Photovoice for Promoting Empowerment with Migrant and Refugee Communities: A Scoping Review

Aloe Cubero*

Lucía Mildenberger**

Rocío Garrido*** (corresponding author)

** Pedagogy Department, Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain*

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6308-3937

***Ministry of Health of Cordoba Province, Cordoba, Argentina*

****Psychology Department, University of Seville, Seville, Spain.*

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2238-0222.

Correspondence details: rocioga@us.es

Reference:
Cubero, A., Mildenberger, L., & Garrido, R. (2024). Photovoice for promoting empowerment with migrant and refugee communities: A scoping review. *Action Research*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14767503241269750

Photovoice for Promoting Empowerment with Migrant and Refugee Communities: A Scoping Review

Policymakers and researchers carry a significant responsibility to foster environments and opportunities that authentically enhance migrants' sociopolitical involvement in host societies. Incorporating participatory action research methods, such as photovoice, is crucial to amplify migrants' voices and experiences. This scoping review investigates the implementation of photovoice projects with migrant and refugee populations, as well as their impact on empowerment. Following PRISMA guidelines, 65 articles published from 2000 to 2020 were analysed. The findings indicate that photovoice can serve as a potent tool for fostering intrapersonal, interpersonal and citizenship levels of empowerment. However, key epistemological and methodological considerations must be upheld to promote profound levels of empowerment.

Keywords: photovoice; migrants; empowerment; participatory action research (PAR); scoping review

Introduction

Several social, economic, historical and international factors converge and intertwine to create and complexify migrations today. In 2020, approximately 281 million international migrants existed worldwide, constituting 3.6% of the global population, with the highest reception rates in Europe (86.7M), Asia (85.6M) and North America (58.7M) (IOM, 2022). It is well-known that migrants' rights are often not recognised or guaranteed—especially in the case of racialised and impoverished migrants—and the continuum of violence shapes not just their journey to migrate but also their experiences in the host communities (Buckingham et al., 2021; Solano & Huddleston, 2020). According to Mora and Piper (2021, p. 2), 'crossing inequalities that affect and finally condition migration not only refer to social categories, but also public policies, international regimes, states and other normative definitions and discourses'.

Thus, geopolitical and economic dynamics determine the material conditions of international migration and the vulnerabilities experienced by displaced people. For instance, visa policies characterised by high fees or complex procedures result in migration flows through unsafe routes, causing the death of many individuals (Könönen, 2020). Furthermore, precarious living and working conditions, limited access to health services, exclusion and the denial of citizenship for political participation are just some of the oppressions that migrants face in host societies (Buckingham et al., 2021; Gold & Nawyn, 2019). There is therefore an urgent need to implement human rights–based policies to protect migrant and refugee communities, with international organisations striving to ensure compliance (IOM, 2022; Solano & Huddleston, 2020) and practices to address diversity effectively (Garrido et al., 2019). To achieve this, promoting partnerships involving all stakeholders is also imperative, with a particular emphasis on migrant participation (European Commission, 2020).

In addition, right-wing populism and hate speech within the institutional landscape have been growing globally (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015), situating the 'immigrant' as the 'threatening other' (Ekman, 2019) to the economy and national traditions, but also as a source of insecurity and crime (Liang, 2008). These narratives are amplified and spread through mass and social media, generating a climate of symbolic and cultural violence towards migrant and refugee communities (Ekman, 2019). Hence, alternative discourses on migration that acknowledge its benefits for host societies and recognise the diversity of migrant populations in their own words are needed (Mamary, 2023).

Despite oppression's negative impact on migrants' wellbeing, it can be transformed and contested through the generation of resistance and empowerment processes (Buckingham et al., 2021; Moane, 2003; Prilleltensky, 2008). In the words of

Maton (2008, p. 5), empowerment is a ‘group, participatory and developmental process through which oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valuable resources and basic rights, achieve important life goals, and reduce marginalisation’.

Although participation is crucial for the empowerment of migrants, it can be a privilege for some due to living conditions, status and lack of time, among other factors (Martinez-Damia et al., 2021). Therefore, community researchers and practitioners should promote participatory methodologies that aim to (a) engage communities in meaningful ways that respect their voice and agency, (b) facilitate processes and resources to advocate for social change and (c) co-create knowledge based on trust between partnerships (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2022). Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be a powerful strategy to this end.

Specifically, photovoice as a PAR method has been widely used to promote empowerment processes with migrants and refugees (Chapman et al., 2013; Lögdberg et al., 2020). Nevertheless, empowerment largely depends on the methodological considerations taken into account within the research process. PAR methodologies should be implemented under a critical lens in order to help to achieve social change and flee from the extractivist logics of knowledge production that have been so present in the history of social sciences (Deliovsky, 2017; Mohanty, 1988).

Thus, this article examines the use of photovoice studies with migrant and refugee populations from 2000 to 2020, focusing on methodological aspects related to empowerment. We introduce photovoice as a PAR method and its potential contribution to migrant and refugee empowerment. Following we explain in detail our scoping review procedure and present our results. Then, we discuss the importance of preserving the methodological understanding of photovoice as an inherently collective process and

the urgent need to advocate for feminist and post/de/anticolonial epistemic-methodological frameworks so that photovoice does not lose its emancipatory goals.

Framing Photovoice as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Method

PAR methodologies aim to construct action-oriented knowledge collectively to bring about social change (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2021). In this sense, this framework cannot be understood as timeless, but instead located in a particular sociohistorical context with complex power relations, addressing the multiple layers of oppressive systems and unveiling hierarchies within research in order to find pathways towards truly emancipatory PAR processes (Lenette, 2022).

In this vein, photovoice has been identified as an emancipatory and empowering PAR method (Budig et al., 2018; Hergenrather et al., 2009; Liebenberg, 2018). Developed by Caroline Wang & Mary Ann Burris (1994, 1997), it proposes that participants take photographs and build narratives to 'record and reflect their strengths and concerns … promoting critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues … and reaching policymakers' (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). Photovoice is rooted in three theoretical foundations: first, in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1973), which seeks emancipation through critical consciousness and action-oriented dialogue; second, in feminist theory and methodology, which seeks to democratise science and combat power inequalities (Frisby et al., 2009); and, lastly, in documentary photography and visual techniques (Collier & Collier, 1986), by which people document their own realities, as an epistemic shift from gathering to producing knowledge.

