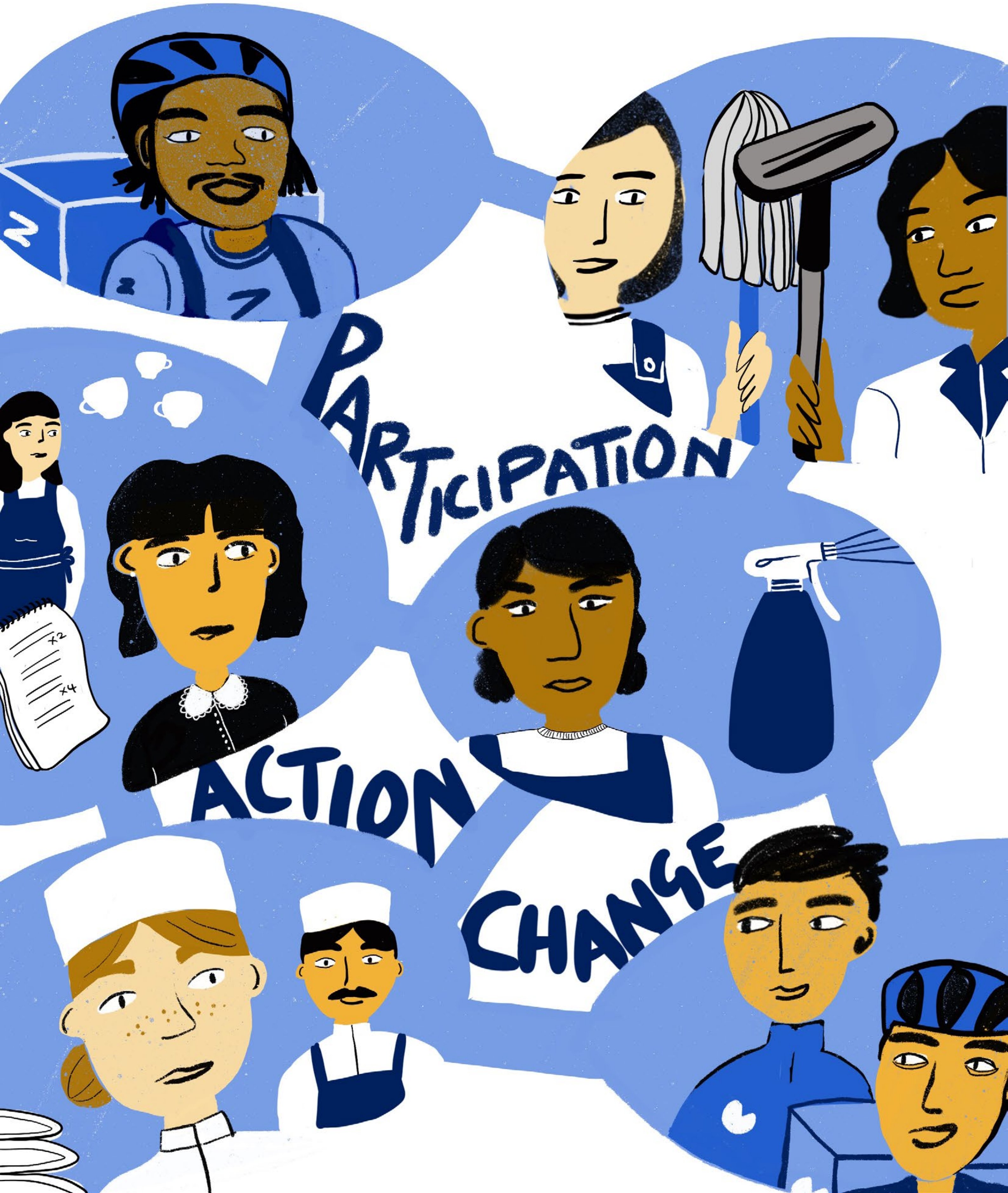
FOCUS ON
LABOUR
EXPLOITATION

EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE: CONDUCTING FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITH WORKERS IN HIGH-RISK SECTORS



Please cite as *Focus on Labour Exploitation. 2021. Experts by Experience: Conducting Feminist Participatory Action Research with Workers in High-Risk Sectors.* London: FLEX. Available at: www.labourexploitation.org

Designed by Two Hyphens Graphic Design.

Illustrations by Cara Holland.

This publication was written by Meri Åhlberg, Eleonora Paesani and Lara Farrell. It was edited by Lucila Granada. It presents the learnings from a three-year research project conducted by FLEX together with workers from cleaning, hospitality and the app-based courier sector. Invaluable input on the participatory research process was provided by FLEX Peer Coordinator, Alberico Ricci, and FLEX Peer Researchers, Alice Barker, Tatiana Carniato, Juliana Daraia Massoud, Ivan Nikollov, Marisol Urbano, and others. Thank you to the East European Resource Centre, Latin American Women's Rights Service, Roma Support Group, Independent Workers of Great Britain, Polish Migrants Organise for Change and others who helped advertise the Peer Researcher role and shared our surveys with their networks. Thank you also to the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women for sharing their insights on doing Feminist Participatory Action Research.

Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX) is a research and policy organisation working towards an end to labour exploitation. FLEX seeks to achieve this vision through the prevention of labour abuses, protection of the rights of those affected or at risk of exploitation and by promoting best practice responses to labour exploitation through research and evidence-based advocacy.

Produced with the support of

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

FOCUS ON
LABOUR
EXPLOITATION

EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE: CONDUCTING FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITH WORKERS IN HIGH-RISK SECTORS

MARCH 2021

CONTENTS

1. PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is twofold. The first is to document lessons learned from using Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) to study the experiences and drivers of labour exploitation – and advocate for change – with workers from three High-Risk sectors in the UK. By documenting what we have learnt, we hope to raise awareness about the importance of doing research and advocacy 'with' rather than 'on' or 'for' communities, and de-mystify the process of doing so.

The second purpose of this guide is to provide a sounding board for those interested in or already applying FPAR in their own work. FPAR is a research approach rather than a methodology, and how it is done in practice will depend on the context and circumstances it is being applied in. This is therefore not a definitive guide on 'how to do FPAR', but an account of how we have done it in our specific context – the challenges we faced, how we adapted, the ethical considerations made, what worked, and what we might do differently next time.

Doing participatory research is a process of continuous learning about power sharing, and we are still on that journey. We hope this guide will provide others with a chance to reflect on their own processes. In this guide, we draw on project observations, insights from academic literature, conversations with stakeholders and, of course, the perspectives of workers themselves. We discuss the benefits and challenges of FPAR and propose some practical tools and solutions.

2. BACKGROUND

This FLEX guide to researching labour exploitation has grown out of a three-year research project that seeks to address the knowledge gap concerning experiences and drivers of labour abuse and exploitation in three understudied low-paid sectors of the economy: cleaning, hospitality and app-based courier work in the gig economy. The project has two strands. One concentrates on the experiences of women workers, aiming to produce worker-led evidence to support FLEX's call for a gender-aware approach to labour market enforcement (FLEX, 2018a), as well as support women workers in taking action against the issues that affect them most in the workplace. The other strand focuses on the specific challenges faced by young migrant workers – a group that is overrepresented in insecure work and at heightened risk of experiencing issues at work.

The project, which at the time of writing is still ongoing, builds on methodological reflections from our research project in the construction sector (FLEX, 2018b), documented in *Researching Labour Exploitation: Guide to Research with Hard-to-Reach Migrant Workers in the UK*, which employed a community researcher model. The aim of the community researcher model was to enable 'hard-to-reach' migrant workers i.e., workers who are traditionally not represented in policy research due to barriers like language, immigration status and lack of trust, to participate as interviewees and survey respondents. This was done by working with community researchers who spoke the same language and/or came from the same community as participants and could therefore do data collection through their networks and without the need for interpretation.

FLEX is committed to involving experts by experience in our work, which has led us to adopt an FPAR approach. Whilst moving from the community researcher model towards FPAR has brought new challenges, it has also presented an opportunity to facilitate deeper engagement with workers throughout the research process and in action towards improving working conditions.

Workers from the sectors being researched have participated in the project in three ways: 1) as research participants through interviews, focus groups and surveys; 2) as Peer Researchers designing and shaping research tools, carrying out data collection, developing recommendations, disseminating findings and advocating for change; and – in the case of one individual so far, 3) as Peer Coordinators doing research and supporting and coordinating others to do the same. Peer Researchers and Coordinators are paid for their work and receive training and ongoing support. Research participants receive a participation incentive to compensate them for their time and potential travel costs.

