a lower year group or attend an intensive English course rather than follow the mainstream curriculum, described this positively.

> Well, my oldest girl was in year 10 last year, but she came at the end of the year, so it was very difficult for her to adapt to the curriculum and the language. I mean, she suffered a lot. I contacted the administration, and they were very responsive. I told them about her situation and that I didn't want it to affect her well-being. So, she had to get back to year 10 instead of being in year 11. Now she and her sister are in the same year. Honestly, all of them are now much better than before.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, refugee status)

Some young people reported having to take time away from school to provide translation support to their families for health or asylum-related appointments. Consequently, they needed to catch up with missed schoolwork, which could aggravate an already pressured and stressful experience. The intensity of their studies often meant having limited time for relaxation and leisure activities, which were described as important for young people's mental health and well-being, as outlined in Section 6: Health and healthcare.

> I have a very tight schedule. I have an English teacher, I have the Speaking Club, I have a Ukrainian teacher, and I also have math classes. So, joining any [leisure] club would not be very comfortable for me.

(Translated interview, young person, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for less than one year)

Peers and friendships

Making friends initially was often described as easier with other young people who were also new to school or had recently arrived in the UK. These early friendships were said to help young people begin integrating into wider social groups. Some young people spoke about feeling shy and nervous at first, but as they began to make friends and their language improved, meeting people of different nationalities became an enjoyable experience. In some schools, buddy systems facilitated friendship building.

> I mean, you come from another country, and you don't speak the language, it's kind of hard to make friends. Unless someone new arrives and then you can establish a friendship and from there. Some of the two of you get a group of friends and they include you in that group which was what happened to me, with that friend of mine. He helped me to get that group of friends that I had for those two years at school.

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for three to four years)

While forming friendships in school could be difficult, often because of lower language proficiency limiting their communications, there were also examples of kindness demonstrated by other young people. Group projects in school were also cited as helpful in establishing and building connections with peers.

> All sorts of projects helped me there, for example, for a business class, we need to make a presentation or prepare some kind of project, for example, as a group of three people…We did, usually sitting together with sixth form, doing something, that also helped. So, basically, well, somehow, I found friends here like that.

(Translated interview, young person, male, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

Strained relationships were also described, relating to perceived discrimination and racism, making school an isolating experience. Incidents of being bullied at school were reported for reasons including a lack of subject comprehension, lower language proficiency and cultural differences, such as their choice to wear, or not to wear, a hijab.

> Once I tried wearing a hijab to school because I really liked it and I wanted to wear it, but I was treated very differently when I put it on, and I was kind of isolated from everyone else.

(Young person, female, other bespoke resettlement scheme, living in the UK for five years or more)

Navigating systems and provision of support

Accounts of the process of accessing school in the UK varied, with those receiving support from charities, social workers, or host families particularly describing a quick and smooth process after their arrival. By contrast, those who experienced long waiting periods of up to eight months before being able to enrol in education noted the adverse impacts of confusion over required documentation, or the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

> When we first arrived we were quarantined in the hotel. Then we went to a hotel [in the town where I live]. I got enrolled in school six months after moving [here].

(Translated interview, young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Parents and carers reported not receiving enough information to make informed decisions around schooling and experiencing a lack of choice over the school their child attends. This led to perceptions of being treated disadvantageously compared with young people from the UK, who were said to have increased flexibility and options to select and change schools.

> Near our place is a small town…with excellent [state] schools. And I've tried to transfer my son to one of those schools since October, but, however, it felt like I was banging my head against a wall…But frankly speaking, when a Briton wants to change the school, it is easier for them to do it. And when a Ukrainian refugee wants the same, they do not solve anything. They just kicked me back and forth. This is my experience with the schools.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme)

Parents and carers noted that additional support and guidance was needed to support them in navigating school access.

> There is a [non-UK born] teacher here at the school…I also spoke to him about my children's admission. He helped me a lot. I mean, the people here are very nice.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, other or unknown status)

Participants highlighted challenges of adapting to an education system described as very different to that of their home country. Some parents and carers held concerns around teachers not having enough authority in the classroom in contrast to their home countries, where teachers were sometimes considered a second parent.

> Honestly, it was very different in every way. The system, the people, the teachers, the education, everything was different. It took me about three months to figure out where to go and what to do, how to understand the curriculum and how to study.

(Translated interview, young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK one to two years)

Despite many young people initially struggling to adapt to new education systems, some felt they had benefitted from attending school in the UK, citing the advantage of learning life skills alongside academic subject knowledge.

> Here, they teach you ordinary things you will need, not all, but most, in your everyday life, business and so on. Here, people learn more about what people need, and in Ukraine, most of the things they teach you are not necessary for life.

(Translated interview, young person, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK less than one year)

Participants discussed the provision of support within education, with some praising the individual approach demonstrated by their schools and school staff in their endeavour to support displaced young people. Some young people also noted the positive influence of individual teachers helping them to adjust to attending school in the UK. Increased support and less formal relationships with teachers compared with their home countries were said by some to contribute to a high-quality education.