Photovoice is a flexible method that usually includes three phases (i.e., individual, group, social), connected with its main goals: (a) critical thinking, (b) sharing of experiences and development of resources, and (c) sociopolitical incidence (Cubero & Garrido, 2023). First, participants are invited to reflect individually about a

topic to develop their photonarrative, which promotes critical thinking about their lives and communities. Second, a group discussion is facilitated based on the photonarratives, where people share their views and identify commonalities, resources and action needed to make changes. Finally, photovoice results are typically shared with the community and policymakers so that these realities can be visualised and change can be generated (e.g., through photo exhibitions or ad campaigns).

Photovoice was initially oriented toward emancipation, but critical approaches to PAR have further broadened the way in which it is developed. Photovoice has been identified as a feminist and de/anticolonial method (Cornell et al., 2019; Fricas, 2022; Lykes & Scheib, 2017; Reid & Frisby, 2008). Despite nuanced differences, these approaches underscore the need for researchers to self-reflect continually during photovoice implementation, considering intersections of identities with co-researchers and addressing power dynamics related to gender, class, and race (Cubero & Garrido, 2023). This appears crucial when co-researching with migrant and refugee communities for 'centring concerns and world views of non-Western individuals, and respectfully knowing and understanding theory and research from previously Other(ed) perspectives' (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021, pp. 1–2).

Migrant and Refugee Empowerment Through Photovoice

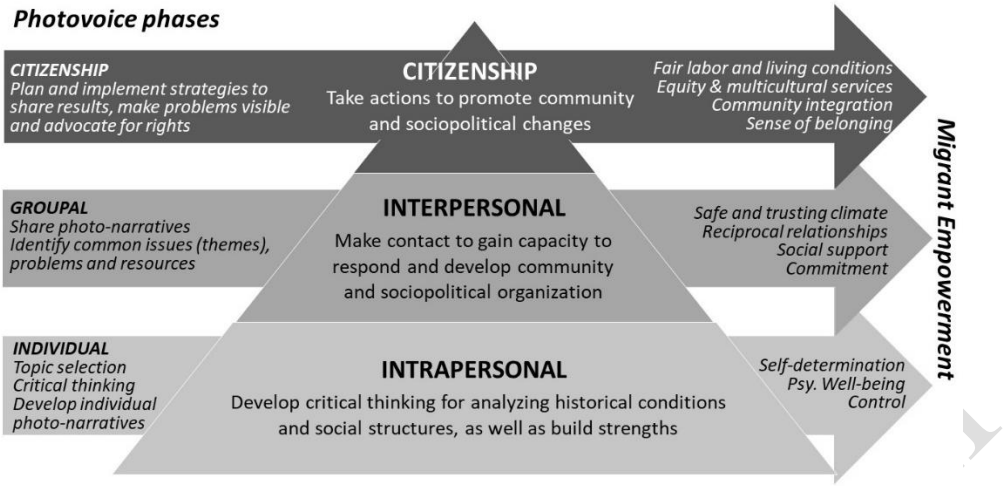
Photovoice has been extensively applied with migrants and refugees, mostly in needs assessments and explorations of their experiences in host societies (Lögdberg et al., 2020; Rhodes et al., 2015). Through its visual language, migrants and refugees are able to narrate their own experiences with all their nuances (Lenette & Boddy, 2013), expressing 'deeper and hidden emotions, stories, or ideas about complex issues beyond language and cultural barriers' (Marzana et al., 2023, p. 113). The first-person approach in photography and narration allows for the re-signification of experiences, fostering

critical consciousness regarding communities and power dynamics (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Furthermore, photovoice allows us to understand how migrants and refugees make meaning of their realities – frequently invisible or stereotyped – while positioning themselves against systems of oppression (Lykes & Scheib, 2017). Photovoice has also been a space for migrants to build support networks and develop skills related to communication, decision-making, advocacy and action-taking (Cubero & Garrido, 2023; Kwok & Ku, 2008).

This capacity is engaged in the social phase of photovoice, when these networks are broadened through the building of partnerships and solidarity to promote change in host communities (Wang & Burris, 1997). The photonarratives are already an example of counterspeech to the normalisation of anti-migrant discourses (Mamary, 2023). Moreover, this advocacy orientation allows participants to engage in dialogue with other stakeholders and policymakers (Liebenberg, 2018; Wang & Burris, 1994). Achieving these levels of participation correlates positively with migrant empowerment (Chapman et al., 2013; Cubero & Garrido, 2023; Guariso et al., 2016).

Of the various approaches to addressing empowerment (see Christens, 2024), this study follows the proposal of García-Ramírez et al. (2011), which explains migrant empowerment through three interrelated ecological levels that could be linked to the PAR action stages (Fals Borda, 1987), as well as the three photovoice phases explained above (Figure 1): intrapersonal, interpersonal and citizenship. According to García-Ramirez and colleagues (2011), 'this complex process involves the dialogical and dual reconstruction of selfhood and settings: at the citizenship level, from exclusion to belonging; at the interpersonal level, from isolation to participation; and at the intrapersonal level, from hopelessness to psychological wellbeing' (p. 89).



Nevertheless, the method's impact on empowerment depends on the epistemological framework, methodological design, resources and community partnerships to facilitate meaningful participant engagement and create social change (Evans & Rosemberg, 2016; Liebenberg, 2018). Photovoice projects have become widespread in various fields, but they often deviate from their original goal of actively contributing to social justice (Call-Cummings et al., 2018). Without denying its usefulness also at these levels (e.g. contributing to individual growth or community reflections), this can distance the method from its theoretical and practical underpinnings, and thus, prevent it from promoting empowerment processes (Evans & Rosemberg, 2016).

This scoping review arises precisely from the need to analyse and systematise how photovoice is conducted, identifying the elements that influence whether or not migrant and refugee empowerment is fostered. This research gap arises from scientific literature, as well as from our own challenges as white women researchers–from Europe and Latin America–using photovoice with migrant and refugee communities.