The research has been phased by sector, allowing us to learn and adapt as we moved from cleaning to hospitality and then to the gig economy. At the time of writing, we have published our research with workers in cleaning (FLEX, 2021) and finished collecting data in hospitality. Our research with workers in the gig economy is still ongoing. So far, we have engaged with 13 Peer Researchers (nine of whom were women, four men, two aged 16-24 and 12 migrants) and 104 interview and focus group participants (76% women, 23% men, 1% non-binary, 32% aged 16-24 and 88% migrants). In total we have done 23 peer-to-peer interviews and eight peer-facilitated focus groups. We have complemented peer-led data collection with desk-based research, nine community researcher interviews with workers, three community researcher-led focus groups, one FLEX-led focus group and 26 FLEX-led interviews with workers and key stakeholders. To help triangulate our qualitative data, we have also run two multi-language surveys: one for cleaning and hospitality in five relevant languages (English, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish), which reached 213 participants from 30 nationalities, and one for the gig economy in English and Portuguese, which is still ongoing. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we moved all our data collection online from March 2020 onwards.

TEN TIPS FOR DOING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH WORKERS IN HIGH-RISK SECTORS

1. **Assess your readiness to do FPAR.** Carefully consider the time, resources, networks and flexibility required to carry out truly participatory research ethically and safely, and critically evaluate your preparedness.

2. **Make enabling the participation of those most at risk of labour exploitation the guiding principle**. Remove as many barriers to participation as possible and prepare to substantially adapt or completely re-design your plans as you learn what works. Find ways to involve Peer Researchers in every step of research from design to data collection, analysis and advocacy.

3. **Recognise the value of the knowledge workers hold.** Reflect on how this knowledge is different from and complements other types of expertise.

4. **Ensure Peer Researchers receive in-depth training** that provides them with transferable skills and a solid basis for carrying out primary research. Topics to cover include research methods, data collection tools and techniques, research ethics, safeguarding and signposting. Make space in the training to discuss informed consent.

5. **Note that Peer Researchers may have limited availability.** Those working in low-paid and insecure work may have long hours with shifting schedules, which will require extra flexibility around meetings and during the data collection process. Others may be parents, carers or have health needs.

6. **Pay Peer Researchers and research participants for their time**. Make sure the payment sufficiently recognises the value of their work and expertise, and the time commitment of participants.

7. **Amplify workers' voices as researchers and experts by experience.** Create opportunities for workers to engage in policy spaces and with the media, and support worker-led action.

8. **Make the safety and wellbeing of Peer Researchers a priority**. Discuss potential safety issues with Peer Researchers such as recruitment through personal networks and staying safe online and establish mitigations strategies.

9. **Have up-to-date and tailored signposting policies in place** in case participants need information, advice or support. Peer Researchers should receive signposting training but should not be made responsible for supporting their peers. Have clear policies in place in case anyone participating is at immediate risk, including clear guidance for when concerns should be escalated to the researching organisation.

10. **Approach FPAR as a process of continuous two-way learning.** Be flexible, change processes as needed, seek feedback and input, and test new ways of doing things.

3. WHAT IS FPAR AND WHY ARE WE USING IT?

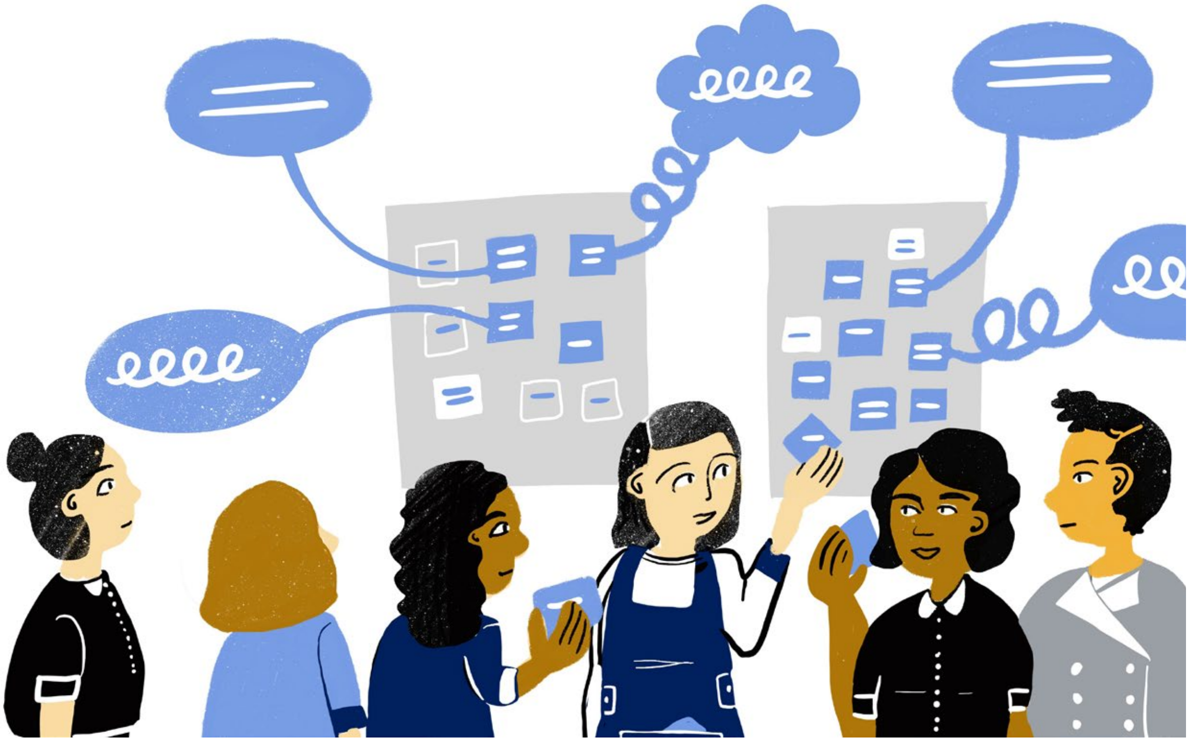
WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research approach where the experience, knowledge and perspectives of the group or community being researched are not just acknowledged but form the foundation of the research (Cornwall and Jukes, 1995). The two core principles of PAR are that it is community-led and that it aims to empower those most affected by an issue to generate knowledge that can bring about social change. What makes PAR distinct from other participatory research approaches, such as community research, is the 'action' element – a primary focus on collectively improving a situation or advocating for change, as opposed to only involving communities in the production of knowledge (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012). It entails working in partnership and participation is essential at all stages of the research process – design, data collection, analysis and research-based action.

Workers facing risk of labour exploitation have important insights about the issue and its contributing factors through direct experience. They are experts in their own right and, as such, their knowledge can help identify and shape better policy solutions. Despite their expertise by experience and despite being the ones most affected by such policy decisions, workers at risk are rarely involved by policymakers in developing solutions to labour exploitation. At FLEX, we think policy should be shaped by those with lived experience, and participatory research approaches are a means to achieve this by evening out traditional hierarchies between 'researcher' and 'research subject' and working 'with', rather than 'for' or 'on', at-risk workers. PAR recognises that those most affected by an issue are 'experts by experience' and can be the agents of change, and therefore seeks to democratise and demystify the research process so it becomes more accessible and open to all (Gatenby and Humphries, 2000).

THE 'F' IN FPAR

Most PAR is in some ways intrinsically 'feminist' because, like feminist research, it aims to maximise involvement, activism and social critique for the purpose of "liberatory change" (Gatenby and Humphries, 2000: 89). It also challenges the 'neutrality' of research i.e., the idea that research – the topics chosen, the questions asked, the methods used, and how the findings are interpreted and acted on – is or can be objective. However, what makes 'Feminist PAR' (or FPAR) different to traditional PAR is its focus on the experiences of women and other minoritized and traditionally 'othered' groups, and its aim of highlighting and challenging intersecting forms of oppression, like poverty, racism and gender inequality (Reinharz, 1992; Lorenzetti and Walsh, 2014).



WHY WE ARE USING FPAR

We chose to adopt an FPAR approach because we wanted to engage with workers who are at high risk of experiencing labour abuse and labour exploitation, and to understand what structural and intersecting factors create vulnerability and risk. Choosing a participatory approach was important, as marginalised groups are often under-represented in official statistics and data due to being in 'atypical' and/or informal employment.[1] In addition, they are often overlooked or unable to fully participate in research due to access (for example due to language barriers) or to being considered 'hard to reach', or because the ethical considerations and procedures involved in doing so are problematic or challenging (Aldridge, 2015).

HOW WE ARE USING FPAR

FPAR is an approach rather than a specific methodology and how it is done in practice depends on the context in which it is used. FLEX has applied FPAR in the specific context of doing research with workers who are women, migrants and/or young (aged 16-24), from specific ethnic and cultural backgrounds, in three low-paid sectors of the economy. If we were to apply FPAR with a different group of workers, we would need to re-evaluate and adjust our approach, including everything from the materials and methods used to the ethical considerations made.