> [The teachers in my home country] don't care about your education. It's okay. Just go to school. Nothing. Even the teachers. But in England it's different. They help with everything. Like, I stuck with a question, they will help me.

(Translated interview, young person, other or unknown status, living in the UK for three to four years)

However, others felt the relatively more relaxed approach taken by teachers in the UK may hinder academic achievement.

> Like, in [my home country], we studied really, like, hard and someone has to force us to study. I was study in 7am ‘til 9pm…We get used to it, but here it's too, like, relaxed and it's too peaceful. Like, I lost myself, I lost control with, yeah. Actually, I prefer [my home country] system than UK system because, like, it train you in a tough situation and…It's, like, no pain, no gain. But here, it's too easy, like, everything is too relaxed.

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Schools were also said to offer financial or material support, including the provision of supermarket vouchers, free school meals, laptops, uniforms and bus cards enabling free transport to school. These were described as particularly useful considering young people’s personal circumstances. One parent or carer explained how the school had discreetly covered costs for their daughter to attend a school trip, which ensured they would not miss out on experiences and opportunities with their peers.

> She gladly attends school and likes everything. Plus, they have an excursion, they are going to Italy or Spain. And it is also free of charge for Ukrainians. Well, those children who came here after the war don't pay for it. Well, this school is a paid one. Parents pay for everything here, but for us, it's free. They probably made an exception for us, or they simply didn't single us out.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme)

Access to a range of types of mental health support in school was also reported by young people, with some describing their school as very focussed on providing well-being support for students. One participant discussed benefitting from drama therapy within school, which provided opportunities to talk about their family circumstances or other worries.

> I have in school, drama therapy. She takes me in a room, like, and she talks with me…Most of the time, I sometimes talk about family…She is really helpful.

(Translated interview, young person, male, other or unknown status, living in the UK for five years or more)

However, others described a lack of mental health support in school or described feeling hesitant or uncomfortable sharing their feelings with staff. Further discussion around young people's mental health and mental health support can be found in Section 6: Health and healthcare.

Future aspirations

Young people discussed wide ranging goals and aspirations for their futures. They generally expressed ambition and dedication to working hard to achieve their goals and often had firm career plans in mind. A desire to enter a profession where they could help people, for example, as a doctor, nurse, dentist or psychiatrist, was often discussed, with some explaining how witnessing traumatic events in their home countries had inspired this. For some, these ambitions were linked to motivation to return to their home country to provide support for people there.

> You know, it's important for me that I have to improve my English level to be a dentist in the future because I want to go back to my country, to help my people…Because our economic situation is really awful.

(Young person, male, status not known, living in the UK for one to two years)

However, other young people described a disconnect between their personal future aspirations and what they believed was expected of them by their family, which was sometimes related to cultural ideals.

> But my parents, they don't want me to do [a forensic science course] because they think that I'm going to be, like, employee forever…They want me to, like, [have] financial freedom, to be a businesswoman…They're allowed to do it. It's quite sad actually, but I get used to it. Do you know, with mostly… parents [from my home country], you won't have any choices. Yeah.

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Those describing a sense of optimism about their future prospects here highlighted opportunities available to young people as being greater in the UK compared with their home country and felt a sense of personal responsibility to make the most of this. For example, one young person described how they had become more focussed on further and higher education since arriving in the UK, with their parent or carer suggesting a greater equality of opportunity here.

> My big dream is to do my GCSEs and go to college, which is what I want to do, and get high grades and go to uni. This is my biggest dream and getting a job is the most important thing because I am a woman who does not rely on other people...For example, I noticed that in the country where I used to live, not many people thought about what they wanted to become in the future, like their dreams and so on. Here, I have a great hope to take good grades and go to college. In many countries, girls do not put such a thing in their heads. Here, there is a big difference.

(Translated interview, young person, female, refugee status, living in the UK for one to two years)

However, displacement could also place additional challenges on young people's ability to achieve their goals. Displacement was said to cause significant disruption to young people's lives and studies. Having to learn a new language alongside mainstream subjects could limit aspirations to enter higher education and significantly delay progress towards achieving future goals. Some young people described the frustration of seeing peers in their home country moving forward with their lives, while they felt they were falling behind.

> I'm behind the people of my age because my friend, my classmates are now in the university in [my country] and they're all getting along with their lives and I'm like 'Oh my God, I'm behind.' They, they even have their license, you know, everything you plan to do together, and I'm like 'Oh my God, now I'm really behind' because I was late here, I came here late. I couldn't even finish my high school in [my home country].

(Young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Young people under asylum support described the additional impact of their immigration status on the availability of student finance, which was cited as a significant barrier to accessing higher education.

> Because the tuition fee, because I'm currently asylum-seeker so I cannot access to the student loans, so it's a big challenge for me.