Consequently, first, we contextualised the photovoice studies, exploring when, where, by whom, for what purposes and within which epistemological frameworks they were conducted. Secondly, we addressed the methodological design¸ in terms of participants and community networks. Thirdly, we analysed the process's duration, data

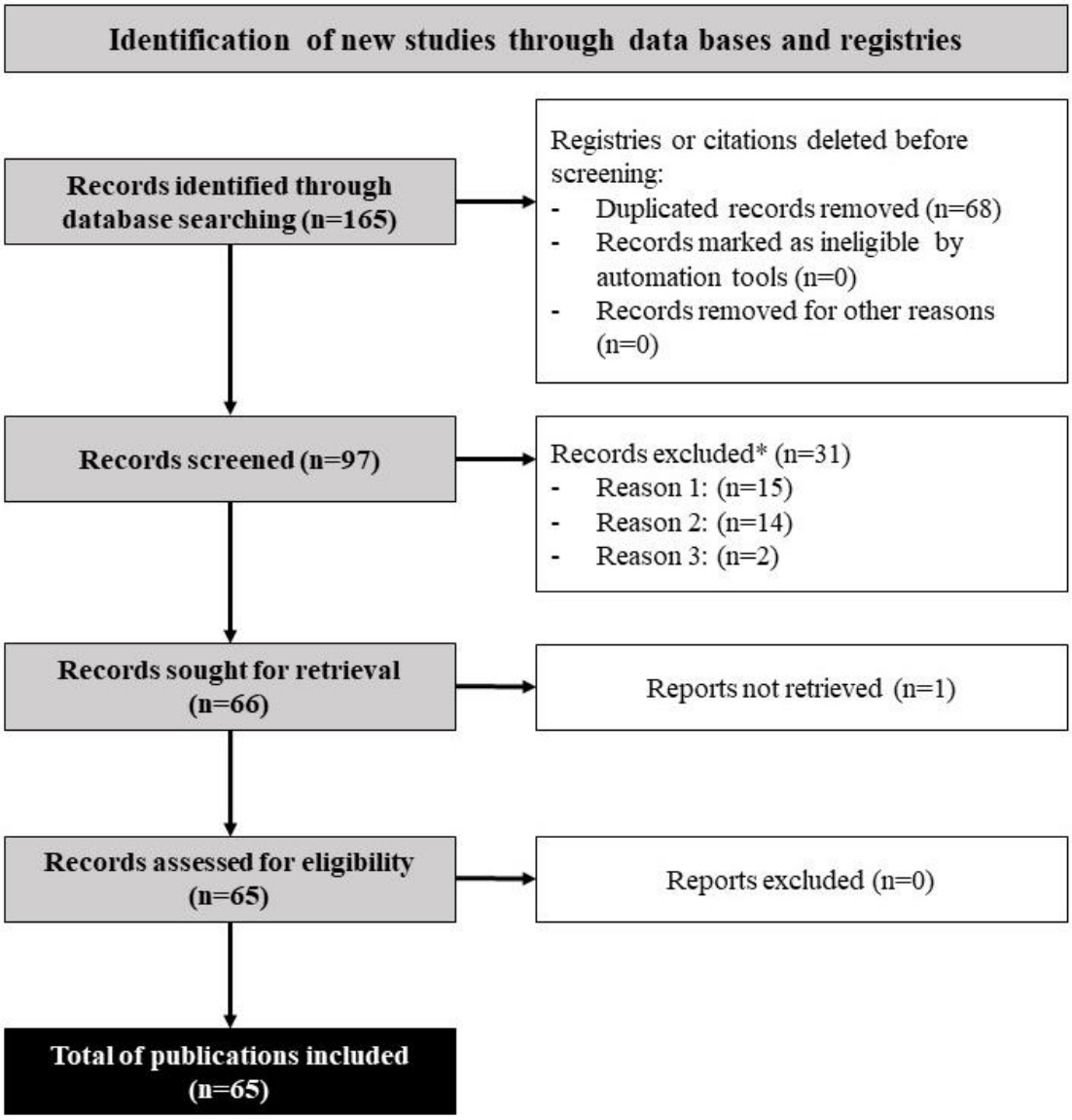
analysis, and dissemination and advocacy actions. Finally, we examined the included studies for indicators of the three levels of empowerment: intrapersonal, interpersonal and citizenship.

Materials and Method

Search Strategy

This research consisted of a scoping review, which, in the words of Arksey and O'Malley (2005, p. 23), is oriented to 'provide a narrative or descriptive account of the available research'. We proceeded according to the structure proposed by these authors, i.e. by (1) operationalising research questions and objectives, (2) identifying studies, (3) selecting them, (4) recording and systematising information, and (5) reporting results.

To ensure a systematic process, we followed PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page et al., 2021) when designing and conducting our search of studies involving the use of photovoice with migrants. Figure 2 shows the PRISMA flow diagram, which illustrates the article selection process. The search was conducted in 5 databases: Psycinfo, PubMed, Dialnet, SCOPUS and WOS, using the search criteria 'photovoice' AND 'migrant' OR 'immigrant' OR 'emigrant' OR 'refugee' OR 'nonnative' OR 'displaced people'. We limited the search to peer-reviewed articles published from 2000 to 2020. These search criteria resulted in 165 articles, of which 68 were removed as duplicates.



*Exclusion criteria:
a) Reason 1: Non-migrant participants
b) Reason 2: Not a primary study with photovoice
c) Reason 3: The language of the main text is not English or Spanish

After this, two of the authors carried out the preliminary abstract screening process of these 97 articles. The inclusion criteria were: (1) Migrants and refugees as participants, (2) Primary studies of photovoice as a unique or combined technique and (3) Main text available in English or Spanish. As a result, 65 articles were selected for full text analysis.

Review Process

To analyse the selected papers, the second and third authors constructed tables with different analysis categories to extract the information. These categories were proposed from research questions put forward by the authors based on the available literature on photovoice. Each category was debated before ultimately being included. After that, categories were grouped into four dimensions to facilitate further analysis (see details in Table 1): (1) Contextualisation, (2) Design, (3) Procedure and (4) Empowerment. Each article was analysed following this descriptive scheme. After the content review, the authors shared the results obtained in the analysis process, which are presented in the next section.

Table 1.
Dimensions, Categories and Research Questions for Content Review

Dimensions	Categories	Research questions
Contextualization	Year	What year are the publications from?
	Country	From which countries/geographical locations are photovoice-based action research processes being carried out?
	Gender	What is the gender of the researchers? Are more predominant female authors?
	Topics and objectives	What topics are being addressed in photovoice research with migrant communities? What are their main objectives?
	Epistemological framework	Do the studies have a critical or explicit stance about decoloniality or feminism?
Design	Participants	How many participants are involved in the process? What is their age and gender? What are their countries of origin? Which strategies were developed to adapt the method to the diversity of the participants?
	Community networks	What role does the community play in the photovoice process? What is their level of involvement? Is there a collaboration with community grassroots organizations?

