



Refugees (not)welcome: Is UK's being selective towards which refugees are allowed to enter its territory?

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Abstract

Countries of the Global North have long established restrictive measures to deter refugees and asylum-seekers from their territories. In 2022, when the number of refugees in Europe doubled due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the international response varied, and refugees were granted access to entry and protection. Focusing on the United Kingdom (UK) as a case study, this thesis examines the selective response towards refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK as a result of its immigration policies and explores the underlying facets that influence the differential treatment. This study also examines the political rhetoric and narratives which shape the attitudes towards different refugee groups.

Through qualitative research in the field of refugee and citizenship studies, the applied methodology consists of in-depth interviews with refugees in the UK, as well as an analysis of its immigration policies. By applying the theory of dehumanisation, the thesis aims to analyse how immigration policies shape the experience of refugees and asylum-seekers.

The findings reveal that different groups of refugees are being given differential treatment depending on where they come from and the route they choose to the UK, given the limited options available. Country of origin, mode of arrival, and legal status are some of the factors that influence the support and services available to refugees. This selective treatment is a portrayal of the UK's discriminatory immigration policies. The work argues that the UK's refugee system is segregated and selective. The selection as to who should receive protection is biased towards those who share similarities in terms of culture, religion, and race.

The study concludes with recommendations aimed at addressing the differential treatment and emphasizes the need for a non-discriminatory approach. The relevance of the thesis from a human rights perspective is the documentation of a narrative which highlights the exclusionary policies and approaches in the UK towards refugees and asylum-seekers, and how these impact their human rights.

Key words: refugee studies, dehumanisation, immigration policies, citizenship studies, hostile environment.

Word Count: 18,087

I was only five years old when me and my family had to flee our home to escape war. We were fortunate that despite a long and difficult journey we were welcomed in another country and provided safety. We were also fortunate that we were able to come back home when the conflict ended. My experience as a refugee led me to embark on this thesis to explore the experiences of the other less fortunate ones who face restrictions when trying to find safety.

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Explanation of terms

Refugee: In general terms, refugee will refer to a person who was forced to flee their country of origin because of conflict, violence, or persecution, and cannot return home or is afraid to do so. This definition will also refer to those in the UK whether they have been given refugee status or humanitarian protection.

Asylum-seeker: A person seeking international protection (UNHCR, 2021). Given that asylum-seekers could become refugees, throughout the thesis refugee and asylum seeker will be used in equal terms.

Irregular movement: Movement which takes place outside the laws, regulations, or agreements of the countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Safe and legal routes: Immigration arrangements provided by the UK government to allow people to arrive to UK for humanitarian reasons. More specifically on this will be explained in the analysis.

1. Introduction

2022 marked the year when the number of forcibly displaced people rose to a hundred million worldwide. 32.5 million were refugees who were forced to leave their homes to flee conflict, violence, and persecution (UNHCR, 2022). The rise in the number of refugees was propelled by the war in Ukraine when millions of Ukrainians fled the Russian invasion. The high number of Ukrainians fleeing prompted policies across the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) which facilitated the entry of refugees to these territories. We witnessed countries opening borders and providing accommodation, food, transport, and financial donations. This level of solidarity was inspiring to witness, yet it also got us thinking why we are witnessing this only now, and where was this compassion before? Long before the war in Ukraine, mass refugee displacement has been going on in many parts of the world. Perhaps the most notable one in 2015, when as a result of the ongoing Syrian conflict, refugees started to move to Europe. Unfortunately, the reality these refugees faced was different, as countries adopted hostile policies like border pushbacks, detention measures, and offshoring to prevent them reaching Europe (Reilly and Flynn, 2022).

A differential treatment towards refugees can be observed in the UK as well, where in response to the Ukraine conflict the government launched two visa schemes for Ukrainians which allow them the opportunity to relocate to the UK and have the right to work, study, and obtain public benefits, for three years. This was the first time the UK established a visa scheme to apply for asylum. In the same year the UK introduced policies according to which those who arrive via irregular means or without resettlement schemes may be criminalized, off shored, and receive less protection and support. This differential response has raised the question whether the social protection of refugees has become more conditional and selective. While refugees from the Middle East, Asia, and Sub-Saharan countries continue to risk their lives crossing the English Channel, the UK is providing safe routes to Ukrainian refugees. The disparity has also been observed in the language used, where refugees from Ukraine are regarded as “genuine refugees” whereas those from the Middle East or Africa are labelled as “illegal migrants” (Schmitz, 2022). The reasons behind the differential treatment are an entanglement of identity politics, citizenship, racialized narratives, and securitisation. This thesis examines some of these concepts to provide a better understanding of underlying facets that result in policies which unjustly differentiate between refugees.

1.1 Purpose and research question

This thesis will focus on the United Kingdom as a case-study to analyse how its policies respond to refugees and asylum seekers and examine why some refugees are allowed to enter while others face barriers. In addition, the research will analyse if refugee rights depend mainly on their origin, nationality, or identity. The main research question is:

Is the United Kingdom being selective towards which refugees deserve protection, and what are the underlying facets that play a role in the differential treatment towards refugees? While the related sub questions include:

- *How do policies shape the experiences of refugees depending on where they come from and how they arrive to the UK?*
- *Do refugees face dehumanisation in the UK?*

1.2 Thesis layout

Chapter 1 starts with an introduction and purpose of the thesis, while Chapter 2 gives a contextual background by analysing the refugee movements in the last two decades, focusing on the one in 2015 which occurred due to the war in Syria, and the recent one in 2022 as a result of the war in Ukraine. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the international legal framework for the protection of refugees for the reader to have a better comprehension of how refugee rights should be protected. Chapter 4 covers the literature review as well as the theoretical framework focusing on the theory of dehumanisation and how it applies to the issue in question. In Chapter 5 the methodological approach will be discussed, which in this research is qualitative using both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through individual in-depth interviews with people who sought protection in the UK and those working with refugees. For secondary data the research explores various policy documents, books, journals, as well as articles, to understand the approach and treatment of refugees. Chapters 6 and 7 are analytical in nature and will analyse the UK's response towards refugees aiming to see whether the UK is selective towards refugees. Chapter 6 will focus on providing a brief analysis of the UK's immigration policies and approaches to refugees and asylum-seekers and will argue that today's policies are a result of its historical approach to immigration. Chapter 7 presents and discusses the findings from the semi-structured interviews. Finally, Chapter 8 includes the conclusion and recommendations part of the thesis.

2. Contextual background

2.1 The 2015 “refugee crisis”

In 2015 for the first time, Europe witnessed an unprecedented arrival of refugees from the Global South (Betts and Collier, 2017). The largest and fastest movement of refugees since World War II was spurred by the ongoing conflict and violence in Syria which began in 2011 and resulted in 10 million displaced people (UNHCR, 2021). Although most people settled within Syria or neighbouring countries some began moving to more developed countries in hopes of finding better living opportunities. In 2015, over a million refugees sought protection in EU Member States (FRA, 2016), primarily from Syria but also from other fragile countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sub-Saharan countries. Asylum-seekers and refugees coming from these countries were ethnically and culturally different compared to the “classic Europeans” which until then were the predominant refugees in Europe. The cultural clashes coupled with internal left and right political divisions in Europe resulted in reduced empathy for refugees, but also in discrimination and unfair treatment.

The media labelled it a “refugee crisis” but in fact it was a European political crisis. The European response was incoherent and led to chaos within Europe (Betts and Collier, 2017). In order to secure its borders, EU member States started restricting asylum laws and established border externalisation¹ policies (FRA, 2016). Rights organisations reported that as a result of externalisation policies, countries in Europe used hostile means to deter refugees such as illegal pushbacks, deportations, detention measures, and violence against asylum seekers to prevent them from reaching the EU shore (Amnesty International, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

The “refugee crisis” was also a catalyst for the British Exit from the European Union (Brexit) (Betts and Collier, 2017). The “Breaking Point” poster of the Brexit campaign suggested that EU was not able to control the immigration of non-EU citizens which resulted in excessive and unregulated immigration to the UK (Betts and Collier, 2017). Brexit was intended to “take back control” of immigration. The Brexit campaign utilised fear, xenophobia, and racism to encourage supporters to “protect” the UK from migrants and refugees (Burnett, 2017; Golec de Zavala, Guerra and Simão, 2017). Over the last two decades the UK government has focused on bringing policies aimed at deterring, detaining, and deporting illegal migrants. This situation

¹ Border externalisation refers to the transfer of border control and related functions to third countries.

has created a hostile environment for refugees and asylum seekers. Since Brexit, the UK is no longer part of the Common European Asylum System, and as such has turned to developing its own national approach in responding to refugees and asylum seekers. These policies will be the focus of this analysis with the aim of determining whether they are selective towards refugees.

For a person to apply for asylum in the UK they must be physically in the UK. Otherwise, the only way to come to the UK as a refugee is through resettlement schemes and family reunion which are limited to certain refugees and are quota dependent. For this reason, many asylum-seekers traverse unsafe irregular routes to come to the UK. Yet when they do arrive through irregular means, they face many obstacles in the process. In April 2022, the UK government adopted the Nationality and Borders Act. This Act created a two-tier refugee system, where depending on where refugees come from and how they enter the UK some will be granted more rights than others. In addition, in March 2023 a new Bill was introduced which if passed will completely deny access to asylum for people coming through irregular means. More on these policies will be elaborated in Chapter 6.

2.2 The 2022 refugee movement

In 2022, we witnessed a different dynamic in the response from developed countries towards refugees. On 24th of February, Russia invaded Ukraine which led to horrific violence and displacement of millions of Ukrainians. To date, more than eight million refugees have fled the war in Ukraine, making it the fastest mass-displacement in the century (UNHCR, 2023). The international community condemned Russia's actions and quickly mobilized to help innocent people fleeing violence. The Ukrainian war happened in Europe, and European nations witnessed a refugee crisis within their borders which they were used to see in the Global South. This was a wake-up call for Europe as it disrupted the idea that war, and displaced people are limited to geographical entities and to people of different ethnicity, race, and religion. European countries opened their borders and implemented policies to grant quick and unbureaucratic access to protection to Ukrainian refugees. For the first time the EU agreed to activate the Temporary Protection Directive. Under this scheme, Ukrainians are offered up to three years temporary protection in EU countries, without having to apply for asylum (European Commission, 2022). Similarly, the UK government swiftly launched two visa schemes for Ukrainians and mobilised the community to support refugees from Ukraine. This meant that for

the first-time refugees were able to apply for protection even if they were not physically in the UK.

In this Chapter it was observed that both the EU and the UK responded differently towards the two plights of refugees from Syria and Ukraine. Why this is the case in the UK will be analysed in chapters below. However, before delving into an analysis it is important to see how the international legal framework seeks to protect refugees, which will be elaborated below.