(Young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Many young people reported receiving insufficient guidance from teachers or other school staff to make informed decisions about their school subject options, or more generally around what steps they needed to take to reach their future goals. It was noted that young people would benefit from being made aware of potential occupations and internship opportunities related to their area of interest. Those applying for higher education highlighted the significant differences in systems compared with their home countries and said more guidance on funding streams and support writing personal statements and other applications was needed.

> So, firstly, since submitting one's personal statement is required by the universities, knowing its proper structure and how to write it would be helpful. In Ukraine, we don't do that.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes)

However, others described receiving extensive support from their teachers in choosing subject options relevant to their desired career paths and guidance on how to navigate complex application processes. Schools facilitating direct engagement with universities was described as beneficial and a different approach to their home country.

> But in my school, there is, like, a headteacher of sixth form, head of the sixth form, and he helped me a lot with the personal statement. I went to him fifteen times probably and rewrote it, because he said, ‘Remove this, here’s how to rephrase it.’ Well, he helped me a lot with this.

(Translated interview, young person, Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, living in the UK for one to two years)

6 . Health and healthcare

Approaches to health promotion

Participants described approaches they used to keep mentally and physically well. Spending time with friends and participating in hobbies, such as reading, art, sports teams and dancing were said to help promote young people's health and well-being, helping them to relax, feel less lonely, stay positive and focus on the present. However, a recurrent theme was that they lacked time to engage in such activities because of the difficulties and pressures of schoolwork, as outlined in Section 5: School and education.

> Whenever I feel, like, sad or something, I would just try to stay active, which is, I don't know. It could be reading, writing, go have a shower. Just don't sit alone. If I sit alone, I'm just going to have a lot of negative thoughts, like, think about what happened in that day and that kind of stuff.

(Young person, refugee status, living in the UK for five years or more)

Some participants living in hotel accommodation had free access to gyms and some local leisure centres were said to provide free access to those who had arrived through the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes. Access to gym facilities was said to help promote physical health and well-being, but young people said it was important for female-only access to also be available.

> I wanted to participate in sports, but there's no separate gym for the girls. The boys and girls go to the same gym and the family don't allow me to go to the boys' gym, but I'm trying to find a way to be a sport person or a doctor.

(Translated interview, young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for less than one year)

For some, staying healthy was more difficult in the UK. New health issues were experienced since participants' arrival, which included catching viruses they had not previously been exposed to, such as chicken pox, suffering illnesses or allergies attributed to the change in climate, or iron deficiency from a change in diet. Accommodation conditions were said to affect participants' health, including the presence of damp and mould or lacking cooking facilities, making it difficult to eat healthily, as previously discussed in Section 4: Housing and neighbourhood. This was said to exacerbate pre-existing health conditions, which needed to be managed by a controlled diet.

> Also, there is a report from the GP regarding that, I sent it to the Home Office, Department of Health, to help us at least to transfer from this bad hotel and to see if we can make our own food. It's difficult because the food is also not matching with my health, you know, for my blood pressure and other things. So, I have cholesterol and I have to manage my food, but I cannot manage that here. So, this is why I also sent it. We hope they can do something for us soon.

(Parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Accessing healthcare

Overall, participants expressed gratitude for the healthcare they received in the UK, appreciating perceived egalitarian access and it being free of charge. However, there were mixed experiences and perceptions around accessibility and quality. Participants who arrived via the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes reported being offered blood tests and investigations upon arrival in the UK, which was described positively. Registering with a GP initially seemed relatively straightforward for many participants, although one parent or carer stated it took them a year and a half to gain access to a GP because of documentation issues.

> It is very complicated, especially at the beginning, trying to contact, all appointments are by phone and if you are not face-to-face it is often very difficult to understand. The first few times it was quite difficult to get access. I also had problems with my documentation, so I had a GP after one year and a half.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Waiting times to see health professionals were described as much longer than in participants' home countries, with accounts of appointments being cancelled or no longer needing care by the time appointments were arranged. This was particularly impactful for those needing to arrange transport, sometimes with support from the Home Office, or to organise for others to accompany them to appointments to help with translation. This meant that some participants did not seek help when needed as it was too complicated and instead relied on online information to resolve health issues.

> Our biggest problem is about the doctor, because every time we call the GP, it takes a lot of time. We try our best to solve our problems through online websites.

(Translated interview, young person, male, other bespoke resettlement scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

Additionally, one young person receiving asylum support explained how they had understood from a medical professional that their parent or carer would have to wait to gain refugee status before receiving a kidney transplant that they needed.

When seeking treatment, participants described being recommended rest and paracetamol with little information or explanation which was said to be uncommon in their home countries. This led to perceptions that their pain or symptoms were not taken seriously and was said to dissuade participants from accessing healthcare when needed.

Another noted difference in the healthcare system in the UK was not being able to get prescription medication directly from pharmacies without seeing a GP. This was a source of frustration for some, while others acknowledged that self-prescribing could be dangerous when not monitored by health professionals.