Since it must be adapted to the context it is being applied to, there is no one 'right way' of doing FPAR. However, the guiding principle should be to maximise meaningful participation and the extent to which the research and action is participant-led. There are different levels or degrees of participation that can be achieved through FPAR, depending on how much power is shared with or trans-

1 Atypical employment is defined as "working arrangements that do not conform to the 'standard' model of an individual working regular hours for a single employer on an open-ended contract" (Acas, 2017). It can include, for example, part-time, fixed term, zero-hours and agency work, as well as self-employment and gig work.

ferred to participants. Building on existing frameworks of participation (Arnstein, 1969), we have developed the below framework to help us assess the level of participation and power-sharing we have achieved in different areas of our research and advocacy work.

FLEX FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING PARTICIPATION

8. Worker Control – Workers initiate the agenda and have responsibility and power to make decisions and bring about changes	Degrees of participation
7. Delegated Power – Workers do not decide the agenda but are fully informed and are responsible for aspects of an initiative or project.	
6. Partnership – Workers are fully informed and consulted in the decision-making process, with outcomes resulting from negotiations and shared decisions.	
5. Involvement – Workers are fully informed, and their views are listened to in order to inform the decision-making process, but there is no guarantee their views will be acted on.	
4. Consultation – Workers are fully informed and encouraged to express their opinion but have little or no impact on outcomes.	
3. Informing – Workers are informed of decisions and actions, but their views are not actively sought.	Tokenistic
2. Decoration – Workers are indirectly involved in decisions and actions but are not fully aware of the purpose of their involvement or how decisions might affect them.	
1. Manipulation – Workers are told what to do and tend not to be informed of why, rubberstamping decisions already taken.	

It is important for those doing FPAR to aim for the highest levels of participation within this framework, taking into account the constraints attached to the type of organisation they are and the nature of its work. In FLEX's case, the most successful levels of participation are most likely to be 'involvement' and 'partnership', as these approaches combine FLEX's policy expertise and connections with workers' expertise by experience and peer networks. To maximise meaningful engagement with workers, we have approached doing FPAR as a process of continuous learning and adaptation, regularly seeking feedback from participants and reflecting on what works and what could be done better. We have developed a number of tools and processes to support this process, which are summarised in the box below.

BOX 1. TOOLS AND PROCESSES FOR CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

To support a process of continuous learning, we have developed a number of tools and process to assess where we are at and what could be done better. These include:

1. **A Monitoring and Evaluation framework** that divides the research procesess into four stages (design, data collection, data analysis and action), which are further divided into sub-stages. Each stage and sub-stage are

Informal employment is defined as work that "involves the paid production and sale of goods or services which are unregistered by, or hidden from the state for tax, benefit and/or labour law purposes, but which are legal in all other respects" (Small Business Council, 2004: 9).

assessed at regular intervals to determine: 1) the current level of participation achieved (based on our framework of participation); 2) what has been done to achieve participation; 3) what should be improved; 4) barriers to achieving participation; and 5) next steps.

2. **A Participatory Research Diary** where we document the research process, especially any changes that have been made and why. It is also a place for noting any reflections by FLEX staff and recording ad-hoc feedback from Peer Researchers and research participants.
3. **Actively seeking feedback from Peer Researchers** through post-interview and focus group debriefings, formal feedback sessions and 'exit interviews', and informally during training and other points of contact.

Avoiding tokenism requires ongoing reflection, and we recommend that anyone interested in applying FPAR should seriously consider whether it is the appropriate approach for them, especially to engage with potentially vulnerable participants. Below is a checklist to aid this assessment:

CHECKLIST FOR FPAR PRACTITIONERS

- **Why do I want to use FPAR?** FPAR approaches aim to empower marginalised groups to push for social change. While an FPAR approach may give enhanced access to participants who traditional researchers may find hard to reach, this should not be the sole motivation for applying it.
- **Is there capacity and scope for continuous learning?** Doing FPAR requires flexibility and a willingness on the part of researchers to learn and test, adjust and refine processes to meet participatory objectives. Researchers should consider whether they have the time and capacity to do so. For example, can participatory aims be prioritised over strict deadlines?
- **Is there capacity to effectively safeguard and support participants?** Working directly with potentially vulnerable participants requires serious ethical considerations. It calls for researchers to be prepared and able to, at a minimum, signpost individuals to relevant support and advice services and to maintain up-to-date safeguarding guidance. To ensure support is available to participants and make the project sustainable, researchers with limited networks or experience working with vulnerable groups should ideally partner with (and seek joint funding with) frontline organisations that have the relevant experience and/or can provide support.
- **Can the quality of data be ensured?** Where those collecting the data are not experts in data collection, the right support and training must be in place to enable robust data collection. Researchers should consider whether they can provide sufficient training and ongoing support to ensure quality of data.
- **Is there an exit plan?** Once a project has achieved its objectives or reached the end of its funding, researchers may no longer be able to engage on a topic or with the community. Researchers should consider whether there are ways to enable participants to continue engaging in action for change beyond the life of the research project.

4. ENGAGING WORKERS AS PEER RESEARCHERS

Deciding who to engage with as part of FPAR can be challenging, as the question of who belongs to and represents a community is subject to debate. This tension was apparent in our research on the construction sector, which used a community research model that engaged Romanian community members to carry out research with Romanian construction workers. As highlighted in our methodological reflections on the project (FLEX, 2018c):

> [T]he distinction between "inside" and "outside" researchers can be blurry, or even non-existent. A Romanian researcher may for example struggle to gain access to a Romanian community if her class, background, gender or age differs from other members of the group.

When doing community research, the main concern around 'belonging' was linked to access – can nationality and language act as a sufficient bridge to enable access to 'hard-to-reach' workers whose experiences would otherwise not be reflected in research? In FPAR, this consideration goes deeper. While working with Peer Researchers may give enhanced access to participants who traditional researchers may find difficult to reach (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012), it is not and should not be the main motivation for employing FPAR. Instead, the aim of FPAR is to engage with community members to identify and work towards shared goals.

Our approach to maximising representation has been to engage with Peer Researchers with as many shared characteristics as possible with the community we are hoping to benefit i.e., women and young migrant workers at risk of exploitation in cleaning, hospitality and the app-based courier sector. The most important requirement was for Peer Researchers to have first-hand experience working in the target sectors. This helped us overcome some of the issues in the community research model, as grouping a research community by occupation is far less likely to incorporate disparate interests and experiences than a grouping by nationality. Recruitment was also guided by a mapping of the demographics in the sectors (age, gender and nationality), while the channels and strategies chosen were informed by our understanding of key characteristics that increase risk and 'vulnerability' for workers, such as not speaking English or having an irregular/insecure immigration status.

> It [the FPAR approach] is good also because one Peer Researcher might think this issue is very important and another might think something else is important, so you start seeing all the different factors and how they might matter for different people. Even though people are doing the same work, they might have completely different experiences of the job, like a student who is doing it on the side of their studies compared to someone doing it full time.
>
> **Alberico, Peer Coordinator**

To capture a diversity of perspectives, we sought to remove as many barriers to participation as possible during the recruitment phase, such as affording less significance to criteria such as research experience or English proficiency. This has helped democratise the research process, a core aim in FPAR, but has also been challenging; Peer Researchers who share experiences with and can best represent workers at risk of exploitation also face the most barriers to participating. As is detailed below, we had to go through multiple adjustments to reach these groups, and retention was a significant challenge.

This reflects a key tension in participatory research: those whose voice is most absent from traditional research and advocacy, and who might benefit the most from FPAR, tend to also be the most marginalised and hard to engage, requiring significant time, resource and capacity commitments for the process to be done in an ethical and safe way (Aldridge, 2015). Researching organisations interested in using FPAR should take these commitments seriously, especially if they are planning to engage with groups experiencing high levels of vulnerability. In order to meet these commitments, researchers are advised to consider whether there are existing peer-led groups or supporting organisations they can work with to recruit and support workers to engage in FPAR. Organisations that have existing community links may be well placed to engage people in FPAR, due to their knowledge of the issues facing the community, established trust, language capacity, and existing support structures. However, especially if workers are highly marginalised, such groups may not yet exist or have the capacity to engage. Many frontline community organisations are overstretched, so researchers hoping to work with them should consider how to add to their capacity.

Our approach to recruiting workers as Peer Researchers has gone through significant changes. Initially, we sought to recruit Peer Researchers through an English language advert posted on the FLEX website and disseminated through social media and partner frontline and community organisations. This attracted a talented pool of researchers from various European migrant communities, but none worked in the target sectors. Two applicants from this initial round of advertising were recruited into the team. Being more proximate in their profiles to Community Researchers, they supported our FPAR goals by disseminating information about the project and the Peer Researcher role to those they interviewed.