3. International Protection of Refugees

Any person who is fleeing war, persecution, or serious harm is entitled to international protection and enjoyment of human rights. States are responsible for the protection of human rights of those within its territory, but due to war, violence, political reasons, or discrimination individuals may suffer human rights violations which force them to seek sanctuary in another country. The movement of refugees across international borders takes place within a context in which state sovereignty plays an important role. This sovereignty is based on the right of the state to exercise jurisdiction over its territory and to decide who can enter and remain in the country, and who will be denied entry. Yet, this power held by states must be in accordance with international law and standards.

The right to seek asylum is recognized as a fundamental right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 14 of the Declaration notes that “*everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution*”. As evident from the wording Article 14 provides the right to seek asylum, however, does not guarantee the right to be granted asylum. As such the right to asylum is contingent upon the sovereign rights of each state, and upon the “mercy” of each state. This does not mean that states can or should prevent individuals from accessing asylum. On the contrary states have a duty under international law not to prevent anyone from seeking asylum.

The core international instruments for refugee protection are the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) and its 1967 Protocol², as well as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The asylum system in the UK is based on the obligations that arise as a signatory to these conventions.

² The Convention entered into force on 22 April 1954, while its Protocol on 4 October 1967, which extended the scope of the Convention to cover refugees outside Europe and those who were displaced after 1951. These instruments have also inspired important regional instruments such as the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention in Africa, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration in Latin America and the development of a common asylum system in the European Union.

3.1 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol

The Refugee Convention provides the legal framework for the protection of refugees, including among others, the right to seek asylum, the right to access basic services such as healthcare and education, and the right to work.

The Refugee Convention defines a refugee as “*any person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin out of fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion*” (1951 Refugee Convention, Article 1). Once a person meets this definition, they are considered a refugee regardless of whether their status has been officially recognized by a particular state. While the term ‘asylum seeker’ is not defined in international law, asylum has been commonly accepted as a term for the overall system of protection that a state provides within its borders (Nicholson and Kumin, 2017), thus an asylum seeker can be understood as someone seeking international protection. Taking this into consideration, asylum seekers should not be returned to their home country until their claim has been assessed.

Countries that have ratified the Refugee Convention must undertake specific obligations to ensure the protection of refugees. The most important obligation is the binding principle of *non-refoulement* which prohibits the return of refugees to their country of origin or any other country where they would face persecution or harm (Article 33). This principle is applicable regardless of whether an individual has an official refugee status or is entitled to other forms of protection (Goodwin-Gill, 2011). It applies to any actions taken by the state which would directly or indirectly put the safety of the refugee at harm. Therefore, restrictive state actions towards refugees such as refusing entry, closing borders, or deporting individuals without allowing them to apply for asylum, undermine the principle of *non-refoulement*. The principle of *non-refoulement* has been universally recognised as the fundamental and inviolable principle of international refugee protection.

Given the vulnerability of their situation refugees may sometimes be compelled to enter a certain country unlawfully. The Refugee Convention specifies that illegal entry does not forfeit protections given that they meet the relevant criteria as noted in Article 31. This Article notes that asylum-seekers should not be punished for not having a passport or using a false one. In addition, the article recognises that for some refugees irregular routes are the only available

options to flee persecution and seek asylum in another country, thus no one should be penalised for entering a country irregularly.

3.2 European Convention on Human Rights

Another significant instrument for the protection of refugees is the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Although rights of refugees are not explicitly mentioned in the ECHR, Article 1 obliges all ratifying countries to ensure that everyone within their jurisdiction is granted the rights and protection as outlined in the ECHR. The main rights include the right to life, liberty, and security of persons, and prohibition of torture, inhumane, or degrading treatment.

The most important provision for refugees can be found in Article 3 which protects individuals from torture, punishment, or other ill-treatment. The European Court of Human Rights has interpreted Article 3 as providing effective protection for refugees against any form of repatriation to places where they may be exposed to such treatment.³ The Court has found that Article 3 can be interpreted as a principle of non-refoulement and has ruled that the provision applies to both direct and indirect repatriations. In cases of multilateral international agreements regarding the allocation of refugee claims, the obligations in Article 3 prevail over any other obligation to return, expel, or deport a refugee arising from other international treaties.

Article 5 safeguards the right to liberty and security and prohibits arbitrary detention. This is particularly important for refugees and asylum seekers who due to their status may be subject to detention.

3.3 Overall admissibility procedures

The State in which an individual seeks asylum has the primary responsibility to offer protection to the individual. However, States have established an admissibility procedure to determine if a claim is valid and whether another State is responsible for the substance of the claim. In such cases asylum-seekers may be denied access in that country if they have already found protection in another country, also known as the “first country of asylum” (UNHCR, 2003). A state can also deny access to asylum if they believe that the individual should have requested asylum in

³ The general principles concerning Article 3 in expulsion cases have been set out in *Saadi v. Italy*, Application No. [37201/06](#), 28 February 2008, §124-133,

another country while transiting and to which they can be returned to, also known as the “safe third country” (UNHCR, 2003). If a State decides to send/return the individual to a different country it must ensure that the individual will be safe from refoulement, have access to asylum procedures in accordance with international human rights standards, and if recognised in need of protection be able to enjoy asylum (UNHCR, 2003). Even then rejection of a claim may not be appropriate if the security, human rights, and rule of law are compromised in that country. An individual is not obliged to seek asylum at the first available opportunity, however, they also do not have an unrestricted right to choose the preferred country of asylum (UNHCR, 2003).

This Chapter mentioned the main provisions on refugee protection in the Refugee Convention and the ECHR, and the admissibility procedures. The instruments are universal and non-discriminatory meaning the provisions should be applied to all without discrimination to race, religion, country of origin, or geographical proximity. Developing restrictive policies which make it difficult for refugees to enter or seek asylum undermine the obligations in international law.

4. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section will explore the work of scholars who have contributed to the fields of refugee studies and citizenship studies. In addition, the theory of dehumanisation will be defined and analysed how it reflects on today's treatment of refugees.

4.1 Refugee studies

Refugee studies is a multi-disciplinary field which emerged formally in the 1980s (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh *et al.*, 2014) and focuses on the complex issues surrounding forced migration, patterns of the refugee experience, and the national and international responses to refugees.

4.1.1 Who is a “refugee”?

A dominant discussion within the refugee studies has been on defining who a refugee is to better understand displacement. The most accepted international definition of refugees is the one within the 1951 Refugee Convention. This definition is widely used by societies in designating who is entitled to asylum. Scholars have criticised this definition emphasising that it is restrictive and leaves a lot of room for different interpretations as to who should be entitled to refugee status (Shacknove, 1985; Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989; Knox and Kushner, 1999; Haddad, 2004). In addition, the process of granting asylum by states rather than allowing individuals to claim this right can be problematic as it means that refugees are subject to choices by states who do not always make such decisions out of humanitarian concern (Knox and Kushner, 1999). According to Zolberg *et al.* and Knox and Kushner the main principle of what makes an individual a refugee is that they do not have a choice rather than seek refuge elsewhere. In line with this, anthropologist Kubo defines refugees as those in an asylum status in the host country and those in an in-between condition of not yet having an asylum status but also not having protection in their home country (2010). As such, fear for one's safety and fear of violence should be enough of a reason for people to be accepted as refugees regardless of their status (Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989; Knox and Kushner, 1999). This will be used as the overall definition in the thesis when referring to refugees.

4.1.2 The refugee experience

The term “refugee experience” is used in the field of refugee studies to explain the human consequences of forced migration by focusing on the experience of refugees themselves and the forces which shape their experience (Ager, 1999). Scholars have focused on documenting the lived experience of refugees through three discrete phases, which include the decision to flee, the period of flight, and the period of temporary settlement, resettlement, or repatriation (Keller, 1975; Desjarlais *et al.*, 1995; Ager, 1999).

Refugees are “pushed” out of their home country. The decision to flee is most often influenced by exposure to danger or hardships which they experience in the period leading up to the flight. Such experience include family fragmentation such as the loss of a family member or imprisonment (Rumbaut, 1988; Richman, 1993; Ager, 1999). In addition, it is a well-known fact that in war situations, refugees are exposed to or witness some form of violence. Scholars have focused on analysing how exposure to violence and trauma, before and during flight, impacts their wellbeing and emotional distress (Keller, 1975; Mollica, Wyshak and Lavelle, 1987; Agger, Vuk and Mimica, 1995; Mahmood *et al.*, 2019). The traumatic experience of refugees plays a key role in better understanding their experience. The decision to flee home is not one taken lightly and is accompanied with emotional and cognitive confusion (Ager, 1999). The emotional burden is accompanied by the fear of danger during flight. Women are especially vulnerable during the flight phase as they are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence (Mollica, Wyshak and Lavelle, 1987; Ager, 1999; Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001; Freedman, 2016).

Once refugees arrive in the country of asylum, they usually go through bureaucratic registration procedures. With limited access to resources and the possibility of detention or deportation, refugees are left with a sense of uncertainty and helplessness (Ager, 1999; Brekke, 2010). During the reception stage, refugees find themselves in situations where they need to justify and prove their “credibility” and “worth” (Zetter, 1991; Bloch and Schuster, 2005). In many cases, refugees are put in camps or inadequate accommodation, where many spend an extended period of time (Chan and Loveridge, 1987; Ager, 1999; Betts and Collier, 2017). This prolonged time in camps or temporary accommodations, where they are excluded from society has a negative impact on their integration and mental wellbeing (Beiser, Turner and Ganesan, 1989).

The reasons why refugees flee their home, coupled with their experience should always be considered when designing a country's refugee response policies.

4.2 Citizenship studies

“Citizenship in Western liberal democracies is the modern equivalent of feudal class privilege – an inherited status that greatly enhances one’s life chances” (Carens, 1987, p 252).

The modern state system as we know it, is divided into sovereign states which have authority to govern and control entry to its territory. Citizenship is at the intersection of territory, state sovereignty, and a sense of belonging to a state. The idea of citizenship is usually understood as a type of membership in a geographical and political entity. Citizenship usually comprises a legal status, entitled rights, and political and social participation (Bloemraad, Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2008). Through laws and admission criteria, states determine who should be granted membership in their communities. The sovereignty of a state plays an important role in the admission of non-citizens. According to the quote above by Carens, the state system entrenches citizenship inequality and has a significant impact on one's life (1987). Through this framework it is easy to analyse the degree to which refugees and non-citizens are accepted into the receiving communities.

