



Children Caring on the Move
Report 1 | July 2020

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Report written by Sarah Crafter, Rachel Rosen
and Sayani Mitra

About the team

The CCoM project is led by Sarah Crafter (Open University) and Rachel Rosen (University College London).

They are joined by five co-investigators: Elaine Chase, Ravi Kohli, Helen Stalford, Ellie Ott and Evangelia Prokopiou. Kamena Dorling is a consultant with expertise in children's rights.

Project researchers are Sayani Mitra, Veena Meetoo and Lucy Leon.

You can read more about the team by going to our [CCoM website](#).

 www.ccomstudy.com
 ccom@open.ac.uk
 @CCoMstudy



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Introduction

The [Children Caring on the Move](#) (CCoM) project has come to the end of a busy and fruitful first year. Coinciding with the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, this has also been a challenging time.

Our aim, from the outset of the CCoM project, was to bring together an interdisciplinary team to develop new insights, using research-based knowledge, to one of the greatest global challenges of our time: the care of separated child migrants affected by transnational displacement and migration. Our project breaks new ground by exploring separated children's care for each other as they navigate contradictory, complex, and changeable immigration and welfare systems.

Our project began in May 2019 and since then we have made significant strides. Detailed in this report is the progress the **Work Package 1** team have made working with migrant Young Researchers (YRs). We provide an overview of the advancements made for **Work Package 2**, where we are seeking the views of a range of adult stakeholders' perspectives on care relationships and practices. The **Work Package 3** team provide an overview of their work examining the political economy of separated child migrants care, with a focus on semi-independent accommodation, and a legal framework analysis.

Across our three Work Packages we have an interdisciplinary team from sociology, migration, psychology, law, social work, children's rights and foster care expertise. This interdisciplinary perspective has promoted rich and complex discussions about the care of separated child migrants. We have focused on fundamental questions about the ethics of working in this arena. The team has dedicated

time to discussing questions raised by participatory approaches to research, and significantly, are alive the shifting needs of the young migrants who are training to be young researchers. From the onset of the [covid-19 pandemic](#), the safety and well-being of [the young researchers and participants, as well as the team](#), have been foreground. Our discussions about care, and care can be understood, have taken on new meanings as we went into lockdown, and navigate the complexities of undertaking research during a pandemic. More on that later in the report.

Alongside the tremendous strength and support within the team, we have also been able to draw on the expertise of our [Advisory Group](#). They have been able to provide vital insights into the continuously shifting landscape of the care of separated child migrants.

Overview of research

Work Package 1: Separated child migrants' care relationships and caring practices

The team: Rachel Rosen, Evangelia Prokopiou, Veena Meeto, Lucy Leon, Elaine Chase

Work Package 1 (WP1) seeks to systematically investigate how, in the context of England's immigration-welfare nexus, separated child migrants build, sustain, navigate, and make sense of care relationships and caring practices; both the care they provide and that they receive. A key aim of this work package is to utilise participatory approaches, collaborating with young migrants, who are training to be Young Researchers on CCoM, to design the research and collect data from separated child migrants.

Over the past year, and with the support of partner organisations in the Midlands (British Red Cross), Greater London (Refugee Youth), and existing relationships within the team, we have co-created two research teams each comprised of two university-based researchers and five Young Researchers. Our teams have focused on team building, research training, fieldwork preparation and practice. As part of the training we have discussed the purposes of social research, ethical issues we may encounter in all aspects of the research, research design including co-creating the research questions of the study, and methods of data generation. We have trialled individual and group interviews, observations, object-based focus groups, photo elicitation, writing a letter to the Prime Minister, and more. Each session includes games, practice activities, opportunities to reflect on learning and feed this forward into our research design.