Overall, the most effective approach was to stage the recruitment in two phases: recruiting workers to participate as interviewees and then, once they had been introduced to the project, felt it was relevant to them, and had a better understanding of what 'doing research' meant in practice, presenting them with the opportunity of becoming a Peer Researcher. Engaging people first as interviewees was an important step, because most had never experienced a research setting before. It helped build trust between FLEX and workers, and demystified the research process, making it easier for people to imagine themselves as part of it. In other instances, when a Peer Researcher was recruited and trained without having been interviewed as a research participant, the lack of a relatable example of an interview was evident in the training session.

We mainly recruited participants through adverts placed on relevant Facebook groups, which tended to be organised by geographic region combined with sector or nationality, for example 'Cleaners in London' or 'Spanish in Bristol'. The initial advert was posted in English, thus generating responses from English speaking workers. Two of the initial respondents recruited and interviewed in Bristol went on to become Peer Researchers. One was a Spanish kitchen porter and the other was a Czech room attendant. Because these workers were bilingual, we were able to train them in English while they were able to conduct interviews in their own languages.

To further reduce barriers to participation and increase our engagement with High-Risk workers, we also sought to recruit non-English speakers as Peer Researchers. This was made possible thanks to the language skills spoken by the

FLEX team, who could recruit and support migrant workers directly in their own language.

While this helped remove barriers to participation, it was not sufficient to recruit from all the groups we were trying to reach. Interestingly, we found that young workers were less likely to engage through online adverts and were only able to recruit one young Peer Researcher through the selected social media channels. To reach younger workers we therefore turned to community organisations that worked with young people and frontline organisations running youth groups. We have also been unable to recruit irregular or undocumented migrant workers as Peer Researchers due to the fact that the illegal working offence makes it unlawful to employ someone you know or have 'reasonable cause to believe' does not have the right to work in the UK.

Retaining recruited Peer Researchers has been another challenge. Since the Peer Researchers we engaged with were working in low-paid jobs with long, varying and often insecure hours, and sometimes have additional responsibilities like childcare, many felt unable to continue after having been trained and carried out their pilot interviews. This required us to adjust our approach, including by recruiting and training more Peer Researchers than initially planned, providing as much support as possible with the recruitment of interviewees and focus group participants, and extending the data collection period.

BOX 2. PAY

All Peer Researchers were paid for the work and time they gave to the project, including for training, research and advocacy. Research participants received a small compensation for their time. Paying for participation is a way to recognise the importance of people's contributions, signify that you value their time and acknowledge their expertise. Compensating people for their time and work felt particularly important considering Peer Researchers and participants were from sectors where their work is regularly underpaid and undervalued.

Paying for and therefore treating Peer Researchers' engagement in the project as work has overall been a positive approach, enabling more people to participate and formalising the role. However, it has also had drawbacks, such as making it harder to engage with migrants who do not have the right to work in the UK. The contractor relationship also introduces a new power dynamic into the research, which could have the unintended effect of deterring participants from disagreeing with or challenging preconceptions that may be held by the researching organisation – something researchers should take steps to mitigate.

There is an existing debate around whether paying participants for their time creates a false motive for participation or can cause harm if participants feel they have to discuss sensitive, emotional, or traumatic matters to fulfil researchers' expectations (Rende Taylor and Latonero, 2018). However, in our experience Peer Researchers have not been motivated by pay, but by feeling like the project mattered, feeling valued, and having an opportunity and the space to discuss issues experienced at work.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Do a mapping of the community you are hoping to engage with and aim to recruit Peer Researchers who are most representative of that community.
- Actively seek to remove barriers to participation to enable engagement of those who are most marginalised.
- Consider engaging potential Peer Researchers first as research participants, as this can help clarify the research process and provide valuable experience for when they start doing research themselves.
- Be prepared for Peer Researchers to disengage from the project; recruit more people than you are hoping to retain.
- Trial different recruitment channels – social media may work for reaching some groups, while in-person recruitment or working with existing groups or organisations may be more effective for reaching others.

5. TRAINING AND ON-GOING SUPPORT

Training is an essential part of participatory research approaches, and should be ongoing (Brown *et al.*, 2012). It provides Peer Researchers with the skills, tools and confidence to carry out research, as well as use that research to advocate for change. The skills acquired should be transferable and useful for Peer Researchers past the life of the project, in line with FPAR's transformative aims (see section nine below). It is important to recognise both the time and funding required to sufficiently support Peer Researchers, and this should be reflected in funding applications and project plans (Clark *et al.*, 2012). Training is also important for data quality assurance. Since those collecting the data are not formally trained in research methods, the right support and training needs to be in place to enable those without a research background to collect robust data.

The training FLEX provides Peer Researchers with aims to draw on their diverse transferable life and work experiences. In the case of FLEX's study, given that previous research experience was not required, there was a range of backgrounds and abilities amongst participants. We therefore sought to ensure that the training was accessible regardless of background yet rigorous enough to equip Peer Researchers to confidently carry out research.

The structure of the training has been continually developed and adapted based on input from Peer Researchers, in keeping with the cyclical process of FPAR in which the methodology is informed by practice. At first, the training was done in person at FLEX's office, and lasted about four hours with lunch, snacks and opportunities for socialising and getting to know each other. This was a way of creating linkages and relationships between all researchers, as well as responding to well-being needs. Having to adapt to the pandemic and social distancing norms, we moved the training online using Zoom. This required making the training shorter and developing more visual aids to make it more engaging and easier to follow on screen. It was also necessary to adapt some of the training materials to the changes caused by moving data collection online (See Box 3 in the next chapter).

The current training covers the following topics: an introduction to qualitative research; reflexivity and positionality; how to conduct interviews and focus groups; signposting and safeguarding; how to stay safe online; and principles of ethical research, including informed consent. The project itself, why FLEX is doing FPAR and what Peer Researchers would like to gain from participating are also discussed. Peer Researchers receive a handbook with clear and concise information about FLEX and the project, step-by-step advice and checklists on the issues covered in the training, all relevant forms for participants, and key contact details.

The training is designed to be as participatory as possible, with discussion and activities built into each section. This is an important way of giving the trainer a sense of whether participants have fully understood important concepts and processes like informed consent and safeguarding, and for participants to ask questions and voice their opinions. The training is also a useful way to understand what Peer Researchers hope to gain from the process, and for them to provide feedback on and shape the design of the project. For example, during the training we discussed draft interview templates, including whether the questions make sense, are relevant or need to be reworded, whether any questions or topics are missing, and which topics or questions Peer Researchers would prioritise. This has allowed Peer Researchers who may not have been involved in the original design of data collection tools to still shape them, as well as to provide valuable input on how they may need to be adapted to specific participant groups.

It is vitally important to be flexible to the needs of individual Peer Researchers, with some needing more training and support than others. To assess the level of training and support needed, Peer Researchers, once trained, carried out pilot interviews, which were followed by a debriefing and feedback session with a member of FLEX staff. Additional training or coaching was provided as needed, and Peer Researchers were given the option of carrying out an interview jointly with a FLEX staff member who could provide real-time support.

KEY LEARNINGS

- People will often only retain part of the information received in a one-off training session. We recommend breaking the training down into multiple sessions and allowing time to revisit key concepts, for example by having prep meetings before focus groups, pilot interviews and follow-up calls and debriefings. Be prepared to re-do parts of training and make sure to offer ongoing support throughout the project.
- Ensure that training is as participatory as possible through the use of activities, tasks and discussion. This will support learning, create opportunities for Peer Researchers to ask questions, as well as enable trainers to assess the level of understanding and support needed. Where possible, training is best delivered as a group.
- Training is a good opportunity to receive input from participants on everything from project design to adapting data collection and other tools to suit a specific group, so be open to changes, including to the training itself.
- Training on safeguarding and signposting is important, especially when working with higher-risk groups.

6. RESEARCH DESIGN

While FPAR involves participation by the research community in all stages of the research, there is often a tension in terms of research design. Organisations and researchers doing FPAR will usually have pre-existing objectives, mission statements and frameworks within which they must operate, often setting the parameters for what their projects must broadly focus on. Additionally, to secure funding, most research will need to explain the purpose of the grant by establishing clear aims at the outset, which generally means they must be set before Peer Researchers can be recruited. The experience of "bumping up against the existing systems of financing research" (McDermont *et al*., 2018) is a common one within participatory research and necessitates a pragmatic, creative approach.