Scholars of the citizenship field have been exploring this topic in terms of the citizen/alien relationship or member/non-member (Marshall, 1950; Arendt, 1951; Carens, 1987; Soysal, 1994; Benhabib, 1999). The term citizen has become a synonym for a “rights-holder”, indicating that non-citizens are “aliens” deprived of the rights which citizens get to enjoy. Perhaps one of the most prominent names in the study of modern citizenship is T.H. Marshall. Marshall presented the idea of citizenship as membership, noting that *“Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed”* (Marshall, 1950, p 28-29). He emphasized both the exclusivity and inclusivity of citizenship. For Marshall, citizenship is open to all equally, however, for one to access it and reap its benefits one must be a full member of said society. Further, Marshall described citizenship as a unified concept encompassing civil, political, and social rights, which are depended upon one another (Marshall, 1950). The idea of citizenship as membership enjoyed by some indicates that there is an entry process. It suggests that membership is “exclusive” to its members who enjoy certain privileges which are not available to non-members (Bellamy, 2008). Closely related is the idea

that citizenship is ultimately connected to nation-state and the assumption of culturally similar values (Honohan, 2002). As such, it is important to note that in the case of refugees, exclusion to citizenship is often based on the idea that they do not share the same identity and cultural values, and thus should not be accepted as members of the in-group.

4.2.1 “The right to have rights”

Hannah Arendt, a political theorist and philosopher, wrote substantive work on the importance of membership for non-citizens. Arendt was among the millions of refugees who were stripped of their citizenship after fleeing Nazi Germany. For Arendt the issue of statelessness is that once one has lost membership, one has lost protection from the state. For Arendt this could lead to the state of rightlessness (Arendt, 1951, p 284). Arendt goes as far as to allude that in the state of rightlessness criminals have more rights than refugees. If a refugee is to commit crime at least they would stand before the law as a human entitled to rights (Arendt, 1951, p 286). Arendt criticised the universality of human rights, noting that human rights do not belong to every human, rather they are exclusive and conditional only to members of nation-states. Through her famous quote “*the right to have rights*” Arendt stressed the way in which human rights are taken away from refugees, and only as members of a nation-state individuals can enjoy civil, social, or political rights (Arendt, 1951, p 296). Only a state can provide protection and basic needs to refugees but for that one needs access to territory. In the present day, states deny this access to refugees. Given the principle of state sovereignty, states can choose not to accept refugees and deny citizenship to any individual. As such, once individuals become refugees they are left in their “*abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human*” and in that “human state” not much is left for them (Arendt, 1951, p 299).

Arendt’s work is critical to this analysis, specifically when analysing the quest of refugees for belonging and enjoyment of human rights. While Arendt’s work was written more than seven decades ago, not much has changed. Refugees still find themselves in a state of rightlessness fighting to regain their visibility and voice, and the ultimate right to have rights.

4.3 Theory of Dehumanisation

Closely linked to the “othering” of non-citizens is the theory of dehumanisation. Dehumanisation can be defined as perceiving or treating individuals as less than fully human (Haslam, 2006). Dehumanisation is often used as a justification for suppressing certain groups

who are deemed as inferior and thus less deserving of protection and basic rights. Non-citizens are an easy target for dehumanisation as they are perceived as not belonging to the in-group. To define the “humanness” that dehumanisation is denying, the scholar Haslam suggested that dehumanisation can be split in two categories. The first category is the human uniqueness which focuses on human traits which separate humans from animals, such as moral sensibility, rationality, as well as maturity, and is known as animalistic dehumanisation. While the second category is human nature which includes, among others, agency, emotional depth, and responsiveness, known as mechanistic dehumanisation (Haslam, 2006).

Dehumanisation as a social and psychological concept has been examined in a range of contexts. Scholars have mainly studied dehumanisation in connection with conflicts and genocide. Research has found that blatant dehumanisation facilitates violence and aggression towards others (Kelman, 1973; Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975; Struch and Schwartz, 1989). The initial research on dehumanisation occurred as a result of atrocities during and after World War II. A primary focus was on the dehumanisation of Jews, first through ideologies which meant to compare them to animals and then through violence and aggression (Kelman, 1973; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990). Social psychologist Herbert Kelman argued that during conflict members of the outgroup will be perceived as different, and therefore inferior and undesirable and less deserving of moral consideration (1973). This will lead to exclusion of the group and ultimately denial of their rights and protections. According to Kelman dehumanisation occurs when an individual’s identity and community is denied (1973). Identity in this sense means losing one’s agency and attributes which distinguish the individual from others, while community means denying participation in the wider network of individuals who care for each other. So when an individual is dehumanised, they are stripped of their identity and deemed as not deserving of compassion and moral consideration as others (Kelman, 1973).

A major focus in the studies of dehumanisation has been analysing the dehumanisation of specific ethnic and racial groups. Scholars have found that the non-majority ethnic or racial groups were either blatantly compared to non-human apes (Goff *et al.*, 2008; Haslam and Loughnan, 2014) or assigned less human characteristics and perceived as individuals with no culture, moral awareness, or cognitive capacity (Jahoda, 1999). Slavery is an example of blatant racial dehumanisation, where individuals were not only called animal names but were stripped of their identity, exposed to inhumane working conditions including exploitation, and subjected to physical and sexual abuse (Foster, 2011; Smith, 2011). Until now, the theory of

dehumanisation mainly focused on conflicts, genocide, and specific ethnic groups, below I will analyse how the theory of dehumanisation can be expanded to refugees too.

4.3.1 Dehumanising refugees

Given their status, migrants and refugees are easy targets of dehumanising actions and policies. The available literature on this topic mainly focuses on the language used by media and politicians which perpetuates the dehumanisation of migrants and refugees. Migrants and refugees have been described as “invaders”, “threats to social order”, “pollutants”, as well as “infesters” (O’Brien, 2003; Esses, Medianu and Lawson, 2013; Utych, 2018). This language which frames them as a security threat encourages the in-group to uphold their supposed supremacy and promote dehumanising behaviour (Kteily *et al.*, 2015). A report analysed the media portrayals of refugees and asylum seekers in Britain from 2010 to 2012 and found that the most common collocation associated with asylum seekers was “failed” (Blinder and Allen, 2016). This type of depiction leads to seeing refugees as a homogenous group rather than individuals with unique backgrounds and experiences. In addition, such language decreases empathy and provides justification for dehumanising actions (Esses *et al.*, 2008).

Struch & Schwartz highlighted the way dehumanisation differentiates between “our” versus “their” values. If ones values are viewed as incompatible with those of the majority then the individual or group will be subject to dehumanisation (Struch and Schwartz, 1989). As such, when refugees are perceived to have considerable differences from the country they are trying to enter, the members may believe that refugees threaten and undermine their national identity and culture (Velasco González *et al.*, 2008). Whereas, refugees that are able to assimilate in the receiving society are regarded as “deserving refugees” (McPherson, 2010). These differences are usually in terms of race, religion, and culture. Different scholars have argued that the Western world tends to perceive the experiences of white refugees differently from those of non-white/non-European refugees (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001; Colic-Peisker, 2005). When the war in Yugoslavia broke out the response of the international community intensified since the victims were Caucasian and the autocracies were happening in a developed country (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001). Similarly, Colic-Peisker concluded that compared to other refugees the white skin and the “Europeanness” of Bosnian refugees enabled them to remain “invisible” and ultimately be accepted as insiders in Australia. Whereas most other refugees are “visible” and thus perceived as culturally different. It seems that whiteness is perceived as more

than just a skin colour, but it also reflects class, status, and language and ultimately can bring a person closer to the “white western norm” (Colic-Peisker, 2005). This similar rhetoric is seen in the case of Ukrainian refugees as well. Media reports where constantly singling out Ukrainian refugees from other refugees, emphasizing that they are “European”, and “white”, thus not your typical refugee.

In this Chapter, I have touched upon the refugee definition and experience, citizenship in terms of membership, as well as the dehumanisation of the others. The concept of dehumanisation builds the distance between “us” versus “them”. The distance can be cultural differences, geographical, feelings, life experience, as well as identity and values (Struch and Schwartz, 1989; Kteily *et al.*, 2015; Markowitz and Slovic, 2021). This distance means that the in-groups treat the out-group as less than fully human. By considering these areas of study, I analyse if citizenship is exclusive of the refugee experience, and by using the theory of dehumanisation I will analyse if UK policies are dehumanising to refugees and asylum-seekers, while excluding them from social, civic, and political participation, as well as human rights.

5. Methodology

Since the purpose of the thesis is to understand how policies affect refugees and asylum-seekers coming from different countries, a qualitative approach was taken. The approach is two-fold which included collection of primary data through semi-structured interviews and analysis of UK policies on refugees and asylum-seekers. By using both policy analysis as well as primary data, a connection was made between the actual experience of refugees with UK policies, which allows for thought-provoking insights to understand how policies shape the lived experience of refugees in the UK. In addition, language used by politicians and decision-makers when introducing these policies or when referring to refugees and asylum-seekers was highlighted to enrich the context.

5.1 Sample

Participants in the interviews included persons who have fled their countries because of fear for their safety or persecution due to conflicts and have received refugee status or temporary protection in the UK. In addition, one interview was conducted with an employee from UK for UNHCR⁴.

The sample size of this study was limited to ten individuals. Of the refugees interviewed, eight adults were from Syria and Ukraine, as well as one former refugee from Kosovo. The reason for choosing persons primarily from Syria and Ukraine was since the two conflicts are used as examples during the thesis to analyse if the experience of individuals differs based on their country of origin. The participant from Kosovo, who has obtained UK citizenship was included to provide insights on how the refugee experience has influenced her life after obtaining citizenship. It was also important to mix the sample to include participants coming through different means such as resettlement schemes, visa schemes, as well as those that came irregularly and then applied for asylum.

To be able to conduct in-person interviews the geographical scope was limited to London where the thesis was written. To select the sample, grassroot charity organisations and NGOs in London were contacted to identify participants that would be willing to participate. Two organisations responded positively and assisted in connecting me with the participants. Given

⁴ UK for UNHCR - is the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) national partner for United Kingdom.

that initially there was only one respondent from Ukraine, snowball sampling was used by asking the participant to refer individuals who were willing to share their experience.

5.2 Data collection

The interviews were semi-structured to allow for the conversation to flow naturally and leave room for connected topics that the interviewees might deem relevant (Richards and Morse, 2012). The interviews were conducted over the course of a month in March-April 2023, with each participant separately and face-to-face, and lasted for an average of 45 minutes to an hour. The participants chose the location of the interview. The interviews were mainly conducted in the premises of the charity organisations that put me in touch with them, given that the participants felt comfortable and safe in these locations. The interviews with the participants from Kosovo and the employee from UK for UNHCR were conducted in their working places. Since all participants had a conversational knowledge of English, no translation was required.

The interview was guided by a set of pre-determined questions which were included in the interview guide which was used during the interviews. There was no recording of the interviews rather the transcribing was done in real time during the interviews with the consent of the interviewees.

The interviews started with a general question about their ethnic origin, reason for fleeing, and the reason for choosing the UK as their safe haven. The interview ended with an open question to give an opportunity to respondents to add additional insights related to the topic that were not covered during the interview, as well as add any recommendations they deemed relevant.