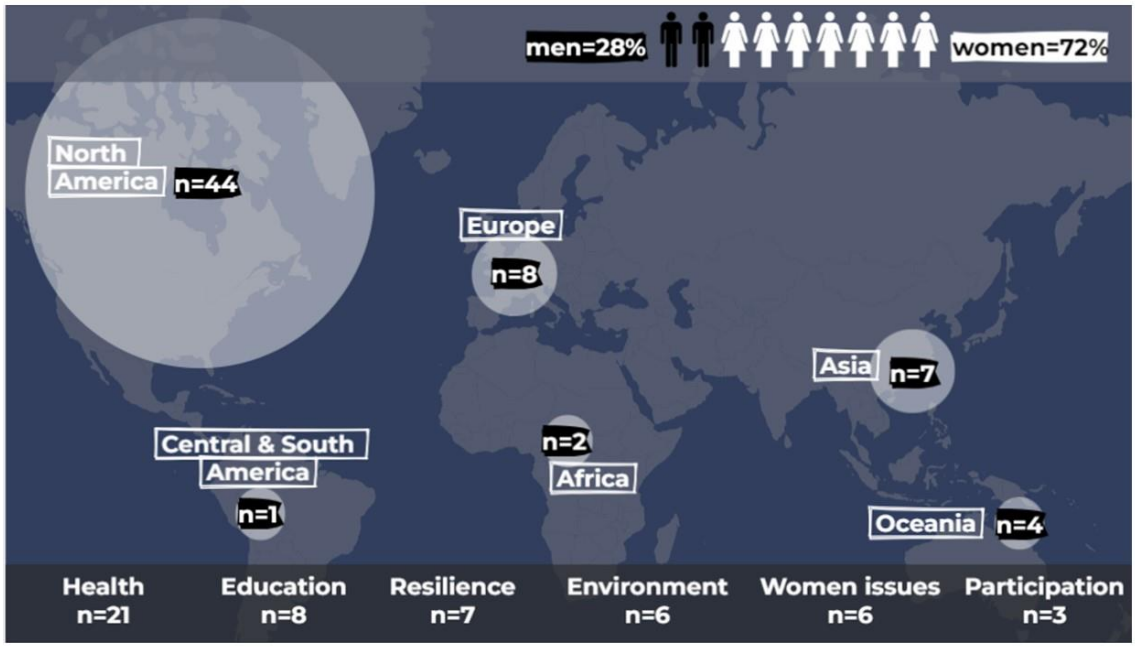
Procedure	Number of sessions	How many group sessions are held during the process? How long do these sessions last?
	Data analysis	How is the data analyzed? Is the analysis of the photonarratives and debates done in a participatory manner with the people involved?
	Dissemination and advocacy actions	Are community exhibitions of the photonarratives produced held in community or policy-making spaces? Are other dissemination and community actions carried out after the process?
Empowerment	Intrapersonal Interpersonal Citizenship	Can we find explicit indicators of intrapersonal/interpersonal/citizen of empowerment level?

Results

The findings from this scoping review are described through the four analysed dimensions, which are summarised in Appendix 1 in order to facilitate identification of the articles – not mentioned individually in the results due to lack of space.

Contextualisation

The studies were published from November 2007 to July 2020, 54% being after 2015. Regarding gender, 72% of the 237 authors are female, and most are from the United States and Canada (68%). Figure 3 details this information graphically.



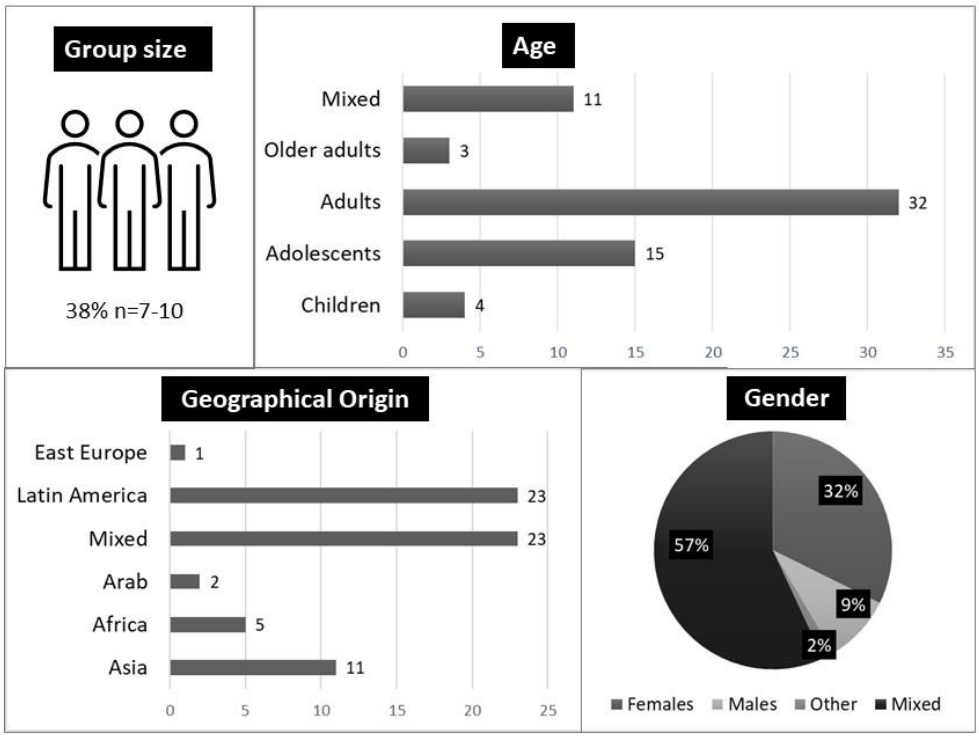
In terms of objectives, 60% have a research-oriented approach, while 25% of studies are more social intervention–oriented (e.g. gathering information to improve community services) and 15% aim to promote transformative actions and sociopolitical advocacy. The topics addressed were diverse, with the majority relating to health (see Figure 3 for details).

In addition, we analysed the epistemological framework, focusing on whether they have an explicit critical stance regarding feminism or post/de/anticoloniality. Only 3 of 65 studies introduce these critical approaches. Oliveira (2018) 'combined feminist critiques of androcentrism with participatory research's emphasis on inclusion and social change to explore the diverse experiences of migrants who sell sex in SA' (p. 5). Higginbottom et al. (2011) declare a postcolonial approach, 'underlining the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender and class, and how contemporary migrations reflect a historical legacy of power and colonialism … [a] critical lens will be applied to the categories used in our analyses and representations' (p. 6–7). Finally, Merino et al. (2019) include a sub-section about 'critical reflection and positionality of the research team' (p. 14), where a white researcher recognises that 'good intentions by white

authority figures are insufficient to overcome deep structural barriers to equity for new immigrant youth and others who are societally marginalised' (p. 15).