Vaccines offered in schools to those in a specific school year were said to be complicated to access for young people arriving after that year. For example, one young person attending college and their parent or carer explained how they needed a permission letter from the school for them to be given the HPV vaccine by their GP surgery, but the school was unable provide this.

> He needs confirmation from the school that he hasn't been vaccinated. And the school doesn't know, since he was already too grown up when he came in.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

It was suggested that health professionals should take more time to explain things like vaccines, health systems, treatment plans and medications to displaced young people and their families and not assume prior knowledge.

> I would think that, I don't know, take a little bit of your time to explain some things, like in the medical centres, how some things work. Because I have met people that for example, they don't know that there are certain medications or something.

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for three to four years)

Language and translation

Language was said to be a substantial barrier to accessing healthcare and communicating with professionals for participants with lower English proficiency. Navigating different appointment booking systems was described by participants as complex, with procedures not always well communicated.

Communicating over the telephone was described as particularly challenging, which was sometimes said to be the only way to book appointments or speak to health professionals. Language barriers appeared less problematic for those who spoke certain common languages, such as Arabic, where there were often Arabic speaking staff or interpreters available to support. Although others, such as Spanish speakers, reported finding it more difficult to make appointments or receive care.

> In England, the basic problem is that for Spanish speakers there are no translators, it is very complicated...For us, as Latinos, it is a little bit more than a little bit. There are Indian translators and there are Arab translators because they work there.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Charity organisations, case workers, host families and friends were said to provide support with translation and navigating appointment bookings. However, this support was not always available, particularly in urgent circumstances, and having to rely on others could lead to feeling overly dependent and lacking autonomy.

> I mean, ‘til now, whenever I wanted to go to the doctor, I had to call my case worker, then he has to call the doctor. Sometimes he is busy and cannot come, sometimes he doesn’t pick up. All such things are headaches.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, other bespoke resettlement scheme)

Some young people described attending appointments with their parents or carers to provide language support as a last resort, which could entail learning in-depth detail of parents’ health conditions that might otherwise be kept private. This could also lead to missing school, as outlined in Section 5: School and education.

Where young people relied on their parents or carers to translate for them, they did not always feel comfortable discussing certain health concerns. One participant described how they were able to get support from a teacher to find an interpreter to translate.

> Yeah, I wanted to talk to my doctor about something which is private…My teacher helped me to do that with a translator.

(Young person, male, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

One strategy to overcome the need for interpreters was to use mobile phone translation applications to communicate. However, despite these efforts, one parent or carer described being denied necessary care completely when they were unable to communicate in English, which was perceived to stem from prejudice.

> I had a racist doctor, I can say, yes, because she told me that if I didn't speak English, that she couldn't examine my son. And I told her that I could explain to her on the phone, on the translator, but she told me no…I mean, I feel like that's, it was really hard for me because I felt discriminated against at that moment when I had that need for my son, and to see him sick and she told me that.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Aside from having access to adequate interpretation during consultations with healthcare professionals, participants highlighted the importance of having written translations of health information. This was noted particularly where information was important or signatures were required.

> If there is anything important...write [it] down, yes, and translation on laptop or computer, yes, because they say, ‘This is very important’, you must know if you need signature or anything, yes.

(Parent or carer, other bespoke resettlement scheme)

Mental health and support

Participants discussed mental health challenges often in the context of the adversities faced in their home countries, as well as difficulties with current living situations and adapting to life in the UK. Participants described the worry and anxiety arising from ongoing conflict in their home countries and family members left behind.

> I can’t sleep at all and my whole day will be filled with stress if I call my children in [my home country] and they do not pick up. All my tension is related to them.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, other bespoke resettlement scheme)

Young people discussed traumatic experiences prior to arriving in the UK, struggles with language, a lack of community, missing family, poor living conditions and parents being unable to work as contributing to loneliness, mental health challenges and low well-being. This combination of factors was linked to some young people missing school, self-harming, contemplating suicide or behaving aggressively.

> I faced an accident in [my home country] and went through some tough times. When we came here, I had no friends and didn’t know the language as well, therefore, I used to sit alone all the time. Due to loneliness, I started shouting and fighting others.

(Translated interview, young person, female, seeking asylum, living in the UK for less than one year)

Additionally, young people described being acutely aware of their family’s suffering, sometimes worrying more about their parent or carer’s mental well-being above their own.

> Well, somehow, I got along. For my mother, maybe, it somehow, somehow it affected her more, her mental health, because she is away from my father. And it’s, she gets help, for example, the meetings, she can talk with someone there, all that. The meetings of the Ukrainians.

(Translated interview, young person, male, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for one to two years)

While young people often understood the necessity to move to the UK for their safety, some parents or carers described shielding their children from events in their home country, making it difficult for young people to comprehend the reason for their displacement.