5.3 Ethical and safety issues

The main ethical and safety issue was interviewing refugees. Research with refugees can be challenging given the unequal power relations, their vulnerable situation including poverty and in some cases violence, and a potential politicised context (Müller-Funk, 2021). Therefore, several ethical considerations were considered. Firstly, interviews were voluntary and confidential. For the sample of refugees' ethnicity and racial background was collected. However, all participants were asked in advance if this could be revealed. None of the participants had any issue in revealing this information. Written informed consent was developed for all and distributed prior to the interview, and the interview was conducted only

after the participants have agreed on the consent form. In the informed consent participants were notified about their right to end the interview at any point, their right to not answer questions they are not interested in, as well as their right to withdraw at any given time. In addition, participants were informed that all identifying information will be anonymised. Interviews were not recorded, and pseudonyms were used throughout to protect their identity. All data was stored in a secure external hard drive.

One must also consider that the experiences of refugees can be distressing (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 2007). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were selected to empower the participants to determine how they want their narrative to be told. It is acknowledged that interviews can offer a “therapeutic” journey to the refugees as by telling their experience they have the chance to make sense of their experience, even the traumatic ones (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 2007). Some questions which would be deemed to cause distress to the participants were not asked, such as people who they left behind or recounting their life in their home countries. Instead, the focus was mainly on the refugee experience in the UK.

5.4 Limitations

Having no prior established communication with the organisations working with refugees, it was difficult to find an organisation willing to assist in finding participants for interviews. Out of more than twenty organisations which were contacted only two responded positively and introduced me to participants who were willing to share their experience. In addition, except the employee from UK for UNHCR, no other stakeholder was willing to participate in the interview as a key-informant. This meant that the second sample which was supposed to include the views of key-informants working with refugees was limited. However, this did not compromise the data collected given that the main interviews with refugees were conducted.

5.5 Data analysis

To make sense of how the UK policies affect the experience of refugee, policies were first analysed in the context of the broader UK immigration policies which served as an introduction to the main findings. For the analysis of the primary data, transcriptions were used to identify and analyse patterns which emerged during the interviews. After carefully reading the transcripts, through a grounded theory approach, key features and themes were identified. The collected data informed the analysis chapter of the thesis.

6. Overview of UK's immigration policies

This Chapter, which acts as a prologue to the main findings focuses on the UK's immigration policies. The UK's response towards refugees and asylum-seekers should be understood in correlation with its historical construction of immigration policies and attitudes towards the outsiders. By using the membership lens of citizenship, I will analyse how race, culture, and religion influence one's attitudes towards the others. This will be done by also scrutinising the language used in the public discourse towards migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

6.1 British identity vs “the otherness”

The origins of modern-day UK immigration control can be traced back to the end of the 19th century. In 1905, the Aliens Act was enacted which aimed to restrict immigration to UK. The Act, although it had limited powers, was significant as it introduced the concept of “undesirable immigrants” (Wray, 2006). While the definition of “undesirable” was vague it granted power to Home Secretary to refuse entry or deport aliens. The Act came as a consequence of tensions created around immigration from Eastern Europe, particularly Jews (Wray, 2006). It was the first of the many immigration measures that aimed to restrict entry based on nationality, ethnicity, or race.

In 1955, during a cabinet meeting for the upcoming election campaign Winston Churchill supported the slogan “*Keep England White*”. This slogan referred to restricting Caribbean migration as according to Churchill their presence would create a “*magpie society*” (Goodfellow, 2020). This view that people of colour coming to UK were not welcome and would threaten the British standard of living was interwoven in the views and rhetoric used by politicians before and after 1955. Whiteness was seen as the ultimate representation of modernity and civilisation. Such approach suggests that citizenship in terms of membership was seen as exclusive to white people. These views formed the backdrop of immigration and asylum controls in the UK. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act ended the right of citizens from Commonwealth countries to settle in UK, instead they became the subject of immigration controls. Although on paper the restrictions applied to all citizens of the Commonwealth, in a memorandum of the Act it was openly noted that the restrictions were put in place for people of colour since immigration from Australia, Canada, or New Zealand was not seen as an issue (Goodfellow, 2020). By keeping the legislation on paper non-discriminatory, the government portrayed the image of a multi-racial and multi-cultural

Commonwealth, yet the reality was different. White people were seen as ideal citizens who were able to enjoy their rights while the others were second-class citizens.

Race was not just about colour and physical appearance, but also about cultural and religious differences. In the late 1970s, just before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, during an interview she expressed that there are concerns among people that UK is being “swamped” by individuals from different cultures.⁵ This language which encourages dehumanisation of refugees is a portrayal of how non-British individuals coming to UK were viewed, as a negative external force which threatens the nation. This thinking shaped the way how migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers were perceived by the public. The introduction of the Immigration Act of 1971 was another pivotal act of UK’s strict policies towards those trying to enter the UK. The Act introduced “partial” and “non-partial” concepts of immigrants. The term partial referred to people who were born or naturalised in the UK or had parents or grandparents that were from the UK. These individuals could enter the UK freely without any restrictions, whereas non-partial individuals who did not meet the criteria faced entry restrictions (Evans, 1972).

From 1990s onwards due to an increase in conflicts and instability in the Global South, more refugees and asylum seekers arrived in Europe. These asylum-seekers, most of which were of different religion and race, were seen as “bogus” and portrayed by a wave of negative media coverage. In the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent “War on Terror”, politicians around the world including the UK’s then Prime Minister Tony Blair noted that the West is in a battle to safeguard the Western liberal values from extremist Islam (Goodfellow, 2020). Since then, Muslim communities have been unfairly associated with terrorism and seen as threat to society. In 2008, a study found that the most frequent words used in media to depict Muslims in Britain were related to terrorism and extremism (Moore, Mason and Lewis, 2008). This fed the narrative that Muslim refugees present a threat to society. This leads to the conclusion that because the majority of refugees were from predominantly Muslim countries, led to further strengthening of strict policies.

Manufacturing an issue or crisis around migration and refugee policies creates an urgency to solve the “issue”. While this can benefit the members of the host nation by reducing their uncertainty and anxiety it also leads to dehumanisation of displaced peoples. As noted by Hier and Greenberg, dehumanising migrants and refugees can be linked to a collective feeling of

⁵ ‘TV Interview for Granada World in Action’, (1978).

insecurity and uncertainty about the national identity and citizenship (2002). Dehumanisation allows for the justification of actions and policies that can be cruel and unjust towards them, and excludes them from social, civic, and political participation.

6.2 Construction of the “illegal” individual

Given the limited legal pathways to claim asylum in the UK, many refugees’ turn to dangerous irregular journeys to make their way to the UK which in most cases is on boats by crossing the English Channel. People who come irregularly are dubbed as “illegal” by the government. The idea of the ‘illegal’ refugee and asylum seeker has been vigorously peddled by the UK government in recent years. Over the last two decades the government introduced even stricter laws and policies aimed at deterring people who come irregularly.

In 2012, former Prime Minister and Home Secretary Theresa May introduced an immigration package with the aim of creating a “*really hostile environment for illegal migration*” (Kirkup and Winnett, 2012). Unfortunately, these policies created a divided society where only British citizens got to exercise their human rights while those labelled “illegal” could not access basic rights and services. The denigrating of the “other” was a result of the belief that there is an inherent British identity and culture shared by a few, and the outsiders could rock this boat. This created the “us” versus “them” mentality which underlines today’s immigration policies. These constructions result in discriminatory practices against the out-groups who are perceived as different.

Due to the significant rise in the number of individuals arriving in the UK on small boats the hostile environment was further exacerbated in the last couple of years. In reference to the increase in the number of asylum seekers and refugees in 2022 the current Home Secretary Suella Braverman referred to their arrival as an “*invasion*”, further adding “*Let’s stop pretending that they are all refugees in distress. The whole country knows that is not true*” (Sparrow, 2022) . As explained in Chapter 4, dehumanising language such as “invasion” strips people off their humanness. While assuming that refugees “are not real refugees” is harmful as it assumes that refugees are a dishonest homogenous group without seeing each as a unique individual having their own experience and agency.

Addressing a person as “illegal” contributes to hostility as it reinforces the belief that people who come to the UK through the channel or other means are engaging in unlawful behaviour

and are not deserving of protection. Such dehumanising language is a tactic to seek support for the harmful policies, such as detention or offshoring while covering its one failure of not providing safe routes to those in need.

6.3 UK current policies affecting refugees and asylum-seekers

6.3.1 Nationality and Borders Act

Using the narrative to stop people from coming irregularly and break the human smuggling model in April 2022 the UK government adopted the Nationality and Borders Act.

The Act has created a two-tier refugee system, where depending on where refugees come from and how they enter the UK some will be granted more rights than others. Individuals who have arrive to the UK directly without passing through another safe country and immediately claim asylum will be categorized in Group 1 and will qualify for a leave to remain within the UK. Whereas Group 2 would include refugees who did not come directly to the UK from their countries, and those who did not claim asylum straight away. If their claim is accepted they will be given ‘temporary refugee protection’ for 30 months and they will have limited rights to welfare benefits and family reunion (*Nationality and Borders Act, 2022*). This creates a division between those who deserve full-protection and those that are treated as second-class citizens and thus deserving less-protection.

Inadmissibility and offshoring: According to the Act, asylum claims can be deemed inadmissible if the individual previously claimed protection in another safe-third country or has connections to a safe-country. The Act allows for asylum claims to be offshored to a third safe country for their claims to be processed. In light of this, UK has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Rwanda for processing some asylum claims. Under this MoU refugees who have passed through a safe-third country especially those who have arrived to the UK irregularly can be deported to Rwanda and their claim will be processed under their legal system (Goddard, 2023). As elaborated in Chapter 4, returns and transfer to another safe country are allowed only if certain international standards are met. However, human rights organisations have documented serious human rights violations in Rwanda, including arbitrary arrest, torture, and extrajudicial killings, which among others included refugees as well (Human Rights Watch, 2019, 2022). As such, the provision with Rwanda goes against the principle of

non-refoulement. At the time of writing there have been no deportations to Rwanda given that the scheme is the subject of continued legal dispute.⁶

Criminalisation: If an individual enters the UK through irregular ways without a valid entry clearance and their claim is deemed inadmissible they could be criminalised and face up to four years of imprisonment as well as be deported (*Nationality and Borders Act, 2022*). Instead of offering protection to people who need safety this provision seeks to punish them. In addition, it portrays refugees as “criminals” feeding into the dehumanisation rhetoric.

Revoking citizenship: Provision 9 of the Act foresees that British citizenship can be revoked at any time. This provision will affect naturalised citizens who have dual nationality which in most cases includes people who have come to the UK as refugees or migrants. As such for them British citizenship is a privilege, while for British born citizens who are sole nationals’ citizenship is an unconditional right.