Design

We analysed two important aspects related to the photovoice's methodological design: (1) participants' characteristics (number, gender, age and origin) and (2) community networks. Photovoice has been described as a flexible method for working with diverse populations. Regarding the number of participants, Wang (1999, p. 187) suggests that '7 to 10 people is an ideal group size'. This range is followed in 38% of the studies, while 43% work with participants outside this recommendation (up to 19). Figure 4 summarises participants' main characteristics, in terms of age (mainly adults), geographical origin (35% mixed and 35% from Latin America) and gender (mainly mixed groups or non-mixed groups of women).



The studies develop some strategies to the diversity of participants. For example, Stevens (2010) reflects on the difficulties deriving from the diverse backgrounds and traumatic life stories of Cambodian participants: 'history under the Khmer Rouge made them sceptical of participating in the photographic method of the evaluation, which might allow their locations to be easily identified' (p. 279). Therefore, the methodological design must consider the intersectionality of participants and overcome barriers to participation (e.g. legal status, language and cultural barriers, lack of time), perhaps by hiring cultural mediators, and facilitating transport of participants.

As noted above, building community networks is key when implementing photovoice with migrant and refugee populations. In this regard, 86% mentioned some type of partnership, such as community-based organisations (37%), educational settings (12%), health and reception services for migrants and refugees (11%) and faith-based organisations (3%). The involvement and role of these entities/institutions vary greatly, from assisting in recruiting participants (Haque & Rosas, 2010; Sin et al., 2010) to providing a space for group sessions (Turk et al., 2015). However, in other projects, community partnerships are essential for developing an in-depth advocacy strategy:

> As a result of the partnership, the women presented their gallery and concerns at local conferences, academic settings, community forums, and the Mexican Consulate's office in El Paso … providing an opportunity for study participants to present their 'Call to Action' and encourage key health officials to make a public commitment to address IPV and sexual and reproductive health (Moya et al., 2014, p. 10).

Procedure

In terms of number of group sessions, 31% of the studies held 1–2 meetings, 9% held 3–4 meetings, 22% held 5–6 meetings and 14% held 7–8 meetings. The remaining studies (22%) do not provide information or did not conduct group sessions. Regarding data analysis, 92% apply qualitative content analysis to produce themes, categories

and/or codes. Only one relies mainly on quantitative analysis (Quach et al., 2015), while another (Haque & Rosas, 2010) applies a different methodology from the rest (nonmetric multidimensional scaling, MDS). Three papers do not mention any method of analysis.

Despite the importance of photographs in this method, 72% of the papers do not mention having analysed the images, while 23% of them acknowledge the photographs as part of the data set or previously analysed with participants. Visual analysis is named in 5% of the papers, as in Rogers et al., (2018), who apply thematic analysis and code the images into categories, or Logan & Murdie (2014), who 'analysed [196 photographs] using content analysis and summarised by theme' (p. 103). Others, such as Chapman et al. (2013) and Fozdar and Hartley (2014), apply semiotic visual analysis. Specifically, the latter pair undertake 'a semiotic analysis of the representation of the home space … to explore the ways in which identity, emotion and social connections were signified' (p. 8). It is therefore clear that photographs are often used to stimulate participants' debates or reflections, rather than being analysed as data in depth.

Wang & Burris (1997) highlight participatory analysis as a fundamental element in photovoice, to 'enable us to hear and understand how people make meaning themselves or construct what matters to them' (p. 382). They propose a three-stage process in which participants collectively (1) select the photographs that best reflect community needs and thoughts, (2) contextualise or build different meanings and (3) codify or identify topics, themes and theories. In our review, 12 of 65 studies carry out a participatory analysis, though only Moya et al. (2014) and De Castro et al. (2014) follow the three-stage process proposed by Wang & Burris (1997). Others, such as Rosado et al. (2020) and Lögdberg et al. (2020), do not provide for participant collaboration in the last phase (coding), but they do in the other phases. Similarly, in

Rhodes et al. (2009), although supplementary meetings are dedicated to 'revising, further developing, approving and interpreting these themes' (p. 22), the codes derived from participants are initially defined by the researchers. One example of this limitation being overcome is in Gómez & Castañeda's (2018) research, where 'participants identified their main health concerns and strengths by using affinity diagrams, an inductive method for groups to visualise and organise their ideas and thoughts … their shared and collective concerns led to draft solutions and policy recommendations' (p. 500–501).

Finally, as photovoice is oriented towards social change, it is important to emphasise that community and advocacy actions were conducted in 57% of the papers. The most commonly implemented strategies are community forums, photographic exhibitions, participation in scientific events and preparation of recommendation documents. Additionally, dissemination efforts include articles in the non-academic press, journalistic notes, radio interviews and videos.

Empowerment

Empowerment results were analysed with consideration of the impact of photovoice at three levels: (1) intrapersonal, (2) interpersonal and (3) citizenship. Below are the results according to level, along with examples of the analysed articles as good practices (Figure 5).

First, indicators of intrapersonal empowerment are found in 85% of the studies. Participants became aware that their problems had a collective dimension: 'one participant stated that she felt "relieved" … knowing she was not alone and among others that shared her experience as a DACAmented individual' (Gómez & Castañeda, 2019, p. 6). The process also generated self-confidence in participants: 'the process of participating in design workshops helped them to develop their self-esteem and a strong sense of confidence and competence' (Kwok & Ku, 2008, p. 279). Consequently, the participants gained confidence in themselves as valid interlocutors: 'I am an expert of my own life. You [practitioners and researchers] may know a bit, but I can tell you what is going on with me better than you may think' (Rhodes et al., 2009, p. 30).

Furthermore, the participants evaluated limitations and potentialities of their own community, developing self-criticism and change intentions. Moreover, they connected the impact of policies on their everyday lives and how change can be brought about through collective action: 'We need community awareness and action to address homelessness … governments should ensure federal, state and local funds to support positive efforts to end homelessness' (Moya et al., 2017, p. 5). In this vein, Kwok and Ku (2008) mention that 'through photovoice, the women began to concern themselves

with issues affecting their livelihood, to understand the problems of Hong Kong's housing policy, and to become aware of their rights as citizens' (p. 279).

Second, the interpersonal level of empowerment was identified in 71% of the cases, through the construction of support networks, as well as negotiation and communication skills and teamwork. For instance, Kwok and Ku (2008) note that 'this project helped to establish relationships among these newly arrived women, strengthening their social cohesion … they circulated resources and information, and mutually supported each other in everyday life [and] began to form an informal support network' (p. 279). Finding support networks and meeting spaces reinforced cultural identities and practices, while promoting participation in host societies (Garrido & Cubero, 2019). Furthermore, on the subject of skills acquired during the process, Rhodes et al. (2015) state that participants 'developed skills in leadership; public speaking, partnerships development; harnessing relationships with media; negotiation and group decision-making; and community engagement, organisation and mobilisation' (p. 93).