Each session includes lots of laughter. 'Laugh a lot' is one of the 'ground rules' of the research team in the Midlands. We view this intervention

of the young people as an important antidote to approaches which may solely, or primarily, focus on the traumatic aspects of young migrants' lives; a reminder that they are much more than their immigration journey and status in the UK. As the Midlands team wrote in a [blog](#): "We are young people who are asylum seekers and refugees. But we are more than that. We are students, interpreters, helpers, carers, advisers and researchers. We are humans." We suspect that laughing together is important because it brings joy, despite difficult circumstances, and when used respectfully can build an embodied sense of being a group. At the same time, we have not shied away from difficult conversations or working through disagreements that are inevitable when talking about complex issues.

Similar narratives have emerged within the London team which consists of a more heterogenous group, having been recruited from a range of established partnerships and relationships within the project team. Some of the Young Researchers differ in age and thus, each one of them is facing similar and different life demands. As the Greater London team wrote in their [blog](#): "We are a group of young people (... young... we don't really feel young because of the responsibilities and levels of stress that other young people of our age, don't usually have) ... who have been through the caring system so we have first-hand experience of care. When we think of care certain words come to our mind such as support, relationships, people, opportunities, friendships, advice, the law...care could also be frightening if care is bad or if you get bad advice."

From the beginning of the CCoM project we were committed to developing participatory approaches to the research. We originally thought that the Young Researchers would primarily help to shape methods for data generation. We saw their involvement as

essential for developing context-based research methods which account for religious and cultural values. We also felt that Young Researchers would be knowledgeable about ethical issues to be aware of which result from specific local practices of immigration control and welfare provision. As the project has progressed, we have remained committed to these ideas, and we have come to see the importance of the Young Researchers contributions to all aspects of the research project. For instance, in the Midlands team, our conversations have turned towards challenges within 'the system' of immigration control and a welfare system where not everyone who 'should be caring' seems to care. This has shaped informed the focus of our interviews. Young Researchers in the Greater London team talked about the word 'children' in the title 'Children Caring on the Move'. They feel that their experiences mean that they are often not viewed as children. These discussions have led the CCoM team to reflect on the terminology we use and how appropriate and inviting it may be to potential research participants. The discussions have highlighted how ideas about 'childhood' and 'youth' differ with significant implications when they clash and contradict with the meanings of these words within the immigration-welfare nexus. Furthermore, the Greater London team engaged in a rigorous questioning of the term 'Young Researcher' – a term often used within participatory approaches. They preferred the term 'Improvement Researchers' which the London team feel highlights their active role, and further positions them as active agents in carrying out research that aims to improve the lives of separated child migrants.

The value of developing field work in context-specific ways has also been confirmed by the differences in the two research teams. To date, the Midlands team has emphasized a group approach, making decisions together about all

aspects of the research. As a result, the team's outreach plan involves collectively presenting the research to potential participants and carrying out fieldwork together. The team plans to use 'object-based interviews'. Participants will be asked to bring an object that represents 'care' to them, and the Young Researcher will use this as an opportunity to interview about care experiences and relationships. This will be followed by 'day in the life' photo elicitation. Participants will be asked to take anonymised photos of everyday practices, spaces, and relationships of care. The photos will be the focus of the interview. In contrast, in the Greater London team each Improvement Researcher or/and a pair of them will work in partnership with a university-based researcher, and their experience will contribute to a shared project: CCoM research. As a team, the Greater London group have embraced 'individual process within the whole group process' by developing strategies of constantly moving from individual to group with sensitivity to context and the demands in each participant's life. The Greater London team also plans to use photo elicitation and/ or objects to understand what care means to participants. Participants will be asked what method they prefer: a focus group with other young people from the local organisation they belong to or an individual interview. There will also be the option for those taking part in a focus group to participate in a follow up interview.