For FLEX, as a grant-funded charity working to end labour exploitation, any project we do must contribute to our overall mission and fit within board-approved business and operational plans. These plans are based on FLEX's previous work engaging directly with workers and are informed by organisations supporting and led by workers, for example through the Labour Exploitation Advisory Group. While the broad focus of our FPAR project (understanding the experiences and drivers of labour abuse and exploitation in three High-Risk sectors of the economy) and the target communities (women and young EEA migrant workers at risk of exploitation) were pre-determined, the specifics of the research were left open and flexible for when we started engaging with Peer Researchers. However, we must recognise that people's lives do not necessarily neatly align with our organisational focus – employment experiences are highly linked with other social issues, such as housing and welfare. As our Peer Coordinator noted:

> It would be interesting to apply this process to other elements of workers' lives, such as lack of formal housing, lack of rights, and how these fit together and are linked, and not be restricted only to exploitation in the workplace.
>
> **– Alberico, Peer Coordinator**

Though this approach to research design does not meet a level of participation where workers independently define the focus of the FPAR project (see FLEX's framework for participation in section 3), it effectively brings together the strengths of FLEX and Peer Researchers. FLEX contributes its experience as a research and advocacy organisation with established knowledge of tackling labour exploitation, research expertise, and an existing relationship with funders and policymakers, while Peer Researchers bring their insight and knowledge of the intersecting issues affecting specific groups of workers and their community networks.

The main way in which Peer Researchers influenced the research design was by shaping and informing the data collection tools. This process evolved as we adapted and found ways of increasing participation. For the first two research sectors (cleaning and hospitality), an interview template was drafted by the FLEX research team based on a literature review and initial scoping interviews with workers and stakeholders. To facilitate the discussion, Peer Researchers were presented with this draft and asked which topics they thought were most important, whether any issues had been missed or needed clarifying, and how they would frame the questions. The template was then amended accordingly.

Consulting Peer Researchers on the interview template meant that at the data collection stage, Peer Researchers were familiar and comfortable with the content of the interview and were collecting data they felt was important. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also allowed Peer Researchers to focus on those questions and topics that they found to be most relevant during the interviews themselves, and to add follow-up questions as they saw fit. Peer Researchers did this to a varying extent depending on their level of confidence and sense of autonomy. We aimed to instil Peer Researchers with the confidence to shape the interview process during the training and through subsequent meetings. The survey was designed in a similar way: first drafted by FLEX based on findings and debriefing discussions with Peer Researchers, and then shared for input and feedback.

Moving from interviews to focus groups allowed us to further increase Peer Researchers' involvement and autonomy in the research design. While FLEX provided an initial structure for the focus groups (See section 7, Peer-to-peer collection of data), the discussions were guided and shaped by the Peer Researchers facilitating. Overall, focus groups felt more in line with the FPAR methodology than interviews, as they enable a group of workers, led by their peer, to come together to discuss their experiences as well as brainstorm potential solutions.

> Everyone has a bit of a different experience from the rest. Every time I feel like I had something to add to the conversation.
>
> **– Ivan, Peer Researcher**

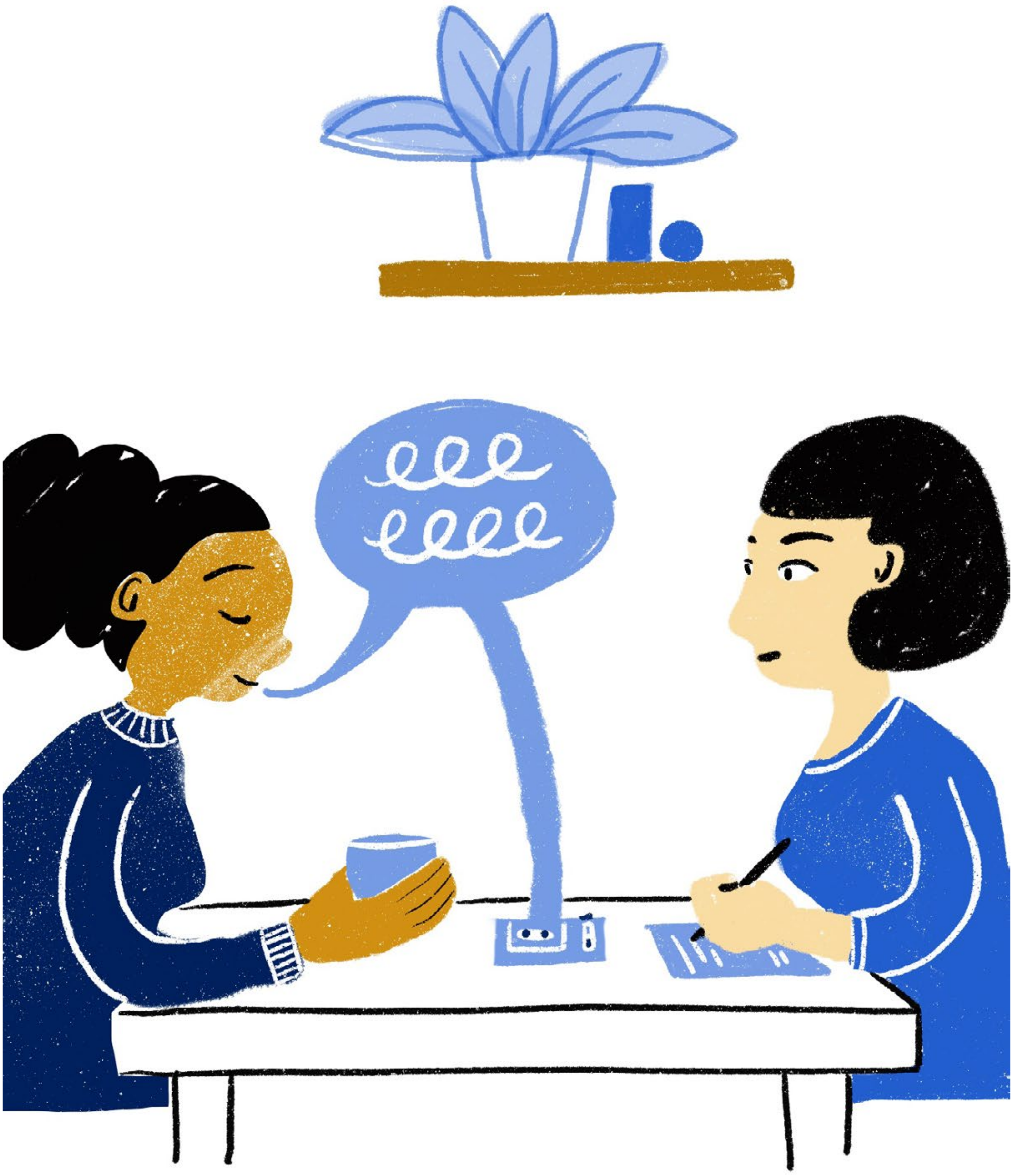
Finally, as the project moved to the third sector (app-based couriers in the gig economy), we once again sought to increase workers' say in the design by establishing a new, Peer Coordinator, role. Whereas previous Peer Researcher engagement has been largely ad hoc, the Peer Coordinator role is a part-time staff position aimed at facilitating longer-term and more sustainable worker engagement in the project. The Peer Coordinator, who must have experience working in a relevant sector, designs the data collection tools, which are then shared with FLEX and workers for input; recruits, trains and supports workers to become Peer Researchers; and works with FLEX to create and disseminate opportunities for joint action and advocacy. Having a more established role for worker engagement within the FLEX research team has helped integrate workers' perspectives into the research and, as we move forwards, we will look for ways of further developing this role.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Engage workers as much as possible from the start of the project in setting objectives, choosing research methods and designing research tools. Funding terms must be flexible enough to allow for this approach.
- Ensure the design of research tools is iterative and flexible and that you are able to change them if necessary.
- Consider developing new approaches or roles to engage with people with experience of the sector from the very start and on a longer-term basis.
- Involve workers from the start who can also help determine what data collection tools to use or which ones will work.

7. PEER-TO-PEER COLLECTION OF DATA

As FPAR is an approach rather than a methodology, how data is collected depends on what works best for the organisation and participants doing the research, as well as the context in which it is being done. This section outlines the key methods FLEX has used so far, their benefits and drawbacks, and how we have adapted them to online use during the Covid-19 pandemic.



PEER-TO-PEER INTERVIEWS

The first data collection tool we tested together with Peer Researchers were approximately one hour long, semi-structured, peer-to-peer interviews. Interviews are a good way of gaining an in-depth and nuanced understanding of workers' experiences. They provided a space in which research participants could share their stories one-to-one without interruptions and, being semi-structured, Peer Researchers could delve deeper through follow-up questions and active listening.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and, where they had been done in languages other than English, translated. Initial interviews were followed by debriefings between Peer Researchers and FLEX staff, providing an opportunity to ask questions; discuss what went well, what was challenging and whether changes to the interview template were needed; identify any safeguarding concerns; and provide feedback and support on interview technique.

Interview participants regularly said the interviews made them feel heard and welcomed the opportunity to talk about the challenges they had faced. However, for participatory research, interviews can be limiting, as interaction happens on an individual rather than a group level.