For the third, citizenship level, we created two sublevels: (1) a community sublevel with short-term effects and (2) a sociopolitical sublevel with medium/long-term effects. In 54% of the studies, an impact on the community is observed. Sensitisation and dissemination activities in community forums or presentations to decision-makers are the most common actions (in 28% of the studies), which have a positive impact on communities' visibility (Chapman et al., 2013). Other community actions promoted (in 26% of the studies) focus on attaining resources or services, problem-solving or advocating for community rights. For example, Schwartz et al. (2007) developed multimedia resources on family planning for community dissemination and organised a cultural training day for health agents. In addition,

Murray et al. (2015) express that participants '[made] a list of local physical activity [and developed] videos featuring cultural dances and exercises from various East African communities' (p. 7).

Actions regarding the sociopolitical sublevel are found in 25% of the papers. In Fleming et al. (2017), a group was formed and carried out several interventions beyond the photovoice process, such as recreational spaces for young people, an environmental defence committee and substance abuse prevention campaigns. Similarly, in Moya et al. (2014), participants became health promoters, observing the need 'to train service providers and other public health authorities to better understand the prevalence of IPV among women' (p. 890) and demanding greater cultural competence in health plans. By way of conclusion, Moya et al. (2013) state that photovoice 'empower[s] women to talk, inform, support and manage their own necessities with policy-makers' (p. 5).

Finally, it should be noted that 97% of the studies that reach the citizenship level of empowerment also promote individual awareness-raising (intrapersonal empowerment), strengthening of networks and development of capacity to action (interpersonal empowerment). Furthermore, most of them establish community networks (except two studies) and implement four or more group meetings (except three studies). Additionally, community actions are carried out in 8 of the 12 studies that apply participatory analysis.

Discussion

This paper examines literature on the use of photovoice with migrants and refugees published between 2000 and 2020. It contextualises, describes and analyses the impact of photovoice on migrant empowerment. Our results highlight the flexibility of this method for developing PAR with diverse populations and yield some interesting results regarding theoretical and practical implications.

Key Elements for Promoting Migrant and Refugee Empowerment Through Photovoice

Our results indicate that photovoice is a flexible technique (especially in terms of topics and participants), but certain requirements must be met when the aim is to promote empowerment. The first is to include the three phases of photovoice, assigning special importance to group discussions, which facilitate participant bonding and collective analysis of community concerns (Wang & Burris, 1997). We therefore assert that photovoice is inherently a collective process, emphasising that individual interviews alone lack the conditions necessary to foster empowerment.

The second requirement is the development of community partnerships, which are found in 86% of the studies in a variety of forms (e.g., NGOs, community-based organisations, educational settings, faith-based organisations and governmental institutions). To this end, Wang and Burris (1997) and Liebenberg (2018) emphasise the importance of establishing local partnerships in the implementation of photovoice at various levels to achieve long-term impacts and truly empowering processes. These studies seem to work along these lines, but just a few develop an in-depth advocacy strategy through community partnerships (e.g., Moya et al, 2014). Future photovoice research should consider strategically mapping and actively cultivating strong and enduring relationships with grassroots community organisations to establish the necessary foundations for empowerment.

Third, active participation must be promoted at all stages of research (e.g., participatory analysis, advocacy actions, etc.). This seems to be connected to citizenship empowerment (Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016; Hannes & Parylo, 2014). However, only 12 of 65 studies explicitly state that they carried out a participatory analysis of the photonarratives and 25% promote sociopolitical actions with medium/long-term effects.

According to Johnston (2016), 'despite the central focus on social action and policy change, there is a vagueness in addressing how to enact social action plans' (p. 5). These results are in line with other studies which highlight the difficulties of accessing policy-making spaces and the need to pay attention to long-term evaluations to verify whether changes have been achieved at policy level (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Hergenrather, et al., 2009).

A Call for Post/De/Anticolonial Feminist Frameworks

In a context marked by oppression and violence against migrant and refugee communities, science has a duty to contribute to the protection of human rights and promote social justice (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2011). PAR methods, such as photovoice, can effectively promote empowerment of oppressed communities (Cubero & Garrido, 2023; Reid & Frisby, 2017). Nonetheless, these methods alone will not lead to empowerment (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Hergenrather et al., 2009) and our findings suggest that specific contextual, epistemological and methodological considerations must be carefully made.

Photovoice has been defined as a feminist and/or de/anticolonial practice (Cornell et al., 2019; Fricas, 2022) that questions the patriarchal and positivist Western gaze that prevails in science. In light of this, our review highlights the significant representation of women researchers in photovoice projects (72%), prompting questions about the nature, methods and purposes of contemporary women's research. Nevertheless, it would be essentialist to state that the simple fact that women do science already means that they conduct feminist research. Hence, future research should delve deeper into whether photovoice is genuinely a FPAR (Reid & Frisby, 2008).

In addition, our data raises concerns about the decolonial basis of the analysed studies. Most of them were produced in countries of the Global North (e.g. the USA,

Canada, Australia). While acknowledging the particularities of each territory, it is noteworthy that 40% of the studies conducted in countries of the Global South involve US universities. These results indicate the need to continue to problematise science as a field of power (Haraway, 1988) that establishes hierarchies between centres and peripheries, both territorially and epistemically (Medina, 2013). The availability of funds, the rules imposed by high-impact journals and the undervaluation of specific scientific productions generated by the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 1992) may be factors influencing these results.

Moreover, only 3 out of 65 studies include critical post/de/anticolonial or feminist approaches in their frameworks. This statement is alarming when it comes to PAR with migrant or refugee communities in host societies, where power relations privilege researchers and may impact knowledge production (Cornell et al., 2019; Cubero & Garrido, 2023; Deliovsky, 2017). With this in mind, researchers must recognise these power imbalances, being careful not to force participants' involvement or overexpose them (Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016). If this happens, photovoice may be more damaging than beneficial (Hannes & Parylo, 2014). Additionally, we call upon authors to critically revise their sexist, racist and colonial bias, which could be manifested in language. For example, it is common to read that photovoice 'empower[s] the marginalised by *giving them a voice*' (Logan & Murdie, 2014, p. 102), as if these communities do not already have one, contrary to PAR assumptions and empowering methodologies.