The week that the COVID-19 lockdown was announced in the UK, both teams were on the cusp of beginning outreach to separated child migrants for interviews. Face-to-face field work was paused as a result. Since then, both teams have been meeting online. In the beginning the focus was on informal check-ins and support within the team, continuing our practice of care towards each other as we research care. Since then, we have gradually moved towards re-

starting the research using online formats as we have become more familiar with digital spaces and the general context has stabilised somewhat. We have been experimenting with online interviews within and between the two teams, reflecting a great deal on how to build rapport and show interest in participants during online communication, when ‘having a tea together’ is no longer an option. We have reflected on the way that follow up questions in interviews become even more important to demonstrate interest. The teams have reflected on questions of gaze and body language, particularly in contexts where participants may be interacting over small mobile screens. Young Researchers from both research teams have been keen to ensure that when separated child migrants are interviewed it will feel completely different than a Home Office interview. As a result, issues of trust and privacy have been central to the ethical discussions and a key reason why the teams have been apprehensive about using online methods more widely. We are currently experimenting with ways to make online interviews safe and inviting (e.g. by conducting a pre-interview session with separated child migrants, consisting of ice-breaker activities, details about ethics, and information about project, and a post interview check in), as well as exploring online spaces that will allow participants to post anonymously. Both teams remain hopeful that we will be able to return to face-to-face methods or combine these with the online approaches we have been developing.

The training and planning sessions with Young Researchers have allowed us to finetune the research design. They have also generated interesting insights into care and participatory research methodologies. Some of these emerging themes are:

- The importance of *change-oriented* social research. This was a key draw for many of the young people to get

involved as Young Researchers. One of the Midlands team explained: ‘I am doing this because I don’t want other young people to experience what I experienced. I want things to be better.’ As the Greater London team agreed, ‘We are not Young Researchers but Improvement Researchers’.

- Young migrants often find that the rhythms of their lives are out of their own control. They may need to wait for asylum decisions, act rapidly to appeal rejections, engage in work when it is available, deal with distorted sleep patterns due to stress and anxiety, and so forth. As a result, it can be challenging to be involved in research training and practice on a consistent basis. Rather than treating sporadic involvement as a failure, we have come to think of a river as a metaphor for participatory research – fed by individual contributions at different times but always qualitatively more than any one individual.
- Separated child migrants who have engaged with ‘the system’ may experience Home Office interviews and engagements with adults in welfare services as requiring repeated articulation of their migration story. This general frustration is heightened by the sense that the story must be coherent, linear, and consistent or else risking negative consequences (e.g., refused asylum claim or deportation). As a result, methodologically, the teams have reflected that accepting fragments, contradictions, and refusals from participants during interviews is an important part of our ethical

commitments and change-oriented research.

- Separated child migrants engage in a myriad of caring practices. These range from showing newcomers around, making and sharing meals, interpreting, calling/messaging to check in, being there to listen, laughing, pooling or sharing resources, providing referrals and information about how to handle 'the system', and more. But, we have found this care can be difficult to articulate and discuss. We suspect that there are a number of reasons for this. In some ways, these caring practices and relationships are so mundane and everyday, they can be hard to articulate because they are simply what 'we do'. Given normative discourses in the UK which tend to position children as the objects of care, such practices – while mundane – may be harder to get at because they are below the surface, or young people may be reluctant to talk about their caring labour, aware that it is seen as something 'children shouldn't be doing'. Another reason may be that many of the Young Researchers got involved in CCoM because they see the importance of using research to make change. It is the lack of, or gaps in, care 'in the system' that they see as needing to change, and therefore the priority to discuss. In reflecting on these points, our teams have been considering how young people are filling care gaps, and how to inform policy and practice by learning from the ways separated child migrants practise care.

Work Package 2: Adult stakeholders' perspectives on care relationships and practices

The team: Sarah Crafter, Sayani Mitra, Ravi Kohli, Ellie Ott

Work package 2 seeks to investigate how those involved in the care of separated children make sense of and value care relationships and caring practices, including the care children provide each other. A key aim of this work package is to speak to a range of adults who work in both professional and non-professional roles, whose caring roles may blur the boundaries between formal and informal, and those whose roles may not explicitly be conceived as caring but none-the-less have supportive connections with separated child migrants. We have begun with a range of stakeholders including, but not limited to, social workers, educators, interpreters, health carers (inclusive of mental health), lawyers, foster carers, those from charity/NGOs, and informal youth networks.