6.3.2 Illegal Migration Bill

In March 2023, the government decided to take additional measures to prevent individuals coming to UK illegally introducing the Illegal Migration Bill or “*Stop the Boats*” Bill. Although at the time of writing the Bill has not yet been ratified, it is important to mention it since if this Bill becomes a law, it will take precedence over the provisions in the Nationality and Borders Act (Walsh and Sumption, 2023).⁷

As per the proposed Bill almost everyone who enters the UK irregularly or after having transited in another safe country will be automatically denied access to asylum. Individuals who come to the UK irregularly will be detained for 28 days and their asylum claim will be deemed inadmissible without taking into consideration if they are refugees in need of protection (Home Office, 2023a). Those individuals will never be able to seek asylum in UK again, rather they will be deported back to their country if it is deemed safe, or to another safe third country such as Rwanda. The Bill goes even further and prohibits those individuals and their children from ever obtaining British citizenship. Further, the Bill seeks to eliminate almost all safeguards for

⁶ In June 2022 a flight which carried asylum-seekers to Rwanda was prevented from leaving due to an injunction from the ECtHR. Later that year the UK High Court held that the policy is lawful but allowed for partial appeal of the ruling (Goddard, 2023).

⁷ Those who have arrived between June 2022 and March 2023 as well as those who arrived legally but overstayed their visa will still be subjected to the Nationality and Borders Act (Walsh and Sumption, 2023).

victims of modern slavery and trafficking, including removing the condition to grant such victims permission to remain in the UK.

Denying refugees and asylum-seekers in need the right to safety and protection is a breach of the Refugee Convention. The Convention acknowledges that refugees in some circumstances will have to enter a country of asylum irregularly. Legislation which aims to prevent actions is usually observed in criminal law, but in this case the Bill identifies individuals who are potentially refugees as criminals instead of targeting the specific crime. As it stands refugees and asylum seekers are in a state of “rightlessness” the concept introduced by Arendt.

6.4 What are the “safe and legal” ways?

The term “safe and legal” has been used by the government when referring to the routes available for people who seek protection in UK that have officially been approved by the government, such as specific programmes created by the government or obtaining a visa. There are no visa schemes available for people to claim asylum in the UK, regardless if people have family connections in the UK (Amnesty International, 2023). One can argue that this approach allows the government to limit admission to its territory for certain members by putting criteria as to how one can enter its borders. The government establishes the “safe and legal” routes, and thus in a way selects who is a potential member of its “club”.

The main “safe and legal” routes established by the government include resettlement schemes for refugees and family reunion visas. The family reunion allows for family members to join those who have already been granted refugee status in the UK (Amnesty International, 2023).

The refugee resettlement programme is among the biggest “safe and legal route” available in the UK. The resettlement schemes are provided through UNHCR, who in agreement with the Home Office selects refugees for resettlement. Currently the available schemes are the UK Resettlement Scheme, Community Sponsorship Scheme, the Mandate Scheme, as well as nationality specific schemes (UK Government, 2021). The UK Resettlement Scheme is the main scheme, and it provides support to vulnerable refugees identified by the UNHCR by offering them housing, and access to other essential services to rebuild their lives. In addition to the resettlement programmes the government created nationality-specific schemes. The biggest resettlement scheme of this kind was the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) which was created to resettle Syrians and ended in 2021. Currently schemes are open

for nationals of Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Hong Kong. The criteria for eligibility, the protection granted, and other entitlements differ for each of these routes. For the purpose of this analysis, I will explore the Ukrainian scheme and the Syrian resettlement scheme, since both have been created as a response to address the most recent and biggest plights of refugees in recent years, and they are among the largest schemes available.

6.4.1 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

Until 2014 the response of the UK Government towards the Syrian conflict was the provision of humanitarian aid on the grounds that establishing a resettlement programme for Syria would be insignificant given the high number of Syrian refugees in need (McGuinness, 2017). However, given the pressure from the international and domestic community in 2014, the government introduced the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) with the aim to provide safe and legal routes for Syrian refugees to the UK. The beneficiaries of the scheme were selected by the UNHCR according to its “vulnerability criteria” which prioritized women and girls at risk, people with disabilities, children and adolescence, persons at risk due to their gender and sexual orientation, survivors of violence, and refugees with family links. Making distinctions based on such vulnerability assessment can contribute to feelings of compassion and repression towards those refugees which deserve protection and those that do not.

Beneficiaries of the VPRS were granted humanitarian protection status for five years, after which they were eligible to apply for permanent leave to remain (McGuinness, 2017). In the UK, humanitarian protection is used to grant quicker asylum and resettlement. However, in 2017 all resettled refugees were granted refugee status which provides for more entitlements such as specific travel documents for refugees and student support for higher education. The scheme relied upon the help of local authorities as well as community volunteers to help in integrating refugees. Local authorities received funding from the government in order to support the resettlement process and provide refugees access to basic services (McGuinness, 2017).

The quota for this scheme was set to 20,000 refugees. In 2021 when the scheme ended 20,319 refugees benefited from it (Home Office, 2021). Although the scheme offered free and immediate settlement for the selected refugees, because of the limited number it was not a realistic option for the ten million displaced Syrian refugees. Given that there is no other legal

route for Syrians to travel to the UK this scheme was the only “safe and legal option” for Syrians.

6.4.2 Ukrainian Schemes

Shortly after the invasion of Ukraine, in March 2022, the UK introduced two visa schemes for people fleeing the war. These include the Family Scheme and the Sponsorship Scheme or also known as the “*Homes for Ukraine*”. In addition to these schemes Ukrainians who were already in the UK before the war on temporary visas can extend their visas for three years. The Family Scheme allows for Ukrainian citizens to apply for visa if they have family members in the UK who have British citizenship or permanent residence (Home Office, 2023d). To make the process easier the Home Office has removed some eligibility criteria such as language requirements and salary thresholds. While under the Sponsorship Scheme, all British nationals and people settled in the UK can sponsor families from Ukraine for at least six months with the possibility for extension. The Home Office gives a monthly allowance to the sponsor for the first 12 months and conducts a security check on all sponsors as well as confirms whether the property is suitable for hosting (Home Office, 2023d).

To apply for these visa schemes, Ukrainians do not need to be present in the UK. In addition, they can apply through Visa Application Centres in neighbouring countries. This is significant because it contrasts with the regular asylum assessment criteria where a refugee must apply for asylum in the first safe country they arrive to. This could partially be explained given that Ukraine is part of the citizenship and geopolitical regimes which allows the freedom of movement within Europe. This has allowed Ukrainians to “legally” move within Europe without necessarily applying for asylum in the first safe country they reach.

The eligibility criteria for Ukrainians under these visa schemes is not dependent on assessing the individual’s need for protection, rather anyone from Ukraine can apply for the visas if they have family connections or can find a sponsor. This contrasts with the Syrian scheme where the resettled refugees were assessed based on the “vulnerability criteria”. Ukrainians who get the visas are not given a refugee status but rather temporary permission to stay in the UK for three years during which they have the right to work and study in the UK, as well as access welfare benefits and other public services. Neither of these schemes offers a pathway to resettle in the UK after the three years. Since the scheme is relatively new, the Government did not announce

what will happen after the three-year period ends and if Ukrainians will be allowed to stay long term.

There is no numerical limit on how many people can access these schemes. The number of beneficiaries will depend on the goodwill of community or family members willing to host them. As of May 2023, 96,200 people benefited from the Family Scheme, while 195,200 benefited from the Sponsorship Scheme (Home Office, 2023c). Data shows that the total number of Ukrainians who received protection under the schemes is higher than the overall combined number of individuals who received protection in the UK through other resettlement schemes and through the asylum system from 2016 to 2021 (Walsh and Sumption, 2022).

6.5 Impact of the policies on refugees and asylum-seekers

According to the government the aim of its policies is to end illegal immigration as a means of seeking asylum and focus on assisting individuals who come through “safe and legal” ways. However, as seen previously, there are limited safe routes for refugees. For most people to claim asylum in UK they must be physically in the country. In addition, coming on a visa and then claiming asylum is not possible for most as the establishment of the visa information system has created a bureaucratic system of selecting who gets to enter the territory. Thus, for people who cannot travel visa-free in the UK, which is most of the countries where refugees come from their options are limited. According to statistics on irregular migration, consecutively in the past couple of years people from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran have consistently been the top nationalities coming through irregular routes, and only in the last year people from Albania (Home Office, 2023b). This clearly shows that most people coming irregularly are from countries where there is on-going conflict, instability, or human rights abuses. Research conducted by the Refugee Council found that out of 45,746 people who came irregularly by crossing the channel in 2022 more than 25,000 would be recognised as refugees if their claims were processed (Refugee Council, 2023). This means six out of ten people needed safety and protection. Refugee Council also found that zero Ukrainians were among those people who crossed the Channel irregularly given the availability of the schemes to arrive safely.

When it comes to the Schemes, they are selective and differ extensively based on each conflict. The VPRS Scheme was applied on a selection basis and vulnerability criteria, and it included a limit on the number of refugees resettled, clearly not enough as there are still Syrians coming irregularly. While the scheme for Ukrainians differed as it was the first time a visa scheme on

an application basis was established, allowing any person with family connections or sponsors to apply for the visa, without a limit on the number of people eligible for it. The mere fact that the government established the Scheme a month after the conflict started, shows its swift readiness to support an unprecedented number of Ukrainian refugees. On the other hand, the VPRS Scheme was opened for Syrian refugees three years after the conflict started.

The sponsorship scheme for Ukraine is notable as it was the first time the government established a visa scheme to apply for protection in the UK, as well as a scheme which relies on leveraging the whole community instead of relying solely on government provisions. When a government establishes a scheme which calls upon the community to support certain refugees, it is dictating who should be protected and who deserves the compassion and support of the community. When the government urges society to welcome Ukrainian refugees in their homes it is sending a message that these refugees need our help and we can and should support them. This can also be observed in the language used by the government. When introducing the new Bill “Stop the Boats” the Prime Minister noted how the Bill is necessary to stop irregular people for coming since it is not fair to British citizens who have “*opened their homes to genuine refugees*” (Sunak, 2023), as such referring to Ukrainian refugees as genuine. The isolation of the “genuine refugees” from others referred to as “illegals” ultimately delegitimises the movement of people from the Global South.