> They have been practically stripped of their environment, the environment they were born into. And more in adolescence, I think it's a bit more complicated because they don't understand why their parents did that many times. At least in my country, I tried to keep [my son] in a bubble so that he wouldn't notice anything that was going on around him for his own protection. But when I took him out of his environment, for him it was like, why?

(Translated interview, parent or carer, seeking asylum)

Additionally, parents and carers expressed concern that their young person’s focus on wanting to return to their home country was causing them distress, hindering them from adapting to life in the UK.

Young people sometimes described relying primarily on themselves to cope with the trauma they had experienced and manage difficult feelings and emotions, such as sadness and loneliness. They found ways of distracting themselves and shifting their focus away from what was upsetting them.

> I like dancing. I come home from school and dance. It makes me more feel relaxed…If I am sad, I usually sleep or try to cry a little, think about my life, then calm down, pull myself together and do my business, as always.

(Translated interview, young person, female, Ukraine Humanitarian Scheme, living in the UK for less than one year)

Differences in attitudes towards mental health between the UK and their home country were identified. While some appreciated the recognition of, and open dialogue around mental health, others were sceptical, stating they would not feel comfortable with, or see any benefits to, discussing their experiences and difficulties with others.

> I have a friend who kind of complains that teachers don't understand what that is, what depression and mental health is. But I don't know, I feel that here it's, like, it's very common, it's, like, it's generalised, so it's more normal…I feel that it's more like a trend, let's say, because people are used to being helped and all that, that they offer us...so they get carried away by that. Sometimes literally the only help is ourselves.

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Despite perceptions of greater visibility and understanding of mental health issues in the UK, those who said they needed support identified a lack of availability, long waiting times and a lack of translation facilities as barriers. Many who had been referred to a counsellor or psychologist because of experienced trauma discussed not receiving any indication as to when they would be seen. There was a general sense that more could be done to support mental health, especially considering the trauma many young people and their families have faced. For example, a parent or carer highlighted the need for support to help their daughter to better understand why they had to leave their home country which had affected their relationship as well as their daughter's mental health.

> And if there is an opportunity, maybe some school psychologist will work with her. Because she started saying, 'I hate you because we moved'. I said, 'It wasn't our desire, we moved because of the war. I didn't want to make money in a foreign country'…Well, I asked [my social worker] to give me some, not pills, but some impetus so [my daughter] could understand that this situation was due to the circumstances, and I didn't want to force her to live and study in another country.

(Translated interview, parent or carer, Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes)

Even some participants who were more comfortable speaking English felt it would be too difficult to express themselves in a counselling setting, which could prevent them from seeking support. One family said they had to access support privately online with a professional living in their home country but were unsure if they would be able to sustain the expense.

Friends, community groups and schools were described as important sources of support for helping young people with their mental health and well-being, with some schools offering meditation and therapy sessions. It was also suggested that further support could be provided to help young people with socialising at school, which was said to directly affect their mental health and well-being.

> Helping Ukrainian children to socialise is a good idea. Well, I mean at school, because school is a problem for many children, and many do not like it. You know, there is a video on TikTok, it's popular…Well, it's about England. It goes like this, 'Every day I get up to school and I want to die.' This is what every Ukrainian child feels when they go to school in England. Well, I don't have that feeling anymore. But I used to have it too. This is regarding the schools and regarding socialisation. Well, I had a person who looked after me.

(Translated interview, young person, female, Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, living in the UK for one to two years)

7 . Cross-cutting themes from participant accounts

Displaced young people and their families described the challenges they faced since arriving in the UK, as well as beforehand, with navigating complex processes and services alongside language difficulties, the emotional and mental health impacts of displacement, missing their families and lack of clarity about their futures. Participants noted the frustration of ”waiting” for immigration processes to progress and the knock-on effect this had for receiving support and engaging with other services. This was said to make participants feel stuck and added to their sense of uncertainty, which affected all areas of their lives and well-being.

> Well, we've been requesting [asylum] since the beginning, two years since we came here. We contacted the lawyer, but he hasn't contacted my father for quite some time I think, so it's like we're still waiting. We hope that this year he will get in touch and we will be able to move forward.

(Translated interview, young person, male, seeking asylum, living in the UK for one to two years)

Language was almost always cited as one of the most challenging aspects of adjusting to life in the UK. The ability to communicate with others was said to affect all areas of participants’ lives, including their access and engagement with services. It also influenced their ability to integrate into society and form relationships, which consequently affected their well-being. Participants who began to feel more confident with speaking and understanding English from their time in the UK felt their studies, relationships and general confidence improve.

Despite the difficulties reported, young people often appeared to maintain a positive outlook, highlighting the importance of optimism and determination, and advising other young people to remain positive as well.

> Keep your head up and follow your dreams and, like, everything’s possible, like. Even though, like, you think, like, it’s never [going to] happen, it will, like. Just follow your dreams and keep your hopes up.

(Young person, male, refugee status, living in the UK for three to four years)

Although some young people wished to return to their home countries, others, particularly those who had lived in the UK for longer, saw their futures in England and began to see it as their home.