The first step in our data collection for WP2 was to undertake a small exploratory pilot study. Our team developed an interview schedule that broadly covered 1) the interviewee's background, their broad experience of caring for separated child migrants and their role in their lives; 2) the interviewee's own understandings of care, care relationships and caring practices; 3) their views on the wider economic, social and political priorities and challenges and how these influence 'care' and; 4) personal practices of care that speak to challenges and what works well.

For our pilot study we interviewed a foster carer, an independent social worker currently working in the charity sector, and a project manager overseeing an education support programme for separated child migrants. Our

initial analysis has focused on three broad themes: Care contradictions, barriers and challenges; Care facilitators and actions and; Positioning of the young people.

In terms of the first theme, 'care contradictions, barriers and challenges', all three interviewees talked about the ways in which systematic or institutional processes could contradict or work against developing in-depth personal relationships with young people. Care meant either providing the basic needs that could be fulfilled superficially by ticking a checklist, or it meant a personalised and emotional investment at a deeper level. Discussions about resources, and how they shaped the way in which care was performed, featured in all the interviewees accounts. In particular, poor resourcing was described as limiting the care that professionals could provide, as well as the care that young people could receive.

As part of our second theme 'care facilitators and actions' we noted a number of synonyms associated with our interviewee's descriptions of what it means to care. Our pilot respondents talked about 'love', often cited in contrast to institutional or formal practice which did not practice 'love'. 'Trust', 'solidarity', as a 'shield from the world', a 'therapeutic' connection, and as an association with 'family'. As a verb, or an action, care was a form of 'noticing' – an action that could be passive or active in its essence. Care, when framed as active, is foreground as 'care by doing' or 'care with a purpose' – that which goes beyond a job or a role. However, care could also be framed as passive, without the intention or motivation to go beyond the basic checklist of requirements.

Our final theme addressed the different ways in which our participants spoke about, or positioned, the young people in particular ways. In terms of young people's care of each other, our interviewee's reflected on how shared experiences of past and present and

cultural ties create a close relationship. The independent social worker further articulated the way in which separated child migrants are differentiated from citizen children in terms of how children's care of 'others' is framed. Children caring for an adult is described as 'young caring' but there is no similar terminology for children's care of each other.

Just as we finished our pilot study, the covid-19 pandemic hit the UK, and data collection was suspended (see more details below). However, as the situation stabilised, the WP2 team began to embark on data collection for the main study using online tools. To date, we have conducted over 30 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders predominantly in the charity sector and the social work sector. Our interview schedule broadly reflected the same areas covered in the pilot study, with an additional question addressing the impact of covid-19.

Over the coming year, WP2 efforts will continue to focus on collecting more data through interviewing a range of different actors and stakeholders.

WP3: The 'cultural political economy' of care for and by separated child migrants

The team: Rachel Rosen, Sayani Mitra, Helen Stalford, Kamena Dorling

Work Package 3 (WP3) studies the political economy of the care separated child migrants receive and provide. The study of the political economy of care focuses understanding law, public and policy discourses, media representations, and the distribution and organisation of public funding and other financial resources. These issues are not simply a backdrop for the lives of separated child migrants but are a dynamic part of this field of social action. A key aim of WP3 is to analyse how these political economic structures shape how care is understood, valued, and practiced.

During the first year of the project we have approached our analysis from two directions: (1) a focus on international and domestic legal frameworks and (2) a focus on the political economy of supported accommodation.