It is evident that the government has established conditions as to who deserves “membership” to its community. Bellamy has noted that the conditions to qualify the entry of members to the community can be legitimate if the conditions do not favour groups which are ethnically and culturally similar, and if the country is generally welcoming towards immigrants (Bellamy, 2008). Ukraine shares more similarities to the UK given its proximity, race, and religion rather than Syrians and others who come through irregular ways. Perhaps the best example of such is seen in the observation of the columnist of the Telegraph newspaper: “*They seem so like us...That is what makes it so shocking. Ukraine is a European country. Its people watch Netflix and have Instagram accounts, vote in free elections and read uncensored newspapers. War is no longer something visited upon impoverished and remote populations. It can happen to anyone*”(Hannan, 2022). The language here shows that the author feels empathy towards Ukrainian refugees given the assumed similarities they share. In addition, the comparison between European refugees from others highlights the racial hierarchies still embedded in the society. This narrative that war only occurs in the Global South and is foreign to the European

continent, as well as these assumptions regarding people in the Global South implies that they are “uncivilised” and thus prone to conflict. The language feeds a dehumanising narrative around people coming irregularly and people who are not White or Christian.

In this Chapter I have briefly looked at the history of UK’s immigration policies to include a more comprehensive view of what has shaped the UK’s current policies on refugees and asylum seekers. One can conclude that the refugee policies in the UK have been inextricably linked to immigration, which are guided by the principle of exclusion. By using dehumanising language, the government is justifying the need for restrictive policies. It is dehumanising to claim that asylum-seekers and refugees who come irregularly are “illegal” given the government has not created any other options for them. The “safe and legal” schemes which are in place make a differentiation towards which refugees should be granted membership to the UK. While dehumanisation seems to be an important process to defend policies less is known how refugees and people seeking asylum experience these policies. Considering this, the following Chapter will focus on the narrative of refugees themselves.

7. Findings

In this Chapter, I will present the material from the ten semi-structured interviews. The aim of the interviews was to examine the main challenges facing refugees in the UK who are subject to UK policies. By using the theory of dehumanisation, I will analyse whether their experiences can be defined as dehumanising. The participants were not asked specific question on feeling dehumanised as the aim was to inductively analyse this through their responses. The primary data was filtered and arranged according to the refugee experience: decision to flee, the period of flight, and period of settlement or resettlement (Ager, 1999), as well as one section which focused on their emotions and perceptions.

The semi-structured interviews included 10 participants, the table below gives more details about their situation and the way they arrived in the UK. For the interviews with refugees, pseudonyms have been assigned to maintain their anonymity. While the other two participants will be referred to as the participant who works for UK for UNHCR and the participant from Kosovo.

The questions asked during the interviews with the refugees differed from the ones with the participant from Kosovo and the employee at UNHCR. As such some sections of the findings will not incorporate all the viewpoints from the participants.

Country	Gender	Situation/Status	Means of arrival	Pseudonym
Syria	Male	Granted refugee status in 2023	Arrived irregularly through the Channel	Ahmed
Syria	Male	Granted refugee status in 2023	Arrived irregularly through the Channel	Ali
Syria	Female	Granted refugee status in 2018	Arrived on a student visa and then claimed asylum	Fatima
Syria	Male	Granted refugee status in 2019	Arrived on family reunion visa	Hassan
Ukraine	Female	Granted temporary protection in 2022	Sponsorship visa	Maryia
Ukraine	Female	Granted temporary protection in 2022	Sponsorship visa	Olha

Ukraine	Female	Granted temporary protection in 2022	Sponsorship visa	Nadiya
Ukraine	Female	Granted temporary protection in 2022	Ukraine Family Scheme	Ivanna
Kosovo	Female	Arrived as refugee in 1998. Has UK citizenship. Founder of an NGO and lecturer at Cambridge.	Arrived on a student visa and then claimed asylum	/
N/A	Female	Works for UK for UNHCR.	/	/

7.1 Decision to flee

This section regards the situation the refugees fled from in their home countries and the reason they choose the UK. All participants described living in constant fear of violence, including bombings and use of chemical weapons, destruction of their homes, as well as fear of imprisonment. This fear compelled them to seek refuge somewhere else in hopes of finding safety.

Ahmed from Syria describes the reason he left: *“Most dangerous area was my city because the regime used chemical weapons. I was detained and was afraid I would be detained again so I escaped. Most of the houses in my city the regime bombed. I cannot come back as I don't have a house.”*

Olha from Ukraine shared a similar experience: *“We woke up one day and heard explosions. It is a deep fear, you realize your life has changed and now you must learn to live with new reality which does not smile to you. I choose UK because of the programme that was available and knowledge of English.”*

Hassan from Syria who fled with his wife Fatima said that they did not want to leave at first but were forced when their hometown was seized. Fear of persecution given their activism against the regime was also mentioned by Fatima who believes it is still dangerous to go back.

The reasons for choosing the UK to seek asylum in most cases was influenced by existing family or social connections, knowledge of the English language which in their view was

important for employment and education, as well as the perceived safety and opportunities for a better life. In the case of participants from Ukraine it was also simply the availability of the Schemes which made their decision easier as they knew they will get the visa given that they had family or sponsors to accommodate them.

From the interviews it was observed that all participants who sought asylum in the UK fled out of danger for their lives and fear of imprisonment and torture, and as such would be recognised as refugees. While the unfortunate “starting point” was the same for all, it is now important to examine if their experience differed.

7.2 Period of flight

This section will focus on the participant’s journey to the UK and means of arrival. Most participants did not come directly to the UK from their home countries. The journey was different for everyone, but the feeling of fear and sadness was mutual.

Fatima and Hassan who are originally from Syria, after six years of living in a neighbouring country decided to move since their citizenship application got rejected and they faced threats and bullying. Fatima who had family in the UK got a student visa and decided to come on her own: *“I arrived in I should say a legal way, as I secured a scholarship, so I got a visa for student. Once I arrived in UK, I applied for refugee status.”* In Fatima’s case she was not chosen for the Syrian resettlement scheme, so the only other safe way to come to the UK was through a visa and then apply for asylum. The participants coming from Ukraine applied for the visa schemes and once they got the visa, they arrived in the UK on a plane from neighbouring countries. Usually, the process with resettled refugees is planned and managed by UNHCR and other organisations, and therefore runs more smoothly.

For people who came irregularly the journey was the longest and most difficult. Both Ali and Ahmed who came irregularly on a boat recounted stories of survival and how they found ways to navigate the difficult challenges. When reflecting on his journey, Ali reported waiting in a camp for more than a month before taking the boat to the UK. He described how smugglers made him work for them, held him in overcrowded conditions and mistreated him: *“Smugglers don’t have human sense, they just want money, they treat us like numbers”*. This testimony reflects the human rights violations and dehumanising behaviour that refugees often face before arriving to the host country. The mechanistic dehumanisation introduced by Haslam when

people are treated as objects or in this case as Ali describes “numbers” who have no emotions or reason is evident here (2006).

“I passed through many countries. Between each country there is a hard story. We were walking for nights and days, slept on wood, very cold, we didn’t have shelter, it was horrible. We sometimes got attacked by rebels, we climbed mountains to cross the borders, we hid” says Ali. The most difficult part was crossing the English Channel: *“The channel is very hard, it is horrible, a big sea, and you know the small boats with 25-30 person makes it very dangerous. We don’t have something to help us if the boat deflates, we don’t have someone to save us. We stayed for 16 hours on a boat. Very long journey and scary. We tried to contact the guards. They took us with a big ship, they arrested us. We arrived illegally so they said we will detain you. They took all clothes and gave us biscuit and water. We were asking for food, and they said wait we don’t have food here. They gave us biscuit and water.”*

These feelings of hopelessness when stranded at sea without no reassurance if they will survive is an indication of the vulnerability to dehumanisation, where one has lost “the right to have rights” due to the circumstances they are in. Ali and Ahmed are among thousands of refugees who make this journey every year to the UK to seek asylum because of not having other options. Just the fact that they had no other option than going on a boat while risking their lives is dehumanising. Surely the government is aware that the high number of people coming irregularly every year is a consequence of not establishing more safe and legal routes. The fact that the government has not done anything to solve this issue leads to the presumption that it is purposefully neglecting this issue and these people. This is a failure of the UK government to recognize these refugees as human beings.

Ali spent three days in one of the UK’s detention centres after which he was sent to a hotel. He briefly mentioned that in the detention centre all his basic needs were met but he was not allowed to leave the centre. One can argue that detaining people who arrive on boats is a sign of mechanistic dehumanisation (Haslam, 2006), where in response to the mode of the arrival the asylum-seekers is stripped of their agency and treated as a homogenous group of “illegals” until their claim has been accepted or denied.

From this, it can be observed that while the reasons to flee remains similar for all, when it comes to the process/journey of seeking protection it differs drastically. While the refugees who arrived in the UK through legal means did not have their safety compromised, those who had

no other option but to follow irregular routes, were exposed to severe danger, ill-treatment, and human rights violations. It is important to highlight the fact that the refugees who follow irregular routes are exposed to human rights violations and dehumanisation even prior to arriving to the country where they seek asylum, in this case the UK. This experience of theirs should be considered when processing their asylum claims, or even when designing state policies for refugees.

7.3 The period of settlement and resettlement

This section will focus on the period of participant's arrival to the UK and their settlement, including any challenges they faced.

The participants from Ukraine noted that having family or a good relationship with the sponsor had a big impact in making the process of settling easier. Ivanna who arrived on the Family Scheme talked about the importance of family and friends in making things easier in a new environment: *“When you come from war and are starting a new life you want to feel at least a little comfortable, a friend, family, or just a friendly face can be lifesaving”*.

The participants who had to apply for asylum in the UK revealed common themes which shed a light on the main challenges within the asylum system. One prevalent theme among the participants was the lack of information and knowledge regarding the asylum system. Participants mentioned difficulties in understanding the procedures and their entitled rights which made it difficult for them to navigate the system. Participants mentioned feeling hopeless at times as the process seemed complicated, and they did not know to whom to turn to for help. Most of them had to do their own research, ask help from volunteers and charity organization, as well as get assistance from solicitors. They also expressed difficulties in understanding the process given the cultural differences, as expressed by Ali: *“We need someone to educate us, because we come from another culture. The asylum system is completely different, no one here invites you for a lecture on how the system works, how can we ask for our rights, so you will stay lost.”*

The experience also depended based on each person's individual circumstances. People who had a good level of English proficiency, support from friends or family, or prior experience with legal processes were able to navigate the system more effectively, as Fatima explained:

“My experience was easy as I speak English, but I understand how difficult it is for people to apply who can't speak the language. I searched a lot, asking friends, and then one of my friends connected me to a Syrian solicitor who helped in easing up the process. It's a lot of paperwork, but I am used to this kind of work”.

For others like Ahmed whose English was limited he relied on translators or friends who helped them with translating but mentioned language barrier as an issue for navigating the system. Again, for purposes of this analysis, it is important to take these issues into account when designing policies and the overall response to refugees. Free translators, and clear guidance should be available at every step of the asylum-seeking process.