PEER-FACILITATED FOCUS GROUPS

The next tool we tested was focus groups, which were facilitated by Peer Researchers with support from FLEX staff. These had between four and six participants, were organised by sector or theme, and were held in Peer Researchers' and participants' first language.[2] As part of FPAR's aim for all participant viewpoints to be recognised and valued (McTaggart, 1991), we worked with Peer Researchers to create a supportive environment where discussion and differing points of view are encouraged (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This was done by keeping the groups small so everyone could get a turn to speak (something which proved important especially when we moved to online engagement), establishing shared ground rules at the start of each focus group, and actively encouraging quieter participants' engagement.

The focus groups lasted on average three hours and included the following sections:

1. Introduction to the project – explaining the aims of the project, the structure of the focus group, establishing ground rules and addressing any questions.

2. Problems – discussing key issues experienced by participants at work and identifying their causes.

3. Solutions and actors – brainstorming solutions to problems raised and identifying actors responsible for addressing each issue.

4. Discussion recap and last points – allowing the focus group facilitator to draw connections between the different sections of the discussion and providing participants with a chance to raise any last points.

2 Three focus groups were facilitated by a Romanian Community Researcher. This was to enable us to engage with Romanian-speaking workers in cleaning and hospitality after our Romanian speaking Peer Researcher was no longer able to engage.

Focus groups allowed Peer Researcher to have much more control over the conversation, often drawing on their personal experience to prompt reflection from the group. They also helped the project move from an individual interaction between Peer Researchers and research participants to a group conversation within the target community. This was important as it enabled a more nuanced and in-depth discussion not only about problems experienced, but also the solutions needed and the actors relevant to implementing those solutions. While many of the issues experienced by participants across the focus groups were similar and mirrored findings from the interviews, the solutions and actors identified differed greatly. For example, the Spanish-speaking group with Latin American women workers identified trade unions as the main actor relevant to resolving workers' issues, while the Romanian-speaking group pointed mainly to the government and employers.

ONLINE SURVEYS

To triangulate the in-depth qualitative data from interviews and focus groups, we used sector-specific surveys to gather quantitative data from a broader sample. As a quantitative tool, surveys are not traditionally considered a participatory method. However, our surveys were designed in a participatory way, drawing on Peer Researchers' input and issues raised by workers in interviews. They also included open questions like, "If you could change anything about your work, what would you change?" and, "If you could ask the Government to change one thing about your job what would it be". This, and the fact that surveys ran in up to five languages, allowed us to gather recommendations from a larger and more diverse group of participants than would have been possible through interviews and focus groups alone. The surveys were disseminated by the Peer Researchers and FLEX through social media and personal networks.

The surveys also gave respondents the option to join a mailing list and express an interest in participating in other aspects of the research, for example by being interviewed or joining a focus group. This led to the creation of a newsletter which we use to share information about the research – new focus groups, opportunities to become Peer Researchers, workshops and training that may be of interest – leading to an increase in size of the community involved in the research.

SAMPLING

Peer Researchers identified research participants through their personal and professional networks using snowball sampling. The ease with which Peer Researchers were able to do this varied. Mostly it was successful, but fear of repercussions for participating in the project was very real for some workers, most notably those working as hotel room attendants and those with insecure or irregular immigration status. In some cases, being approached by someone familiar or with shared experiences helped reduce this fear, but for others this connection may have created a barrier.

BOX 3 – ADAPTING THE FPAR APPROACH TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In 2020, the Covid-19 crisis meant we were no longer able to conduct research in person. Recruitment, training and data collection has been moved online, and engagement with Peer Researchers and participants has been through video calls and social media. In addition, sudden changes to the labour market meant that, while many workers in High-Risk sectors were facing increased pressure to work longer hours, others faced redundancies and had to prioritise securing a new job, making it harder for Peer Researchers and participants to commit to engage in the project.

Despite these changes, we have still been able to recruit and do training with Peer Researchers and carry out data collection through online focus groups and surveys. Interviews have been harder to do, as Peer Researchers have found it more challenging to recruit participants and conduct interviews without in-person contact.

Moving the data collection online has come with unexpected benefits. It has allowed us to more easily reach Peer Researchers and participants outside of London, as well as enabling participation from people who have before struggled to attend in-person meetings, such as parents with young children or people working long hours. Online focus groups have also increased anonymity, as people can choose not to have their camera on.

Online engagement has also created new challenges, including technological barriers linked to the lack of suitable equipment or stable Wi-Fi connection. Moving online has also created new administrative challenges. For example, participation incentives have to be paid through online bank transfer, making them less immediate, requiring more coordination and removing the anonymity provided by cash incentives. For future projects, if engagement must still be done online, it would be important to include sufficient budget to provide Peer Researchers with the necessary technology and sufficient data allowance and change participant incentives from cash to vouchers to better ensure participants' anonymity.

KEY LEARNINGS

- While reaching several nationality groups in different languages allows for wider-spread data collection, it also means that a lot of time and resources will be spent on translation.
- It can be seen as good practice to have the person who collected the data also transcribe it, as they have a better understanding of the 'unsaid' things and can take note of them. However, in this case, transcriptions were too onerous for some Peer Researchers. We recommend considering external transcription services to avoid disengagement.
- Think about the different data collection tools and the purposes they can serve – what are the questions you are trying to answer and what are the best ways to answers them? Include Peer Researchers in this thought process.
- Online surveys can be hard to disseminate. Keep surveys as short as possible to encourage responses. Translating surveys into multiple languages helps reach a wider audience. Assume that you will need to use multiple dissemination channels, for instance in-person leafleting, social media, WhatsApp groups, partner organisations' and Peer Researchers' networks, etc. Note that in sectors where a lot of research is happening, workers might be experiencing survey fatigue.

8. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Working with Peer Researchers to analyse findings and develop recommendations is central to FPAR's aim of including workers' perspectives in advocacy and activism. If workers are not involved in the analysis, there is a danger that the resulting recommendations do not adequately reflect the views and priorities of the workers. This does not mean that organisations should step back completely, or shy away from applying their knowledge. Instead, they should remember that FPAR is an opportunity to bring together different forms of knowledge, and that different kinds of expertise might be required to take over at various stages in the research project (Gillis & Jackson, 2002).

For FLEX, the analysis stage of the research ended up being a strong example of how FPAR can reach a partnership level, where both parties' expertise – in this case worker's expertise by experience and FLEX research and policy knowledge – can work together. Some aspects of the analysis work, for example sifting through and coding qualitative data, was done by FLEX using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. FLEX also did the quantitative analysis of survey responses. These were practical decisions, as it would not have been possible for Peer Researchers to complete these tasks without intensive training in qualitative and quantitative data analysis, and significant supervision and time commitments from them. Language would also have been a barrier. However, the coding of qualitative data was not done without Peer Researchers' input. Having completed the data collection, both interview and focus groups data were discussed in follow-up meetings with the Peer Researchers, who were asked to identify the main themes within the data collected. These themes, as well as others based on the ILO's forced labour indicators and FLEX's risk matrix[3], were then used to code the qualitative data.

Another way in which workers were involved in the analysis of findings and development of recommendations was through focus groups. These were designed to engage the groups in establishing connections between the issues they were experiencing at work, their preferred solutions for addressing these issues, and who the relevant actors were for implementing changes at the policy, civil society and workplace levels. Focus groups also provided spaces in which to review assumptions and confirm findings from other sources, such as interviews and desk-based research.

All in all, recommendations were developed based on:

1. Solutions identified during focus groups.
2. Recommendations from interview participants, gathered from the questions like, "If you could change anything about your work, what would you change?", "If you could tell the UK Government what they should do to help workers, what would you tell them to do?" and "If you could give your younger self some advice about work, what would you say?".
3. Recommendations from survey participants, gathered from open questions mirroring the ones in the interviews.
4. FLEX policy expertise.

3 FLEX's risk matrix (see FLEX, 2017, p.6) has been further developed through this research.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Seek Peer Researchers' and participants' views on what change is needed throughout the research process and incorporate these views in policy recommendations.
- While the research organisation might need to do the bulk of coding and data analysis, this should not be done without Peer Researcher input. Find creative ways of involving Peer Researchers in processes like determining themes and developing analysis frameworks.
- To ensure Peer Researchers' voices are represented and that they agree with the narrative developed, it is important to get their input on any outputs produced. Where possible, outputs should be co-produced.

9. SUPPORTING ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY

'Action' is a key defining element of FPAR, as the research process and outputs are aimed at supporting and driving social change. What this looks like will depend on the project, but FPAR literature broadly distinguishes between three types of change: the development of critical consciousness among the researching organisation and Peer Researchers; improvement in the lives of those participating in the research process; and transformation of societal structures and relationships (Freire, 1970; Maguire, 1987).