International and domestic legal frameworks

First, the team has carried out an initial review of relevant international and domestic legal frameworks. We began with a review of the various legal statuses of 'separated child migrants', the legislation that applies to these different groups, and by extension the provisions they are entitled to in England. From the outset, the CCoM project has been committed to a broad understanding of children and young people who have migrated to England without parents/guardians, rather than relying on pre-defined categories often found in legal arenas. This is an ethical and empirical decision as we recognise that these socially-produced categories miss the complexities of young people's lives, trapping them in a singular status. Additionally, particular groups of children (e.g., asylum-seekers) are often the focus of research while

others (e.g., children who are undocumented) remain invisible. CCoM therefore is interested in the experiences of children who may be identified as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), children identified as trafficked, children transferred to the UK under the Dublin III Regulation, separated stateless children, and undocumented separated children.

We also consider the way that various legal frameworks address care entitlements for separated child migrants, as well as the care they provide for others. Care is a feature of virtually all international, European and domestic law and policy relating to separated children, but is largely confined to issues of family reunification (with an emphasis on returns rather than reunification in the UK), care placements, and access to health care and social assistance. Crucially, we note the absence of any reference or acknowledgement in the legal framework to the actual or potential role of separated children as carers of others, and virtually no guidance on how their role as carers should inform assessments of their best interests or care arrangements.

This legal analysis provides a broad and comprehensive children's rights-informed evaluation of existing legal obligations. We have used this to inform the empirical side of the research, generating a set of questions in relation to what we would expect to see from a legal perspective as well as the gaps in legal provision (e.g., around separated children as carers).

The political economy of supported accommodation

Inspired by the concerns emerging from separated child migrants in WP1 and drawing on legal obligations towards these young people in relation to care and well-being, we have focused in on analysing the political

economy of supported accommodation in the formal sector in CCoM's two regions of data collection in England CCoM. Supported accommodation refers to 'other accommodation'; it is also known as (semi-)independent housing, supported lodgings, and shared accommodation. Unlike foster care or children's home, this type of accommodation is not required to register nor is it regulated by regulatory bodies like Ofsted. We have carried out a background mapping of this accommodation, including analysing legal and policy frameworks at local and national levels. This sought to evaluate resource flows and placement expenditures (between the Home Office, local authorities, and accommodation providers); and create profiles of accommodation providers focusing – where possible – on unique selling points (USPs), assets, and business structures. We have accomplished the latter through publicly available online documents from local authorities, providers, and Companies House. We have carried out a pilot interview (online) with one accommodation provider and are in the process of recruiting for future interviews with the owners of supported accommodation and tendering, contracts and placement teams in the Midlands and Greater London..

Our preliminary analysis highlights several points for further investigation. Firstly, although supported accommodation makes up a relatively small proportion of the total placements for separated child migrants, these young people are over-represented in such accommodations compared to other groups of children (e.g., British born children, children non-citizen children who came to England with their parents/carers and so forth). Previous research points out that such placements might be cheaper for the local authorities, and therefore appealing in times of austerity and budgetary cuts. But the formal and in-practice basis for such placements are not clear, which is

a particular issue given concerns about its quality and a general preference for foster care amongst social workers according to previous research. The question that remains, and which our future research will explore, is why UASC are disproportionately placed in such accommodation.

Secondly, while foster care and children's homes are regulated and inspected for quality under the Care Standards Act 2000, supported accommodation is not required to register and is allowed to operate as unregulated provision. The core legal distinction made is whether a provision provides *full-time care* (registered + regulated) or simply *support* (unregulated). This is an ambiguous distinction with significant consequences. Our analysis does not imply that individual accommodations and those working within them are not providing high quality services. Rather, our focus is on the ways in which policy ambiguities about unregulated accommodation make way for back door privatisation and deregulation by labelling the services offered in those placements as 'not care'. This raises questions about how publicly funded services and responsibilities are organised, how the appropriateness and quality of such placements can be assured, and how separated children are able to receive the care they might need and are entitled to.