> When we go anywhere else, we can't really wait until we come back to [the town where I’m living] because we just feel like it's where we belong…So, I think [this town] is, like, if you are there, then you belong there, so they don't make you feel any different. They make you feel like you are there, like, supposed to be there.

(Young person, female, other bespoke resettlement scheme, living in the UK for five years or more)

There was a strong narrative of gratitude running through participants’ accounts of their experiences in the UK, with many discussing how thankful they were for the services and support they had received, even though these were not always described as adequate. When asked how services in the UK could be improved for displaced young people, participants often did not provide any suggestions. For example, when asked what their school could be doing better, a young person replied that:

> There are some things that are not nice or something like that, but, you know, when you look at the end…everything is fine, you know. We are supposed to study there and get our grades and get the support that we deserve…So, that's fine, you know…I guess I'm trying to be optimistic.

(Young person, female, other or unknown status, living in the UK for one to two years)

Participants did, however, share several examples of what had and had not worked well for them. While the extent and type of language support received differed between participants, the benefit of schools and colleges providing increased flexibility to aid language learning was described as substantial. The provision of extra classes, permission to use phones for translation purposes and ability of teachers to act as translators were said to aid learning and inclusion. Participants described the importance of the kindness and support shown by new friends and acquaintances in helping them to learn English and adapt to life in the UK.

Having the necessary emotional and practical support in place from charitable organisations, government case workers, host families or family members was said to help participants to adjust to life in the UK, to navigate school admission processes and to access higher quality, more suitable accommodation. Young people seeking asylum generally described receiving less support and reported a perceived lack of autonomy and freedom of choice, particularly around housing and their future prospects, which affected their general quality of life and well-being.

8 . Experiences of displaced young people living in England data

Experiences of displaced young people living in England: Sample information
Dataset | Released 23 January 2024
Sample information for qualitative research on the experiences of displaced young people living in England.

9 . Glossary

Asylum-seeker

Asylum is protection given by a host country to someone fleeing persecution in their home country. Someone who is seeking asylum has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision on whether they will be granted refugee status. Children living with families are often dependents on their parents' claim, though they may be main applicants in some cases.

Asylum-seekers have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) which means they will not be able to claim most benefits, which include child benefit, tax credits, disability benefits, social housing or homelessness assistance and are generally not permitted to work. Many asylum-seekers access Section 95 asylum support through the Home Office, giving them access to somewhere to live and a cash allowance.

Asylum-seekers may be able to apply for a work permit if they have been waiting over 12 months for their decision. In this case, they can work in occupations listed on the Shortage Occupations List. However, young people aged under 18 years and adult dependents are not able to apply for this permission in any case. Asylum-seekers may access temporary Section 98 support while awaiting Section 95 support, and families with children aged under 18 years can continue to receive Section 95 support even if they have been refused and have exhausted their appeal rights. However, where a child is born into a family after an asylum refusal, the family will only be able to access cashless Section 4 support for refused asylum-seeking adults.

Refugee status

Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. Those with refugee status will have full access to the labour market and rights to social security benefits and will often have limited leave to remain granted for five years, after which they are eligible to apply for settlement.

Leave to remain

Limited leave to remain provides permission to remain in the UK for a restricted period of time. The rights and entitlements for those with limited leave to remain depend upon their route of entry to the UK.

Indefinite leave to remain provides permission to live, work and study in the UK permanently and apply for benefits if eligible. Those with indefinite leave to remain are able to apply for British citizenship.

UK Resettlement Scheme

The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) is open to vulnerable refugees from around the world. Individuals coming through this scheme are assessed and referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) according to their criteria, which is based on people's needs and vulnerabilities.

People arriving via this route only move to the UK once suitable accommodation is in place for them. Since its launch in 2021, the UK has accepted refugees through this route from a range of countries, including Ethiopia, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen.

Those arriving through the UKRS are granted indefinite leave to remain and refugee status on arrival in the UK and have an immediate right to work and access welfare benefits, depending on their circumstances.

Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme

The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) provides a safe and legal route to the UK, prioritising those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech or rule of law. This includes judges, women's rights activists, academics and journalists, as well as vulnerable people, including women and girls and members of minority groups at risk. Those arriving through the ACRS will generally be granted indefinite leave to remain with an option to apply for British citizenship after five years and have full access to the labour market, benefits, and services.

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) ran from 2014 to 2021 and was aimed at those requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. The VPRS provided a safe and legal route for vulnerable refugees fleeing Syria and the surrounding region until the introduction of the UKRS in 2021. Those arriving through the VPRS were generally permitted refugee status and five years limited leave to remain.

Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas)

On 31 January 2021, the UK government launched the Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas (HKBN(O)) immigration route in response to China's passing of the National Security Law, which significantly affects the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong. The BN(O) route is not a refugee resettlement route but is a safe and legal route to the UK for those eligible. Those arriving through this route have the right to work but no automatic right to have recourse to public funds. They are normally granted five years limited leave to remain with an option to apply for settlement after.