For researching organisations, the first type of change – the development of critical consciousness – comes from the undoing of traditional research methods and hierarchies, and the questioning of organisational culture and structure. For FLEX, the process of doing FPAR has led to extensive reflection and learning about how to increase workers' participation and influence not only in our research, but throughout our organisation. The issues raised by Peer Researchers and participants are also shaping our advocacy priorities and have, for example, led us to set up a working group focusing on tackling sexual harassment in low-paid and insecure work. For Peer Researchers and participants, the process of doing FPAR has seen them take an active role in researching issues affecting them and their peers and reflecting on the drivers of these issues and the changes needed. For many, taking part in the project has been the first chance they have had to discuss the problems they are having at work, to have someone listen and feel validated by knowing they are not alone. This has increased awareness and has, according to Peer Researcher feedback, felt empowering.

> Participating in this research, it felt good, it felt better. As a cleaner, you are not important, no one pays attention to you. As a peer researcher, I would do interviews, people would share their problems with me, I would recruit new participants, I felt important. In my job you feel invisible all the time. Being a Peer Researcher, I finally felt heard.
>
> **– Juliana, Peer Researcher**

The second type of change – improvement in the lives of those participating in the research process – can be hard to achieve during the course of a project, as change often requires long-term work. We sought to be clear from the start that participating in the project was unlikely to lead to concrete improvements or changes in participants' lives and that the aim was to generate knowledge that could contribute to longer term structural change. Yet, there are some important changes that we were able to anticipate and confirm, namely that Peer Researchers and research participants are more aware of their rights and where they can access help and support. Specifically, workers have been informed about trade unions (what they are, and which ones operate in their sector); where they can get free English classes to improve their language skills; and where to get help and support on a range of issues, including immigration advice.

> The participants told me how it's important to document this, to investigate these things, but also the recognition of their time through the incentive payment. People without documents have been telling me they never though they could have had their voice heard.
>
> **– Marisol, Peer Researcher**

The third type of change – transformation of societal structures and relationships – can be even more long-term and challenging to measure. Our hypothesis is that working together with workers to generate knowledge and advocate for change will lead to better, evidence-based policies and on-the-ground change. However, this will take time and also be contingent on things like the policy environment and agenda, which during the course of our project has largely been taken up by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, we have carried out and supported a number of actions to achieve this goal, including creating platforms and spaces for workers to speak about their experiences and the change they want to see. For example, one Peer Researcher is delivering talks about the research to trade unions and their members, presenting the findings back to a key group of workers in their first language. She has also proposed organising a forum to present the research to relevant organisations. Peer Researchers have also responded to policy consultations related to employment rights through FLEX, written blogs that were published on FLEX's website and worked with journalists from major national newspapers. We have made sure that the outputs FLEX produces as part of this project, whether they are policy consultation responses, presentations or publications, include direct quotes from workers so it is their voices and not only our interpretations that reach policy audiences.

Doing collective action that is actively worker-led has been a challenge. This is due in part to the fact that we have worked with individual Peer Researchers from multiple sectors and nationalities in a phased way (i.e., first in cleaning, then hospitality, then app-based couriers), which has made it difficult to encourage collective action. The fact that most of our Peer Researchers work full time, often with varying work patterns, has also presented a practical barrier to group activities.

> Instead of having Peer Researchers working individually, it would be great to have them working more as a group, so coming together to discuss and decide what they are going to do. Though that is easier said than done, especially when we can't meet in person at the moment.
>
> **– Alberico, Peer Coordinator**

It may be that collective participant-led action would be better achieved by engaging an existing group or organisation of workers in FPAR, as they would have pre-existing aims and goals that the research could support, as well as structures for supporting engagement and advocacy. Such approach might of course not always be possible, particularly where there are no known specialist organisations or groups, or where these struggle with capacity to engage. Alternatively, over time it might be possible to build up a large and well-established enough group of Peer Researchers who could initiate and deliver collective action.

While many of the actions we have done so far have been initiated by FLEX, we have made sure they are shaped by Peer Researchers and participants. For example, we have proposed creating short videos together with a videographer and have consulted Peer Researchers and research participants on what their focus and audience should be. Once an overall plan is in place, the goal is for Peer Researchers to engage directly with the videographer to create the videos. For future projects, FLEX is considering developing a training workshop around advocacy. This could help transfer more of FLEX's policy knowledge to Peer Researchers by covering what the available avenues for advocacy and influencing are, who relevant decisionmakers are, and media engagement, among other topics.

KEY LEARNINGS

- The 'action' part of FPAR can take many forms and can happen at the personal, organisational and societal levels.
- Achieving change can take a long time, so it is crucial to be transparent about the potential outcomes of the project and to designate sufficient resources to support longer-term engagement.
- Actively seek out, create and present opportunities for Peer Researchers to engage in policymaking, including by acting as a platform for their voices. Ensure Peer Researchers can decide whether the opportunities identified are suitable or appropriate and have room to shape them.
- Offer support to Peer Researchers interested in speaking to journalists to ensure they feel confident and in control of the information they share and how it is framed. It is a good idea to work with journalists you already know.
- Consider delivering workshops or training on policy advocacy to further support knowledge transfer and Peer Researchers' capacity to drive change.

10. DOING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Interviews and focus groups were conducted, where possible, in the native language of Peer Researchers. The languages we engaged in were based on a mapping of the key nationality groups represented in the research sectors, such as people from Latin America and Eastern and Southern Europe.

When doing research in more than one language there are a few things to be taken into account. Firstly, all research materials need to be translated – this includes recruitment materials, interview templates, surveys, training materials and consent forms. Because the nature of FPAR means that the methodology is continuously evolving, it is often necessary to adapt materials, for example, adding questions to an interview template. In such cases there might need to be a degree of reliance on external consultants for transcription and translation services, as well as notetaking during focus groups.

Often people who do not speak English face significant barriers when accessing government bodies or generic support services, so it is important to signpost them to appropriate, more accessible support services whenever possible. This means including signposting resources that offer assistance in all the different languages spoken by research participants, and providing practical information to increase access to reporting and information from statutory agencies and generic advisory organisations.

It is also extremely helpful to have some level of internal language capacity to be able to do recruitment and support peer researchers throughout the process. In our case, one of the Peer Researchers only spoke Portuguese and we could not have engaged with her as a Peer Researcher without FLEX's team members' knowledge of the language.

Lastly, doing qualitative research in multiple language also raises a number of practical challenges. Some elements, nuances or the full subtlety of the meaning behind certain words or phrases may be lost in translation, for which it is useful to work with native speakers of those languages to mitigate the risk of inaccuracies in translation. In order to prevent some of these issues, we favoured the recruitment of translators with similar backgrounds to the Peer Researchers and also provided them with guidance on how to note down clarifications when needed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

1. Doing research in multiple languages enables people who may otherwise not be engaged in research to take part, leading to a more representative sample. It allows you to include the views and experiences of those marginalised and made vulnerable by language barriers.

2. Allowing people to express themselves in their own language is important for making research inclusive and for understanding the nuances of someone's experiences.

3. Being able to communicate in their native language increases research participants' trust and creates a sense of community between researchers and participants. People may feel safer in sharing their personal experiences.

CHALLENGES OF USING MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

1. Working in multiple languages can create barriers to Peer Researchers and research participants engaging as a group, for example to plan and carry out actions, as they may not have a shared language.

2. It can add 'distance' between the research team and the research process. For example, the FLEX research team may not be able to understand focus group discussions being carried out in languages other than English and have to rely on a translated transcript or notes.

3. It can be time and resource intensive, especially when needing to resort to external contractors, as everything from consent forms, research and training materials, interview and focus group recordings, and day-to-day communications with participants must be translated.

4. An FPAR approach requires being flexible and iterative with the research materials, which can be difficult if making a change means having to retranslate multiple documents.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Consider whether working in multiple languages will create barriers to Peer Researchers engaging as a group, and what steps can be taken to mitigate this, such as working with bilingual Peer Researchers.
- When translating interview or focus group transcripts, aim to work with translators with similar backgrounds as research participants to mitigate the risk of nuances and the full subtlety of meaning being lost in translation. Provide guidance to translators on how to note down clarifications where needed.
- Consider language needs when signposting participants to advice and support – generic services may not be able to provide support in languages other than English.
- Be aware of the time and resources needed to translate research and training materials, especially if the materials need to be adapted or changed during the course of the project.

11. ETHICAL RESEARCH

FLEX's research follows the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2015) and our internal ethical research guide. Doing FPAR raises some additional questions about how to ethically conduct participatory research. As part of this process, we strengthened our commitment to key principles and developed a set of additional procedures. These procedures have been open to revision throughout the project based on feedback and discussions with Peer Researchers.

SAFETY AND WELLBEING

While doing research with marginalised and workers potentially facing high levels of vulnerability it is important to maximise the benefits of participating in the research project and minimise the risks it may pose to them. This, for instance, involves seeking to ensure that participants experience no retaliation as a result of taking part in the research and that participation is informed, confidential and voluntary. There can also be a strong emotional element to doing FPAR, for example with some Peer Researchers experiencing second-hand trauma from listening to interviewees' experiences of abuse. Integrating wellbeing as an element to consider from the start of the project and schedule regular check-ins to discuss this with Peer Researchers, offering a space for them to talk about any emotional impact from the research and to explore any needs for additional support. In the case of this project, FLEX has carried out regular debriefings after interviews and focus groups.