One of the strengths of the CCoM project is the interconnections between the three work packages which enables a multi-perspective analysis. Not only has the WP3 focus on supported accommodation been inspired by WP1, but in the coming year we plan to extend our political economy analysis by working with teams in WP1 to explore young people's experiences of supported accommodation and WP2 to explore the perspectives of adult stakeholders involved in direct accommodation provision.

Communications, impacts and engagements

Communication and media

In the first year of this study the team have set up a website for the [Children Caring on the Move](#) project, which details the key elements of our study and details about the team. A [blog](#) has been a regular output, and since September 2019, when we put out our first blog, there have been 14 posts. These have been written by team members, young researchers and our consultant, Kamena Dorling.

The team has been tweeting using the @CCoMstudy twitter handle. Over the course of the year the project has had 32,984 Tweet impressions, which is the number of times one of the project posts has been seen.



During #Refugeeweek2020, the team launched an intense blog-posting campaign to raise the awareness of the CCoM project.

Engaging with our Advisory Group members

From the inception of the project, the team were very conscious of how quickly the immigration landscape can change and that this might be reflected in the experiences of both our young, separated child migrants, and the adult stakeholders. Our Advisory Group members have provided an important connection to changes occurring at both policy and practice levels. Our academic advisory members have fed into our methodological and conceptual developments. Individual members have helped us with making connections with potential participants and been an important source of information, especially in light of the impact of covid-19 (see below).



UNREGULATED ACCOMMODATION

Posted on 15/06/2020 by Admin in Latest News

In this blog, Kamena Dorling talks about the problems with putting children who have migrated to the UK alone in 'unregulated accommodation'. Kamena is a consultant on the CCoM project. She is the Head of Policy and Advocacy at Article 39, an organisation that fights for the rights of children

The Children on the Move symposium

Four members of the CCoM investigative team (Rachel Rosen, Elaine Chase, Sarah Crafter and Sayani Mitra) and a member of our Advisory Board (Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh) organised an international symposium titled *Children on the Move: Unsettling narratives of care, childhood, and the migration 'crisis'*. The symposium explored and analysed the ways in which care, childhood and migration are conceptualised in varied global contexts and their implications for the provision of, and access to, necessary resources, infrastructures and relationships of care. The onset of covid-19 in the UK meant the symposium was moved online, across three sessions. Each symposium was attended by around 30 delegates, representing countries from around the globe. The contributing papers and discussions were very rich, and we are developing an edited book in the coming year.

Academic outputs

Over the first year of CCoM, a number of pieces have been published about the pilot studies which [informed CCoM](#). These include pieces in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies and in Migration and Society. You can find details of this pilot study and associated papers on the [CCoM website](#). More

recently, Sarah and Rachel have had a chapter published in a book edited by one of our Advisory Group members, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. The book is titled '[Refugee in a Moving World: Tracing refugee and migrant journeys across disciplines](#)'. You can hear Sarah talk about the chapter [here](#).

The impact of covid-19

The impact of covid-19 on the project has been significant. At the start of the pandemic in the UK, the team considered in great depth how to move forward with the research. From the start, we prioritised health and safety, and sought to minimise the anxiety, of our team members, young researchers and participants.

The team decided that suspending the study was not an option. In particular, the young researchers all felt they wanted to stay connected with each other. Communications were moved online and included regular check-ins with a gradual move towards research design and preparation as the online platform became more familiar. For a number of months interviews with adult stakeholders was suspended, recognising that they were dealing with very challenging issues. As lockdown progressed, we have resumed our data collection through online interviews as appropriate (see Work Package 2). This has been progressing well.

It remains unclear how the research will progress given the ongoing issues raised by the global pandemic, and we anticipate that there will be more challenges to come. It is clear that Covid-19 has raised additional questions about what care means at the intersection of practice, systems, regulations, materiality, technology and political economies. Rather than viewing covid-19 as separate from the project, imposing or interfering with our research, we view its impact as an inseparable contextual element of care practices and caring relationships as separated child migrants navigate the immigration and welfare nexus.