Lengthy procedure

The time it takes for a decision on an asylum-seeking claim varies significantly depending how refugees came to the UK. Ukrainians who came through the visa scheme waited 10-14 days for the visa application to be approved. Fatima from Syria who arrived in the UK on a visa and then claimed asylum got her refugee status within six months, and her husband Hassan joined after four months through family reunion. Fatima believes the fact that she came legally and had a passport helped: *“A lot of refugees come without passport, so how can Home Office believe them who they say they are.”* This thought is reinforced by the narrative that assistance should focus on “genuine” refugees, in this case those that can prove they escaped danger by having documentation from their country. However, as explained international law notes that no one should be penalised because of not having documentation.

Those who came irregularly, the length of the decision was the longest from just under two years to more than two years. Ali from Syria waited for a year and eight months to get his refugee status: *“I waited for one year and five months to finish the main interview, and just now I got the decision for leave to remain for five years. So, three months after the interview I got the decision. It is very hard to wait.”*

Sometimes the decision takes even longer. Ahmed from Syria waited for more than two years for the decision. He spoke about the difficulties of being in limbo for a long period of time and the impact it had on his mental health: *“Being for more than two years in the same place, just stress and waiting, not knowing what will happen. Imagine, you are lost, and no one cares about you, the Home Office always told us you need to wait, but it is our right to seek asylum”.*

Ahmed conveyed his dehumanising experience by emphasizing that seeking asylum is a human right, and thus implying he is a human deserving of rights, which is a common thing in discourse of those being dehumanised.

When asylum-seekers are waiting for an outcome on their claim they are not allowed to work for the first twelve months. After that they can apply for permission to work if they are not liable for the delay. If the permission is granted they can only take up jobs from the shortage occupation list which restricts them to specialised jobs (McKinney, Meade and Gower, 2022). As such, the interviewed participants did not work during the period of waiting for the decision on their claim. Not being able to work was described as frustrating and isolating among the participants as they felt they could not fully participate in the community. The inability to work was described by Ahmed as living a life of “*barely surviving*” and “*living like animal*”. This type of feeling is in line with animalistic dehumanisation, when one feels that the unique human characteristics which separate humans from animals are being stripped away (Haslam, 2006). In addition, as noted by Kelman, denying participation in the wider community, which in this case is employment, is a form of dehumanisation itself (1973).

Accommodation and living situation

Three of the Ukrainian refugees interviewed came to the UK on the “Home for Ukrainians” visa and were staying in temporary accommodation with their sponsors, while one participant came on a Family Scheme and was staying with her extended family. All of them were grateful for their living situation, they all had their own private room and space. As Maryia noted: “*It is not easy for people to open their homes to strangers, so I am grateful to have this opportunity.*” Nadyia also showed gratitude as she was aware that others might have a more difficult time to find a suitable sponsor: “*My sponsor is good. I found it through a Facebook group. But I know women are being told to be careful as some men are luring them in*”. The uncertainty of how long they can stay with their sponsor was distressing for some: “*For now we can stay here as we agreed with our sponsor but what if they decide one day that they cannot host us anymore, where will we go?*” said Maryia. If the host families cannot host them anymore, they will be matched with another sponsor, and in the absence of that put in a hotel accommodation until a sponsor is found.

Fatima from Syria who came on a visa stayed with her family until her husband and children reunited with her after which they moved to a place of their own.

Unfortunately, the reality for the ones who came irregularly has been more difficult. All people interviewed who came irregularly were placed in a hotel. At the time of interview the participants were still living in the hotel, as they just got their refugee status approved and were in process of finding accommodation. Although the hotel accommodation is supposed to be a temporary solution for asylum-seekers, the participants have been living there the whole time while their claim was being processed, some for more than two years. Ahmed and Ali complained about the destitute living situations. The main issues identified were overcrowded hotels, unsanitary conditions, as well as dissatisfaction with food and staff. The situation is especially difficult for vulnerable people. Ahmed, an elderly man, stayed in a small room with his family: *“The situation in hotel is not good, especially for old people, vulnerable people. I am staying in a bunk bed with my wife and child. It is not comfortable, I hit my head every day. The hotel is overcrowded, it is noisy all the time as there are many people. I do not have any peace or comfort.”* An adequate standard of living is a human right (UDHR, Article 25). The importance of providing a minimum standard of living and treatment to refugees and asylum-seekers has been emphasized by various institutions including UNHCR who noted that they should be provided an adequate standard of living not only to survive but also live a dignified life (UNHCR, 2000). Living in dignity is an essential part of being human, and once this gets taken away, one is dehumanised.

Since the accommodation provided meals for them, they were given a symbolic weekly allowance which was not enough to cover their basic costs, such as to buy clothes or some other food. Not being able to afford basic necessities was described as humiliating. Ali said: *“I cannot buy even biscuits, nothing. The quality of food here is not very good. We ask them many times to give us more money and we will cook instead of giving us food because the food here is very spicy”*. In addition, when asked about the staff Ahmed noted: *“Staff is rude sometimes as they are dealing with big numbers of people, maybe 400 people. But you must be polite and understand we are people, we are human, and you are here to help us not to be arrogant.”* Once again, the mistreatment was described by appealing that they are humans who do not deserve such treatment.

Ali and Ahmed were looking for accommodation now that they got their refugee status but were in distress as they feared they will become homeless if they do not find a place in time. They relied on the help from charities to help them in finding accommodation. Ali described the difficulties in finding a place of their own: *“I am still in hotel they sent me the eviction letter*

because now I have universal credit, so I need to rent privately. I contacted the Church; they referred me to a local council to find accommodation. My name is on the waiting list. In a few days I must leave the hotel. I am afraid I will become homeless. The system is very bad. You need to go local charities to help you as the Home Office will not help you.”

The living conditions and treatment are a result of dehumanising policies and attitudes towards refugees coming irregularly, who are not deemed worthy of better circumstances. The government can, if they want, arrange other types of accommodations, or change the asylum procedure and policies to not allow for people to spend years in these unsuitable living conditions. In addition, support in finding accommodation should be provided to all equally.

Family reunion

Those who have applied for family reunion, for some their family has joined them while others are still waiting for the reunion. Fatima who came to the UK on a visa and applied for asylum noted that after she got the leave to remain, her husband and children joined on a family reunion within four months. Others who have applied are still waiting and there are concerns that the process will be prolonged. Ali said that as soon as he got the refugee status he applied for family reunification, but is afraid the process might take a while:

“After I got the leave to remain, my wife and two children applied for family reunification, but Home Office make it hard they are always saying two things: backlog and Covid problem. They always say this. Most people have been waiting for a year to bring their family and no answer for now.”

For parents with children the most difficult part of the whole journey was being away from their children. Fatima who came to the UK alone did not see her children for ten months: *“When I came to the UK my child was still a baby, and it was very difficult to cope without seeing my children for ten months, it was heart-breaking.”* As such parents noted that priority should be given to those who have small children. Another issue that was noted was that parents are not allowed to join their children on a family reunion visa. Fatima who is the caregiver for her parents, who are in need of constant care, said she had many times applied for them to join and sent medical proof for their condition but got denied.

Ukrainians had no issues in this regard given that the schemes allow for extended family to join, however, three out of four participants were separated from their husbands since the Ukrainian government does not allow men to leave the country. The inequalities of the UK refugee system are visible here, since in the case of Ukrainian refugees the whole extended family is allowed to come through the visas, but for other refugees they can only bring their martial partners and children.

7.4 Emotions and perceptions of in(ex)clusion

This section will focus on the feelings and perceptions of refugees with the community, and whether they ever felt discriminated.

Refugee stereotype and discrimination

Most participants noted that they experienced some sort of prejudice and stigma because of their status. Prejudice and stigmatisation are closely related to dehumanisation, as they are characterised by a negative evaluation of the other. By its very definition “stigma” suggests that an individual is devalued, while the stigmatising characteristic in this case the “refugee status” is perceived as socially devalued (Bos *et al.*, 2013).

Fatima explained that she and her family encountered numerous barriers when trying to find work or in school: *“You need to constantly prove yourself because there is the refugee stereotype - refugees are not well educated, they came from war, they don’t have knowledge, which is generally an unfair point of view.”*

Given the negative connotation with the word “refugee” some of the Ukrainian participants highlighted that they are not refugees since they have a temporary protection status. In addition, Nadiya from Ukraine noted it is better that they were granted temporary protection rather than refugee status, since the latter one leads to the victimisation of individuals, and therefore they can be perceived differently. The participant from Kosovo also mentioned the negative outcomes of victimisation as it instils fear into the community that refugees and asylum seekers need help and are a burden. The discourse on victimhood is presented by denying the refugees agency, typical aspects of animalistic and mechanical dehumanisation.

Feelings of discrimination were perceived also for naturalised UK citizens. The participant from Kosovo who has been in the UK for more than twenty years and built a successful career said

there are instances where people treat her differently because she does not fit the “British image”, *“Regardless of what I achieved I am still being judged. When you have an accent people perceive you different. I always get question where I come from rather than what I know, and this is what frustrates me.”* Questioning someone’s identity because of these perceived differences comes from the socially ingrained ideologies of what it means to be British, and singles people out as the “other” regardless of their citizenship.

Instances of discrimination were also reported in the employment sector. The Kosovar participant described that for her and other refugees she met there were barriers in finding work due to their ethnicity or race: *“My friend sent two different applications, one in her original name and the other in an English name. The English one got invited to an interview”*. In this case, we have a clear discrimination based on someone’s nationality, where the person was perceived as not living up to the standards of the in-group – the British just because of their different origin.

“Illegal” - not human

Those that arrived irregularly reported instances of being discriminated because they were regarded as “illegal”. The differential treatment on basis of how they came to the UK added an additional layer of difficulty to their already challenging situation, which affected their sense of feeling welcome and included in the society. The participants noted that because they arrived irregularly, they were often met with disbelief by certain individuals. They reported instances where their stories and situations were doubted which created frustration and disappointment. Ali shared a particular example:

“Most people oppose the idea of refugees who come illegally. They say we are liars. One day I was in front of the hotel and a man was passing there and he said look they are eating burgers and chicken; they are not refugees. So should we eat garbage to prove that we are refugees?”

This is an example of clear dehumanisation where the perpetrator is not recognising the refugees as fellow humans and believing that they should be denied the “privileges” that are typically assigned to in-groups (Haslam, 2006; Kteily *et al.*, 2015) which in this case is food. As mentioned before dehumanisation of a certain group decreases empathy towards them, and leads to the belief they are not worthy of protection (Esses *et al.*, 2008). Discrediting asylum-seekers and showing feelings of suspicion are a result of the damaging governmental policies

and language. Government is creating safe and legal ways to protect “genuine” refugees, while suggesting that asylum seekers who came irregularly are not “genuine” but inherently “illegal”.

