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## 'Bring Your Voice to the World Café': Migrants identifying challenges and establishing research priorities

A partnership between the Institute for Social  
Justice, York St John University & Our City Hub



## A Brief Report

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the results of an exploratory research project titled 'Bring your Voice to the World Café! Identifying Migrants' Research Priorities'. In partnership with 'Our City Hub' (a centre for migrants in York run by migrants), a team of researchers from York St John University organised a World Café to discuss migrants' perspectives on what they think researchers should prioritise in research. Based on the voices of 19 migrants, we identified current challenges faced by the migrant community living in York, recommendations on what type of research is important/relevant to them, and how they want to be involved in future research. Challenges are mostly related to language barriers and negative views about migrants, which seem to create several constraints in relation to employment, access to healthcare, housing, and education. Participants identified insufficient support and services related to medicine and healthcare, transport and mobility, childcare, free and accessible English courses, and lack of opportunities for personal and professional development. In terms of research, participants suggested the need for research that is co-produced in collaboration with migrant communities and that recognises the diversity within the community.

## Migrants in York

Data from 2021 indicated that around 10% of the Yorkshire and Humber region population are migrants (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2022), which suggests a significant presence of migrants in the region. York is the ninth most densely populated area of Yorkshire and the Humber, with a population of 202,800 and slow population growth when compared to surrounding areas (UK Census, 2021[MFJ1] ) [MFJ1]Slightly change the presentation order.

1,267 Ukrainians have made North Yorkshire their home since the escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022 (York.Gov, 2023). The Homes for Ukraine visa scheme was popular in the community of York, with 323 residents signing up for the scheme and 181 households hosting migrants (Cooper, 2023).

**Migrants** – An umbrella term to refer to those people who moved away from their usual country of residence for various reasons, including to seek employment and education opportunities and/or to escape conflict and human rights violations. In this report, the term includes both forced and non-forced migrants living in York temporarily or permanently.

Past research has shown that once in the UK, migrants often encounter profound and multiple challenges, including barriers to accessing employment, housing, and social support (Reino & Vargas-Silva, 2022). These barriers have been exacerbated recently due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit (Ullah et al., 2021; Lahuerta & Iusmen, 2019). ‘

Our City Hub’ was created in 2022 to provide support to migrants in York. As a hub for and run by migrants, it has several partnerships with a variety of organisations within the local community, including with the Institute for Social Justice at York St John University. Our City Hub aims to facilitate communication between organisations which might be relevant to migrants and to signpost what support currently exists. Their support includes but is not limited to referrals, interpretation, and basic advice.

## Our Approach: World Café

As part of an ongoing partnership between York St John University and Our City Hub, we have identified a need for understanding the perspectives of migrants on future research priorities and the challenges faced during and after they moved to York.

The World Café was used as an entry method (Löhr et al., 2020) to explore the themes and topics considered relevant from the perspective of migrants. This participatory research method involves creating an informal environment that looks like a café. The World Café method is beneficial in community research due to facilitating dialogue and mutual learning among participants (Recchia et al., 2022).

Migrants from diverse backgrounds were invited to participate in four discussions around the following questions:

- **What are the main challenges migrants face in York?**
- **What kind of support and services are missing for migrants in York?**
- **What research on the topic of migration should be prioritised?**
- **How can migrants be involved in research?**



# Participants

19 migrants living in York participated in our World Café, which took place on the 6th of May, 2023, at York Explore Library and Archive. Most participants were women from Ukraine, but we also had participants from Poland, Romania, Colombia and South Korea.

These conversations were organised around four main tables (one per question). Participants were deliberately mixed between cycles to maximise knowledge exchange (Pewitt, 2011). A researcher acted as a table host at each discussion table, able to answer any practical questions that may arise and take detailed notes.

We provided colourful pens and blank paper where participants wrote down keywords, phrases or images reflecting their ideas emerging from the conversations. After four rounds of small group conversations, participants shared the results from the conversations with the large group.