Ukraine Humanitarian schemes

The UK government devised three bespoke visa routes for the people of Ukraine, working in close communication with the Ukrainian Government:

- Ukraine Family Scheme
- Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine)
- Ukraine Extension Scheme visa

Those arriving through these schemes are granted limited leave to remain for up to three years and have the right to work and study, access to public services and recourse to public funds.

10 . Methodology

We commissioned the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) and Refugee Education UK (REUK) to support on this research. NIESR conducts policy-relevant research to improve understanding around economic and social issues. REUK is a charitable organisation that helps refugees to access and thrive in education, supports education providers with training and good practice guidance, and carries out relevant research.

Between January and March 2023, a team of seven peer researchers worked alongside REUK and NIESR researchers to conduct in-depth interviews with displaced young people and their parents or carers living across England. Interviews took place in person, through telephone or online, depending on participants' preference, and lasted approximately 60 minutes with young people and 30 minutes with parents and carers. There were 10 young people who opted to participate jointly with their parent or carer. Ethical approval for this project was obtained from the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee.

Peer researchers

Peer researchers were recruited through REUK's network of young people. Peer researchers involved in this research were aged between 19 and 28 years and had been displaced from the following countries:

- Afghanistan
- Pakistan
- Palestine
- Sudan
- Ukraine

The peer researcher approach was adopted to address potential power imbalances between participants and researchers, ensuring a comfortable environment for participants and a greater contextual and cultural understanding among interviewers. It also enabled interviews to be conducted in a range of languages, ensuring young people and their parents or carers were not excluded because of language barriers.

Peer researchers received training on research methods, interviewing techniques, research ethics and qualitative data analysis in preparation for undertaking fieldwork. This training was adapted from REUK's existing training for refugee youth researchers as part of the Global Evidence for Refugee Education initiative to meet the specific requirements and context of this research. The training covered the main research ethics principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, researcher positionality, safeguarding and mitigating distress. This included specialist training from REUK's Educational Well-being Team on how to recognise "green, amber and red" signs of distress and possible techniques for mitigating escalation of distress.

Ongoing supervision and support were provided to peer researchers throughout the project. Regular check ins (both one-to-one and as a group) were established to reflect on emerging ethical concerns and to adopt a reflexive approach, while also ensuring support needs were met. Weekly meetings were also held with all researchers to discuss observations and reflections on the interview process, amending interview topic guide questions where needed.

While the peer researchers did not have Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance, they were always joined by a member of the NIESR or REUK research teams, who all had enhanced DBS clearances.

Sampling and recruitment

The sample comprised 57 young people aged 14 to 19 years living in England and 33 of their parents or carers. Participants had arrived in the UK between four months and seven years prior to their interviews taking place, coming from 16 different countries of origin. Participants were recruited through gatekeepers, which included education institutions (schools and colleges), voluntary sector organisations and local authorities.

A maximum variation purposive sampling approach was used to gather a wide range of perspectives and experiences. This approach enabled the exploration of how different characteristics and circumstances may shape the experiences of living in the UK for displaced young people and their families. The sampling frame for this research focussed on achieving a spread of personal characteristics which included:

- region in England where they were living at the time of the interview
- sex
- age
- country of origin
- length of time in the UK
- current immigration status and route of entry

Further details of the achieved sample can be found in our accompanying dataset.

Design and materials

In developing this research, we consulted three expert advisory groups:

- experts by experience – this included a group of 14- to 17-year-olds with experience of displacement from several different countries and regions; for convenience purposes, experts by experience were recruited from a single school in London
- experts by profession – this included academic and third sector professionals with expertise in this topic area
- cross-government – included representatives from government departments

The expert groups helped to shape the research focus so that it reflected the priorities of displaced young people and those who work with them, as well as being relevant to policy priorities.

Development of the in-depth interview topic guides was informed by our proposed Children's well-being indicator framework and the Home Office's Indicators of Integration framework 2019 (PDF, 4.2MB). Questions were tested and further developed with peer researchers and the experts by experience.

Participant materials were translated into twelve different languages and interviews were conducted in participants' language of choice, with a professional interpreter offered for any languages not covered by the research team. There were 28 participants who opted to take part in English and none of the participants chose to use an interpreter, although some young people provided translation support for their parent or carer.

Participants provided recorded verbal or written informed consent or assent. Consent for participants aged under 16 years was also sought from parents or carers. An ongoing assent process was followed which included reaffirming participants were happy to continue, taking breaks when needed and, on some occasions, stopping the recording or interview.

The participant materials used in the in-depth interviews are available on request from equalities@ons.gov.uk.

