

Social Justice Pulse Review

Poverty and Cost of Living

Together Through Crisis

Dr Hayley Alderson & Dr Steph Scott (Newcastle University), Professor Eileen Kaner & Dr Felicity Shenton (NIHR ARC), and Ms Julia Wysocka (ICOS)

Project Summary

This collaborative project between International Community of Sunderland (ICOS), a Sunderland-based registered charity, Newcastle University, and the North East North Cumbria Applied Research Collaboration consisted of interviews, creative art-based workshops and a live artist workshop to explore the extent to which the cost-of-living crisis impacts on the wellbeing of Eastern European families living in Sunderland, North East England.



The Challenge

ICOS aims to improve the quality of life of Black and Minority Ethnic people in the North East of England and aid their integration into the local community. We know that Eastern European families have limited access to mainstream networks, lack their own voice and face issues of discrimination and multiple, intersectional disadvantage. This has been exacerbated further due to the cost-of-living crisis. This project highlighted the challenges faced by Eastern European families and co-produced a visual depiction of findings in an impactful and accessible format.

Findings

This project triangulated the findings from interviews and images from creative workshops with Eastern European Women and their children. A final workshop was held bringing together professionals and people with lived experience to sense check the findings and co-produce a piece of visual artwork representing key findings and areas of consideration regarding the cost-of-living crisis.

The cost-of-living crisis impacted on Eastern European families in multiple ways, inclusive but not limited to:

Family circumstances: Women expressed difficulty paying for rent but they were unable to take up employment due to several barriers including childcare, caring responsibilities, and language barriers.

"I live with my husband, disabled mother and two children, our house is rented from Gentoo... I have problems with paying for energy, sometimes for the rent for my house."

Impact on Children: Families were unable to participate in activities with their children as they used to e.g. after school activities, going out on trips, visiting families in their home countries. They also expressed concerns around not being able to afford necessities for children such as hygiene items and clothing.

Effects on wellbeing: Families were experiencing distress due to the rising prices of energy bills, in some circumstances they were unable to afford to pay their bills, putting their household in debt. Due to the rising cost of groceries and food, they had to change their shopping habits. This included shopping at discount stores, purchasing discounted food with 'yellow stickers' and buying products which are less healthy due to them being cheaper.

Support: Many participants have accessed many different charities for various support, inclusive of financial advice and food banks.

Recommendations

- *Translate materials into other languages and promote involvement activities through various platforms, including social media and community groups, to ensure inclusion of minoritised communities.*
- *Choose culturally and linguistically appropriate facilitators that can accommodate the needs of Eastern European families.*
- *Look at further funding opportunities to continue co-produced research to better understand the issues experienced by Eastern European Women, their support needs and how agencies can best support them.*
- *Share the research across our networks including with the NHS, local authorities, Universities and policy makers to raise the profile of challenges faced by Eastern European families.*
- *Provide opportunities for Eastern European Women:*
 - *To be part of research and have their voices heard.*
 - *Provide development opportunities e.g. becoming research champions, Project Steering Group members and allow women to share their lived experience.*
 - *Providing women with new skills, experiences, and opportunities.*