RECRUITMENT AND SAFETY

By recruiting through their community networks, researchers make others aware of their relationship with the research organisation and project. It is important to recognise the potential effect of this approach on safety, especially when researching sensitive topics like labour exploitation, as there is a risk that participants become known to exploitative employers or individuals. While completely eliminating all risk is not feasible, training for Peer Researchers should discuss how to best ensure both participants' and their own safety. Safety routines and precautions should be developed in partnership with Peer Researchers and should cover in-person and online safety.

INFORMED CONSENT

Ensuring informed consent is dependent on Peer Researchers' knowledge and understanding of the project, so it is important that this is covered sufficiently in the training provided. Project information and consent forms should be provided in participants' first language whenever possible, and participants must be given the opportunity to ask questions and withdraw their consent. Additional consent is needed if researchers want to contact participants in the future for other activities related to the project, such as media engagement. Peer Researchers should also be trained in how to recognise a refusal to answer, even when expressed indirectly. The balance between probing and accepting a research participants' wish to skip a question must be developed through practice and forms part of FLEX's training programme. It is also discussed during focus group preparation and is covered by our focus group ground rules.

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

When research participants are recruited through personal networks, it is important to keep in mind that their experiences may be known to others within the network, and anonymity could therefore be compromised. This is particularly relevant for focus groups and other methods that involve group participation. Peer Researchers should be encouraged to reflect on this before engaging in the data collection, and to share any concerns around anonymity with the project team so these can be taken into account before data is made public. For example, it can be helpful to set ground rules at the beginning of each focus group to reiterate that participants are free not to answer questions, that no one should feel pressured to respond, and that while all participants have committed to maintain confidentiality, participants are advised to avoid sharing identifiable information such as place of employment or name of the employers.

SUPPORT AND SETTING BOUNDARIES

When researching topics like labour abuse and exploitation, Peer Researchers are likely to come across participants in need of information, advice or support, including immediate assistance. Like all researchers, Peer Researchers may feel responsible for providing help and may find it hard to set boundaries, especially if they know the participant outside of the research setting. It is crucial that Peer Researchers do not feel responsible to resolve participants' problems or provide advice. Instead, participants should be signposted to organisations that can provide professional, long-term and ongoing support, and that have the relevant resources and expertise to help. FLEX has prepared a signposting guide for this purpose, which is tailored to specific groups based on input from Peer Researchers. Peer Researchers are supported to set boundaries through training, regular debriefings and a guidebook, and through clear guidance to discuss or identify when concerns should be escalated to FLEX staff. Peer Researchers wellbeing must always be prioritised, and efforts should be made to make them feel able to raise any concerns with the team ultimately responsible for the research.

PAYMENT

A risk of coercion of interviewees could arise, for example if Peer Researchers feel under pressure to conduct a large number of interviews in a short amount of time. It is important to agree data collection targets together with Peer Researchers, make sure they are realistic within the time available and be flexible. Research participants should be compensated for their time, especially when engaging with people who work in jobs where their time is underpaid and undervalued, but the sum paid should not be large enough to be considered a sole incentive for participation[4].

4 See Rende Taylor,L. and Latonero, M. 2018. *Updated Guide to Ethics and Human Rights in Anti-Trafficking: Ethical Standards for Working with Migrant Workers and Trafficked Persons in the Digital Age* for a discussion of the ethics of reimbursement and alternatives to cash payments.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Make the safety and wellbeing of Peer Researchers and research participants a priority both during and after the research. Ensure that participation is informed, confidential and voluntary and does not lead to retaliation, and check in with Peer Researchers regularly after interviews and focus groups.
- Provide Peer Researchers with the tools and support to ensure informed consent, for example through training on recognising indirect refusal to answer and making consent forms available in multiple languages.
- Discuss potential safety issues related to recruitment through personal networks and through social media with Peer Researchers. This conversation should include guidance on setting boundaries, how to help participants through signposting and how to stay safe online.
- Consider how to ensure anonymity, especially in group settings like focus groups.

12. SUGGESTED LITERATURE

- Jo Aldridge, Participatory Research: Working with Vulnerable Groups in Research and Practice, 2015.
- Focus on Labour Exploitation, *Researching Labour Exploitation: Guide to Research with Hard-to-Reach Migrant Workers in the UK*, 2018.
- Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, *Reclaiming Migrant Women's Narratives: A Feminist Participatory Action Research project on 'Safe and Fair' Migration in Asia*, 2019.
- *Lisa Goodson and Jenny Phillimore (eds.), Community Research for Participation, 2012.*
- Lisa Lorenzetti and Christine Ann Walsh, *Is there an 'F' in your PAR? Understanding, Teaching and Doing Action Research*, 2014.
- Lisa Rende Taylor and Mark Latonero, *Updated Guide to Ethics and Human Rights in Anti-Trafficking: Ethical Standards for Working with Migrant Workers and Trafficked Persons in the Digital Age*, 2018
- Research Network for Domestic Worker Rights, *We want to be the protagonists of our own stories!*, 2014.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acas. 2017. *Ain't That Typical: Everyday Challenges for an Atypical Workforce*. Acas Discussion Paper. (online) [Accessed: 8 February 2021]

Aldridge, J. 2015. *Participatory Research: Working with Vulnerable Groups in Research and Practice.* Bristol, UK: The Policy Press

Arnstein, S. 1969. A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35(4): 216-224.

Brown, P., Scullion, L and Niner, P. 2012. 'Community Research with Gypsies and Travellers in the UK: Highlighting and Gegotiating Compromises to Reliability and Validity' in Goodson, L. and Phillimore, J. (Eds.). *Community Research for participation: From Theory to Method.* Bristol, UK; Chicago, IL, USA: Bristol University Press.

Clark, A., Holland, C. and Ward, R. 2012. 'Authenticity and Validity in Community Research: Looking at Age Discrimination and Urban Social Interactions in the UK' in Goodson, L. and Phillimore, J. (Eds.). Community Research for participation: *From Theory to Method. Bristol, UK*; Chicago, IL, USA: Bristol University Press.

Cornwall, A. and Jewkes, R. 1995. What is Participatory Research?. *Social science & medicine*, 41(12): 1667-1676.

Economic and Social Research Council. 2015. *Framework for Research Ethics.* Swindon: ESRC.

Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX). 2017. *Risky Business: Tackling Exploitation in the UK Labour Market*. London: FLEX.

FLEX. 2018a. *Women in the Workplace: FLEX's Five-point Plan to Combat Exploitation*. London: FLEX.

FLEX. 2018b. *Shaky Foundations: Labour Exploitation in London's Construction Sector*. London: FLEX.

FLEX. 2018c. *Researching Labour Exploitation: Guide to Research with Hard-to-Reach Migrant Workers in the UK*. London: FLEX.

FLEX. 2021. *"If I could change anything about my work..." Participatory Research with Cleaners in the UK.* Working Paper 1. London: FLEX.

Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gatenby, B. and Humphries, M. 2000. Feminist Participatory Action Research: Methodological and Ethical Issues. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23(1): 89-105.

Gillis, A. and Jackson, W. 2002. *Research methods for nurses: Methods and interpretation*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company.

Goodson, L. and Phillimore, J. 2012. 'Community Research: Opportunities and Challenges' in Goodson, L. and Phillimore, J. (Eds.). *Community Research for Participation: From Theory to Method.* Bristol, UK; Chicago, IL, USA: Bristol University Press.

Lorenzetti, L. and Walsh, C. A. 2014. Is there an 'F' in your PAR? Understanding, Teaching and Doing Action Research. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 15(1): 50-63.

Maguire, P. 1987. *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach*. Amherst, Massachusetts: Center for International Education, School of Education, University of Massachusetts.

McDermont, M. with the Productive Margins Collective. 2018. Alternative Imaginings of Regulation: An Experiment in Co-production. *Journal of Law and Society*, 45(1): 156-175.

Reinharz, S. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Rende Taylor, L. and Latonero, M. 2018. *Updated Guide to Ethics and Human Rights in Anti-Trafficking: Ethical Standards for Working with Migrant Workers and Trafficked Persons in the Digital Age*. Bangkok: Issara Institute.

Small Business Council. 2004. *Small businesses in the informal economy: Making the transition to the formal economy*. London: The Stationery Office.

FOCUS ON
LABOUR
EXPLOITATION

FOCUS ON LABOUR EXPLOITATION (FLEX)
The Foundry, 17 Oval Way,
London SE11 5RR

@FocusOnLabour
info@labourexploitation.org

www.labourexploitation.org