As in previous research (Bulsara et al., 2016; MacFarlane et al., 2016), participants considered their participation in World Café research as a positive experience. The World Café enabled participants to speak freely and openly without being guided by researchers and researcher assumptions. We encouraged all participants to contribute equally, listening to and learning from one another.

All the materials produced during the World café were qualitatively analysed. The analysis was completed with the notes gathered from researchers who were observing the process and hosting the tables.



# Findings

In the following sections, we describe our results around four main topics: main challenges; support and service missing; establishing research priorities; and engagement with research. These themes were discussed in overlapping ways across the different tables.

The table's below summarise the key themes and findings.

<b>Main challenges</b>	<b>Support &amp; services missing</b>	<b>Establishing research priorities</b>	<b>Engagement with research</b>
Language barriers	Easy access to medicine, dentistry, and healthcare	Difficulties/advantages of settling	Provide effective translations
Lack of support in settling	Transport assistance	Migration stories – particularly positive stories to create better pathways	Build long-term relationships
Few opportunities for retired and elderly migrants to socialise	English lessons	Language difficulties	Demonstrate to results of the research
Unfamiliar schooling system	Appropriate extra-curricular activities for children	Expectations vs reality of migration	Utilise user-friendly documents
Cultural awareness	Services in native language	How migrants build communities	Create informal events and atmosphere
Being misunderstood, rejected, and judged	Childcare	Available mental health support	Allow people to attend in groups
Finding employment	Personal development opportunities & administrative support	The history of migrants	Prioritise cultural sensitivity
Lack of diversity/inclusion in government policies	Apprenticeships and employment/simple qualification conversion	Exploring needs across various age groups	Openness to migrant experience and what they have to say
Lack of compassion/encouragement for migrant children	Support for vulnerable migrant women, elderly migrants & other at risk groups	Attitudes towards migrants and creating understanding between local communities	Allowing research to be guided by migrant needs

## Main challenges

Participants in the World Café identified several challenges faced by migrants in York. Most of the challenges identified were perceived as related to language barriers and negative views about migrants, which seem to create several constraints in relation to employment, integration and belonging, access to healthcare, housing, and education.

**Language barriers** – Language was perceived as a major challenge. Participants reported struggling to make themselves understood and feared being judged on their language ability. This lack of confidence in communicating in English created barriers in the interaction with native speakers.



**Lack of sense of belonging** – Participants identified a cleavage between migrants and non-migrants, often leading to a lack of cultural awareness and a sense of belonging. They also mentioned insufficient opportunities and spaces to interact with non-migrants and get to know each other and their cultures. This seems to be particularly true for retired and older people who often lack socialising spaces (e.g., groups, clubs, activities).

**Difficulties in accessing skilled/qualified jobs** – Migrants described situations in which employers discredited their skills and experience just because they were migrants. This discrimination forces them into cheap labour jobs regardless of their existing qualifications and professional experience. Qualifications from their home country are not always recognised in the job market, and converting qualifications is difficult, costly and time-consuming.

**Relationship with the school system** – Participants reported difficulties within their children's schools. Due to English being their second language, migrant children are routinely being put in lower classes, regardless of ability. This leads to them falling behind their peers and skills not being nurtured. There was also a feeling that schools did not understand the difficulties associated with migrant families, such as having family overseas and a lack of support system.

**Impacts of the cost-of-living crisis** – Financial difficulties and cost-of-living crisis were identified by many of the participants as a significant challenge. Current financial strains were recognised as affecting the general population and thus not unique to migrants. However, migrants are particularly affected due to confounding factors at play, such as a lack of family support, frequent reliance on public transport, and employment barriers.

## Support & services missing

Conversations on this table tended to focus on concrete and relatable personal experiences. Several dimensions were mentioned, including those services related to health, transportation, childcare, and personal and professional development. The points discussed in this table were often also mentioned at other discussion tables.