During the interviews it was also noted that when Ali and Ahmed were talking about feeling unwelcome because they came “illegally”, they emphasised that they were “just human” and kept repeating attributes of a human being. The words “human”, “body”, and “soul” were emphasised to call for a more compassionate approach to their situation, as seen in the examples below:

Ali: “We are human we need protection we want a peaceful life in this country, but it is like they are saying you are not welcome because you came in an illegal way, so you have to face the difficulty. They cannot say this out loud, but I can see it in their eyes. We are just human.”

Ahmed: “I can understand from this bad system they are giving me the message - die we don’t care about you. But I am a body I am a soul.”

Actions can be labelled as “legal” and “illegal” however when a human being is labelled as “illegal” it automatically strips the individual from their human characteristics and identity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the participants kept mentioning their human characteristics. This appeal to human category is an important aspect of dehumanisation, where those who are being dehumanised are asserting themselves as fellow humans who are deserving of a dignified treatment.

These attitudes towards refugees are a consequence of the narrative portrayed by the government and media. The employee in UK for UNHCR noted that the narrative feeds the negative perception: *“There has been a lot of misinformation that the UK is overpopulated but this is not the case. Our data shows that we take the least number of refugees. The government is creating an us and against them narrative instead as uniting us all as humans”*.

Deserving citizen

One thing that was noted during the interviews was that all participants wanted to “prove” that they were worthy of the protection and that they will give back to the society. Sometimes this was said indirectly when talking about their achievements or the achievements of their children. While in some instances this was directly mentioned, as Hassan described it: *“We are not children under the wings of the government, we must learn how to integrate and work hard.*

They gave us the opportunity so it's up to us to make the most of this great opportunity." A similar thing was mentioned by Fatima when talking about her children's achievements in school: *"My girl secured the first place in her GCSE in school."*

Constantly having to prove one's worth stems from the whole negative portrayal that refugees are taking advantage of the British nation. Hassan's use of words *"to integrate"* and *"work hard"* is the need to distinguish himself from the constructed negative portrayal of refugees, and to fit into the constructed British narrative of who is welcome and deserving of protection.

Thoughts on the government policies

When asked about their overall thoughts and experience about the UK's approach for refugees and the policies in place, refugee responses varied based on their individual experiences.

Generally, Ukrainians had positive thoughts on the Schemes provided. Olha from Ukraine said: *"British people are so kind and understand the real consequences of war and they provide us this protection and help. Some people say Scheme for Ukrainians is discrimination, but you know maybe this is improvement based on previous experiences and maybe in future they create something even better for others"*. Others from Ukraine also expressed gratitude for the Scheme, but also mentioned concerns that their status is for a limited period of three years.

Fatima acknowledges that there are differences based on how one arrives to the UK: *"People who come as legal and illegal makes a difference in the beginning to get the status but after the status is obtained it is same."*

Others such as Ali and Ahmed who came irregularly expressed relief that they came when they did, as noted by Ali: *"We are lucky for getting here in time"*. However, they also expressed disappointment and fear for their families and friends on how the new policies might affect them.

The participant from UK for UNHCR expressed concerns about the new government policies as well as noted that the current resettlement schemes are not enough to respond to the plight of refugees: *"Government is indirectly making it harder for people to have safe access which means they only choose to help in certain conflicts, but they don't respond to every issue and not in time so lots of refugees make their own way without documentation, risking their lives."* In addition, she expressed concerns that the different schemes *"cause a hierarchy of division"*

about who should be supported". Another observation was the language used: *"There is no such thing as an illegal being"* while also noting that *"good or genuine refugees"* could feed into the belief that some refugees are more deserving than others of the protection.

A similar belief was shared by the Kosovan former refugee who noted: *"The policies are another political game where conservatives are putting barriers for UK to become diverse and it is all related to the 'clean British nation', it demoralizes me and my kids who were born here but have Kosovar origin, it affects how we identify ourselves. Another scapegoating of refugees and migrants for political gains."*

In addition, she added: *"You cannot stop a bird flying the same way you cannot stop people from moving. If we continue to build up forts around borders it will just cause more hardships for people who need our help"*.

The results showed that while the reason for flight was the same for all participants the experience largely depended on how they arrived and where they came from.

7.5 Discussion

In this Chapter, I reflected on the experiences of people seeking safety in the UK, based on the dehumanisation theory, to see how they are affected by the UK policies in place. The findings showed that some groups of refugees experienced dehumanisation depending on how they arrived and where they came from.

The findings are linked with the previous Chapter on immigration policies which showed that the inherent British identity and culture has led to the creation of the "us" versus "them" mentality which underlines the immigration approach. Today's policies reflect the belief that some outsiders could undermine the British values and dilute its culture. The available safe and legal routes to the UK are limited to a selected number of people who are selected according to specific vulnerability criteria or are limited to respond to specific conflicts. The government has justified this approach on the basis that each conflict is different thus a "bespoke" approach is needed. As it stands, this bespoke approach has exposed certain inequalities implying that refugees from certain places are more welcome than from others.

The hierarchy of protection is evident from the findings of the interviews as well. As seen from the interviews, different groups of refugees who are equally fleeing war and equally in need of

protection are being given differential treatment depending on where they come from and how they came to the UK. The establishment of the visa schemes for Ukrainians has allowed them immediate access to asylum in the UK, as well as access to housing, employment, and welfare benefits. The Ukrainians had the option to come safely and immediately to the UK given the visa schemes, they reported no instances of dehumanisation and the whole process was relatively smooth. The experience of participants who arrived on a visa was less easy as they experienced more setbacks in terms of lengthy procedures and family reunion. While the ones who came irregularly had the most difficult experience and a dehumanising experience. The refugees who arrived irregularly were dehumanised even before arriving, by being portrayed in a negative way by the government and labelled “illegal”, as well as by having to go through life-threatening routes in absence of no other options. In their journeys, they were stripped of their humanness with no human dignity and in a state of complete rightlessness. Once they arrived in the UK, the dehumanisation continued either directly or indirectly through policies. As a result of dehumanising policies, they had to wait in despair for years before they were eligible to apply for housing, work, or access benefits. In addition, they experienced blatant dehumanisation by the community because of the whole negative rhetoric used to justify the harassment and discrimination of refugees.

By creating specific schemes for certain nationalities also shapes public perception as to which refugees need to be welcomed. Those who do not have to come irregularly because they have routes are perceived as good refugees while refugees who come irregular are deemed illegal by the government and thus inherently “not genuine” refugees and are left in a situation which as observed from the interviews is often against human rights principles. International human rights treaties acknowledge that no one should not be penalized because they entered a country irregularly.

8. Conclusion and recommendation

8.1 Conclusion

The thesis aimed to find out if the UK is being selective towards which refugees deserve protection, and what are the underlying facets that play a role in the differential treatment towards refugees. By using the theory of dehumanisation and what it means to be a citizen the thesis aimed to analyse how immigration policies shape the experience of refugees and asylum-seekers, and through semi-structured interviews understand if because of these policies they themselves feel out of touch with their humanity.

From the beginning the thesis showed that there is discrepancy in how the UK has responded to different types of forced migration. As we saw in general there are no visa routes for people to claim asylum in the UK, while the safe and legal ways which are available are limited as they are based on specific terms and conditions. The Ukrainian route has illustrated the governments selective approach in responding to refugees from different conflicts. The response to Ukrainian refugees is an example how the international protection should work, by opening safe ways to people fleeing and welcoming them with solidarity and generosity. Unfortunately, this is not the case. UK is using legislation to deter and extradite refugees and asylum-seekers coming irregularly from Global South. Both groups of refugees are equally fleeing war and equally in need of protection, yet the response is anything but equal.

By using a qualitative approach, the research was able to understand how the UK policies were created and how they shape the lived experience of refugees in the UK. The disproportionateness in the reception of refugees coming from Europe and those coming from the Global South has been created by othering those that do not fit the “Western” ideal. The political antagonism as well as the imperial legacies of UK all contributed to creating a narrative of who deserves entry into UK. Thus, today’s hostile environment is not anything new rather it is in line with UK’s historical approach to immigration, race, and identity. From the interviews with the refugees, it was observed that people who arrived from Syria irregularly were denied experiences which humans are entitled to such as, among others, an adequate standard of living, right to work, timely decisions about their claims, and living below poverty levels. While those who have arrived through governmental schemes had a better experience and had access to the benefits and opportunities as any other British citizen. The selective dehumanisation is a

portrayal of the discriminatory politics that value and devalue human beings based on the borders they are born into, live, and come from. As we saw from previous scholars on the theory of dehumanisation people tend to perceive differently groups that have considerable differences from the host country as they believe they might threaten their cultural identity. This is what is happening in UK where refugees who come from the Global South are perceived as a threat to the British nation state and identity while the ones from Ukraine are regarded as genuine and provided with immediate unbureaucratic protection. By closing borders and refusing entry to asylum-seekers who come irregularly the UK is punishing people for being born in the wrong country and for trying to escape violence. This is a clear violation of international refugee law. UK is doing more than just closing its physical borders. In a figurative sense it is creating borders by using words such as “genuine” refugee and “illegal” person. This dehumanisation not only results in hostility but allows for the justification of actions and policies that can be cruel and unjust towards them, and excludes them from social, civic, and political participation.

Ultimately, one can conclude that UK’s refugee system is segregated and selective. The selection as to who should receive protection is biased towards those who share similarities in terms of culture, religion, and race. While those who do not share these similarities are dehumanised as a result of the policies and language used by the government. Refugee-protection should be universal and grouping asylum requests based on nationality is frankly discriminatory. All refugees should be treated equally with no differentiation on grounds of descent or geography.

8.2 Recommendations

The narrative of refugees together with the analysis of the UK policies highlight the exclusionary policies in place and an all-together a segregated refugee system. Observing the immigration policies historically until today one can see that the environment is becoming increasingly “hostile”. As such I want to highlight the importance of continued research in this field. The new policies are just now being implemented and we have yet to see their impact on the refugee experience over the years. Future research should focus on the impact of the policies long-term, especially if the new Bill gets approved and if the MoU with Rwanda starts being implemented. In addition, unfortunately around the world new conflicts are arising. Research should keep up to date on UK’s response towards different conflicts to further analyse if racism and discrimination is at the centre of these immigration policies and provide recommendations.

The thesis urges the UK government and authorities to adjust the policies so human rights are at the forefront of the policies rather than exclusion. The government should provide safe and legal routes to respond to all emergencies and conflicts rather than focus on specific crisis. The UK should strive to improve the overall asylum system, by expediting the application process and allowing everyone equally opportunity and access to support and services.

Ultimately, addressing the selective approach on refugee protection and the differential treatment requires a coordinated effort among the government, civil society, and the public. Efforts to combat the differential treatment should involve cooperation and dialogue among the stakeholders, awareness raising, keeping the government accountable, and creating positive narratives on refugees and asylum-seekers. The UK should strive to create an environment where all refugees regardless of their circumstances are able to enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

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