Approach to analysis

Interviews were audio recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim. Where participants did not want to be recorded, detailed notes were taken. Interviews which took place in a language other than English were first transcribed into the original language, then translated into English and quality assured by a member of the research team. Transcripts were analysed thematically using coding to identify themes, patterns and concepts within participants' accounts. Initial interview transcripts were coded using open, descriptive coding, with initial codes being organised into a coding framework. This formed the basis of continued analysis in NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software, with codes being further developed and adapted as analysis progressed. Findings were constantly compared within and between cases to test and explore initial themes and differences were actively sought. Early themes were reviewed and refined with the peer researchers, experts by experience and experts by profession, informing the development of the final themes.

Strengths and limitations

The main strengths of this research are:

- the qualitative research design enabled better understanding of displaced young people's lived experiences, what is important to them and what could be improved for them in the future
- interviews with parents and carers provided contextual information to situate young people's experiences and views
- flexible interview approaches were offered to maximise accessibility and participation, including the option for joint interviews and interviews taking place in preferred locations; peer researchers sharing some lived experiences and cultural understanding contributed to participant comfort
- peer researcher involvement in the research design, participant recruitment, interviews, iterative reflections and improvements of the interviewing process, preliminary analysis and peer review ensured that the research was relevant, relatable, meaningful and sensitive
- the sample achieved a diverse spread of participants from a range of countries who had differing routes of entry to the UK and lived across different regions in England, which enabled a breadth of experiences and accounts
- support from an advisory group comprising of young people aged 14 to 17 years with lived experience of displacement helped to refine the research focus and priorities and understand needs and preferences for producing accessible outputs
- professional advisory groups comprising subject matter and policy experts from academia, civil society and government departments ensured that the research reflected the priorities of displaced young people and those who work with them, as well as being policy relevant

The main limitations of this research are:

- generalisability of the research findings are limited to the concepts presented by participants, which may be specific to contexts or settings and may change over time
- project timelines meant sample recruitment was restricted to gatekeeping organisations who felt that they had sufficient time and resources to support the young people taking part in the research; there was greater representation in the sample of participants located in London and the South of England
- the sample also did not reach any participants who were not in any form of education at the time of interviews, and as such, this research does not capture experiences of young people who may have very different circumstances
- interviews with parents or carers provided contextual information surrounding young people's experiences; this detail was missing for young people whose parent or carer chose not to participate in an interview
- we were unable to recruit peer researchers who were in the asylum system at the time of the research, as we would not have been able to reimburse them for their work because of right to work restrictions; therefore, we were unable to match young participants in the asylum system to peer researchers also in this system
- peer researchers had varying degrees of research experience, so the data collection process involved continuous learning and development; some of the initial interviews involved less detailed follow-up or probing questions until the peer researchers became more confident and developed their skills

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Peer researchers were: Aiya Abdalla, Haleemah Alaydi, Arooba Hameed, Diana Nikitina, Tahmina Oria, Bilal Safi and Harneet Singh Baweja.

The experts by profession group comprised: Dr Jenny Barke (The Young Foundation), Professor Alice Bloch (University of Manchester), Kamena Dorling (Helen Bamber Foundation), Dr Ann Lorek (King's College London), Professor Joanna McIntyre (University of Nottingham), Bryony Norman (Afghan Evacuee Response), Ilona Pinter (London School of Economics), Professor Ryan Powell (University of Sheffield), Thea Shahrokh (NSPCC), Mohammed Shazad (The Children's Society), Professor Nando Sigona (University of Birmingham), Marieke Widmann (The Children's Society) and John Wiliamson (Refugee Action York).

The cross-government advisory group comprised representatives from: Cabinet Office, Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Home Office.

Researchers from NIESR were Kat Aleynikova, Jasmin Rostron and Sophie Kitson, and from REUK were Amy Ashlee, Divya Jose and Catherine Gladwell.

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11 . Related links

Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes: 27 April to 15 May 2023
Bulletin | Released 7 July 2023
Experiences of visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes, from Wave 3 of the UK Humanitarian Response Insight Survey. Experimental statistics.

Experiences of Homes for Ukraine scheme sponsors, UK: 10 to 21 August 2023
Bulletin | Released 4 October 2023
Experiences of Homes for Ukraine scheme sponsors who house those fleeing conflict in Ukraine: Homes for Ukraine Sponsor Survey Wave 2. Experimental statistics.

Early integration outcomes for refugees resettled in England and Wales: 2015 to 2021
Article | Released 27 June 2023
New analysis on refugees resettled between 2015 and 2020 under the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes in England and Wales. A collaborative study between the Office for National Statistics and the Home Office.

Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2023
Bulletin | Released 23 November 2023
Official statistics (in development) of UK international migration, year ending (YE) June 2021 to YE June 2023; estimates from YE December 2022 and YE June 2023 are provisional and will be updated when more complete data are available.

Children's well-being indicator review, UK: 2020
Article | Released 2 October 2020
Proposal and methodology for updating our children's well-being indicators to better represent children's lives today.

12 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 23 January 2024, ONS website, article, Experiences of displaced young people living in England: January to March 2023