Evidently, the examination of researchers' positions and reflexivity is an important aspect to be discussed at length in PAR (Reid & Frisby, 2017). The research carried out by Oliveira (2016), Higginbottom et al. (2011) and Merino et al. (2019) constitutes noteworthy efforts to address the intricacies of power dynamics,

intersectionality and decolonisation within participatory research. In accordance with Fricas (2022) and her proposal of anticolonial photovoice, we consider that ‘breaking down power dynamics is an ongoing struggle’ which has to be carefully accompanied by a ‘constant vigilance to ethical, methodological, and representational issues’ (p. 4). Current migrations are embedded in complex sociohistorical colonial relations that should be unveiled in photovoice research to build it as a space where we collectively create conditions for empowerment, agency and resistance (Howarth et al., 2014). We recommend that researchers reflect on and share these challenges, with humility and constant dialogue with participant co-researchers throughout the process.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations that should be considered when examining the findings from this study. We encountered difficulties in analysing certain studies due to unclear descriptions. Therefore, we highlight the need for improved clarity in future research, particularly in photovoice design and analysis. Our Appendix may serve as a systematic model for future papers.

Furthermore, our analysis of migrant empowerment is based on a model that interprets it in terms of "level" but not "quality". Future research could use alternative models to complement our results and achieve a more substantive understanding of empowerment. Also, our analysis of the country and gender of researchers is descriptive, and the findings require further examination. We have classified researchers as male or female based on their names, which oversimplifies gender. Additionally, examining the global North–South divide requires a more nuanced approach due to the intricate layers and disparities within the same geographical area, particularly those near borders.

Lastly, despite photovoice being a visual technique, there is a strikingly low prevalence of image analysis. Photographs can provide us with data that go beyond textual information, greatly enriching scientific production (Cleland & MacLeod, 2021). Based on our results, more in-depth visual analysis is needed for the advancement and development of the method.

Conclusions

We are currently observing a sharp rise in violence against migrant and refugee communities in many host societies. The use of photovoice research shows great promise for the generation of resistance and action processes against such injustices. However, certain methodological criteria need to be meticulously fulfilled. This study emphasizes the importance of building strong partnerships within the community, ensuring that participants are actively involved, and developing effective advocacy strategies, all of which have been linked to greater empowerment levels. Therefore, it is crucial to view photovoice not just as a data collection method but as an inherently collaborative process that nurtures social capital and community ties—essential for driving political change.

In this vein, we as researchers bear the responsibility of contemplating the socio-political context within which our work takes place; paying careful attention to how historical power structures can also influence research environments. We advocate for critically engaging with feminist and post/de/anticolonial methodological frameworks so as to recognize and challenge patriarchal and colonial biases both within research settings and beyond them. It is our hope that this article will contribute to rethinking of the use of photovoice research, with a view to broadening the agenda of decolonisation and collective liberation.

References[1]

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 19–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616

Buckingham, S.L., et al. (2021). The roles of settings in supporting immigrants' resistance to injustice and oppression: A policy position statement by the Society for Community Research and Action. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 68*, 269–291. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12515

Budig, K., Diez, J., Conde, P., et al. (2018). Photovoice and empowerment: Evaluating the transformative potential of a participatory action research project. *BMC Public Health, 18*(432). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5335-7

Call-Cummings, M., Hauber-Özer, M., Byers C., & Peden Mancuso, G. (2018). The power of/in photovoice. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 42*(4), 399-413. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2018.1492536

Catalani, C., & Minkler, M. (2010). Photovoice: A review of the literature in health and public health. *Health Education and Behavior*, *37*(3), 424–451. https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198109342084

Chapman, M. V., Zhu, M., & Wu, S. (2013). Mothers in transition: Using images to understand the experience of migrant mothers in Shanghai. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, *4*(3), 245–260. https://doi.org/10.5243/jsswr.2013.16

Cleland, J., & MacLeod, A. (2021). The visual vernacular: Embracing photographs in research. *Perspectives on Medical Education, 10*(4), 230–237. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-021-00672-x

Collier, J., & Collier, M. (1986). *Visualanthropology: Photography as a research method*. University of New Mexico Press.

[1] The bibliographic references of the articles analysed in this scoping review that are only cited in the results section do not appear in the references. Information on and access to these studies can be found in Appendix 1.

Cornell, J., Mkhize, L., & Kessi, S. (2019). Envisioning photovoice as decolonial feminist praxis. In F. Boonzaier & T. van Niekerk (Eds), *Decolonial Feminist Community Psychology* (pp. 59–76). Springer, Cham.

Cubero, A., & Garrido, R. (2023). 'Ain't I a woman?': Feminist participatory action-research with African migrant women living in Spain. *Int. Migration & Integration 24*, 1611–1634. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-023-01020-0

Christens, B. D. (Ed.). (2024). *The Cambridge handbook of community empowerment*. Cambridge University Press.

Deliovsky, K. (2017). Whiteness in the qualitative research setting: Critical skepticism, radical reflexivity and anti-racist feminism. *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry, 4*(1), 1–24.

Ekman, M. (2019). Anti-immigration and racist discourse in social media. *European Journal of Communication, 34*(6), 606–618. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323119886151

European Commission. (2020). *Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021–2027*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0758

Evans-Agnew, R. A., & Rosemberg, M. A. (2016). Questioning photovoice research: Whose voice? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(8), 1019–1030. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315624223

Fals-Borda, O. (1987). The application of participatory action-research in Latin America. *International Sociology, 2*(4), 329–347. https://doi.org/10.1177/026858098700200401

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness.* Continuum.

Fricas, J. (2022). Towards an anticolonial photovoice: A research practice guide to theoretical and methodological considerations. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods, 3*(2). https://doi.org/10.35844/001c.37606

Frisby, W., Maguire, P., & Reid, C. (2009). The 'f' word has everything to do with it: How feminist theories inform action research. *Action Research, 7*(1), 13–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750308099595

García-Ramírez, M., De la Mata, M., Paloma, V., & Hernández-Plaza, S. (2011). A liberation psychology approach to acculturative integration of migrant

populations. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *47*(1-2), 86–97. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9372-3

Garrido, R., & Cubero, A. (2019). La participación socio-política de las mujeres negras africanas en Sevilla (España). *Odisea. Revista de Estudios Migratorios*, *6*, 1–30.

Garrido, R., Garcia-Ramirez, M., & Balcazar, F. (2019). Moving towards community cultural competence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 73*, 89–101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2019.09.002

Gold, S. J., & Nawyn, S. J. (Eds). (2019). *Routledge international handbook of migration studies.* Routledge.