**Access to medicine and healthcare** – Participants reported long wait times, outdated technology, and poor service. There were multiple mentions of barriers to accessing dental care, including those related to the costs involved. Overall, appropriate access to health care was constrained by language barriers.

**Transport and mobility** – Access to private transportation was mentioned as challenging due to their driving licence being invalid in the UK and driving lessons being too expensive. Most participants used public transport, which was considered expensive and insufficient for their needs. The result is limited mobility which impacts both employment and leisure opportunities.

**Childcare support** – Childcare cost in the UK is prohibitively expensive, an issue that is amplified by the lack of geographically close family, which is the case for many migrants.

**Lack of tailored support** – In general existing support for migrants was noted to be insufficient. Participants identified the need to recognise the diversity within the migrant community (e.g., nationality, age, gender) and offer responses that recognise specific needs faced by vulnerable groups (e.g., elderly migrants; women in vulnerable positions, such as pregnancy or instances of domestic abuse; young people).

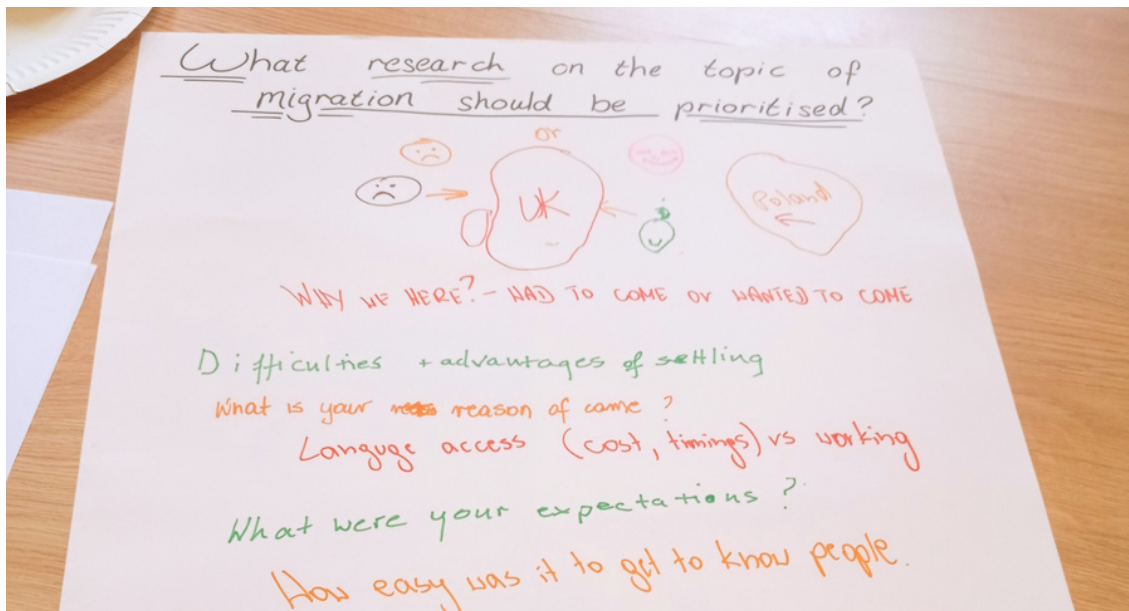
**English courses** – Appropriate English lessons were highlighted as lacking by many participants. The services offered by the hub are too advanced for some and not advanced enough for others. Accessibility to existing courses is also a problem due to the issue of transport and lack of free childcare.

**Limited opportunities for personal and professional development** – Participants identified limited opportunities for personal development, which they felt would be beneficial to them in terms of settling in the UK. They noted feeling excluded from existing personal development workshops due to limited English and cultural knowledge.



## Establishing research priorities

Participants provided several recommendations on what topics should be prioritised in future research. Overall, there was a general feeling that researchers should consider cultural diversity and inclusion, approach research sensitively and prioritise individual experiences.



