

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **£1million to research care of child migrants**

A researcher who travelled to ‘the Jungle’ refugee camp in Calais to see how unaccompanied child migrants lived has secured £1million of funding from the Economic and Social Research Council to study the care of lone child refugees. The new research project led by The Open University will investigate the care of separated child migrants who arrive in the UK. The project team will work with young researchers within refugee communities to gather data on how migrants and those involved in their care make sense of, and value, care relationships and practices.

Lead researcher Dr Sarah Crafter, a Senior Lecturer in Psychology, and the lead Co-Investigator Dr Rachel Rose, an Associate Professor in Sociology (UCL) had their interest sparked after watching a news report about unaccompanied child migrants in Calais camps, and how in the absence of family they cared for each other. Dr Crafter says: “We went to ‘The Jungle’ refugee camp in Calais to investigate how child migrants coped, and to build links with charities working in the area. It was incredibly moving and hard to put into words how horrible the situation was. But understanding life in the camp wasn’t possible without a view of the children’s’ migrant journeys and the appeal of the UK as a destination. It was this that led us to researching the care they received once they reached the UK.”

Dr Crafter says that when unaccompanied children arrive in the UK they face conflicting treatment: “On the one hand we have a duty of care because of their child status so we must protect them, but on the other hand their immigration status means they are sometimes treated with suspicion or hostility. Care in that situation becomes an ambiguous concept.”

The project will work with local organisations such as the MEENA centre in Birmingham and Refugee Youth, alongside Barnardo's and the Refugee Council, to recruit and train young adults from migrant communities to gather research data. These young people will connect to children who arrived as separated child migrants in the UK to find out how they care for each other and discuss their experiences of the welfare and immigration system. The research team will gather data from around 60 children aged 11-18 years old; most of these will be refugees from Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan and Albania.

Professor Alison Park, Director of Research at ESRC said: "UNICEF estimate that, by the end of 2017, there were 13 million child refugees and over 900,000 asylum-seeking children worldwide. ESRC is pleased to be funding this UK-based research that will help us better understand how child migrants separated from their parents provide care and support for one another while navigating complex immigration and welfare systems. It will help create and develop best practice in the care and support of this vulnerable group and will provide valuable insights for policy makers and charities."

The research results will be used to help children understand their own treatment and care as they go through welfare and asylum system and build connections to other young migrants. The project will support practitioners who work with child migrants through online resources, and study the wider cultural, political, economic backdrop of care influences institutions and individuals who work within them.

The project is a collaboration with University College London, University of Liverpool, the University of Northampton, the University of Oxford, the University of Bedfordshire and Coram's Children's Legal Centre. It begins in May 2019 and will run until July 2022.

## **ENDS**

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### **Notes to editors**

### **About The Open University**

The Open University (OU) is the largest academic institution in the UK and a world leader in flexible distance learning. Celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019, the university was founded with a clear purpose: to open up education to all. Since those beginnings in 1969, the OU has taught more than 2 million students worldwide and has over 170,000 current students, including more than 15,000 overseas.

Over 75% of students are in full-time or part-time employment, and three out of five FTSE 100 companies have sponsored staff to take OU courses.

In the latest assessment exercise for university research (Research Excellence Framework, 2014), nearly three quarters (72%) of OU research was assessed as 4 or 3 star – the highest ratings available, awarded to research that is world-leading or internationally excellent. The OU is unique among UK universities having both an access mission and demonstrating research excellence.

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Regarded as the UK's major e-learning institution, the OU is a world leader in developing technology to increase access to education on a global scale. Its vast 'open content portfolio' includes free study units, as well as games, videos and academic articles, which have reached over 36 million people.

#### **About the ESRC**

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- The ESRC is the UK's largest funder of research on the social and economic questions facing us today. It supports the development and training of the UK's future social scientists and also funds major studies that provide the infrastructure for research. ESRC-funded research informs policymakers and practitioners and helps make businesses, voluntary bodies and other organisations more effective.
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