Guariso, G., Paloma, V., Arias, S., Garrido, R., & García-Ramirez, M. (2016). Photovoice as a research-intervention tool for youth neighborhood activism in societally vulnerable contexts. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, *7*(3), 1–18. https://www.gjcpp.org/en/article.php?issue=23&article=140

Hannes, K., & Parylo, O. (2014). Let's play it safe: Ethical considerations from participants in a photovoice research project. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *13*(1), 255–274. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691401300112

Haque, N., & Rosas, S. (2010). Concept mapping of photovoices. *Family & Community Health*, *33*(3), 193–206. https://doi.org/10.1097/fch.0b013e3181e4bbf0

Haraway, D. J. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

Hergenrather, K. C., Rhodes, S. D., Cowan, C. A., Bardhoshi, G., & Pula, S. (2009). Photovoice as community-based participatory research: a qualitative review. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, *33*(6), 686–698. https://doi.org/10.5993/ajhb.33.6.6

Higginbottom, G. M., Vallianatos, H., Forgeron, J., Malhi, R., & Mamede, F. (2011). Food choices and practices during pregnancy of immigrant and Aboriginal women in Canada: A study protocol. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth 11*, 100. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2393-11-100

Hogan, J. & Haltinner, K. (2015). Floods, invaders, and parasites: Immigration threat narratives and right-wing populism in the USA, UK and Australia. *Journal of*

Intercultural Studies, *36*(5), 520–543 https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2015.1072907

IOM (2022). *World migration report 2022.* https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022

Könönen, J. (2020). Legal geographies of irregular migration: An outlook on immigration detention. *Population, Space and Place*, *26*, 2340. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2340

Kwok, J. Y., & Ku, H.-B. (2008). Making habitable space together with female Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong. *Action Research*, *6*(3), 261–283. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750308094131

Liang, C.S. (Ed.). (2008). *Europe for the Europeans: The foreign and security policy of the populist radical right* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315580821

Lenette C. (2022) *Participatory action research: Ethics and decolonization*. Oxford University Press.

Lenette, C., & Boddy, J. (2013). Visual ethnography and refugee women: nuanced understandings of lived experiences. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *13*(1), 72–89.

Liebenberg, L. (2018). Thinking critically about photovoice: Achieving empowerment and social change. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918757631

Logan, J., & Murdie, R. (2014). Home in Canada? The settlement experiences of Tibetans in Parkdale, Toronto. *Int. Migration & Integration 17*, 95–113. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-014-0382-0

Lögdberg, U., Nilsson, B., & Kostenius, C. (2020). Young migrants' experiences and conditions for health: A photovoice study. *SAGE Open*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020920665

Lykes, M. B., & Scheib, H. (2017). The artistry of emancipatory practice: Photovoice, creative techniques, and feminist anti-racist participatory action research. In *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*, pp. 131–142. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473921290.n14

Mamary, E. (2023). Photovoice as counterspeech. *Health Promotion Practice*, *23*(2), 230–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248399211059129

Martinez-Damia, S., Marzana, D., Alfieri, S., Pozzi, M., Marta, E., & Martinez, M. L. (2021). Psychological and structural barriers to immigrant community participation: The experience of Peruvians in Santiago de Chile. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *67*(3–4), 456–469. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12472

Marzana, D., Gaboardi, M., Crapolicchio, E, Giuliani, C., & Regalia, C. (2023). Using photovoice with migrant and non-migrant youth to explore integration in local communities. *Migration Letters*, *20*(5), 111–121. https ://doi.org/10.59670/ml.v20i5.2930

Maton, K. I. (2008). Empowering community settings: Agents of individual development, community betterment, and positive social change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *41*(1–2), 4–21. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9148-6

Medina, L. R. (2013). *Centers and peripheries in knowledge production*. Routledge.

Merino, Y., Thomas, T., Lightfoot, A., Eng, S. F., Thatcher, K., Chapman, M. (2019). 'They were just waiting for me to mess up': A critical discourse analysis of immigrant Latinx teens' perceptions of power dynamics. *J Community Psychol*, *48*, 605–622. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22276

Moane, G. (2003). Bridging the personal and the political: Practices for a liberation psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *31*(1/2), 91–101

Mohanty, C. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist review*, *30*(1), 61–88. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42

Mora, C., Piper, N. (2021). An intersectional and global approach to the study of gender and migration. In C. Mora, N. Piper (Eds), *The Palgrave handbook of gender and migration*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63347-9_1

Moya, E. M., Chávez-Baray, S., & Martinez, O. (2014). Intimate partner violence and sexual health. *Health Promotion Practice*, *15*(6), 881–893. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839914532651

Moya, E. M., Chavez-Baray, S. M., Loweree, J., Mattera, B., & Martinez, N. (2017). Adults experiencing homelessness in the US–Mexico border region: A photovoice project. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *5*(May), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2017.00113

Oliveira, E. (2016). Empowering, invasive or a little bit of both? A reflection on the use of visual and narrative methods in research with migrant sex workers in South Africa, *Visual Studies*, *31*(3), 260–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2016.1210992

Page, M. J., Moher, D., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann T. C., Mulrow C. D., et al. (2021). PRISMA 2020 explanation and elaboration: Updated guidance and exemplars for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n160

Prilleltensky, I. (2008). The role of power in wellness, oppression, and liberation: The promise of psychopolitical validity. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *36*(2), 116–136. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20225

Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2–3), 168–178.

Reid, C., & Frisby, W. (2008). Continuing the journey: Articulating dimensions of feminist participatory action research (FPAR). In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds), *Sage handbook of action research* (pp. 93–105). Sage.

Rhodes, S. D., Alonzo, J., Mann, L., Simán, F. M., Garcia, M., Abraham, C., & Sun, C. J. (2015). Using photovoice, Latina transgender women identify priorities in a new immigrant-destination state. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, *16*(2), 80–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2015.1075928

Solano, G., & Huddleston, T. (2020). *Migrant integration policy index 2020.* CIDOB and MPG.

Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing methodologies in qualitative research: creating spaces for transformative praxis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *20*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211014766

Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Balcazar, F., Miranda, D. E., Velazquez, T., Arcidiacono, C., & García-Ramirez, M. (2022). Promoting justice through community-based research: International case studies. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *69*(3-4), 318–330. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12584

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1994). Empowerment through photo novella: Portraits of participation. *Health Education Quarterly*, *21*(2), 171–186.

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, *24*(3), 369–387. https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819702400309

Wang, C. (1999). Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. *Journal of Women's Health*, *8*(2), 185–192.

Declaration of interest statement

No conflict of interest exists and we confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors.

Funding details

This paper has been possible thanks to the funding of the Secretaria d'Universitats i Recerca del Departament d'Empresa i Coneixement de la Generalitat de Catalunya, the European Union (UE) and the European Social Fund (ESF) (RTI2018-093627-B-I0), through the Grants for the recruitment of new pre-doctoral research staff of the first author of this paper.