**Relationship with locals** – Participants suggested that research should look at how to integrate migrants and break the barriers between the different groups, migrants and locals. Research should examine British people's perspectives on migrants to understand their views and facilitate positive interaction. Research on cultural differences and awareness was perceived as relevant to understanding and facilitating greater integration. Migrants were also keen that any research should be shared with local people so they can understand the challenges and barriers faced by migrants.

**Experiences of accessing services** – Participants suggested that research on the barriers to accessing resources and services (e.g., medical specialists) was needed and would help to understand how to improve these existing services. In particular, research should look at mental health support during the adaptation period in the new country and the challenges faced by migrants once they arrive (e.g., housing, employment).

**Intersectionality of challenges and identities** – Participants highlighted that they are not a homogenous group, and even groups with similarities will have unique and rich experiences. There is a need for research focusing on the challenges, needs and differences faced by the various groups of migrants and looking at how their experiences are shaped by multiple identities (race, nationality, class, age, etc.).



**Capturing change and needs over time** – Challenges and needs faced by migrants tend to change over time. Participants believe that this is often ignored in research, which tends to assume homogeneity of experience and groups. According to participants, there is a need for constantly improving/changing research questions based on the needs shared by the migrant communities.

**Stories of migration** – Research should explore (and disseminate) collective and personal stories of migration, including the reasons why they had to migrate. There is a distinction to be made between forced and non-forced migration, which must be considered. However, it was also shared that ‘forced’ is a complex word that may represent different things for different migrants.

## Engagement with research

Participants highlighted their interest in being involved as equals in the research process and all the phases, including contributing to the definition of research topics and priorities.

**The importance of using non-extractive methodologies** – It was mentioned that migrants would be more willing to be involved in research that amplifies their voices and makes them feel listened to. They should be involved in the study planning, implementation and dissemination as co-researchers. They want to be heard and be part of the research process, feel heard and to not feel instrumentalised as ‘data points’.

**The importance of making research accessible and inclusive** – It is vital that research takes place at an accessible location and time, and that interpreters are provided to ensure that everyone’s voices are heard. Cultural considerations should also be made to ensure a positive experience for those who are participating.

**Conduct research with beneficial impact on society** – Research should address relevant problems, and those should be identified by those directly affected. For that, researchers need to listen to people and have relationships with migrants. The frustration of participants was noted as they feel there is often no tangible result from their participation in research projects.

**Communicating research findings to participants** – Make sure to disseminate the results of your studies among those who were involved. Among our participants, there was a consistent desire to be understood by the local community and feel that their experiences were heard. Participants also suggested that there should be dissemination among those who have the power to make changes in policies and practices (e.g., local councils, employers).



## Concluding Remarks

This report provided a brief summary of the perspectives of 19 migrants living in York. Using the World Café as a method, we explored their views on everyday challenges faced by migrants and how they see existing support and services. Furthermore, we describe their opinions on how research with migrants should be conducted and what topics should be prioritised. Below we would like to highlight three main points that hopefully can inform future research with migrants.

### **Conducting research with migrants rather than on them**

Research should be developed in partnership with migrants. It was clear that migrants wanted to have a voice on the topics that are researched and on how research is conducted. It was fundamental to use methods that give voice to their experiences and stories. Research should address their needs, concerns and ultimately have a positive impact on their lives.

### **Recognising diversity within the migrant community**

Conduct research that gives voice to the multiple experiences and recognise that migrants are a diverse group and may face different challenges. Research should focus on the diversity of experiences, backgrounds, needs, challenges and concerns.

### **Facilitating dialogue and cultural awareness**

Research should focus on the processes and dynamics involved in the integration of migrants. It also involves developing research that ultimately will facilitate the understanding of the dynamic values and beliefs of different cultures. This will involve research on the processes and factors involved in discrimination against migrants and creating barriers to their full integration.

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